

Refugees in Uganda pay price amid funding gaps

By John Agaba

The continued influx of refugees and a funding gap greater than 60% pose difficulties to providing basic humanitarian aid to the immigrants, the Uganda Refugee Response on South Sudan by a UN agency for refugees (UNHCR), has said.

There is probably no other time in history when Uganda hosted refugees and asylum seekers close to the 1.4 million it currently shelters, as highlighted in the UNHCR situation report.

But more and more new arrivals suffer a deficiency and lack basic resettlement amenities, including shelter, food and access to necessary healthcare services and education, amid funding gaps.

Commissioner for refugees at the Office of the Prime Minister, Apollo Kazungu said: "We are able to work with what we have." But he admitted they were unable to provide the best services.

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"We put up requirements, including health, education, infrastructure, water, resettlement and immediate necessities, such as food and medical examination, on arrival. From January to December 2017, the UNHCR would need \$674.25m."

Most of the money is donations from Irish Aid, the UK, US, Canada, and the European Union.

At last year's solidarity summit on refugees, world leaders fundraised more than \$358.3m, which came in handy to help the nation deal with more than a million South Sudanese and DR Congo people fleeing war.

While the meeting hoped to raise at least \$2b, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described the \$358.3m given as a "big start".



Refugees lining up to get food at Imvepi Refugee camp in Arua last year

The European Union, Germany, and the UK were some of the big givers with the Schengen nations and UK contributing Euros 210m, Euros 50m and \$50m respectively.

Guterres said the UN and the international community would continue to lobby for funds to try and better refugees' living conditions and their host communities.

Kazungu said the OPM and UNHCR were still compiling data to tell countries who made good on their pledges and those that had not.

During the June summit, President Yoweri Museveni said he was not worried about allocating 'small

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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portions' of land for refugee settlement, amid Uganda's population growth and its exertions on the environment.

"Why some individuals are

complaining about these small portions of the land the Government allocates for refugee settlement is because they only look at land for agriculture. But myself, I am not worried," the President said.

"There is a lot of activities Ugandans can go into. They can go into industry, into processing, value addition and services. Once you have a vibrant industry, and there is infrastructure and people have jobs, you do not have complaints about small pieces of land," he said.

The President also said

In numbers

1,398,991

The December 29 Uganda Refugee Situation update indicated a total of 1,398,991 refugees and asylum-seekers were in the country. Of these, 1,053,276 are from South Sudan. A total of 354,429 are new arrivals (from South Sudan). Sixty one percent of the refugees are children under 18 years.

287,087

Bidibidi Settlement in Yumbe district hosts the highest number of South Sudan refugees at 287,087. Palorinya Settlement in Moyo hosts 179,025; while Imvepi and Rhino settlements in Arua host 126,636 and 118,251 refugees, respectively. Palabek settlement in Lamwo district hosts 32,801.

383

In Imvepi, 383 refugees were medically screened, 272 received measles vaccination and 98 were immunised against Polio.

700,000

Last year, the health ministry said it had distributed over 700,000 bed nets to refugees to stop them from contracting malaria.

refugees provided market for Ugandan agricultural produce, so they were not entirely 'parasites'.

Guterres hailed Uganda's "exemplary refugee policy", saying it stood out in a world where "many countries are turning their backs on foreigners in need."