

The Situation of, and Impact of COVID-19 on school going refugee  
girls and young women  
in Uganda

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To FAWEU and partners, including UN-WOMEN, OXFAM Uganda, GiZ, Ministry of Education and Sports, this report presents very critical findings regarding factors affecting education of girls, young women and boys across Uganda during COVID-19. We hope that the key insights that are presented in this report will generate concrete actions towards supporting education of school going girls and young women during this pandemic and in the aftermath.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CDO	Community Development Officers
CFPU	Child Family Protection Unit of Police
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHO	District Health Office
DEO	District Education Officer
EA	Enumeration Area
FAWEU	Forum for African Women Educationalists- Uganda Chapter
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IDI	In-depth Interviews
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
ODK	Open Data Kit
PSWO	Probation and Social Welfare Officer
RRP	Refugee Response Partners
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Introduction and methodology*

This report contains the findings of a study commissioned by Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda Chapter (FAWEU) in December 2020. The study was commissioned before Uganda introduced a second total lockdown to contain second wave of COVID-19. While this report focuses on the situation of refugee girls and young women, the study was undertaken as part of the broader study that sought to provide evidence on: 1) prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda; 2) drivers of engagement in sexual activity among school going girls and young women during the COVID-19 pandemic; 3) levels of participation of school going girls in the learning opportunities that emerged during lockdown and the girls' interest in continuing their education; and, 4) levels of involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected in December 2020 using a structured questionnaire from a total of 284 refugee girls and young women and men aged 10-24 years. The study participants were selected from three refugee settlements of Alere in Adjumani district, Kyaka II in Kyegegwa district and Palabek in Lamwo district. Key informants drawn from the Ministry of Education and Sports, District Education Offices, Oxfam, OPM, and other refugee response partners including AVSI, Windle International etc were interviewed. In addition, focus group discussions were held with groups of refugee girls and young women; caregivers. Quantitative data were subjected to varying levels of analysis at Univariate, Bi-variate and Multivariate levels. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, initially following the key study objectives but also considering key emerging issues.

### *Selected Key findings*

#### *i) Increased adolescent pregnancies and marriages during COVID-19 period*

Pregnancy cases increased by 0.8% among girls and young women from 3.3% to 4.1%. This is higher than 1.8% among nationals who reported being pregnant during COVID-19. Refugee girls become more susceptible to risk factors that increased their vulnerability to becoming pregnant than nationals. For some refugee settlements such as Palabek, the proportion of refugee girls who reported being pregnant during COVID-19 were as high as 4.8%.

Close to one in every four refugee girls (23%) were aware of a peer who became pregnant during COVID-19 period. In some refugee settlements such as Kyaka II, the proportion of girls who knew a peer who had become pregnant during COVID-19 period was as high as one in every two refugee girls (48.2%). Our informed opinion is that the incidence of pregnancy among girls and young women is probably higher than the 4.1% established through self-reporting in the questionnaire. As early projections by UNFPA show, over 7 million unintended pregnancies are likely to occur as a result of any additional lockdowns. Indeed, as Uganda enters a second phase of the national lock down, this sounds as a painful reminder that additional unintended pregnancies will occur and particularly among vulnerable populations like refugee girls.

Although the proportion of girls who said they were married at the time of the study reduced from 6.6% to 3.3%, the situation for refugee girls remains critical. At least one in every four refugee girls (23%) knew of a peer who got married during COVID-19 period among the refugees. Refugee girls/young women (3.5%) were disproportionately pressured by their parents or caregivers than refugee boys/young men (1.6%) to get married during COVID-19 period.

Incidence of early marriage has been heightened by the increased poverty and vulnerability among refugee households attributed to the pandemic that has forced families to marry off their daughters to help assuage family financial burdens. Families marrying off their families receive money, food and other goods in return. School closures opened up opportunities for the parents



and caregivers to pressure, lure and entice girls into marriage under the guise of “schools may never open again”.

**ii) *Increased exposure to risk factors associated with increased sexual engagement among school going girls***

The proportion of refugee girls who engaged in sexual intercourse increased by 1.6% from 11.5% before COVID-19 to 13.1% during COVID-19. COVID-19 heightened vulnerabilities for refugee girls to sexual engagement emanating from disrupted livelihood sources for families; limited access to adolescent sexual reproductive health information (ASRH) and services; lack of life skills among young people; increased exposure to violence and online sexual exploitation; and engagement in economic activities that facilitate exposure to sexual violence. Disrupted livelihood sources accentuated an already dire situation leading to low access to basic services such as food, enough clothing including sanitary ware for girls.

**iii) *Food insecurity is rising, and affecting girls in refugee communities***

With poverty rate in refugee communities more than twice as high as for the host communities, increased hunger and general desperation made refugee girls an easy target for men who would lure the girls into sex in exchange for such basics as food and even sanitary materials. Following a reported reduction in food ratios for refugees, hunger bit harder. One in every four respondents (22.5%) reported a reduction in the number of meals consumed per day because families can no longer afford food (64.8%); 19.6% went to bed hungry at least once due to inadequate food (89.4%). The reduction in household food security affected girls and young women the most, who beyond bearing the burden of caring for their households have become susceptible to being lured into sex in search of survival needs.

**iv) *Limited access to learning opportunities, platforms and materials during school closure***

More than one in every three (37.3%) school going refugees did not have access to any learning opportunities during COVID-19. For some refugees, the situation was worse. For example, about 45.4% of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement did not have access to learning during COVID-19 period with girls (46.8%) disproportionately affected than boys (44.1%). Likewise, in Alere refugee settlements, more females (37.2%) than males (33.3%) reported no access to any learning during COVID-19. Although the experiences of the refugee settlements are not uniform and that each refugee settlement has its own unique vulnerabilities, general observations suggest that older school going adolescents (aged 18-24 years) than younger ones (10-13 years) were likely to report limited or no access to learning during COVID-19.

Among those who had access to learning during COVID-19, in all the refugee settlements visited, the common mechanisms/platforms accessible by the learners were community or mobile teachers and other community-based learning arrangements. Results show that this was attributed to the efforts of refugee response partners like UNICEF, Windle International, Fin Church Aid, AVSI that supported community-based learning arrangements; reprinted and distributed learning materials provided by government; trained teachers to reach children in their homes/villages and teach them in groups; and in some cases, coordinated and worked with local leadership and school-based structures to reach refugee children.

**v) *Being a girl and a refugee increases likelihood that one will miss learning during COVID-19***

Besides cost and remoteness of some refugee communities, there were concerns that some of the designated learning platforms are controlled by men or generally adult males in households. The culturally deep-rooted norms and beliefs about access and use of household assets such as radios were disproportionately in favour of males. While these gender related barriers even before COVID-19 pandemic, these disparities were heightened during COVID-19. Some learning platforms were by design unreachable for most girls in communities. Even where the platforms

were accessible, girls and young women reported having to divide their time between learning and household chores leaving them with no time to study.

***v) Loss of interest in continuing with education***

about 5.4% of the refugee girls and young women and men lost interest in school due to prolonged closure and were no longer interested in learning anymore. In some refugee settlements such as Kyaka II, more females (6.3%) than males (4.3%) said they had lost interest in learning. As a result, 3.8% said they will not return to school once schools' resume with slightly more male refugees (4.2%) than female refugees (3.3%). Even before COVID-19, refugees faced several challenges emanating from lack of enough schools in their communities, language barriers, differences in curriculum, and challenges related to mental health as a result of exposure to violence. At least one in two (55.6%) refugee learners said the reasons they are not returning to school was because they lost interest in learning. This should worry all education stakeholders. With the COVID-19 resurgence and the country enters into second lockdown, and school calendar continues to be intermittently affected, more learners will keep losing interest in learning. The future of the refugee learners appears to be bleak unless a serious reversal is engineered.

***vi) Refugee girls forced to enter workforce to provide for their families and antecedent risk for sexual violence***

Over 15.0% of refugee learners were involved in a range of economic activities including the worst forms of work such as working in bars. Refugee girls, as young as ten years, have been lured and taken on the vending fruits and vegetables in the small sprawling trading centers in refugee settlements. Some learners now accompany adult parents/caregivers to work to eke out a living and others have taken on activities, potentially harmful and likely to expose them to abuse. The main driver has been the need to supplement family income (51.3%), working at the urging of parents or caregivers (20.5%), directly fending for family (12.8%) and caregiver inability to provide (7.7%). About 2.6 % (against 1.8% in the non-refugee population) have experienced sexual violence as a result of work and 2.6% (against 1.6% in the non-refugee population) said that participating in work made them lose interest in school. In some communities, girls are kept away by work from joining community-building activities and others will not return when schools reopen.

Discussions with participants show that school-going children's participation in economic activities presents risk to violence especially in most refugee settlements where most of the girls involved in vending food and hawking other items have been raped, defiled and sexually violated. Cases of rape and defilement among refugee girls and young women during COVID-19 have been compounded by inadequate lighting, WASH facilities, and child-friendly spaces as well as inadequate security personnel.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Girls and young women in refugee settings generally experience multiple vulnerabilities. While some of the vulnerabilities existed pre-COVID-19, COVID-19 appear to have exacerbated these vulnerabilities. Evidence from the study indicate that closure of schools heightened protection risks for children, especially girls, including sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, early marriage, and risk of engaging in high-risk sexual activities at the urging of their parents/caregivers potentially leading to sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Several experienced heightened hunger due to insufficient food and became susceptible to forced marriages.

This study has revealed that the future of refugee girls and young women whose education is disrupted by COVID-19 control measures and become susceptible to protection risks is at peril. It is our well-considered opinion that lockdown, and total lockdown in particular, declared by the government to control COVID-19 spread with no proper assessment and response to the social welfare needs of vulnerable populations during pandemics, particularly refugees, is untenable.

The dire effects of COVID-19 on school going girls and young women were preventable had the several agencies been allowed to continue to work to respond to abuse and violence faced by girls and young women. The situation we describe in this report in which school going girls and young women find themselves in could have been prevented had it not been a general failure to involve the social sector as part of response. Response was hindered by travel restrictions imposed on the social sector. If the social sector had been allowed to be part of the COVID-19 response, response against violence faced by girls and young women would have been quicker, seriously disrupt escalation of violence and abuse against girls and young women. While interventions by agencies like Windle International, UNHCR, FIN Church Aid and AVSI are helping to assuage the level of impact, the need is still great and continue to work under immense restrictions. The second lockdown declared by the government of Uganda is likely to even create more significant challenges for refugee learners.

## **Key recommendations**

### **1) Recommendations around education support in refugee during COVID-19**

- Education response partners should establish refugee education taskforces to tackle concerns related to education of refugee children during pandemics. The taskforce should comprise of academic heads for refugee schools, local health authorities, lower settlement structures, NGOs working in education among others.
- Support development of e-learning infrastructure and models that are suitable and work in the refugee contexts. The e-learning infrastructure that can support e-learning should be the focus of efforts towards supporting learning of refugee children.
- Train and support mobile teachers to provide homeschooling or community-based learning at village level. Results from the study show that several learners benefited from community-based learning where teachers were supported to provide group learning at lower level.
- Train and retrain teachers on how to offer online classes.
- The MoES should rethink the curriculum and move towards self-individual learning as opposed to the current one which requires a teacher to deliver the content through physical teaching.
- Go back to school campaigns should be strengthened focusing on learners that have lost interest in education. Refugee parents and other caregivers should be sensitised about the importance of education to help change the attitudes of many children who have become disoriented or lost hope and retain those at the verge of dropping out of school.

### **2) Recommendations focusing on addressing risks associated with sexual violence**

- Directly work with the MoES to ensure that there is a mechanism in place of preparing all actors to receive and support refugee girls who have given birth to return. One way to do this is support schools to establish child friendly corners in schools where learners who have given birth can be allowed in schools and supported to breastfed their children, while at school; where possible directly support to girls and their families.
- Advocate for, and/or directly provide for integration of life skills training in formal education. Life skills training would empower learners to make good decisions outside the classroom.
- Strengthen and directly support establishment of parenting programmes that are gender-sensitive and among others place emphasis on: enhancing positive parenting skills, and male involvement; increasing parent-child communication and appropriate information given to girls and boys during and beyond such emergency situations.
- In anticipation of increased risks and need for services when children return to school, teachers and school management should be sensitized to existing and expected protection risks, and where to report suspected cases following the established referral pathways.

### **3) Recommendations focusing on livelihoods improvement**

- There is need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the social welfare needs of vulnerable populations during pandemics, particularly refugees. As the second lockdown is

- implemented, refugee response partners should prioritize protection of refugee children.
- Ensure financial inclusion and improve livelihood sustainability of refugees to make refugees move towards self-reliant
  - Extend cash transfers to the refugee households particularly those with vulnerable populations such as girls and young women as a quick-fix solution to ease the current financial burden.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings of a study commissioned by Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWE-U) in December 2020 to examine the situation of, and impact of COVID-19 on, school going girls and young women in Uganda. While the study was conducted in 25 districts in Uganda, this report focuses on key issues pertaining the selected refugee settlements of Palabek in Lamwo district, Kyaka in Kyegegwa district and Alere in Adjumani district. When the country entered into a lockdown, the over 1.4 million refugees in Uganda who “occupy areas prone to shocks with limited capacities and opportunities to cope and adapt” became increasingly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. While this study focuses on the girls and young women aged 10-24 years, it has been noted that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other categories of people with special needs<sup>2</sup>. Although pandemics are expected to affect all people, the likely outcome usually is that disasters also exacerbate inequalities. For refugee girls and young women, COVID-19 has simply created additional impact on the already difficult lives of girls and young women whose voices, rights and needs remain unmet.

The report is divided into eight sections: 1) Introduction (which gives a brief background of FAWEU and the COVID19 situation as well as the purpose and specific objectives of the study); 2) Methodology (which discusses the design, approach, sampling, instruments, analysis, ethical considerations, data quality, Covid19 risk management and limitations of the study); 3) Profiling of School Going Girls and Young Women (i.e. age, sex, marital status, religious affiliation, education and disability status); 4) Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage; 5) Drivers of Sexual Engagement during the Covid-19 Pandemic; 6) Girls’ Access to Learning Opportunities during the Pandemic; 7) Girls’ Participation in Economic Activities; and 8) Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations.

#### 1.1. BRIEF ABOUT FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS (UGANDA)

Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda (FAWEU) was established in 1997 with the goal of accelerating female participation in education and, therefore, close the gender gap at all levels of the education system in Uganda. It is one of 34 country chapters of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)—a pan African NGO founded in 1992 by five women ministers of education to promote girls’ and women’s education in Africa. FAWEU’s vision is “*a Uganda in which all girls and women effectively participate in sustainable development*” and its mission is “*to enhance gender equity, equality and inclusion in education by influencing policies, nurturing attitudes and practices, and implementing interventions that positively influence girls’ education.*” Pursuant to this mission, the organization is implementing several projects (including a Higher Education Access Program; Community Action to End Violence against Children; Promotion of Second Chance Education in Karamoja, Acholi, Rwenzori and Teso Bukedea sub regions; and a Reskilling program in West Nile). In 2020, it commissioned this study on the situation of girls and young women in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan, July 2020 – December, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## 1.2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

On March 1, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global public health emergency and urged all countries to undertake several precautionary measures to mitigate its spread. At the height of the pandemic, nearly 90 percent of students worldwide were affected by the closure of their institutions of learning (UNESCO, April 2020). While school closures may have been necessary to reduce the transmission rate of COVID-19, their full impact on the well-being of children and youth has not always been considered in the decision-making process not well known. Regardless, there is emerging evidence to suggest that COVID-19 has impacted access to quality education and learning (INEE Resource Collection, GEC, UNESCO, 2020). This suggests that COVID-19 crisis jeopardizes the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and leaves the most marginalized children and youth—especially those in vulnerable situations—even further behind their less vulnerable peers. Before the COVID-19 crisis, 258 million children were already denied their right to quality education; millions more are now at risk of having this right disrupted and denied (UNESCO, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased protection risks, including those related to various forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation, thereby putting the realisation of SDGs 5.2<sup>3</sup>, 5.3<sup>4</sup>, 8.7<sup>5</sup> and 16.2<sup>6</sup> further from reach.

Uganda confirmed its first case of the disease on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020. And as of April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 41,715 cases and 341 deaths have been confirmed<sup>7</sup>. Like many other countries, Uganda responded by enforcing a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. This started with closure of all educational institutions in the country, resulting into the sending of 11,099,774 students to their families. Up to 49.8 percent of these are female and of these, 26 percent, representing 1,436,896, are teenagers or older. At the time of the study, closure of educational institutions effected in March 2020 had been in place for a year save for candidate and semi-candidate classes, which were allowed to return after six months of total school lockdown. The closure of educational institutions was followed closely by incremental closure of other sectors of society until near total lockdown of economic, social and cultural activity in the country. There was restricted movements except for essential workers and essential services, of which the social sector was excluded affecting response to reported cases of violence. Consequently, many of the families to which the students returned lost their livelihoods and experienced a surge in incidence of domestic and gender-based violence. Creditably, however, a range of educational programs (including homework packages, online classes, education television, education radio, community audio towers, home schooling, etc.) emerged as soon as lockdown was imposed. And although characteristically ad hoc, stopgap and fitful, these programs took shape and covered more and more students as lockdown persisted. At the time of finalization of this report, the government had reintroduced total lockdown

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<sup>3</sup> 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

<sup>4</sup> Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

<sup>5</sup> Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

<sup>6</sup> End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/>.

including closure of schools and other educational institutions following a resurgence of COVID-19 cases<sup>8</sup>.

Coupled with the removal of students from their schools' protective environments and schedules, both the distortion of livelihoods and surge in incidence of domestic and gender-based violence factors could aggravate the susceptibility of girls and young women to abuse, risky sexual behavior and involvement in economic activities (including adverse undertakings that might affect their availability for educational programs during and after lockdown). Indeed, at the time of the study, media reports indicated increase in adolescent pregnancies among school going girls. On 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, for example, *Daily Monitor* reported that during lockdown, up to 2,372 adolescent girls had conceived while 128 had been married off in the districts of Kitgum, Ngora, Kyegegwa, Kasese and Lyantonde<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020, *The Independent* reported that 4,000 girls in Acholi sub-region had conceived since the commencement of lock down<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, when government started easing the lockdown on the economic activities in which parents are involved, many children remained at home redundant and unattended, presenting risk of exposure to abuse and/ or involvement in risky sexual behavior. Finally, it is noted that, their contribution notwithstanding, the education programs that emerged during lockdown presented risk of leaving many children out, especially due to logistical constraints like lack of electricity, computer hardware, internet connectivity, money to pay teachers, etc.

In these circumstances, efforts to protect girls and young women and to support them to attain education in line with targets like SDG4 and FAWEU's mission beg answers to questions about their situation in the context of the pandemic. However, the information available on this situation has largely been anecdotal, incomprehensive because COVID19 is novel and research on it and its consequences is nascent. It is in trying to close this gap that FAWEU commissioned this study—to guide programing for the successful protection and education of girls and young women in the ongoing- and post-COVID-19 situation.

### 1.3. ABOUT UGANDA'S REFUGEE SITUATION

At the end of 30 April 2021, Uganda was estimated to host over 1.48million<sup>11</sup> refugees and ranked among the top five refugee hosting nations worldwide. Uganda's 2006 Refugee Act, has been described as progressive and, arguably, provides a favorable environment for refugees with long-term settlement options. The refugees in Uganda are currently hosted in over 13 districts of Yumbe, Moyo, Arua, Madi Okollo Adjumani, Koboko, Lamwo, Kiryandongo, Hoima, Kamwinge, Kyegegwa, Isingiro and Kampala. Over 62% of all the refugees currently hosted in Uganda are from South Sudan.<sup>12</sup> Approximately 60% of refugees in Uganda are below age 18 and more than a half (or about 51%) are women and girls. Given that majority are under the age of 18, it also means that the demand for

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<sup>8</sup> Athumani, Halima (June 19, 2021). Uganda Imposes 42-Day COVID-19 Lockdown. See <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/uganda-imposes-42-day-covid-19-lockdown>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/2-300-school-girls-conceive-128-married-off-during-lockdown-1909280>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.independent.co.ug/over-4000-acholi-girls-made-pregnant-during-lockdown/>.

<sup>11</sup> Uganda - Refugee Statistics April 2021. Accessed on May 2, 2021 from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86495>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

education is high. Among the several refugee settlements in Uganda include Palabek, Kyaka II, Alere.

Palabek refugee settlement was officially opened in April, 2017 in Lamwo district; the settlement is home to over 56,020 refugees<sup>13</sup>, of which 85% are women and children<sup>14</sup>. Over 22% of the refugee population in Palabek is composed of young people aged between 15 and 24 years<sup>15</sup>. Kyaka II refugee settlement was opened in 2005 following the mass repatriation of Rwandan refugees that led to closure of Kyaka I<sup>16</sup>. Kyaka II received an influx of refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following the 2017 violence in DRC where an estimated 17,000 refugee arrived in Kyaka II<sup>17</sup>. Out of approximately 1,482,101 refugees currently hosted in Uganda, about 9% are in Kyaka II refugee settlement found in Kyegegwa district<sup>18</sup>. It is estimated that over 78% of the refugees in Kyaka II are women and children, 21% aged 15 and 24 years with majority from Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>19</sup>. Alere refugee settlement was established in 1990 as host for South Sudanese refugees fleeing the Second Sudanese War<sup>20</sup>. In 2013, refugees fleeing conflicts were also hosted at Alere. It is estimated that Alere hosts over 6,700 South Sudanese refugees<sup>21</sup>.

When the country entered into a lockdown, the over 1.4 million refugees in Uganda who “occupy areas prone to shocks with limited capacities and opportunities to cope and adapt” became increasingly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic<sup>22</sup>. While this study focuses on the girls and young women aged 10-24 years, its been noted that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other categories of people with special needs<sup>23</sup>.

#### **1.4. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRENT STUDY**

As part of the broader study, the purpose was to assess the situation of, and impact of COVID-19 on, school going girls and young women in Uganda. Data were collected on the following specific issues;

1. Prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda.
2. Drivers of engagement in sexual activity among school going girls and young women during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Levels of participation of school going girls in the learning opportunities that emerged during lockdown and the girls’ interest in continuing their education.
4. Levels of involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84118>. Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Kyaka II Settlement HLP Factsheet 2019". UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). Accessed on May 10, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Kyaka II Settlement HLP Factsheet 2019". UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). Accessed on May 10, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> UNHCR Representation in Uganda (April, 2021). Accessed on May 31, 2021, from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/86495>.

<sup>19</sup> OPM (2020). Accessed on April 10, from [www.ugandarefugees.org](http://www.ugandarefugees.org).

<sup>20</sup> ibidi

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Revised Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan, JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2021

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



5. Suggest innovations to support girls and young women to continue their education during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This section contains information about the way the study was conducted. It explains the design and approach; sampling (i.e., unit of analysis, sampling of study sites and selection of households and respondents); data collection methods and instruments; and data management and analysis techniques and procedures that were used. The section also explains the ethical considerations, COVID-19 risk management measures and data quality assurance checks that the study team adhered to. At the end, the limitations of the study are disclosed.

### 2.2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

**Approach:** The overall approach was participatory in nature involving discussions with stakeholders at inception, development of study tools and general conceptualization of key issues underpinning the study. At inception, the study team, technical team at FAWEU secretariat and gender and education specialists from FAWEU membership discussed the objectives, scope particularly the refugee settlement to be included in the study, methodology and instrumentation of the study<sup>24</sup>.

**Design:** The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. As with most survey designs, a representative sample makes it possible to generalize results to the entire population (Onwuegbuzie, & Collins, 2007), in this case the entire population of refugee girls and young women<sup>25, 26</sup>.

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected mainly using a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the prevalence of early marriages and pregnancies; drivers of engagement in sexual activity; access to and involvement in available learning platforms; interest in continuing with education during and after the pandemic; and involvement in economic activities. Qualitative data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies. In-depth interviews with a range of key informants were conducted to augment the data elicited by the questionnaire. The interviews focused on intricate attributes of the girls' situation that are laced in complex contextual factors, which questionnaires were deemed constrained to illuminate.

### 2.3. SAMPLING

#### 2.3.1. UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis<sup>27</sup> was defined as individual refugee girls and young women aged 10-24 years who were attending school at the time government ordered schools' closure. For comparison purposes, the target group was broadened to include boys and young men of

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<sup>24</sup> During inception meetings, it was for example agreed to adopt a definition of girls and young women to mean anyone aged 10-24 years who was attending school at the time government ordered schools' closure. It was also agreed to broaden the target group to include boys and young men aged 10-24 years instead of limiting the study to only girls and young women aged 10-24 years. This was intended to identify gender issues by having comparable evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on school going girls and young women and boys and young men. By focusing on those aged 10-24, it meant that all female and male children and young people in the entire education cycle covering all levels from primary up to University and Tertiary Institutions had the same chance of being included in the sample. In other words, the study relied on a highly participatory approach involving the key stakeholders at various stages.

<sup>25</sup> Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Collins, K. M. (2007). A typology of mixed methods sampling designs in social science research. *Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 281-316.

<sup>26</sup> Gideon, L. (2012). *Handbook of survey methodology for the social sciences*. New York: Springer.

<sup>27</sup> Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Basics of social research*. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

the same age. Focusing on the ages 10-24 years meant that all female and male students from upper primary to (undergraduate) University had a chance of being included in the sample.

### 2.3.2. SAMPLING OF STUDY SITES

While this specific report focuses on the issues affecting refugee girls and young women, it is part of the bigger report whose data were collected from over twenty-five (25) districts of Uganda (see broader report for more information sampling for the broader study including selection of regions etc). Three refugee settlements were selected for inclusion in the study. These were Alere in Adjumani, Kyaka II in Kyegegwa and Palabek in Lamwo districts.

**Table 1: Summary of samples from selected refugee settlements**

<i>District</i>	<i>Refugee settlement</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Total</i>	
		<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%ge</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%ge</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%ge</i>
<b>Adjumani</b>	Alere	42	30.2	43	29.7	85	29.9
<b>Kyegegwa</b>	Kyaka	37	26.6	40	27.6	77	27.1
<b>Lamwo</b>	Palabek	60	43.2	62	42.8	122	43.0

### 2.3.3. SELECTION OF HOUSEHOLDS AND RESPONDENTS

From each village/block, a sampling frame of the households was constructed. This was done with the assistance of refugee welfare councils, and sometimes, other local leaders who had comprehensive households' lists. From each village/block, the required number of households was randomly determined. Selection of the households in the villages/blocks was done by use of systematic random sampling. At household level, all eligible young girls/women and boys/men aged 10-24 years were listed, and a simple random sampling procedure applied to select two eligible respondents (one female and one male). Where households had one eligible respondent, this would be compensated in the next household. This approach ensured that all eligible respondents in the household had an equal chance of being included in the sample. A total of 284 young people were drawn from the refugee settlements of Alere, Palabek and Kyaka II refugee settlements. This sample size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s sample size estimation formula (*annex 1 (i)*).

## 2.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

Data were collected using household survey questionnaire. This was augmented by key informant interviews, focus group discussions, documentary review and case studies. These were also used to ensure that gender and other relevant equity factors were captured in the study.

**2.4.1 Household survey questionnaire with girls and young women:** The main dataset was collected using a structured questionnaire (*annex II*). The questionnaire was directly administered by a team of trained data collectors using Open Data Kit (ODK). The questionnaire was developed through a participatory process involving the research team, the technical team from FAWEU and gender and education specialists from FAWEU membership. This ensured that all the required information was captured. The questionnaire captured information on key demographics and objectives of the study; early marriages and pregnancies; drivers of sexual engagement among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic; proportion of girls accessing available learning platforms

and the proportion of girls who have either lost interest or are still interested in school and education during the COVID-19 closure and post-closure period.

**2.4.2 Key-Informant Interviews:** Key informant interviews were conducted at three levels: national, district and community.

**a) National level:** Interviews were conducted with purposively selected officials from key government ministries, departments and agencies; CSOs; the private sector; the academia; OPM; Windle International; and AVSI (see annex II). Selection of these key informants was based on their knowledge of the issues that affect girl child education and the COVID19 situation in the country and particularly issues related to refugees.

**b) District level:** Interviews were held with key actors in education and child protection in the districts including the representatives of OPM in the respective refugee settlements and CSOs providing education related support and child protection to refugees in respective settlements. These included respondents from Camp Commandants, probation and social welfare offices, child and family protection units of Uganda police force, district education offices, district community development offices, district health offices, among others.

**c) Community level:** At the community level, discussions were held with selected duty bearers including opinion leaders, refugee welfare council leaders, child protection committees, members of village health teams and cultural leaders. These discussions were conducted using an interview guide with open ended questions.

**2.4.3 Focus Group Discussions:** These were conducted with parents/ caregivers, boda boda riders and girls and young women—to get in-depth information, facilitate data harmonization/ validation and contextual analysis of the status of girls during the pandemic.

**a) Parents/ caregivers:** In each refugee settlement, at least one FGD was conducted with parents/caregivers using a guide. Separate discussions were held for female and male caregivers.

**b) Girls and young women:** At least one FGD was conducted in each of the refugee settlements with groups of 5 to 10 girls, boys and young women and men. These hadn't participated in the survey.

The FGDs were conducted in the communities via face-to-face interactions. This was done with the help of FGD guides (see annex II). During the discussions, notes were taken and electronic recording was done. In line with the COVID-19 SOPs at the time, each FGD had a maximum of seven participants.

#### **2.4.4 Case studies**

In each of the refugee settlements visited, at least one case study involving a girl/young woman aged 10-24 was conducted, in addition to having one case study in each of the 25 districts. The purpose was to conduct in-depth analysis of the situation of girls who had experienced some of the issues investigated (i.e., early marriage, teenage pregnancy, dropout of school and involvement in economic activity). The cases were identified during the FGDs or referrals by the key informants. During discussion, we aimed at capturing information on the history of the girl, and experiences during COVID-19 and

what these experiences mean for them. Information from such sources is used in understanding of the key issues affecting refugee girls during COVID-19.

## **2.5. DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS**

### ***a) Quantitative data analysis***

The questionnaire was programmed and uploaded on a tablet. Subsequently, a team of trained research assistants entered data into the tablets as they collected it. The data entered were then uploaded onto a server (KoboCollect). Once the data was on the server, the statistician checked it for accuracy and ensured that necessary corrections were done. The data were then exported from the server to Microsoft Excel and Stata version 15 for analysis. In Stata, data variables and value labels were created and analysed at univariate, bivariate and multivariate levels. At univariate level, descriptive statistics were computed and the distribution of data generated. At bivariate level, non-parametric techniques were used to compare subgroups within the sample.

### ***b) Qualitative data analysis***

Save for participants' refusals, the interviews were audio recorded. Interviews that hadn't been conducted in English were translated to English. The process was iterative, allowing reflections as data was being collected. Through this process, emerging themes were then identified and followed up while the data collection teams were still in the field. This ensured that the emerging issues were comprehensively studied. During daily briefings, the research team discussed emerging issues with the data collection teams, which enabled identification of issues that required following up. The records were transcribed and exported to Nvivo (Version 12 Pro). A code frame was developed. The initial code frame was based on the thematic areas developed from the objectives of the study. Subsequently, each of the transcripts was reviewed to identify the issues it raised and to establish patterns and analytical reflections for further analysis. After this process, areas of convergence, divergence, strengthening the interpretation and explanation of the quantitative findings were identified. During presentation of results, verbatim statements/quotations are used.

## **2.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study received ethical review and clearance from TASO Research Ethics Committee and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) (study number SS676ES). This study involved talking to young girls and women, and other people, some of whom had negative experiences of COVID-19 likely to evoke psychosocial effects. The research team was aware that talking to them about their experiences might evoke emotional stress, feelings of helplessness and cause unnecessary distress. Therefore, the following ethical action steps were taken;

- Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants and emancipated minors. For all young girls below the age of 18 years, informed parental/caregiver permission was obtained before seeking assent.
- All study materials that relate to participants at community level (including the consent forms and instruments) were translated into the relevant local languages.
- Personally identifying information was not elicited.
- The study had an inbuilt stop-study criterion to address ethical dilemmas particularly in the event that a child or participant showed signs of distress. Signs of distress included, among others, crying in the middle of the interview, refusing to talk and outright aggression. Study teams were trained to immediately stop the

interview for about ten minutes. After the participant would be asked if she/he wanted to continue with the interview or not. If the person was not interested in continuing with the interview, the data collector was expected to inform the supervisor who in turn would call the District Probation and Social Welfare Officer to consider whether the child needed more support.

## **2.7. COVID-19 RISK MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

All the necessary COVID-19 risk reduction measures/ guidelines provided by the Ministry of Health<sup>28</sup> were adhered to;

- i. Hand washing facilities were put in place to ensure that research teams wash hands frequently with soap and water
- ii. Every team member was provided with a hand sanitizer to ensure that they sanitise before and after conducting an interview to avoid spreading the virus. Participants were asked to sanitise before and after interviews.
- iii. All participants, including interviewers and interviewees were asked to wear a mask during interviews. The study procured additional masks for teams to provide for households that did not have their own masks.
- iv. Interviewers and interviewees maintained at least 2 meters distance between themselves. All FGDs had 7 participants or fewer to allow social distancing.
- v. Frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs/handles, car doors, were disinfected regularly.
- vi. Vehicles taking the research teams carried four people or fewer.

## **2.8. QUALITY CONTROL/ASSURANCE CHECKS**

A range of quality assurance checks were put in place to ensure that quality data was collected:

- a) *Regular interaction with FAWEU:* A series of meetings were held with the FAWEU technical team and Gender Specialists from FAWEU membership to harmonise the processes of the study. We had regular engagement around methodology, study tools, data collection and analysis.
- b) *Tools Design:* The questionnaire was programed and downloaded on tablets in Open Data Kit (ODK). Herein, quality control checks were built to prevent wrong entries and detect errors. The tablets were password protected to ensure that access to data was restricted to authorised study team members.
- c) *Training of research assistants:* A team of experienced research assistants was recruited considering gender needs and language. Following preliminary discussions with the key Gender Specialists, it was proposed to have a mix of female and male RAs but skewed towards female RAs. All RAs had to be proficient in the local languages of the communities where they were deployed and English. In addition, all the RAs went through a two-day training on the objectives and design of the study, which included refresher training on data collection and research ethics. The RAs were also trained in conducting community-based surveys during COVID-19.
- d) *Pre-testing of tools:* The clarity, consistency and logical flow of the instruments was ascertained through pre-tests.
- e) *Supervision of the data collection process:* A rigorous supervision process was established to ensure that field RAs collected quality data. Each team of RAs had a

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<sup>28</sup> See, <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/prevention/>.

supervisor who provided onsite support supervision. Challenges experienced were reported daily and corrections effected. Daily briefings were organized with the teams and attended by all members of the study teams via Zoom.

## 2.9. LIMITATIONS

A significant part of the data on which the study relies is self-reported. Studies have shown that sometimes self-reported data suffers from accuracy arising out of social desirability bias<sup>29,30</sup>. Biases in response often occur when respondent desires to present themselves in a favorable light or in a way that may not elicit judgment, especially on sensitive topics such as sex, marriage and pregnancy. To address some of these challenges, we ensured that all data collectors were trained to avoid passing stereotypical statements during the interview that may elicit biased responses. We ensured that all interviews were conducted in spaces that offered the privacy of the respondent and everyone was assured of confidentiality and informed consent obtained at the beginning and throughout the interview. Some studies have shown that “level of information revealed by a respondent is positively related to the level of privacy of the interview”<sup>31</sup>. Besides, the study team also made every attempt to triangulate data sources and even methods. Evidence presented here is drawn from various sources using multiple methods including review of existing data bases.

Secondly, the COVID19 situation continues to evolve, so its effects are fluid. For example, at the time of data collection the government position on school reopening was rather ambiguous. Only candidate classes had been allowed back to school. At the time of finalization of this report, the government had reimposed total school closure following a staggered reopening approach earlier adopted. This was in response to a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. The full impact of COVID-19 may not become clear until much later. Therefore, the findings of this study may only be understood in light of the context within which the study was conducted.

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<sup>29</sup> Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality & Quantity*, 47(4), 2025-2047....

Newman, J. C., Des Jarlais, D. C., Turner, C. F., Gribble, J., Cooley, P., & Paone, D. (2002). The differential effects of face-to-face and computer interview modes. *American journal of public health*, 92(2), 294-297.

<sup>31</sup>ibid

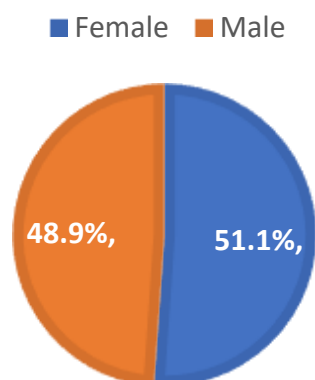


## PROFILING OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

### 3.1. AGE, SEX, MARITAL STATUS AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Overall, 51.1 percent of the respondents were female. This despite efforts to have an equal number of female and male respondents. Nonetheless, the proportions reached for each category is significant enough to allow for independent analysis and comparison for some variables.

**Figure 1: Sex composition of respondents (n=249, %)**



In terms of age, a significant proportion of the respondents were aged between 10 and 13 years (47.8%) and the least proportion were aged 18-24 years (19.4%). In terms of marital status, almost all of the respondents (94.4%) were single and never married at the time of the study. This was probably not surprising given that the focus of the study was school going girls and young women who would ordinarily not be expected to be married. Significant to note however is that 4.0% of the girls and young women said they were married at the time of the study. As we show later, while some respondents were married before COVID-19, there were significantly those who got married during COVID-19 period. Majority of the participants reportedly belonging to the Catholic faith (43.8%) followed by Protestant/Anglicans (41.8%), Pentecostal/Born Again Christians (5.6%) and Seventh Day Adventists (5.6%). Others mentioned Muslim (2.8%), Orthodox, Lutheran among others.

**Table 2 Profile of study participants (n=249, %)**

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Age</b>			
10-13	47.2%	48.4%	47.8%
14-17	30.9%	34.9%	32.9%
18-24	22.0%	16.7%	19.3%
<b>Religious affiliation</b>			
Catholic	43.9%	43.7%	43.8%
Protestant/ Anglican	39.8%	43.7%	41.8%
Muslim	4.1%	1.6%	2.8%
Pentecostal /Born Again	4.1%	7.1%	5.6%
SDA	6.5%	4.0%	5.2%
Other	1.6%	0.0%	0.8%
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single never married	95.1%	93.7%	94.4%
Married	3.3%	4.8%	4.0%
Staying with partner but not married	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%



### 3.2. LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Unlike for the non-refugee communities where a significant majority were in upper primary, in the refugee community, majority (48.8%) of the participants were in lower primary (P1-P5) at the time government enforced lockdown. These were followed by those who were in upper primary classes (P5-P7) (31.3%) and O'level (S1-S4) (17.1%). There were also a few participants who said they were in Senior Six vacation (0.4%) and others were in tertiary institutions. The small proportion of refugee participants attending upper levels of education is not surprising given that access to education for most refugees remains a key challenge. In most refugee hosting communities, there are hardly any secondary schools where learners could go to. For example, the Refugee Response Plan<sup>32</sup>, indicates that there only 34 secondary schools in refugee communities across the country, which limits the possibility to attend a secondary school for refugees. For example, its reported that there are only six secondary schools in the entire South West region<sup>33</sup>.

By age group, while majority (81.4%) of those aged 10-13 years were in lower primary, there were equally older adolescents aged 14-17 years (22.5%) and 18-24 years (4.8%) who were in lower primary. Among refugees, it is common for learners who are older to be in lower classes. For example, according to the 2018 joint multi-sectoral humanitarian needs assessment in Uganda, "an average of 22% are enrolled in grades lower than expected for their age"<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, those in higher levels were fewer than those in lower classes. More males than females were in higher levels of education.

**Table 3: Classes/levels attained by respondents (n=240, %)**

Response	Age			Sex		
	10-13 (%)	14-17 (%)	18-24 (%)	Male (%)	Female(%)	Total (%)
Lower primary (P1-P4)	81.4	22.5	4.8	45.8	50.8	48.8%
Upper Primary (P5-P7)	17.0	50.0	35.7	33.1	29.5	31.3%
Lower secondary (S1-S4)	0.9	27.5	42.9	17.8	16.4	17.1%
A-Level (S5-S6)	0.0	0.0	11.9	2.5	1.6	2.1%
S6 Vacation	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.9	0.0	0.4
Other (Tertiary etc.)	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.8	0.4%

### 3.3. STATUS OF PARENTAL CARE

Overall, although eight in ten (84.2%) of the young girls and boys who participated in the study had both biological parents alive, for the refugees, only about six in ten (64.0%) said they had both biological parents alive. In fact, more refugee participants (6.8%) said they had none of the parents compared to the non-refugees (1.2%). More refugees (22.5%) compared to non-refugees (10.4%) were likely to have the mother only. There were no significant differences across age and sex in terms of being orphaned.

<sup>32</sup> Revised Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan, July 2020 – December 2021.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Plan International Uganda (2020)

**Table 4 Proportion of young people whose biological parents are alive (n=6,140, %)**

	Age			Sex		Residence		Nationality		Total
	10-13	14-17	18-24	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Refugee	National	
Parents who are alive										
Both	87.1	83.5	76.7	84.4	84.1	84.7	83.6	<b>64.0</b>	<b>85.2</b>	<b>84.2</b>
Father	1.9	3.4	4.3	2.8	2.9	2.66	3.1	3.4	2.8	2.8
Mother	9.5	11.2	15.1	10.9	10.9	11.1	11.1	22.5	10.4	10.9
None	1.0	1.6	3.0	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.6	<b>6.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Don't know (for both)	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.5	3.4	0.2	0.5

As expected, there were more refugees (9.8%) who said they were living with none of their biological parents compared to nationals (5.3%). These results in table 5 and 6 show the level of vulnerability that refugee children face compared to the non-refugee children.

**Table 5 Young people that live with their biological parents (n=6,394)**

	Age			Sex		Residence		Nationality		Total
	10-13	14-17	18-24	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Refugees	Non-refugee	
Yes, with both parent	70.5%	67.5%	62.0%	68.8%	67.5%	64.2%	65.2%	64.9%	60.6%	68.1%
Yes, with father only	4.6%	5.3%	4.6%	5.5%	4.3%	5.3%	4.9%	5.2%	1.5%	4.9%
Yes, with mother only	16.9%	18.9%	21.2%	17.3%	19.2%	19.8%	21.3%	20.0%	32.6%	18.3%
None	7.9%	8.3%	12.2%	8.4%	8.9%	10.7%	8.6%	9.8%	5.3%	8.7%

### 3.5 CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19

While the concept of care is often associated with “the action/process of helping those who are suffering”<sup>35</sup>, in this study, care was conceptualized to mean receipt of basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) by the young people. The person giving care could be a parent, friend, relative, grandparent or sibling. We asked participants to mention the person (or people) who were responsible for caring for them before and during the COVID-19 period. Our assumption was that caregiving is important as a protective factor against the vulnerability of young people during COVID-19 especially in the context of refugees.

Results show that refugee men have become less involved in care giving. This has exacerbated the care giving divide between men and women. There was a decline in the proportion of young persons who said they received care from their biological fathers during COVID-19 (17.7%) from 21.3% before COVID-19. Yet, the proportion of young people who mentioned receiving care from their biological mothers increased from 60.0% before the COVID-19 pandemic to 63.5% during COVID-19 period. This may suggest that some men have left the caregiving roles to women during the COVID-19 period. Similar observations were noted among the non-refugee participants. This could also have been occasioned by the significant disruptions in income flow for most households, where the significant proportion of care givers are men. It is also largely related to the deep-rooted cultural norms that places the burden of care giving in a home on women. This result however suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated or

<sup>35</sup> Hermanns, M., & Mastel-Smith, B. (2012). Caregiving: A Qualitative Concept Analysis. Qualitative Report, 17, 75.

continued to widen the divide in caregiving responsibilities between men and women with women disproportionately bearing caring responsibilities. Girls and young women are disproportionately taking on the responsibilities to provide food, clothing, and any other basic needs including emotional care for families as a result of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a vacuum as some men retrocede the caregiving arena. No wonder, as noted later, most young people have taken up economic activities, sometimes at the urging of their parents, as a way of supplementing households/families' income to fill the void left by their fathers. What is also noticeable is a very slight increase in caregiving responsibilities for Non relative guardian/adoptive parents from (3.3%) before the COVID-19 period to (3.8%) during the COVID-19 period.

**Table 6 Caregivers before and during COVID-19 (n=284,%)**

	Before COVID-19 (n, 240, %)			During COVID-19 (n, 230, %)		
	Male	Female	%	Male	Female	%
Biological Mother	58.5%	61.5%	<b>60.0%</b>	64.1%	62.8%	<b>63.5%</b>
Biological Father	22.9%	19.7%	<b>21.3%</b>	18.0%	17.4%	<b>17.7%</b>
Myself	1.7%	0.0%	0.8%	1.7%	0.8%	1.3%
Husband or Wife	1.7%	2.5%	2.1%	0.9%	2.5%	1.7%
Non relative guardian/adoptive parents	2.5%	4.1%	<b>3.3%</b>	3.4%	4.1%	<b>3.8%</b>
Grandparent	2.5%	4.9%	3.8%	2.6%	4.1%	3.4%
Mother or Father's brother or sister	5.1%	1.6%	3.3%	5.1%	2.5%	3.8%
Brother or sister	3.4%	4.1%	<b>3.8%</b>	3.4%	5.0%	<b>4.2%</b>
Other relative	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Other	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0

## EARLY MARRIAGES AND ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES

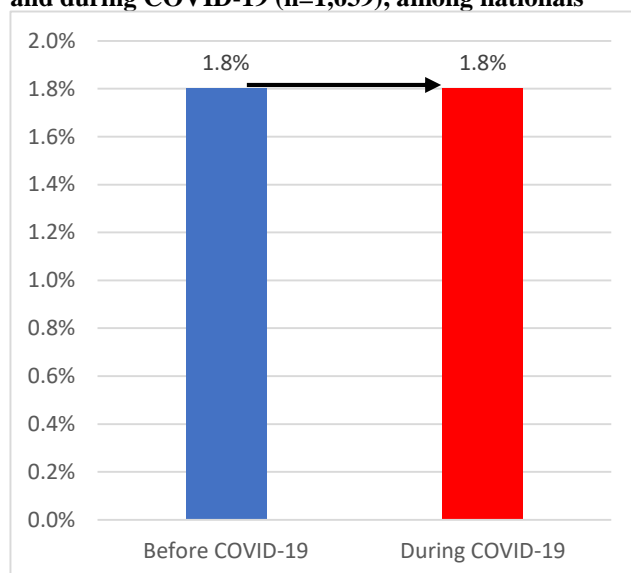
### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Incidence of pregnancy among girls/ young women was established by asking them whether they had conceived during the COVID-19 (school) lockdown and whether they knew of their peers who had conceived. This chapter contains the findings from these sources. In the last section, the findings on the incidence of marriage among the girls and young women are presented.

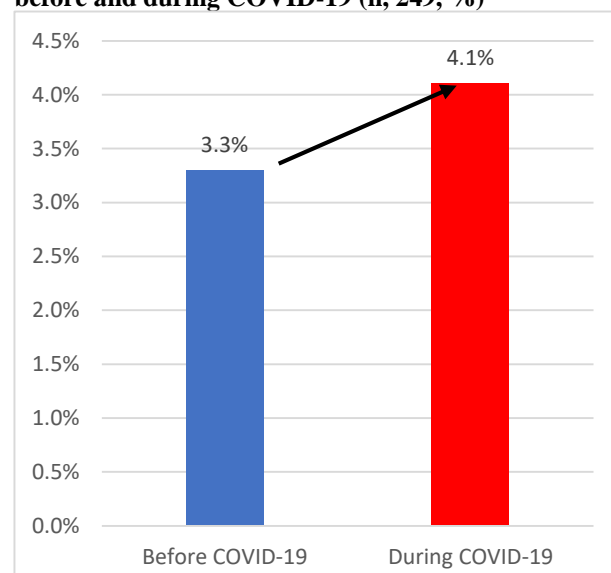
### 4.2 ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES

Results show a 0.8% increment among refugee girls and young women who became pregnant from 3.3% before COVID-19 to 4.1% during COVID-19. When compared to the nationals, results show that only 1.8% of the girls conceived during lockdown which is slightly lower than the 4.1% among refugees. This suggests that COVID-19 disproportionately made refugees more susceptible to risk factors that increase their vulnerability to pregnancy compared to non-refugee communities.

**Figure 2: % of young girls who became pregnant before and during COVID-19 (n=1,639), among nationals**



**Figure 3: % of refugee girls who became pregnant before and during COVID-19 (n, 249, %)**

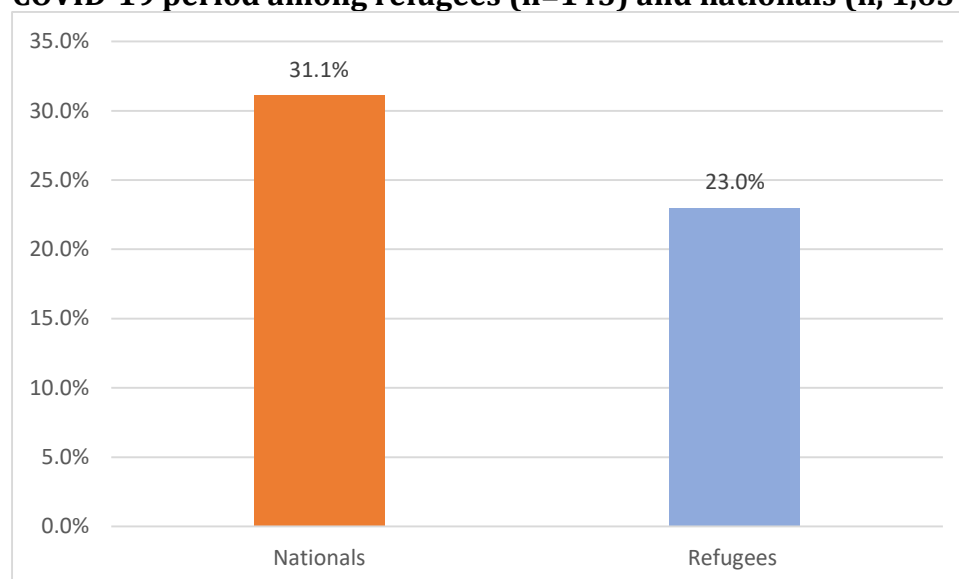


There were slight differences across the refugee settlements. For example, in Palabek alone, 4.8% of girls became pregnant during COVID-19 period, higher than the average of 4.1% among the refugees who become pregnant during COVID-19.

We have registered high pregnancy rates for girls; because of the lock down and the perpetrators being all over the place and these convince the girls to sleep with them. The need for certain needs for these girls also forces them to look at boys as the alternative. The learners have also been idle. The parents go the gardens far away and some leave the children at home. **(Senior Community Officer/ Education Focal Person OPM)**

In addition, 23.0% of the participants of the refugees were aware of a peer who became pregnant during the same period (Figure 4). When compared to the nationals, however, there were slightly more nationals (31.1%) compared to refugees (23.0%) aware of a peer who became pregnant during COVID-19.

**Figure 4: Awareness of a peer (girl of same age) who became pregnant during COVID-19 period among refugees (n=145) and nationals (n, 1,639)**



Differences were noted across the refugee settlements. For example, in Palabek, 16.0% were aware of a peer who became pregnant during COVID-19, slightly lower than Kyaka II refugee settlement where 48.2% were aware of a peer who became pregnant during COVID-19. The inference from results presented in figure 4 above is that the incidence of pregnancy among girls and young women is probably higher than the 4.1%. As early as April 2020, UNFPA<sup>36</sup> projected that over 7 million unintended pregnancies were likely to occur as a result of any additional lockdowns. Indeed, as Uganda enters a second phase of the national lock down, this sounds as a painful reminder that additional unintended pregnancies will occur and particularly among vulnerable populations like refugee girls. Discussions with young girls corroborate the evidence;

R1. Yes, we know some (girls who become pregnant). There is one girl who is in primary who has since become pregnant.

R2. I also know another one, she is in primary five. She has now become pregnant. She is still at home with her parents. She stays with her grandmother and she is being harassed since she is pregnant.

R3. The one I talked about, she is also pregnant but she stays in zone 3 block 5.

R4. There is another girl in block 6. She became pregnant but she still stays with her parents. **(FGD young girls, Palabek Refugee settlement)**

R1: I know some girls who have become pregnant.

R4: There are some girls I have seen as young as 13 years who have got pregnant and married. Some other girls are about 14, years, so COVID generally has really impacted on the girl child. I have a friend who was only 14 years, I was told that she got married, each time I go to check on her, I do not get her, actually she was only P.7 **(FGD with girls, Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

<sup>36</sup> UNFPA. (2020, April 27). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.

### 4.3. PREVALENCE OF EARLY MARRIAGES AMONG GIRLS

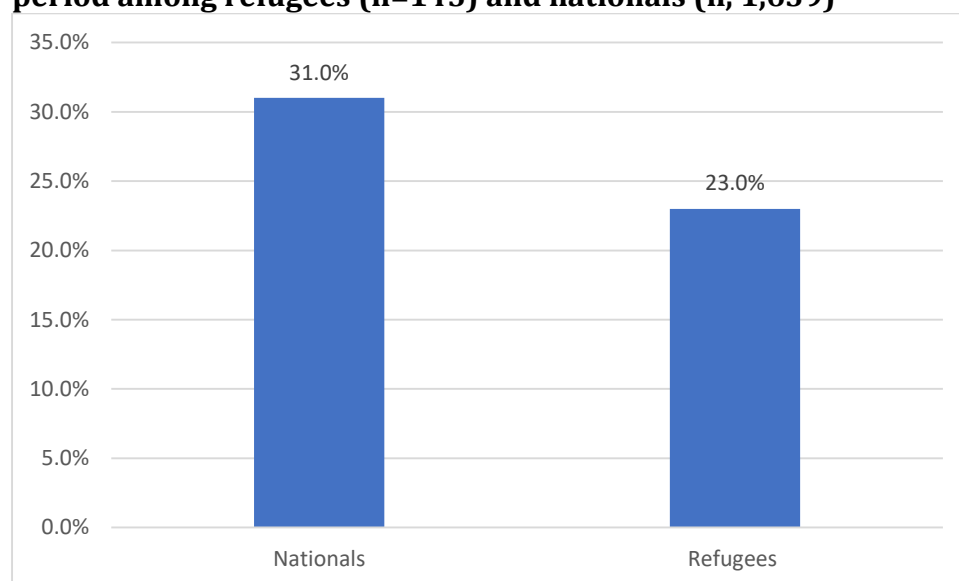
The proportion of girls who said they were married at the time of the study increased to 1.2% among nationals, and reduced among refugees from 6.6% to 3.3%.

**Table 7: % of girls married before and during COVID-19 among refugees and nationals**

<i>Response</i>	<i>Nationals (n=1,217, %)</i>	<i>Refugees (n=145, %)</i>
Proportion of girls who were married before COVID-19?	0.9%	6.6%
Proportion of young girls who were married at the time of the study	1.2%	3.3%

Close to one in four (23%) of all the refugee girls and young women who participated in the study said they were aware of a peer who got married during COVID-19 period, slightly lower than 31% among the nationals in the 25 districts (ref. broader study report). Again, just like pregnancy, it appears that although the proportion of young girls who said they were married during COVID-19 was low, overall, there are indicators that there was a much bigger proportion of girls who got married during COVID-19 among refugees. In fact, UNFPA's<sup>37</sup> projections indicate that an additional 13 million child marriages are likely to take place between 2020 and 2030 as a result of COVID-19 outbreak. According to UNFPA<sup>38</sup>, such child marriages would have otherwise been avoided.

**Figure 5: Awareness of a peer (girl of same age) who got married during COVID-19 period among refugees (n=145) and nationals (n, 1,639)**



### 4.5. PRESSURE TO GET MARRIED DURING COVID-19 AMONG YOUNG GIRLS

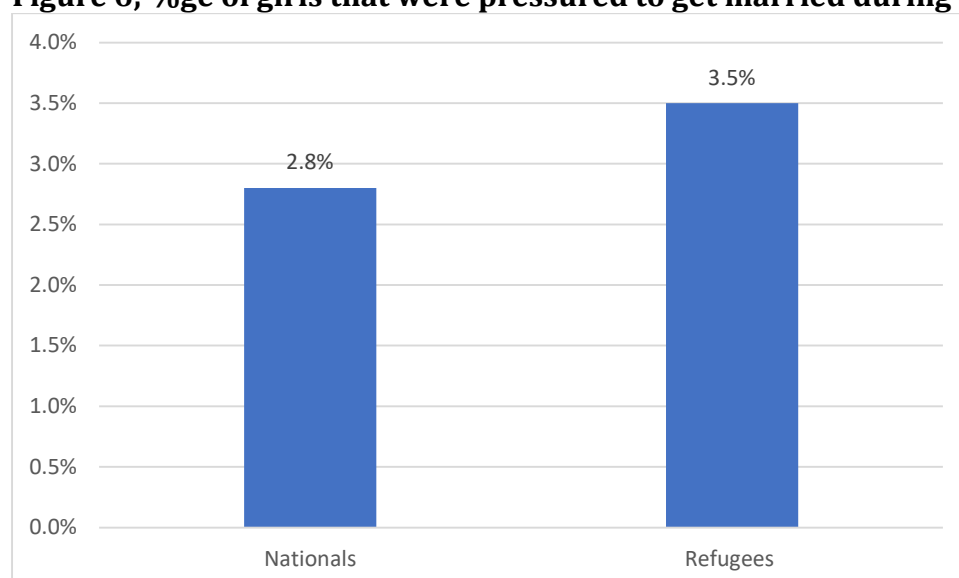
About 3.5% of all the young refugee girls who participated in the study reported being encouraged or pressured by their parents or caregivers to get married during COVID-19 period compared to 1.6% among the refugee boys/males. This result also compares poorly with the nationals where 2.8% of the girls (ref. broader study report) were

<sup>37</sup> UNFPA. (2020, April 27). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

pressured to get married during COVID-19. This also means that refugee girls were more susceptible to pressures to get married compared to non-refugees.

**Figure 6; %ge of girls that were pressured to get married during COVID-19**



Pressure to get married among refugees was higher in some settlements than others. For example, in Palabek about 8.3% of the young girls reported pressure by their caregivers/parent(s) and other people to get married.

The parents put pressure on girls to marry off so that they get bride price and this forces girls to find boys to sleep with, with the hope that they will marry them. This makes the parents happy. **(FGD Girls, Palabek refugee settlement)**

Discussions with girls and young women during focus group discussions attributed pressure to get married to the loss of family livelihood. Marrying off young girls would partly ensure that families receive money and other goods. Incidence of early marriage has been heightened by the increased poverty and vulnerability among refugee households attributed to the pandemic that has forced families to marry off their daughters to help assuage family financial burdens. Discussions with girls from Kyaka II refugee settlement suggest that the need to meet basic needs or the failure of parents/caregivers to provide is forcing a significant number of refugee girls into forced marriages.

**P4:** Yes, you see some girls are not studying. You may find that one does not have money, so here comes a boy who tries to lure a girl, then gives her like 20,000UGX, we call it 'black minding' some body gives you some gifts just to confuse you. Some girls have been pressured to marry based on that.

**P5:** You see, there some parents who lack some of the basic necessities at home. You find that they are lacking sugar, salt, food, paraffin, charcoal and all these are needed in a home and yet for us refugees, we are given about 20,000UGX which cannot be enough for us. So, in the end, the mother has not option because even the monthly 20, 000UGX is not enough, she may ask her daughter to get married. So, children in these homes look at the situation at home and they decide to get

married also. So, they feel pressure (at least indirectly) (**FGD girls, Kyaka II refugee settlement**).

School closures opened up opportunities for the parents and caregivers to pressure, lure and entice girls into marriage under the guise of “schools may never open again”. Girls who participated in the study mentioned that their parents had pressured them to get married since there was no hope for government reopening of schools. At the time of finalization of writing this report, the government proposal of reopening of schools had been reversed by the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in Uganda. It is clear this will fuel anxieties and fears among learners and parents and vanquish any hopes of attending school again. What is certain is that this prolonged school closure and uncertainties will have significant long-term impacts on learners, their communities and the entire country. For most parents, it appears that the prolonged closure of schools has a direct impact on several other decisions including decisions about marriage that many girls are subjected to. As we argue later, this has the danger of rolling back the gains Uganda has made over the years in advancing girl child education.



## DRIVERS OF SEXUAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG SCHOOL GOING GIRLS

### 5.0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains information about the drivers of sexual engagement. These are identified as: Involvement in intimate relationships; disrupted livelihood sources and increasing poverty levels; failed parenting and the shift in the burden of care; limited access to adolescent sexual reproductive health information (ASRH) and services; lack of life skills among young people; increased exposure to violence; increased exposure to online sexual exploitation.

### 5.1. SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OF GIRLS AND BOYS BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19

#### 5.2. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

While the proportion of young people who engaged in sexual intercourse reduced from 13.9% to 13.1%, and from 13.9% to 10.9% among nationals, the proportion of refugee girls who engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 11.5% to 13.1%. It appears that overall, refugee girls experienced heightened vulnerabilities that expose them to the likelihood to engage in sexual intercourse than other categories.

**Table 8: %ge respondents who had sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19**

	Refugee			Nationals		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes, before COVID-19	16.4%	11.5%	13.9%	16.0%	12.1%	13.9%
Yes, during COVID-19	13.1%	13.1%	13.1%	11.6%	10.3%	10.9%

There were also differences across the refugee settlements. One in four respondents (23.6%) in Palabek refugee settlement said they had a sexual partner during COVID-19 with slightly more girls (24.0%) compared to boys (23.3%). The proportion of girls who engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 8.0% before to 12.0% during COVID-19. This suggests that COVID-19 increased the risk for sexual engagement among girls in Palabek than boys.

We have registered high pregnancy rates for girls; because of the lock down and the perpetrators being all over the place and these convince the girls to sleep with them. The need for certain needs for these girls also forces them to look at boys as the alternative. The learners have also been idle. The parents go the gardens far away and some leave the children at home. **(Senior Community Officer/ Education Focal Person OPM)**

Discussions with girls also indicate that the risk of pregnancy increased following closure of schools. School environment and being in school is a protective factor against risk of pregnancy. Given the structured routine nature of school, by itself schools offer protection particularly for refugee children.

R1. The risk is more, this is because we are freer to engage with boys. Besides school have regulations and occupy us in studies, we are always busy and don't think about boys while at school unlike now since COVID has led to school closures.

R2. At school we were busy with school activities, we reach home late and when we are very tired and have no time to engage with the boys.

R3: Yes, when schools are on, we are always engaged with something to do and one leads to another and this leaves us with no time at all to think about boys (**FGD young girls, Palabek Refugee settlement**)

Some girls mentioned that they were exposed to pregnancy because of lack of basic necessities that have forced them into sexual engagement. As already noted, the dire situation of families means that girls who lack necessities like sanitary materials were being lured into sexual intercourse.

R2. There are some basic needs for girls like soap, cosmetics, clothes that pressures girls to get boyfriends to provide them which makes them to end up getting pregnant. (**FGD young girls, Palabek**)

Low access to basic services such as food, enough clothing including sanitary ware for girls is not surprising for refugees. It is estimated that the poverty rate for the refugee populations is more than twice as high as for the host communities<sup>39</sup>. The pandemic has exacerbated an already bad situation and heightened food insecurity in the settlements. About one in four respondents (22.5%) said the number of meals available for consumption reduced during the pandemic period because families can no longer afford food (64.8%). Relatedly, close to one in four respondents (19.6%) went to bed hungry at least once a week before the survey with over 89.4% citing inadequate food at home as the main reason. The situation appears to be very critical for most refugees as food distribution was reportedly affected in most refugee settlements affecting available food rations. Over 16.7% of the refugee respondents said they did not receive any food support during the lock down. This corroborates evidence documented in the refugee response plan, which shows that COVID-19 did not only affect the “delivery of livelihoods interventions, resulting in a loss of income and reduced food security”, it also reportedly came at a time when food rations had reduced<sup>40</sup>. The reduction in household food security appears to have affected girls and young women the most, who beyond bearing the burden of caring for their households have become susceptible to being lured into sex in search of survival needs.

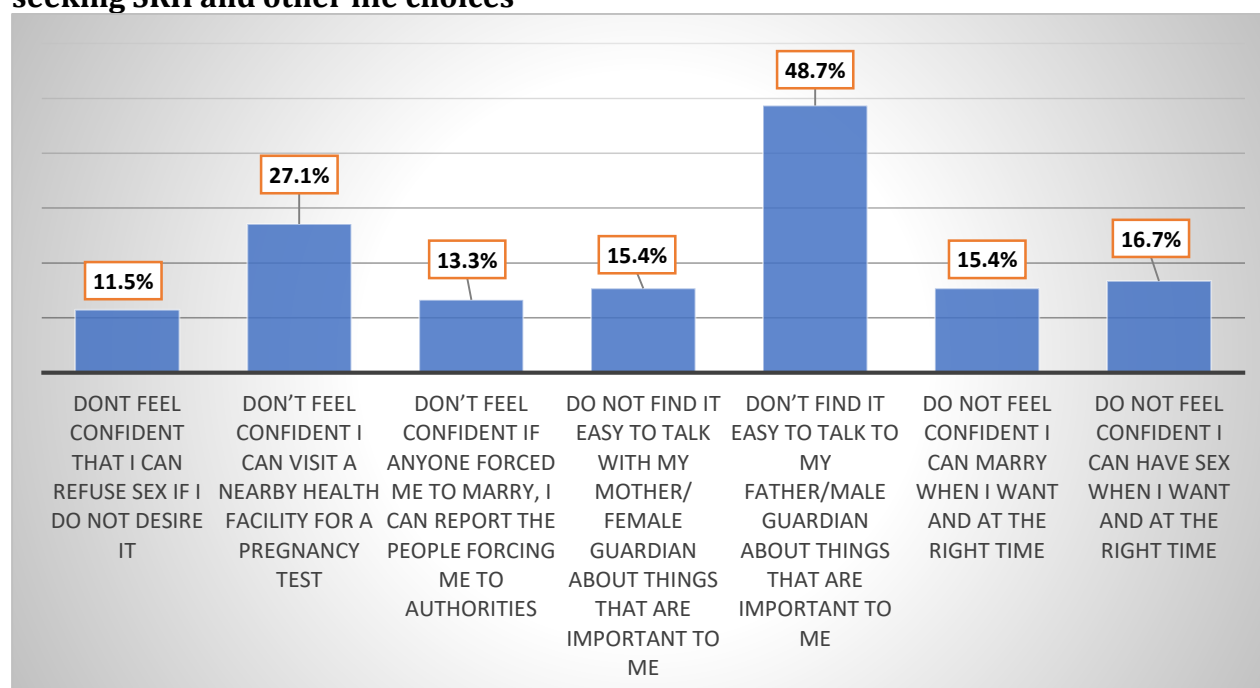
One of the key issues also mentioned was that in most of the refugee communities, there is general lack of confidence and skills to address issues around pregnancy and sexual engagement. While some of these issues are rooted within the existing cultural norms such as poor parent-child communication, they seem to have been critical in explaining why many girls were probably exposed to abuse during COVID-19. The study results show that few young people generally have confidence and skills in exercising and making life choices around sex, marriage and other SRH issues. For example, only 58.2% were confident they can have sex only when they want and the same proportion said they can marry when they want. This means that majority, do not have control over some of these choices.

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<sup>39</sup> World Bank, Informing the Refugee Policy Response in Uganda, 2019, based on UBOS data.

<sup>40</sup> REVISED UGANDA COUNTRY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN, JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2021

**Figure 7: % girls who exhibit varying levels of skills and confidence among girls seeking SRH and other life choices**



Exposure to abuse, particularly sexual abuse was reported to have driven young people into sexual violence. As indicated, 3.5% were forced to get married, about 2.6% experienced sexual violence from exposure to economic activities including rape and defilement. In addition, refugee girls and young women have been exposed to online abuse. COVID-19 has for some children meant online learning, often times unsupervised which in itself is a risk factor. For example, about 3.8% said they had access to a phone with internet connectivity during COVID-19 lock down and that over 75% spend three or more hours on the phone in a typical day implying that most of those with access to a phone spent a lot of their time on phone either reading materials from school (55.6%), or just chatting or holding conversations with friends (66.7%) and others simply browsing internet (44.4%). It is because of these kinds of exposures that about one third of the participants (33.3%) in the refugee communities were asked by people they met online to spend them pictures of their bodies, which they did. It is possible to argue that in most of these cases, access to internet and with lockdown in place, a lot of abuse against refugee children were initiated online.

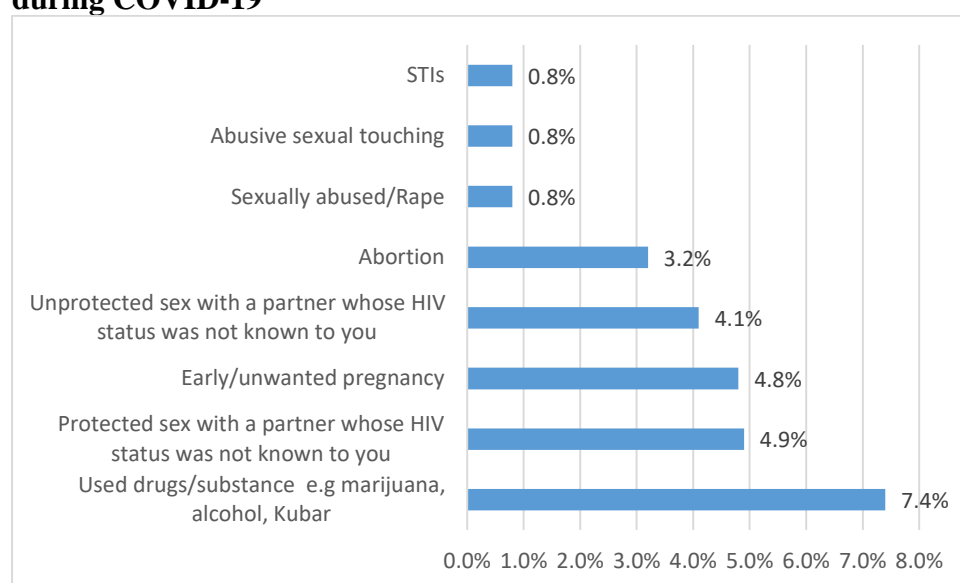
Results also show that exposure to internet has a deleterious effect. It has been noted that a result of COVID-19, some adult offenders are already initiating contact with children via social media and that some offenders also know that the more children spend time online the more its easier for them to have contact with them and expose them to sexual content and exploitation (EUROPOL, 2020)<sup>41</sup>. Online sexual abuse includes asking the victim for parts of their bodies, performing sexual acts on phone among others. What this means is that the potential for online sexual abuse is increasingly becoming a major concern in the refugee communities. The Uganda Child Help Line (UCHL) Report for August 2020 reveals

<sup>41</sup> EUROPOL (2020). Catching the virus: cybercrime, disinformation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Accessed on 13/09/2020 from <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/catching-virus-cybercrime-disinformation-and-covid-19-pandemic>.

that internet is now a platform for “distribution, trade, possession, and viewing of child sexual abuse and exploitation material”<sup>42</sup>. It has also been suggested that online sexual abuse is usually a continuation of what happens offline (Kardefelt-Winther & Maternowska, 2020)<sup>43</sup>. In such cases, online sexual exploitation should be seen as part of a bigger challenge regarding sexual abuse that children experience.

Another critical risk factor has been low access to sexual and reproductive health services. There was also low levels of access to contraceptive services and information about contraception. In Palabek for example, only 60.0% did not use a contraceptive method to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sexual intercourse during COVID-19 period and over 40% did not use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse during COVID-19. Consequently, there has been a significant proportion of young refugee girls exposed to issues around unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse among others. These also vary depending on the refugee settlement that a refugee girl lives. For example, in Palabek, over 4.1% reported having engaged in unprotected sex during the COVID-19 period, 4.8% reported unwanted pregnancy and about 0.8% reported having suffered a sexually transmitted infection (STIs).

**Figure 8% young people in Palabek who experienced any of the following SRH concerns during COVID-19**



<sup>42</sup> Uganda Child Help Line Report, August 2020, page 15.

<sup>43</sup> Kardefelt-Winther, D., & Maternowska, C. (2020). Addressing violence against children online and offline. *Nature human behaviour*, 4(3), 227-230.

## ACCESS TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the findings on the opportunities for learning that became available during the COVID-19 pandemic in the refugee settlements. Findings on girls' and young women's participation in these opportunities; the challenges experienced in participating in the opportunities; and girls' continued interest in education (during and after the COVID-19 pandemic) are presented in this chapter.

### 6.2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Following the closure of educational institutions, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued a Framework for Provision of Continued Learning during the COVID-19 Lockdown in Uganda (MoES, 2020)<sup>44</sup>. This framework outline four key lesson delivery modes as; 1) Print and self – study home package; 2) Radio live recorded lessons and live presentations; 3) Television; and 4) Online uploads to be uploaded on phones. The framework provided for ensuring that all core subjects at both primary and secondary levels were made available to learners across the country. Some schools also started conducted online classes using platforms like Microsoft teams and Zoom. As well, some families enrolled their children in home-schooling programs.

With specific to refugees, following school closure, Refugee Response Partners (RRP) supported the Ministry of Education and Sports COVID-19 Response and Preparedness Plan to ensure that there was continuity of learning, protection of learners, and safe school reopening for refugee children. By the time the country refugee response plan was revised and published mid-2020, over 406,741 home learning packages, developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), had been distributed to refugee children<sup>45</sup>. The partners such as Windle International, Fin Church Aid ensured refugee inclusion in learning. They printed and distributed materials to refugee children, provide direct support to teachers to reach refugee children among others. As noted, these efforts were meant to ensure that learning continues despite COVID-19 pandemic.

### 6.3. REFUGEE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Overall, 62.7% of the refugees had access to learning opportunities slightly better than the nationals at 49% who had access to learning during COVID-19. However, the 62.7% access to learning among refugees was slightly lower than Sebei region (74.3%) and Karamoja (65.3%), but higher than Kampala (60.7%) and most of other regions.

**Table 9: Levels of access to learning during COVID-19 by district/region (n=6,139)**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Had access (%)</i>	<i>Had no access (%)</i>
Refugee	62.7%	37.4%
West Nile	56.1%	43.9%
Kampala	60.7%	39.2%
Central1	59.6%	40.4%
Central2	46.1%	53.9%

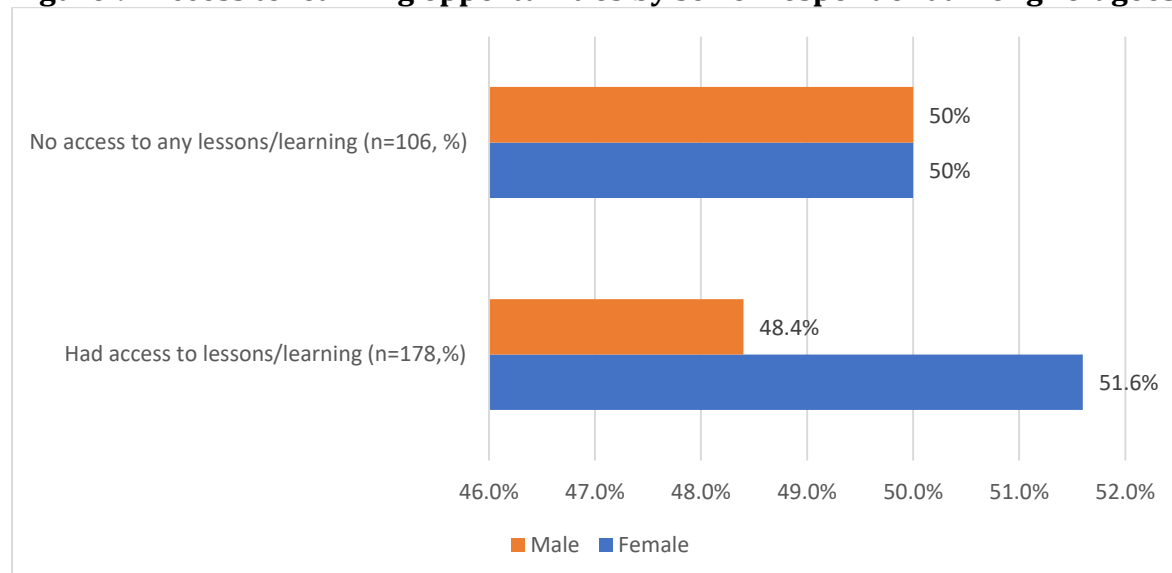
<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Education and Sports, MoES (2020). Framework for provision of Continued Learning During the COVID-19 Lockdown in Uganda. MoES, Kampala Uganda. Accessed on December 20, 2020, from <http://www.education.go.ug/covid-19-sector-response/>.

<sup>45</sup> REVISED UGANDA COUNTRY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN, JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2021.

Busoga	54.1%	45.9%
Bukedi	35.3%	<b>64.7%</b>
Bugisu	40.8%	59.2%
Sebei	<b>74.3%</b>	25.7%
Teso	31.8%	<b>68.2%</b>
Karamoja	<b>65.3%</b>	34.7%
Lango	32.4%	<b>67.6%</b>
Acholi	39.3%	<b>60.7%</b>
Bunyoro	54.8%	45.2%
Tooro	56.4%	43.6%
Ankole	30.8%	<b>69.2%</b>
Kigezi	37.4%	<b>62.6%</b>

There were some slight variations between male and female learners. Results show that slightly more female learners (51.6%) than males (48.4%) among refugees had access to learning/lessons during COVID-19.

**Figure 9: Access to learning opportunities by sex of respondent among refugees**



There were also slight differences across the settlements. For example, 45.4% of refugees in Palabek refugee settlement did not have access to learning during COVID-19 period with girls disproportionately affected than boys. There were slightly more girls 46.8% compared to boys 44.1% who did not access learning during COVID-19. And in Palabek alone, 62.5% of girls aged 18-24 years did not access learning during COVID-19 compared to 40.0% of boys in the same age group. Likewise, in Alere refugee settlement, there more females (37.2%) compared to males (33.3%) who did not have access to any learning during COVID-19, although majority were younger female aged 10-13 years. This suggests that the experiences of the refugee settlements are not uniform and that each refugee settlement has its own unique vulnerabilities.

**Table 10: %ge with no access to learning during COVID-19 by sex, age and refugee settlement**

	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Alere	52.9%	33.3%	26.3%	35.3%	28.6%	25.0%	37.2%	33.3%

Kyaka	46.2%	43.5%	28.6%	28.6%	50.0%	28.6%	37.5%	37.8%
Palabek	45.9%	56.7%	41.2%	21.4%	62.5%	40.6%	46.8%	44.1%

#### 6.4. LEARNING PLATFORMS ACCESSED BY LEARNERS DURING COVID-19 BY REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

In all the refugee settlements visited, the common mechanisms/platforms accessible by the learners were community or mobile teachers and radio. There were some variations across the settlements. While mobile or volunteer teachers were mentioned as the main ways through which refugees from both Palabek (30.6%) and Kyaka II (29.9%) accessed learning, in Alere, it was mainly radio programs (63.5%). Overall, as expected access to Television was the least mentioned and only accessed by 0.8% in Palabek and nowhere else in the refugee settlements which compares poorly with about 16.2 percent among nationals who said they were learning via TV. Access to newspapers was also low for refugees.

**Table 11: Proportion (%) of young girls and boys accessing learning platforms during COVID-19 (n=178, %)**

	Alere	Kyaka II	Palabek
No access	35.3%	37.7%	45.6%
Learning via radio	63.5%	15.6%	14.9%
Learning via TV	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
Mobile or volunteer teachers	5.9%	29.9%	30.6%
Use internet e.g zoom classes	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%
Materials distributed through newspapers	1.2%	2.6%	6.6%
Parents teaching at home	0.0%	3.9%	2.5%

As discussions with the participants revealed, this result corroborates the evidence provided during discussions with the key informants who mentioned that the refugees received support from agencies like UNICEF, Windle International, Fin Church Aid, AVSI. The RRP were reported to have reprinted and distributed learning materials provided by government; trained teachers to reach children in their homes; and in some cases coordinated and worked with Parents' Teachers Associations "to provide mentorship and guidance to secondary school students, by providing upper primary school lessons using a combination of hand-written notes, recorded WhatsApp audios and videos, and by enabling children to access Ministry of Education online lessons"<sup>46</sup>. Its not surprising that majority of the participants mentioned access to mobile/volunteer teachers during COVID-19.

Some of the innovations were critical in ensuring that the refugee children who have no access to radios or technology they needed to learn safely continued to access learners. We learnt for example, that while refugee settlements like Palabek have poor network

<sup>46</sup> Munyambanza, J. (2020). Accessed on <http://www.busiweek.com/how-refugee-ngos-can-deliver-education-during-covid-19/>.

and therefore access to learning on radio or TV would be expected to be a challenge, efforts from some of the organizations to deliver learning materials physically to the learners compensates for poor network coverage.

Virtual learning was not actually there in (some) refugee camps. For example, in Palabek particularly, I am not sure the other refugee camps the network, the radio signals are very poor, TV networks do not connect (as well). So virtual learning was not taking place. But what we were doing was delivery of physical materials, home learning materials to them in a cluster of villages. And now the teacher would support them in groups. That (method) is even happening up to now. **(Interview, OXFAM)**

Partner agencies reprinted and distributed the learning materials that government provided to all learners in their communities using refugee local structures and settlement structures that exist.

At least for each and every learner that we support we managed to provide them the learning materials **(Windle International)**

In Kyaka II, UNHCR came up with the programme of supplying study materials under FIN Church Aid Uganda. They gave out materials which reached every one. Every child at their home of residence received those study materials, they are the ones they have been using **(Headteacher, Kyaka II)**

Discussions with girls corroborate the evidence.

R1. We have been given learning materials, the ones that came from the government. These were brought here in the community through the block leaders.

R2. Yes all of us going to school got learning materials to use.

R3. We also have access learning in the community where the teachers come into our community, he mobilizes us to come together and we learn. Here, teachers come to our community and they teach us after mobilizing us. They come with their own notes and teach us. These normally put us together as upper classes like P5 and P6 and then P1 - P4 together. We are then taught together.

R5. We are also given tests and exams to do in this community learning program and teachers come. The teaching is done in such a way that it's one subject at a time according to the groups. **(FGD with girls, Palabek)**

Direct support to teachers to ensure that they move into homes and mobilise learners and teach them from their homes using available learning materials was also critical.

The teacher can move to the village, get learners of the same class and help them to learn using the materials that we helped distribute **(Windle International)**

In some cases, there were radio programs accessible to the refugees. Only a few and specific radio stations were available and accessible to the learners, which suggests low reach.

This was a government program done with Tennis FM in Kitgum. They engaged the teachers to do lessons. When this ended, Mighty FM with the organisation called IGF (Irene Glasser Foundation) facilitated the program for one more month. This is not the program for the settlement but all the learners benefited. We also have a partner called "I CAN" who had arrangements and programs to facilitate



learners through radio, targeting secondary school learners. **(Senior community officer/ Education focal person OPM)**

The challenge with radio program however was that it did not have enough reach and was aired for a short time, and few individuals have radios.

This was aired for a short period of time. Few people have radios and, in some areas, radio frequency [signals] never reaches. The radio programs were done at around 9:00-10:00am when people were in the gardens. One of the concerns that I heard from the caller-learner, they seem they did not understand math lessons. **(Senior community officer/ Education focal person OPM)**

The study team also learnt that in Kyaka II refugee settlement, Fin Church Aid distributed to a certain degree technology equipment to enable children access learning in groups.

It is FIN CHURCH, an NGO that operates here in Kyaka II Settlement brought computers, some children got computers for learning. You find 10 children sited together learning altogether. They gave few who sit together and learn lessons using this computer. **(Interview, Local Leader Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

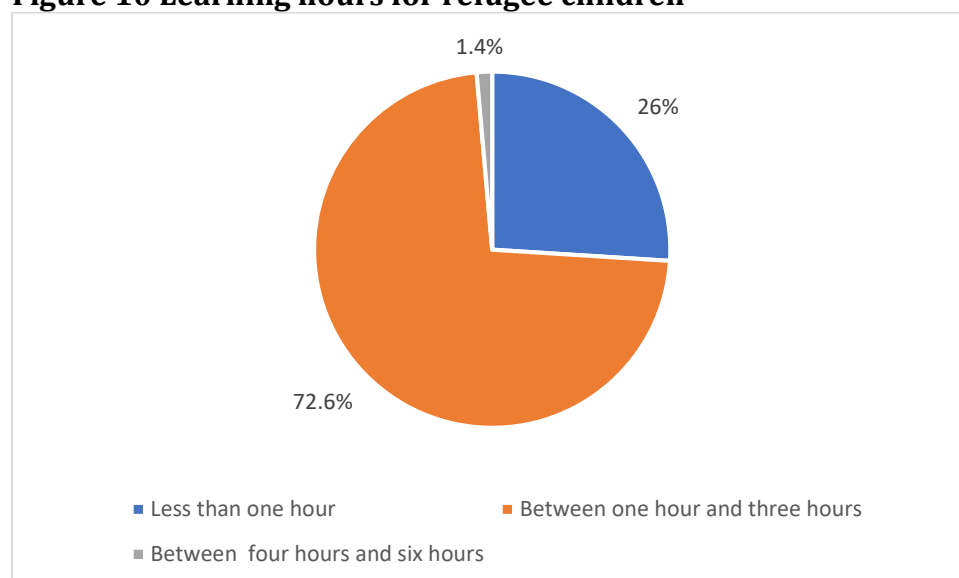
Overall, the support of the response partners was critical. In some districts, the partnership with the district departments ensured that refugee children were reached.

And every week, we had lessons for primary school going children and secondary school going children. Also, we got some support from our partners like FIN CHURCH AID an NGO based in Kyaka II, they funded these activities both in terms of radio programs and also facilitating teachers doing the work. We as the department, we were involved, that is how we managed to go through that phase of the COVID Lock down. **(District Education Officer, Kyegegwa District)**

### **Learning hours for refugee children**

On average, majority (72.6%) of the refugee children who had access to learning platforms spent between one hour and three hours learning. There was no major differences with the nationals where about seven in every ten children (70.1%) spend between one and three hours a day learning. However, among refugees slightly more than a quarter (26%) spent less than one hour compared to 23 percent among the nationals who also spent less than one hour in a day learning. There were however more nationals (5.8%) who said they spent between four and six hours learning compared to just 1.4% among the refugees. This result would suggest that refugee children were generally disadvantaged when it comes to time available for them to participate in learning compared to non-refugees. This has significant implications for their learning as well.

**Figure 10 Learning hours for refugee children**



In terms of the actual time of the day, majority of the refugee children said they participate in learning during morning hours, or between around 7am and 12 noon (49.3%), slightly more than a quarter (28.8%) mentioned between 1pm and 4pm while 17.1% and 4.8% said they learn between 5 pm and 7pm and after 7pm respectively.

Results show slight differences between boys and girls in terms of time of the day although slightly more females (45.8%) than males (52.7%) study morning hours while slightly more males (22.2%) than females (12.2%) study late afternoon between 5-7pm. What this means is that time allocations in the homes is different for most girls and boys.

**Table 12: Time of the day when children participated in learning during COVID-19**

	Male	Female	Palabek	Alere	Kyaka II	%
<i>Morning hours (around 7 to 12noon)</i>	45.8%	52.7%	75.8%	16.4%	52.0%	49.3%
<i>Between 1-4pm</i>	26.4%	31.1%	4.6%	63.6%	16.0%	28.8%
<i>Between 5-7pm</i>	22.2%	12.2%	16.7%	12.7%	28.0%	17.1%
<i>After 7 pm</i>	5.6%	4.1%	3.0%	7.3%	4.0%	4.8%

## 6.5. FACTORS HINDERING ACCESS TO LEARNING AND LEARNING PLATFORMS DURING COVID-19 AMONG REFUGEES

A range of reasons were given as to why more than half of the young people were unable to learn during the pandemic period. More than a half of the refugee children (52.7%) said they were unable to access learning platforms because they were unaware about the available learning platforms. Meanwhile 32.3 percent were aware about the existing platforms but were unable to access them because of barriers related to inability to access the platforms. What was rather challenging is that about 5.4 percent said they lost interest in school and were no longer interested in learning anymore. There were slight differences across gender and refugee settlements. For example, while no respondent mentioned domestic chores as a reason for their failure to access learning or lessons during COVID-19 period in Adjumani (Alere), domestic chores was mentioned as a key barrier in Kyaka II and Palabek, with girls/female learners disproportionately affected. With the exception of Kyaka II where more females (6.3%) than males (4.3%) said they

had lost interest in learning, in the rest of the refugee settlements, girls and young women were disproportionately affected than boys/men.

**Table 13: Reasons for failure to access learning/lessons during COVID-19 period**

	Alere		Kyaka		Palabek	
Reason	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
I am not interested	6.3%	7.1%	6.3%	4.3%	3.5%	7.7%
I am not aware of the available learning platforms	18.8%	7.1%	73.3%	71.4%	68.9%	65.4%
I am aware of learning platforms but I cant access them	37.5%	57.1%	20.0%	14.2%	31.0%	26.9%
I just want to use this time to rest and wait when schools reopen	37.5%	21.4%	6.7%	20.1%	0.0%	0.0%
I lack learning aides	0.0%	7.1%	13.3%	4.1%	0.1%	1.1%
I spend time doing domestic chores	0.0%	0.0%	15.0%	14.3%	10.1%	7.7%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Discussions with stakeholders at various levels corroborate the evidence from the survey. It was noted that some of the platforms such as radio, television were not accessible to some areas because of poor connection. In addition, a significant number of households do not own radios or television sets where most learning was taking place. The 2017/18 National Information Technology Survey Report indicated for example that only 63.8% and 67.5% of households in rural and urban areas respectively had access to a radio set<sup>47</sup>. The 2017/18 National Information Technology Survey Report further showed that only 14.0% and 33.3% of households in rural and urban areas respectively had access to a TV set<sup>48</sup>. This means therefore that access to the necessary gadgets was a challenge. This ideally would mean that for parents, they needed budgets for TVs, radios, laptops, newspapers, smart phones, and other gadgets to be able to enable their children access learning during COVID-19. In addition, for effective delivery of e-learning there is need for access to stable supply of electricity. However, according to National Development Plan III (NPA, 2020), national access to electricity has only increased from 11% in 2010 to 24% in 2018/19<sup>49</sup>. Even then the cost of electricity remains above the targeted 5 cents per unit for all consumer categories<sup>50</sup>. This means that for an average household in Uganda, alternative learning platforms during COVID-19 such as television, radio were an additional cost that most people would not afford. Therefore, for most households, cost of accessing the platforms was prohibitive.

Besides cost and remoteness of some refugee communities, there were also concerns that some of the designated learning platforms are controlled by men or generally adult males in households. This relates to the culturally deep-rooted norms and beliefs about access and use of information platforms such as radio. The refugees just like most other non-

<sup>47</sup> National Information Technology Survey 2017/18 Report, March 2018. NITA, Kampala Uganda

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> National Planning Authority (2020). Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25. National Planning Authority, Kampala Uganda

<sup>50</sup> National Planning Authority (2020). Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25. National Planning Authority, Kampala Uganda

refugee communities “have complex gender experiences which are worsened by factors attributed to emergency settings—such as, change in community structure and power dynamics, lack of access and control over resources, ethnic differences among others”<sup>51</sup>. As a result, gender related barriers even before COVID-19 pandemic, there were inequalities between refugee girls and boys’ access to education. For example, “only 8% of secondary school age refugee girls are currently enrolled in secondary schools, compared to 16% of adolescent refugee boys in the same age group”<sup>52</sup>. It is apparent that some of these complex gender dynamics that disproportionately disadvantage girls and women were at play during this pandemic.

R1. Yes, the boys have little work at home and they can listen more to the radio than us girls. Some boys even have their own radios.

R2. Here, all of us who are seated here do not have radios yet among our brothers of the same age, some have their own radios. **(FGD with girls, Palabek)**

This means that some platforms were by design unreachable for most girls in communities. Relatedly, and as already noted during discussions with girls, girls have to divide their time between learning and household chores. Consequently, most girls have limited time to learn compared to boys. For some of the girls who participated in the discussions, the issue of work load and parents sacrificing their education to that of boys is not necessarily new. However, while these challenges are not new, the findings show that COVID-19 has amplified these gender asymmetries in access to learning. As indicated in the discussions with the refugee girls in Kyaka II refugee settlement, while girls are often involved in household chores, which limits their participation in learning during COVID-19, for boys, they are free to “roam” around communities, which also limits their participation in learning. They argued that even when boys seem to have more time than girls since they are less involved in household chores, they have not benefited and used this to learn.

**P3:** Boys have a lot of time at their disposal. For us girls, we have a lot to do. You wake up in the morning, you do the mopping of the house, cooking, washing. For boys, they just sit there.

**P4:** For me I think if a girl is serious you can set up your own town table and plan how you are going to read, because even parents do not want their school fees to be wasted, unlike boys who are roaming. Now you can see that other boy passing (points to a *boy in a distance passing past the meeting venue with a ball*), he is going to play football, the whole day, they come and ask for food and go back to watch football. The boys have more time but they do not utilize their opportunities **(FGD with girls, Kyaka II)**

Discussions with refugee girls also revealed some mixed reactions and perceptions towards the accessibility to the learning platforms. To some learners, the platforms for learning were not conducive, particularly learning that was taking place on radio and television. As already noted, most of the refugee settlements are located in areas that are relatively remote making access to platforms like radios rather challenging. This is particularly true given that not all refugee children were directly reached with materials that were reprinted and distributed by the response partners working in the settlements.

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<sup>51</sup> Plan International Uganda (2020). Dubai Cares Program. Plan International Kampala, Uganda

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

**P4:** The radio program has not worked. You, at times tune in and find young children singing. There was a radio in Kyegegwa. Actually, I heard the radio program only once and it stopped. it was P.7. Then on TV, I found some program on Bukedde 2, I only saw it once. **(Participant, FGD with girls Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

Others also complained about the method of delivery of learning on platforms like radio and television, where the interaction with the teachers is almost none existent.

**P2:** Actually, these teachers who were on TVs used to just rap (meaning speaking very fast). They were too first in speaking, there was no explanation, they were hurrying. They would erase what they were teaching before the students had written anything. On TVs, I would only find English and Mathematics, other subjects were ignored. The way the teachers were presenting, it was as if they were reading a Novel. It felt as if these teachers were teaching themselves. **(Participant, FGD with girls Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

However, other learners were more supportive of the role of virtual learning. They mentioned how it was easy to follow the lessons.

**P5:** BBS TV does teach well. They are slow, they teacher takes their time, they want their learners to learn with them. When it comes to the Mathematics teacher, the same, he calculates and waits for others to pick up, so these are helpful. **(Participant, FGD with girls Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

Overall, however, discussions with the learners suggest that community learning platforms are more appealing because they offer some level of direct interaction with the teachers.

R1. For me, I prefer the community learning program because there is direct contact with the teacher and learning is better.

R2. With community learning, it is free and physical and does not require airtime to call like a radio program.

R3. Community learning is better, you are with the teacher and the teacher writes the notes on the blackboard.

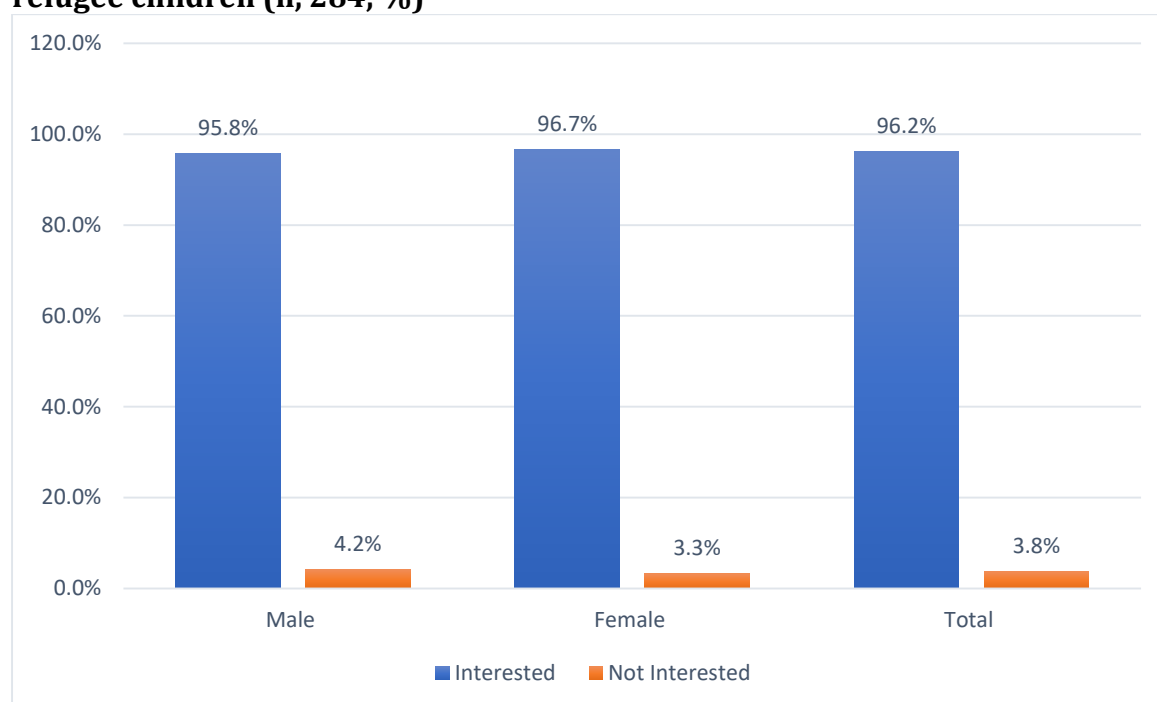
R4. Learning over the radio is bad, when it's the radio, you cannot know the methods and approaches especially mathematics. **(Participant, FGD with girls Palabek refugee settlement)**

## **6.6. INTEREST IN CONTINUING WITH EDUCATION DURING AND POST COVID-19**

As indicated earlier, this study was conducted at a time when candidate classes had been allowed to resume school. Therefore, reference to post COVID-19 was used more generally to mean when schools reopen for learners and not necessarily to mean end of the pandemic. Overall, about 2.4% said they do not hope to continue attending school or resume schools when the schools reopen. However, this slightly increases to 3.8% for among refugees who said they may not return to school once schools' resume. There were slightly more male refugees (4.2%) than female refugees (3.3%) who said they were not likely to resume school when schools reopen. This is possibly related to the idea that most refugee boys tend to be mobile moving in and out of the settlements more often than girls. Therefore, COVID-19 could have created opportunities for them not to return to school.

Overall, results mean that COVID-19 exacerbated the generally precarious situation of refugees compared to non-refugees, and that refugee children are more susceptible to dropping out of school compared to non-refugees as a result of the pandemic. Already refugees are faced with several challenges affecting their education including lack of enough schools in their communities, language barriers, differences in curriculum, and challenges related to mental health as a result of exposure to violence.

**Figure 11 Interest in Continuing with Education during and after COVID-19 among refugee children (n, 284, %)**



By the refugee's settlement, there were more refugee children (4.7%) from Adjumani (Alere) who said they were more likely not to resume school compared to Palabek (4.1%) and Kyaka II (1.3%). With the exception of Palabek refugee settlement where more males (6.7%) said they would not resume school than females (1.6%), for the rest of the refugee settlement there were more females who had no hope of resuming school compared to the males.

**Table 14: %ge of learners who say they are likely to continue in education by gender and refugee settlement**

	Alere			Kyaka II			Palabek		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Yes	93.0%	97.6%	95.3%	97.5%	100%	98.7%	98.4%	93.3%	95.9%
No	6.9%	2.3%	4.7%	2.5%	0.0%	1.3%	1.6%	6.7%	4.1%

Learners mentioned several reasons why they were not hopeful to resume school. More than a half of all the learners who participated in the study (55.6%) said they had lost

interest in learning. This should worry all education stakeholders. With the COVID-19 resurgence and the country enters into second lockdown, and school calendar continues to be intermittently affected, more learners will keep losing interest in learning. For some of the learners, loss of interest in education is attributable to prolonged closure of schools which has created a perception that schools may not reopen soon. With the new lockdown, this can only get worse. This has been heightened by the failure to have a clear structured routine for the learners to follow while at home triggering a general sense of desperation and consequently lack of interest in learning.

**P2:** For me I am getting tired with this whole school thing. You see, when you read a book when you are not expecting an exam, it is really hard. At times I get demoralized. I am slowly losing interest of going back to school. There are times I go and check all my old books, just checking through just

**P5:** Some of us are getting less demoralized to going back to school, I am now used to sleeping all day. It is not easy for us. **(One of the Participants, FGD with girls in Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

Some of the learners are reportedly involved in economic activities and therefore earning money. Discussions with stakeholders also corroborate evidence that suggest that some of the learners have been lured into economic ventures and therefore exposed to making money. In such case, resuming school may be the last thing on their minds;

I think since they have started touching on money doing some business which come because you of closure of schools. So it's going to be difficult because you cannot bring a child to school just to remain in class yet he knows what money is, when he goes to the market he can get money yet at school, they cannot get it. **(Head teacher Kyaka II)**

**P5:** Some other girls have been exposed to receiving and working for money. They may feel that that school life is punishing them, they rather stay with their jobs. **(FGD with girls in Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

Refugee learners face some unique situations. Even before COVID-19, due to differences in education system between Uganda and countries of refugee's origin, some faced challenges around language, adapting to the new curriculum and being able to fit into the system. There were reports of learners who were over aged for their classes. For example, it's been reported that an average of 22% of refugee children in West Nile were enrolled in grades lower than expected for their age<sup>53</sup>. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit schools forcing closures, there were some learners who reported "feeling too old" for school. School closure seem to have reignited the need to drop out of school and therefore a sense of loss of interest in learning.

There are children who say "I am already getting old". As you know, most of these children have been facing violence even from places where they are coming from. So education has not been consistent. Somebody is about 14 years and still in lower primary. So, as COVID has hit hard, and no clear plan of reopening, they see this as waste of time to continue with education. **(Interview with project staff, Humanity and Inclusion, Kyaka II refugee settlement).**

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<sup>53</sup> Plan International, 2020



Discussions with young girls suggest that some of the dropout rates will be exacerbated by lack of money from their parents. While education is free in Uganda, parents are often expected to cater for scholastic materials, including such items as books, pens, school uniform among others. About 11 percent said the main reason was that the parents and caregivers do not have money for school fees and other scholastic materials. Some girls have become pregnant during COVID-19.

R1. Lack of money for buying the scholastic materials may force many to drop out of school for example books.

R3: Parents have no money; fees will be a very big challenge (**FGD girls, Palabek**)

In refugee settlements such as Palabek, some refugee response partners were reportedly distributing scholastic materials to the learners. For example, it's reported that between January and June 2020, refugee education partners' support to schools enabled over 441,850 learners to access education<sup>54</sup>. In particular, a total of 339 temporary, semi-permanent or permanent classrooms were constructed or rehabilitated, over 30,341 learners provided with scholastic materials, and remunerated over 4,205 primary and 747 secondary teachers in refugee settlements. However, given the uncertainty generated by COVID-19, there was anxiety among the learners regarding sustainability of the post-COVID-19 education support or even when schools resume. There are fears that financial aid to the refugees is generally dwindling with dire consequences on education of refugee children.

Some girls were not certain of resuming school because of pregnancy and marriage related reasons. Some of the learners were reported to have become pregnant while others got married during COVID-19. Cases of adolescent pregnancies and forced marriages continue being reported in the refugee settlements further complicating children's opportunities for school.

R2. I expect others to go back to school when they are already pregnant. These will study for a short time and then drop out. (**FGD girls, Palabek**)

**P3:** I think some students may not return. Out of 30 students, only 20 may come back because some of the girls are married, others are pregnant.

**P2:** Like 50% of the girls are likely not to go back to school (due to pregnancy related reasons). (**FGD with girls in Kyaka II refugee settlement**)

## **6.7. RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH PROLONGED SCHOOL CLOSURES**

Closure of schools does not only mean closure of classes and interruption in classroom activities, its impact is more far reaching, resulting in interruption in personal growth and development, interruption in skills acquisition, disruption of safe spaces that offer protection for learners especially for girls and young women and generally loss of much more than an education.

**Direct effects on the learners:** Six in every ten (64.2%) children said they missed playing with friends at school due to school closure. About four in every ten (37.5%) participants mentioned that they miss talking to their teachers. About 12.9% said they miss having meals/food at school. About 32.9% said they now spend a lot of time at home and 2.9% said they spend a lot of time at home with people they do not like. For refugee children, it is critically important given their experiences of violence that they remain in schools.

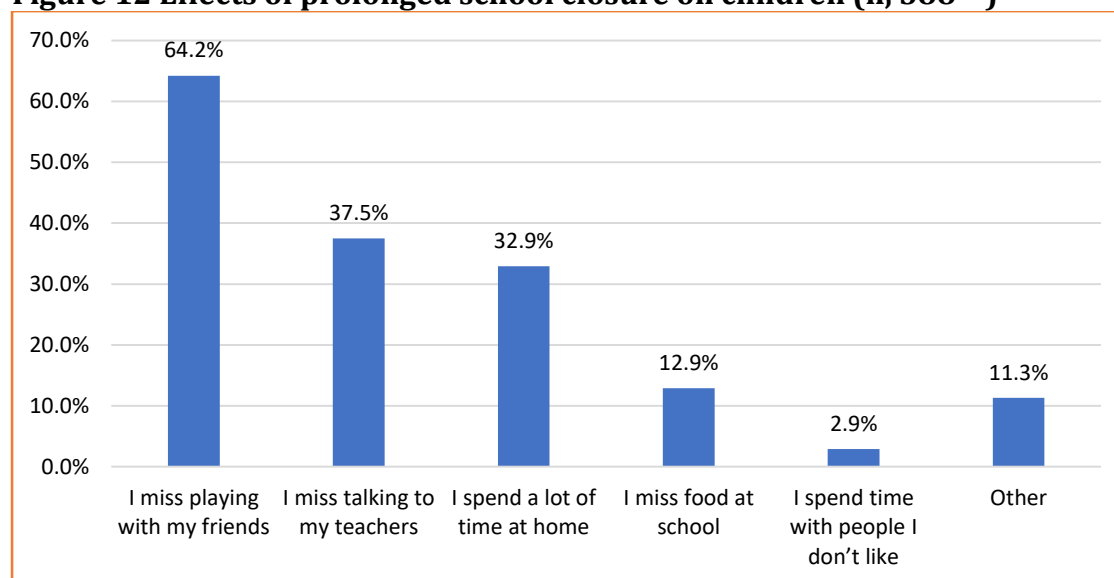
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<sup>54</sup> REVISED UGANDA COUNTRY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN, COUNTRY RRP > JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2021.



Indeed, like with non-refugee communities, education for children is beyond the classroom. It includes activities in the community and what they do or do not do at school. It is not surprising that what children mentioned as things they miss most is not just about the education, they receive in class but about who they are as human beings.

**Figure 12 Effects of prolonged school closure on children (n, 388\*\*)**



**\*\*:** Multiple response allowed

Being out school has several associated risks. As indicated, learners miss playing with their friends, talking to teachers, playing their favorite sport and just having a sense of belonging.

- a) Increased exposure to abuse and various forms of violence:** Being away from school exposes refugee children and learners to several other risks including direct abuse. About (2.9%) said closure of school means they spend time with people they do not like. Some of the people children spend time with are their abusers. As indicated already, closure of schools has occasioned high cases of pregnancy among young girls. In refugee settings, schools offer a buffer and some form of protection against abuse. Therefore, closure of schools, particularly for prolonged periods means that refugee girls are susceptible to abuse and various forms of violence. Yet when schools were locked down, there were also restrictions on the response. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were locked out, no wonder cases of abuse escalated.
- b) Increased school dropout:** School closure has the risk of increasing school dropout rates in the country and particularly among the refugees where the risk of dropout is even higher. Already results suggest that a significant number of learners have lost hope in going back to school when schools reopen. Parents have also become anxious. Some of the young learners who have taken up economic activities say they do not see the reason for returning to school once schools reopen. All these are likely to occasion a significant drop in schooling never seen before in Uganda. Studies elsewhere have also predicted/projected significant drops in enrolment of first-time students<sup>55</sup>.
- c) Collapse of education institutions:** Although not part of this study, conversations

<sup>55</sup> UNICEF (2020). EDUCATION ON HOLD: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling because of COVID-19. UNICEF

with stakeholders in education sector suggest that the cost of closure of education institutions will be felt long into the future, especially by the private investors. Most of the private education institutions relied heavily on school fees paid by the learners. Closure of these schools therefore means not just closure of a school but it risks loss of employment and livelihood and several teachers have already diverted to other vocations.

- d) *Increased risk of overcrowding in public schools.*** Prolonged closure of schools means that when schools finally reopen, there will be fewer schools to take on many learners. The likely impact will be felt by public schools, and particularly refugee hosting schools, which anecdotal information suggests that their infrastructure may be lacking in many respects to take on additional learners. As results of this survey already show a significant number of learners in candidate classes are changing from private schools to public/government aided schools citing school fees and ability of public schools to afford to adhere to SOPs. Consequently, the influx of learners to public schools means that the private schools are not only left with fewer learners and run risk of further collapse but also that the public schools will be overwhelmed. The long-term risk is further deterioration of the quality of learning children will receive rendering it even more difficult to realize the targets set the ESSP.

## PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

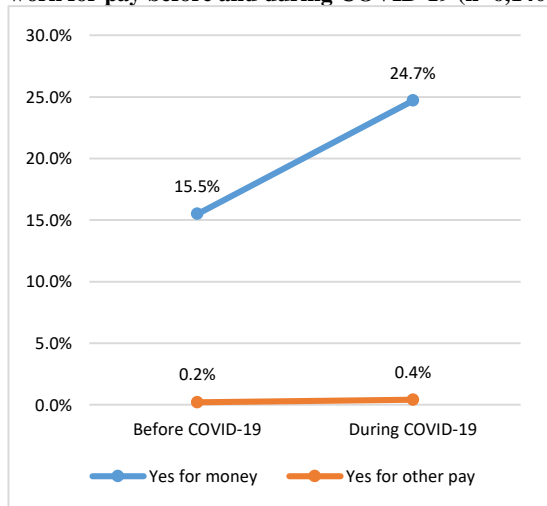
### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

This study sought to examine the level of involvement of school going girls in economic activities during COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of their involvement particularly on their lives. Results in this section highlight the proportion of girls and boys involved in economic activities before and during COVID-19; the nature of activities involved in and the effects of these activities on the lives of girls and boys.

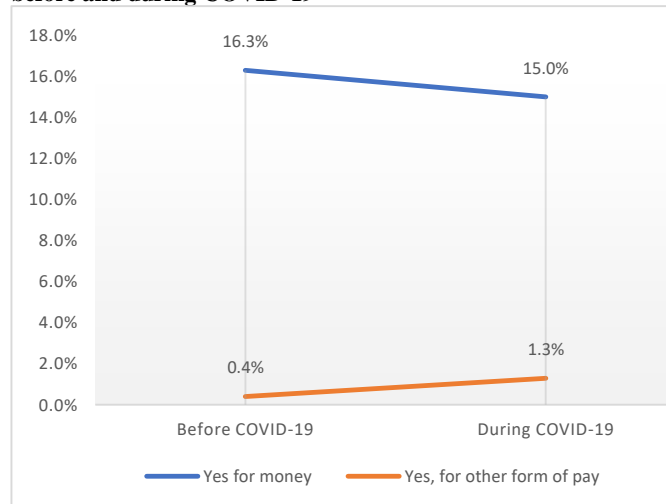
### 7.2. LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Results show that while the overall proportion of girls and boys engaged in work for money increased from 15.5% before COVID-19 to 24.7 percent during COVID-19 (24.7%), among refugees there was a slight decline from 16.3% to 15.0%. However, the proportion of refugee girls and boys who worked for other forms of payment such as being given clothes, food and accommodation increased marginally from 0.4 percent to 1.3%. The results suggest that COVID-19 has left refugee girls and young women and men at the perils of economic survival and the survival of their families. The refugee children remain vulnerable to the worst forms of work.

**Table 15: Overall % girls and boys who participated in work for pay before and during COVID-19 (n=6,140)**



**Table 16: % refugee children who participated in work for pay before and during COVID-19**



When asked what sort of activities/work they were involved in, results indicate a range of activities but mainly of informal nature that refugee girls and boys were involved in before and during COVID-19. The nature of work involved in does not seem to have changed much though at the two periods, before and during COVID-19. However, the proportion of girls and boys involved in vending business increased from about 42.5 percent to 48.7 percent. Discussions with stakeholders, and indeed, general observations show that refugee children, especially girls, as young as ten years, have been lured and taken on the vending fruits and vegetables in the small sprawling trading centers in refugee settlements. Some learners now accompany adult parents/caregivers to work to eke out a living. What is clear however is that some of the activities mentioned are activities that have the potential of causing and exposing girls to abuse.

**Table 17: Nature of economic activities engaged in by refugee study respondents**

	Before COVID-19	During COVID-19
Vending things (e.g., like bananas, food, pancakes)	42.5%	48.7%
Involved in selling metals and scrap (e.g., plastics)	7.5%	5.1%
Stone quarrying	5.0%	5.1%
Commercial businesses like digging for people and fetching water	15.0%	15.4%
Animal husbandry	5.0%	5.1%
Business/Petty trading	7.5%	7.7%
Service industry (salon, restaurant)	2.5%	2.6%
Working at a construction site	2.5%	2.6%
Other	15.0%	10.3%

Discussions with refugee girls and young women in the settlements visited indicated that the activities in which they work are varied. They include working in petty trade, retail shops and even the most hazardous work environments such as bars.

**P6:** Some of them are working as Maids

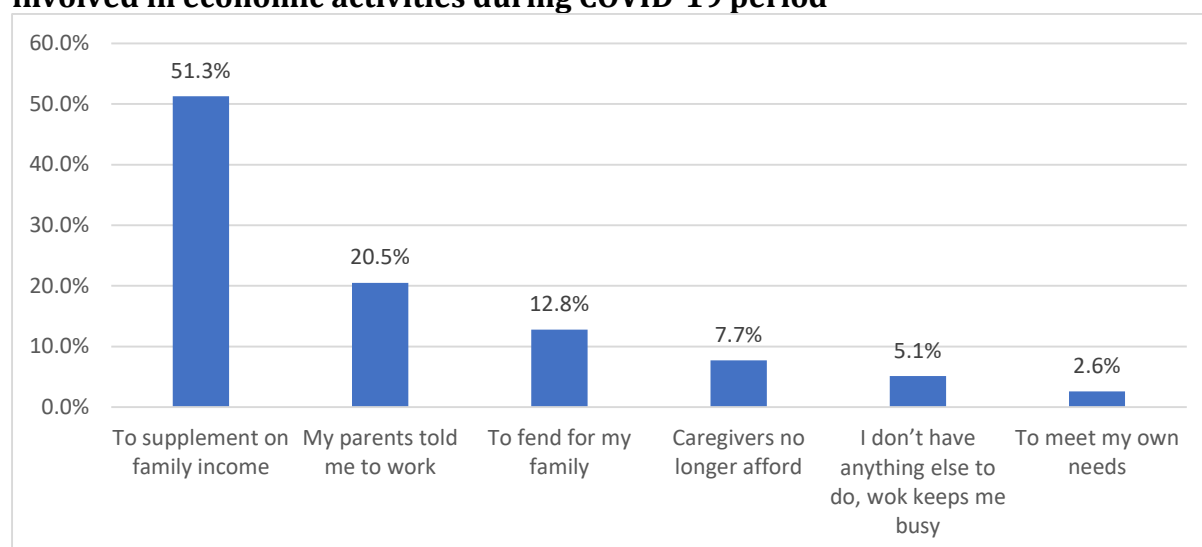
**P5:** Others are working in bars, others fetch water and they earn money.

**P2:** Some are business women, others sell produce.

**P3:** Some are working in the markets where they are exploited and paid less (**FDG Participants, Refugee girls and young women, Kyaka II refugee settlement**)

When asked why they took on work for money or other form of payment, all the reasons mentioned coalesce around the inability of family to effectively cater for the needs. Therefore, children involvement in work is seen as an avenue for supplementing family income. Some parents lost their sources of income during COVID-19, while others have “conscripted” their children into work to eke out a living. About nine in every ten learners who participated in the study mentioned reasons ranging from the need to supplement family income (51.3%), working at the urging of parents or caregivers (20.5%), directly fending for family (12.8%) and caregiver inability to provide (7.7%). All these issues relate to the fact that families can no longer meet the needs of their households and children are seen as the options to support family income. Interventions should most likely focus on securing the livelihood sources for refugees. It was noted that while the refugees receive food rations from UNHCR and OPM, often times this food is not enough and they have had to supplement with their own means. However, since the outbreak of COVID-19, the proportion of families that can afford additional food for their families has reduced. For example, 19.7 percent of young people in Palabek have, during COVID-19, eaten fewer times or reduced number of meals in any typical day compared to the period before COVID-19 mainly because families can no longer afford food (38.3%) and about 18.3 percent of male children and 14.5 percent of female/girl children said they went to bed hungry more than once a week before the survey was conducted. It is such levels of vulnerability that have appeared to force young girls and boys into all kinds of work-related activities.

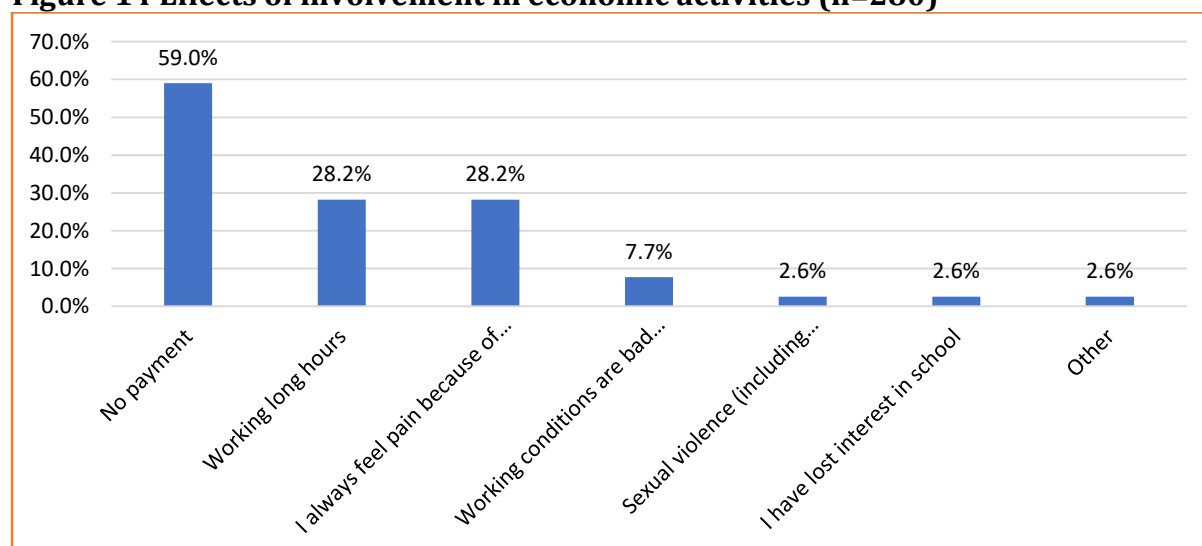
**Figure 13: Reasons mentioned why respondents in refugee settlements were involved in economic activities during COVID-19 period**



### 7.3. EFFECTS OF INVOLVEMENT ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES ON REFUGEE GIRLS/YOUNG WOMEN AND BOYS/YOUNG MEN

Some of the effects mentioned were largely challenges around working and no payment is given in return (59.0%), working for long hours of work (28.2%) and physical pain on the body (28.2%). This means that working has had a toll on the lives of girls and boys who have worked during this period. Perhaps what is also critical is that about 2.6% (against 1.8% in the non-refugee population) have experienced sexual violence as a result of work and 2.6% (against 1.6% in the non-refugee population) said that participating in work has created a sense of loss of interest in school.

**Figure 14 Effects of involvement in economic activities (n=280) \*\***



**\*\*:** Multiple responses allowed

Discussions with participants show that school-going children's participation in economic activities presents risk to violence especially in most refugee settlements. It was reported that some girls in the refugee settlements have been introduced to exploitative work and become targets by perpetrators of sexual violence. Most of the girls

involved in vending food and hawking other items have been raped, defiled and sexually violated. Cases of girls being raped and defiled was noted to be critical. During discussions, participants in the refugee settlements, where security is a big concern, noted that girls were particularly vulnerable. For example, in Palabek it was noted that girls who sell in the market (it was reported that markets were open in one of the zones in the settlement) face the risk of getting raped on the way because the market is 2-3km away and many times they have to walk back home after dusk.

R1. Selling in the market, there are higher chances of rape and getting raped on the way. This is risky because the market is 2-3km away.

R4: Yes, selling in the market can be risky especially when returning back. There are high cases of rape **(FGD participants, FGD with girls, Palabek refugee settlement)**

Cases of rape and defilement among refugee girls and young women during COVID-19 could be compounded by inadequate lighting, WASH facilities, and child-friendly spaces as well as “lack of adequate staffing especially security personnel” in most refugee settlements<sup>56</sup>. In addition, there are some children who are involved in work that directly exposes them to sexual violence, such as those who work in bars.

**P4:** Some of the girls are working in bars. Some have become pregnant. The bar environment is bad. Even when men touch you, you cannot accept to chase a customer, you accept the touches because if you refuse the touches, you are looked at as a rude person to the customers **(FGD Participant, Refugee girls and young women, Kyaka II refugee settlement)**

While bars were generally closed during COVID-19 as part of measures to control COVID-19, some have been operating illegally and illicitly, which makes it worse as exploitation goes on unreported. Even when it is not in bars, work generally exposes girls and brings them into contact with men who take advantage to abuse the girls.

**R:** At times these girls sell food items like beans or when they are selling their products like mats, on their way, they meet men who begin luring them. Some of the men give them money, instead of buying an item at 500UGX, they instead give the girl 1,000UGX and tell them to keep the balance. The man will say *‘You can keep that balance; it will help you buy what you want’*. We have noticed these things happen and there is girl who was impregnated like that **(KII, LCI, Kyegegwa)**

As already noted, most families are struggling to make ends meet. Engaging children who are out school into any form of economic activity is no-negotiable for most parents even if that work exposes the child to abuse.

Besides sexual violence, learners involved in work have also been exposed to physical violence. Some of the girls and boys have also been physically assaulted in the course of their work. Examples of children who have been beaten up, denied payment have been noted during this study. In addition, children selling and hawking food items in this era of COVID-19 are themselves at risk of being infected. Most of these children are not even protected, do not wear masks or any form of protection.

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<sup>56</sup> REVISED UGANDA COUNTRY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN, COUNTRY RRP > JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2021.

A number of the boys and girls who have been working during the lockdown lost interest in learning and are now more focused on making money. For example, in Palabek alone, 42.9 percent of respondents spent between 7 and 9 hours a day working for money during COVID-19. This means that they have no time left to concentrate on learning and other critical aspects while 57.1% spend an average half a day working. Yet, none was paid more than 50,000UGX per month for the work done. For girls, some conceived and were married off during the lock down as some of the respondents commented. Therefore, in the long-term children participation in economic activities means that most children will not be able to return when schools officially reopen.

## 8. REFUGEE RESPONSE DURING COVID-19

### *i) Keeping young people busy during COVID-19 in refugee settlements*

One of the challenges facing young people during COVID-19, even in non-refugee settings is that COVID-19 has created idle youths. Even when the agencies like AVSI and Windle International have made extra effort to distribute learning materials, it appears that these materials have not been utilized by all youths in the communities. Consequently, some spend a lot of time on phone where the potential risks for abuse are high while others have taken up work and others are simply idle. However, through the work of partner agencies, such as AVSI, the study team learnt of efforts to engage and keep the youths in Palabek out of danger by creating activities to engage them. For example, AVSI has organized theatrical activities for young people in Palabek refugee camp.

During the lockdown, AVSI organized theatrical activities for the young refugees of Palabek camp. For them this was an opportunity for leisure, growth and socialization but also to address important issues such as the fight against domestic violence and awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures. Stemming from this need identified, AVSI proposed drama activities to the young residents of Palabek Refugee Settlement, and grouped them in clusters of not more than 20 and named the group the Ada Rii Group (loosely translated as “truth lasts longer” in a South Sudanese language), a local drama group of mostly youth in Palabek Refugee Settlement. The group focuses topics they feel are important to them: violence against women and prevention of COVID-19 infections in their community. Ada Rii Group makes performances thrice a week in different areas in the settlement, sharing messages on how the population can report cases of domestic violence but also providing practical advice on how to safeguard against COVID-19 infections (Vegezzi, 2020b)<sup>57</sup>

Testimonies from the members of this group indicate that the work of keeping the group busy has been enormous.

### *ii) Distribution of learning materials*

As already indicated, there are several agencies that are involved in distribution of learning materials to ensure that they reach the households where the learners are. This was found critical because most parts of the refugee settlement do not have access to the internet and TV network is either non-existent or poor. Given the low socio-economic status of refugees, most do not own a radio or even afford to buy a newspaper where some of the learning materials were distributed. Therefore, distribution of learning materials was noted to be essential intervention in reaching refugees.

### *iii) Community sensitisation around sexual violence*

Some CSOs have been involved in sensitization and awareness creation on issues that affect young people, particularly around sexual violence.

We also intensified our community sensitizations and mobilization against early/child marriages and early sex among our communities in the settlement. This way we believe we have done our best to provide the software solutions to reduce child marriages and early sex, what remains is the actual role of the parents

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<sup>57</sup> Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 from; <https://www.avsi.org/en/news/2020/11/16/drama-groups-helping-to-relieve-anxiety-and-create-awareness/2163/>.



and the community to use the knowledge they have attained through these sensitisation engagements to bring down the numbers of their girls that get affected each year. (**Interview, Windle International**)

While the effects of such efforts is not yet well known or documented, such practices create awareness and have the potential to reduce the effects of continued lock down.

## **9. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **9.1. CONCLUSION**

Girls and young women in refugee settings generally experience multiple vulnerabilities. While some of the vulnerabilities existed pre-COVID-19, COVID-19 appear to have exacerbated these vulnerabilities. This study has demonstrated this evidence around four key issues affecting school going refugee girls and young women, i.e., prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies; drivers of engagement in sexual activity among school going girls and young women; participation of school going girls in the learning opportunities that emerged during lockdown and the girls' interest in continuing their education; and, the involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evidence from the study indicate that closure of schools heightened protection risks for children, especially girls, including sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, early marriage, and risk of engaging in high-risk sexual activities at the urging of their parents/caregivers potentially leading to sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Several experienced heightened hunger due to insufficient food and became susceptible to forced marriages.

Evidence from the study in refugee settlements and other districts in Uganda indicate that girls and boys in the refugee settlements are at heightened risk of sexual abuse, experience heightened hunger due to insufficient food and are susceptible to forced marriages. While some of these challenges were prevalent, COVID-19 appear to have exacerbated these vulnerabilities. The interventions by agencies like Windle International and AVSI while helping to assuage the level of impact, the need is still great. Priority is needed to address sexual violence, ensure that all learners are able to access materials to continue to learn from home, particularly because it is not yet clear when the government will reopen schools.

As the study results show, COVID-19 has exacerbated the vulnerability of refugee girls and young women. This vulnerability is exacerbated by lack of a clear social welfare support system for those critically impacted like the refugees. The most critical question however is: what is the future of refugee girls and young women whose education is disrupted by COVID-19 control measures and become susceptible to protection risks? What is the implication for the refugee response partners? While this study does not generally provide answers to such questions, it is our well-considered opinion that lockdown, and total lockdown in particular, declared by the government to control COVID-19 spread with no proper assessment and response to the social welfare needs of vulnerable populations during pandemics, particularly refugees, is untenable. The implication therefore is that refugee response partners should ensure that they protect refugee children.

### **9.2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

While interventions by agencies like Windle International, UNHCR, FIN Church Aid and AVSI are helping to assuage the level of impact, the need is still great.

#### **1) Recommendations around education support in refugee during COVID-19**

There is need to rethink education as a whole and study the available modalities such as online teaching, home and community based to understand the most suitable to specific needs of refugees. Prolonged closure of education institutions has a potential of generating irreversible consequences for learners, education actors including teachers, institutions of learning among others. While government is quick to close institutions as a measure to curb the spread of COVID-19, it is also important to invest in strengthening alternative learning platforms. We found that access to learning was low for most refugee children, even when Refugee Response Actors made all efforts to reprint and distribute materials. Therefore, the current alternative modals of providing learning when schools close is not sustainable and inclusive. It favours learners with diligent parents, learners from relatively well to do families, and in some cases where there is external support. Evidence emerging from this study for example, show that refugee children were able to access school learning through home and community-based learning due to strong support from the refugee response actors/agencies like Windle International, FIN Church AID among others.

1. As we have seen with COVID-19 task forces at various levels, education response partners need to strengthen existing collaborations and establish refugee education taskforces to tackle concerns related to education of refugee children during pandemics. The taskforce should comprise of academic heads for refugee schools, local health authorities, lower settlement structures, NGOs working in education among others. The taskforce would be critical in ensuring continued delivery of learning for refugee children following health guidelines on COVID-19 to ensure learning takes place in a safe environment. The taskforce would also be critical in encouraging parents to support and adopt community learning or home to home learning.
2. Support and work with technology experts to develop e-learning infrastructure and models that are suitable and work in the refugee contexts. For example, as seen, most of the available learning platforms such as radio and TVs are inaccessible in most refugee settlements. It is therefore critical to develop platforms that work for refugee contexts. The e-learning infrastructure that can support e-learning should be the focus on efforts towards supporting learning of refugee children.
3. Train and support mobile teachers to provide homeschooling or community-based learning at village level. Results from the study show that several learners benefited from community-based learning where teachers were supported to provide group learning at village or block level. It is therefore our considered opinion that investments in scaling up learning during COVID-19 for refugees should focus on models that support teachers to be mobile, move to the village, get learners of the same class and help them to learn using the materials available.
4. Relatedly, there is need, as part of the process of rethinking education in Uganda, to strengthen community and home-based learning including ensuring teacher pedagogy that is suited to the context. For example, teachers should be trained on how to offer online classes and allow real learning to take place on line. In line with rethinking education, actors should support establishment of secure virtual learning platforms. In addition, the MoES should be supported to rethink the curriculum and move towards self-individual learning as opposed to the current one which requires a teacher to deliver the content through physical teaching. The teachers need to be retrained to facilitate learning as opposed to being teachers.
5. Many learners have lost interest while others have become disoriented about education as a result of COVID-19. Given the circumstances, efforts should be focused

on continuous awareness creation and raising about the importance of education to ensure that the progress made is not reversed. Go back to school campaigns should be strengthened focusing on learners that have lost interest in education, become disoriented and ensuring that those at the verge of dropping out are retained in school. Parents and other caregivers should be sensitised about the importance of education to help change the attitudes of many children who have become disoriented or lost hope. For some parents, particularly those who are not appreciative of benefits of education, and used Covid-19 as an excuse to marry off their daughters, constant reminders about the need for education is critical.

## **2) Recommendations focusing on addressing risks associated with sexual violence**

1. Directly work with the MoES to ensure that there is a mechanism in place of preparing all actors to receive and support girls who have given birth to return, especially in line with sections 3 of the revised guidelines for school re-entry. While results suggest that many girls have become mothers, they can return to school. There is need to establish specific interventions that focus on them as a protection group in need of special support to return to school.
2. Support schools to establish child friendly corners in schools where learners who have given birth can be allowed in schools and supported to breastfeed their children, while at school and where possible provide direct support to girls and their families to pay for baby sitters while they attend classes.
3. Advocate for, and/or directly provide for integration of life skills training in formal education set up/learning and training. There is need to empower refugee girls and boys in gender-responsive life skills. Results show gap where girls and boys were not well empowered to resist and also take alternative routes that do not expose them to problems of teenage pregnancy during pandemics like this. Life skills should aim at empowering the learners to make good decisions outside the classroom. Life skills training modules should focus on decision making, gender roles, sexual reproductive health and rights.
4. Strengthen and directly support establishment of parenting programmes that are gender-sensitive, streamlined and among others place emphasis on: enhancing positive parenting skills, and male involvement; increasing parent-child communication and appropriate information given to girls and boys during and beyond such emergency situations. Training of parents and caregivers on positive parenting should focus on building confidence and skills to address gender barriers such as early and forced marriage so that they prioritize schooling especially for girls.
5. In anticipation of increased risks and need for services when children return to school, teachers and school management should be sensitized to existing and expected protection risks, and where to report suspected cases following the established referral pathways.

## **3) Recommendations focusing on livelihoods improvement**

1. There is need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the social welfare needs of vulnerable populations during pandemics, particularly refugees. As the second lockdown is implemented, refugee response partners should prioritize protection of refugee children.
2. Ensure financial inclusion for refugees to promote livelihood sustainability.

Results show that refugee families face a number of challenges emanating from effects of COVID-19 on livelihood security. For example, results show that there is been lack of access to basic necessities to refugee children such as food. In some cases, refugee children were being used as secondary sources of labour for households which expose them to violence and abuse including rape and defilement. There is need to improve the livelihoods of refugees and support engagement in productive activities. These activities should be intended to make refugees move towards self-reliance and sustain livelihoods.

3. In the current circumstances, there is need to extend cash transfers to the refugee households particularly those with vulnerable populations such as girls and young women. Cash transfers for refugees would provide a quick-fix solution that can be useful in easing the current financial burden.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1:

#### *i) Sample size calculation*

The sample size calculation was computed using the following formula by Krejcie & Morgan (1970);

$$n = \frac{Z_{sqd} * P(1 - P) * Deff}{Esqd * RR * h}$$

Let define:

p: Proportion of population that you want to estimate (proportion of school going girls and young women. We considered 0.5 to give us the maximum sample size)

q:  $1-0.5=0.5$

n: Sample size

RR: Response Rate (95%). The response rate of 95% means that 95% of the population targeted would respond to the survey.

H: household size

E: the level of precision with which you want to achieve (level of precision at 0.05- equivalent 5%)

Z: Confidence level at 95% (1.96)

Deff: Design Effect (1.5) (The design effect was used to adjust the survey sample size due to sampling methods that were used resulting in better sampling than what would be expected with simple random sampling. The design effect tells you the magnitude of these increases.

## Annex II



Data collection  
tools.docx

### **ANNEX III: REFERENCES**

#### **REFERENCES**

**Vegezzi, C (2020a)** International Day of People with Disabilities: "not all disabilities are visible". Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 from: <https://www.avsi.org/en/news/2020/12/03/international-day-of-people-with-disabilities-not-all-disabilities-are/2172/>.

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