# EU BACKS REFUGEE INCLUSION EDUCATION DRIVE

By Wilfred Sanya and Juliet Waiswa

The European Union (EU) has partnered with the Uganda Small Scale Industries Association (USSIA) to train refugees in inclusive education, aiming to help them integrate with host communities.

Sam Walusimbi, the project manager at Vocax Startup Hub and Training Centre, said the project is a refugee-led exchange that fosters empathy and offers critical thinking skills to trainers.

"As the modern job market demands strong digital skills, this project intends to deliver targeted training in digital and soft skills to enhance participants' employability," he said.

Walusimbi made the remarks during a training session at the USSIA headquarters in Lugogo, Kampala, on April 28.

He noted that the project, co-funded by the EU, is a virtual exchange initiative designed to promote intercultural dialogue and digital inclusion for refugees and youth in conflict-affected regions, who often lack access to stable education.

Walusimbi revealed that the project is collaborating with Italy, Lithuania, Tanzania and Ghana to develop a working document that will be shared with countries hosting refugees worldwide.

"Our goal is to connect young people from different countries in inclusive online spaces to share lived experiences, challenge stereotypes, and build shared identities rooted in empathy, mutual respect, and civic values," he said.

Walusimbi added that the project is a valuable opportunity for participants to access the job market, as developing digital skills will allow them to pursue online education, connect with global opportunities, find remote jobs or start businesses.

"We believe the training will enable refugees to communicate and collaborate across cultures and participate in our society. Many refugees are already skilled but face barriers to opening up," he said.

Trainers will work with refugees to help them transform their lives through integration with host communities so they can contribute to Uganda's economy – a link that is currently missing.

"If we train them and equip them with the skills they need, they can add value to our economy and transform their lives to end donor dependence," Walusimbi said.

PHOTOS BY WILFRED SANYA



A cross section of participants during a training at Uganda Small Industries Association Scale headquarters in Lugogo, Kampala, on April 28

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

George Ssebanenya, a counselling psychologist at YMCA who specialises in teaching, said there are several challenges refugees encounter.

"When refugees spend a lot of money, they carry a lot of fear. Handling them requires trained counsellors who exercise patience and empathy," he said.

"When you see a refugee in a country, they have sacrificed a lot – including their culture, family, and way of life – to adapt to a new environment. We have people who go to the Middle East and Ugandans who seek greener pastures," he said.

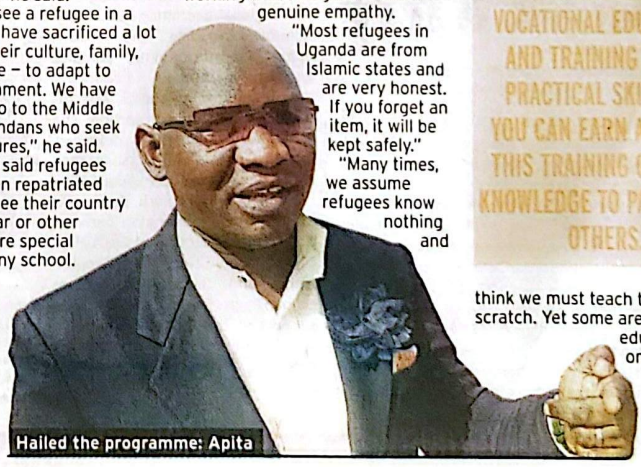
Ssebanenya said refugees who have been repatriated or forced to flee their country because of war or other reasons require special attention in any school.

"The word 'inclusive' may not be enough; the people handling them need to be attentive," he said.

Ssebanenya urged those working with refugees to show genuine empathy.

"Most refugees in Uganda are from Islamic states and are very honest. If you forget an item, it will be kept safely."

"Many times, we assume refugees know nothing and think we must teach them from scratch. Yet some are already educated and only need language skills to fit into society," he said.



Hailed the programme: Apita

> TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TEACH PRACTICAL SKILLS SO YOU CAN EARN A LIVING. THIS TRAINING GIVES US KNOWLEDGE TO PASS ON TO OTHERS.

Patrick Apita, the academic co-ordinator at Lugogo Industrial Training Institute, said the training targets people who have completed the Advanced Certificate of Education, and he commended the programme.

"Considering the people we train, this kind of programme equips them to set up their own businesses," he said.

Apita said once they leave training, they can eke out a living.

"Technical and vocational education and training teach practical skills so you can earn a living. This training gives us knowledge to pass on to others," he said.

Apita added: "Our learners are diverse. Some don't speak the language, and some have low levels of education. But our goal is to give them a means of survival, such as laying bricks in construction."

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