

National News

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Uganda secures \$6m Japan refugee grant

The funding will improve refugee registration and protection systems, expand nutrition services and establish community-managed solar energy hubs.

BY KARIM MUYOBO

United Nations agencies operating in Uganda have secured \$5.97 million (Shs22.3 billion) from the Government of Japan to support refugee protection, food assistance, nutrition and livelihood programmes as humanitarian funding continues to shrink globally.

The contribution under Japan's supplementary budget for 2025/2026 will support operations of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The funding comes at a time when Uganda, Africa's largest refugee-hosting country, continues to accommodate more than two million refugees amid renewed influxes from Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Speaking in Kampala last week, Mr Leonard Zulu, the United Nations resident coordinator, described the Japanese contribution as timely and critical in sustaining essential humanitarian services.

"Uganda continues to host nearly two million refugees and is experiencing renewed influxes driven by conflicts in the region. This contribution is life-saving, life-sustaining and builds resilience within refugee and host communities," Mr Zulu said.

He explained that the support goes beyond emergency humanitarian response by supporting refugees to become self-reliant.

"Sometimes we focus only on humanitarian response, but this support will also strengthen resilience so that refugees become active contributors rather than passive recipients of aid," he said.

According to Mr Zulu, part of the fund-



Women and men prepare food for refugees. There are more than two million refugees in Uganda. PHOTO/FILE

ing will improve refugee registration and protection systems, expand nutrition services and establish community-managed solar energy hubs, serving both refugees and host communities.

The support comes against a backdrop of declining international humanitarian assistance, including reduced contributions from traditional donors such as the United States.

UNHCR figures indicate that refugee aid to Uganda stood at \$500 million in 2019 before falling to \$370 million in 2021, rising slightly to \$414 million in 2022, then declining again to \$294 million in 2024 and between \$130 million and \$140 million in 2025.

UNHCR Deputy Country Representative Bernard Inkoom warned that Uganda's refugee response remains severely underfunded despite growing needs.



Active contributors.

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also strengthen resilience so that refugees become active contributors rather than passive recipients of aid,"

Mr Leonard Zulu, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Uganda.

"In the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan, UNHCR requires \$361 million for 2025 and 2026. In 2025, only 18 percent has been funded, and for 2026, we are at just 14 percent," Mr Inkoom said.

"This shows a huge gap and the severity of the funding crisis as we struggle to

support refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities affected by large influxes," he added.

UNHCR said part of the Japanese funding will support up to 160,000 newly arrived asylum seekers through registration, documentation, emergency cash assistance, healthcare, mental health support, and provision of non-food items.

The International Organisation for Migration said it will use part of the funding to establish two solar-powered community energy hubs in Yumbe District, one in a refugee settlement and another in a host community.

IOM Chief of Mission Sanusi Tejan Savage said many refugee-households remain heavily dependent on aid and lack opportunities for economic self-reliance.

"Many refugee families have become

increasingly dependent on aid and lack opportunities to rebuild self-reliance. At the same time, West Nile faces severe energy shortages affecting agriculture and small enterprises," Mr Savage said.

He added that the energy hubs are expected to support irrigation, cold storage, milling, digital connectivity, and small businesses while promoting climate-smart agriculture and reducing post-harvest losses.

IOM also announced an additional \$533,333 project under the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security aimed at strengthening early warning systems, climate adaptation, and institutional capacity in the Rwenzori region.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme said part of the funding will support emergency food and nutrition assistance targeting newly arrived refugees, especially vulnerable children and mothers.

"The first 1,000 days of a child's life determine their future growth and development," WFP Deputy Country Representative Marcus Prior said.

"What a mother wants when she crosses the border into Uganda, exhausted is to see her child eat and recover. That is what this contribution makes possible," he added.

Japan's Ambassador to Uganda, Takuya Sasayama, reaffirmed his country's commitment to Uganda's refugee response and broader development agenda.

"The funds have been allocated to refugee protection, education, livelihoods, food, and nutrition. The international community faces many challenges that require collective action, and cooperation is more important than ever," Mr Sasayama said.

He noted that Uganda and Japan continue to maintain strong bilateral relations through infrastructure and development cooperation, including the Kampala Flyover project and planned reconstruction of Karu Bridge.

The Office of the Prime Minister welcomed the support, describing it as vital at a time when humanitarian pressures are increasing.

The Assistant Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Douglas Asiimwe, thanked Japan for its continued partnership despite tightening global funding conditions.