



**A MERGED REPORT INCLUDING  
EXPLOITATION, TRAFFICKING AND REFUGEES  
PERIODIC REPORTS OF WORK 2021 AFTER COVID EMERGENCY.**

**THIS REPORT GIVES A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN  
SERVED AT UYDEL**

**(Sexual Exploitation, Refugees and Child Trafficking, Street and Slum Youth)**

***Facing vulnerability at your door step?***

**DRAFT**

**Compiled by: Carol Kyolaba, Sam Kimbowa, Annet Namajja, Anna Nabulya, Kavuma,  
Rogers Kasirye and Mutaawe Rogers**

**October 2021**

## **Background**

Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) is a youth-focused NGO established in 1993, that aims at enhancing the socio-economic transformation of disadvantaged children and young people aged 13-24 years. UYDEL provides services to young people and children who are exiting sexual exploitation, children in worst forms of child labor, refugees, street and slum youth, victims of trafficking and children using drugs and substances.

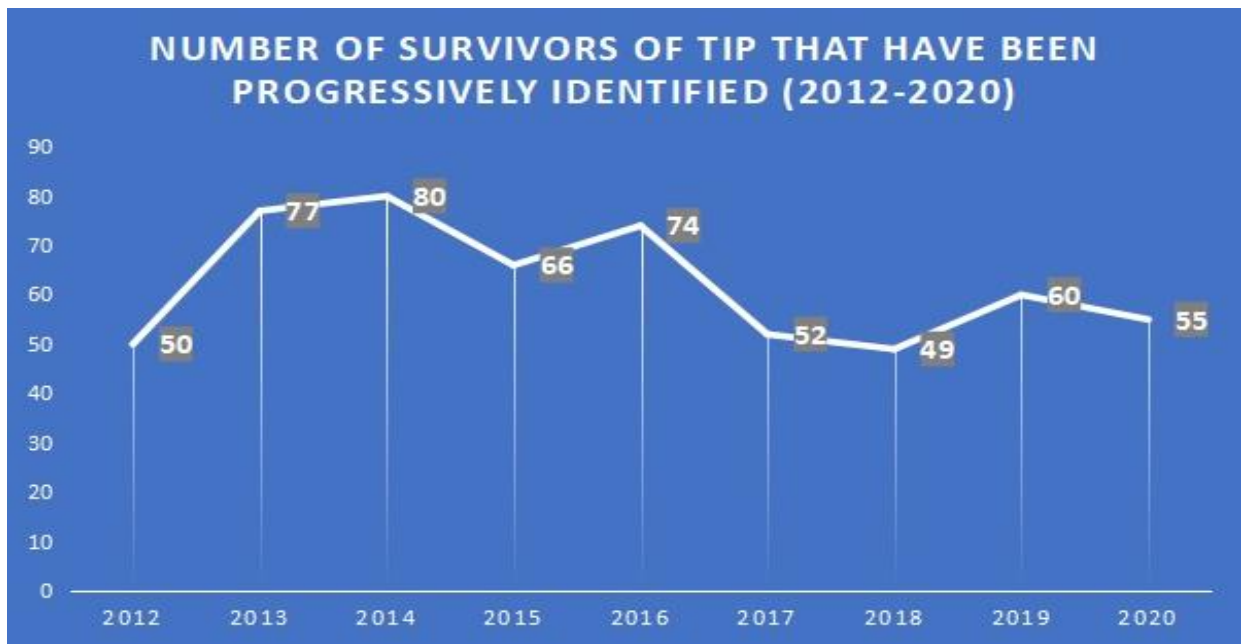
### **Adversities and a myriad of problems experienced by youth served at UYDEL**

Previous research studies by UYDEL show that children and youth who have been pushed out of homes and now fending for themselves face a lot of adversities and a myriad of problems including psychosocial distress, suicidality (Culbreth et al., 2018; Swahn, Palmier, et al., 2012), violence (Swahn, et al., 2012), alcohol use and problem drinking (Swahn et al., 2020) and disparities in sexual behaviors (Swahn et al., 2014). Some of the unique vulnerabilities of youth in the slums are related to living in absolute poverty without adequate access to clean water, electricity, and sanitation, and also exposure to high levels of crime including violent victimizations. A previous study documented a 30.6% prevalence of suicidal ideation among youth living. Juvenile delinquents/prison 15%. 30% experience homelessness (Kasirye & Nakijoba, et al., 2021).

### **Child Trafficking**

Human trafficking specifically child trafficking has received a lot of focus especially from child rights Advocates. Child trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labor are among the worst exploitation that children served at UYDEL experience. Recruiters target girls and women aged 13-24 years for domestic sex trafficking. In 2017, individuals from Rwanda and Somalia, including a Somali refugee from Nakivale Refugee Settlement, were victims of internal trafficking. UYDEL works to withdrawal and rehabilitate victims of commercial sex (child prostitution and pornography, exploration in tourism) and labour exploitation. UYDEL offers them a temporary shelter, medical, psychosocial, humanitarian and legal assistance, vocational and life skills training and reintegration with their families.

**Chart 1 showing the number of international trafficking survivors that have progressively received and rehabilitated by UYDEL since 2012**



The figure above more survivors of Trafficking in persons were in 2014 with 80 survivors, in 2013 they were 77, 74 in 2016, 66 survivors in 2015, 60 in 2019, 55 in 2020, 52 in 2017, 50 in 2012 and 49 in 2018. The downward trend in 2020 maybe due to the COVID-19 lockdown on transport which limited people’s movement from one area to another.

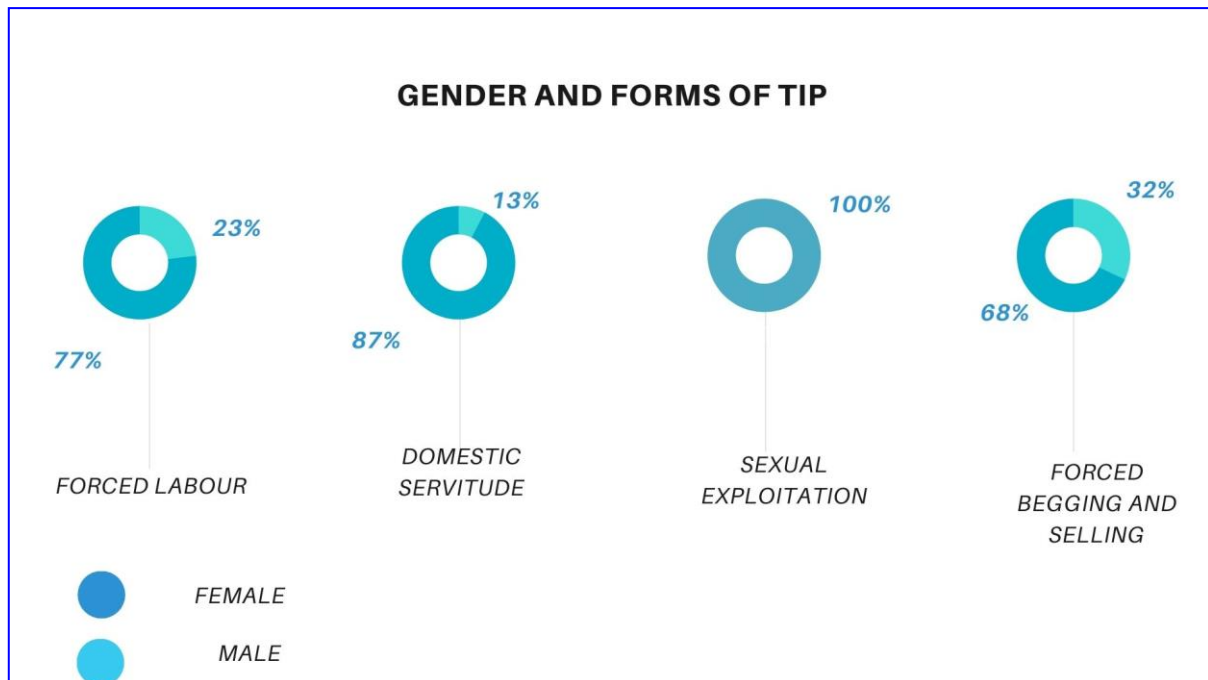
**Country of origin**

**International victims received coming outside Uganda**

**Figure 2: International cases of TIP**



Survivors admitted came from several countries of origin. These included; Kenya (11), Burundi (38), Sudan (11), China (1), Tanzania (9), Rwanda (2), Congo (3) and Nigeria (1). This rather indicates that Uganda is a transit and destination country.



### Trafficking and COVID-19

Although the Ugandan Government collaborates with NGOs to provide support services, the 2020 US TIP Report finds that Government funding to NGOs is very limited and organizations involved in anti-trafficking are mostly self-funded or benefit from international and local donors. Access to vital funding, which is important to the success of victim services may drastically reduce in the wake of the pandemic. Grants and donations may be refocused to the public health sector, and this could adversely shorten the reach of anti-trafficking organizations that provide care to victims and survivors of human trafficking. Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is a disguised practice that abrogates the child's rights to dignity, equality, autonomy, physical and mental well-being. It is characterized by spontaneous and continuous sexual, physical and psychological abuse of children and threats of denunciation and intimidation in order to retain children in sexual exploitation.

### Child labour and Sexual violence

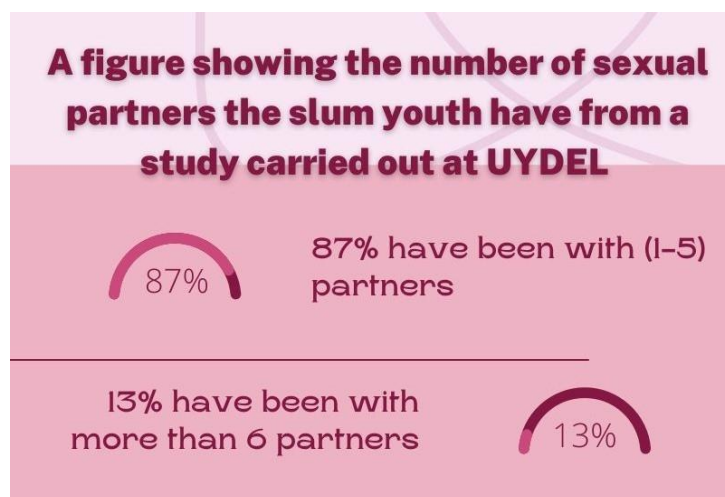
From the findings of the 583 study participants at UYDEL in 2020. Most slum youth could not find opportunity for work and only 32% had worked for pay during this lockdown period

These were connected by mostly friends, guardians or spouse. 67% of these worked to provide my basics needs, 23% to take care of their families and the 10% had to remit their pay back home.

**Sexual activities.** Of the 583 study participants, (73%) engaged in sexual activities. Dominated by those of 15-17 years accounting to (350) 60%. Interestingly those between 10-14 years (110) (19%) were also active indicating early sexual debut and involvement. Of these 30% reported to have experienced forced sex. (59%) were in age range 15-17 years followed by 23% of 10-14 years. Most abusers were mainly boyfriends (39%), clients and strangers 34% as well as relatives and guardians (16%) and employers 11%. Largely 71% never reported the abuse.

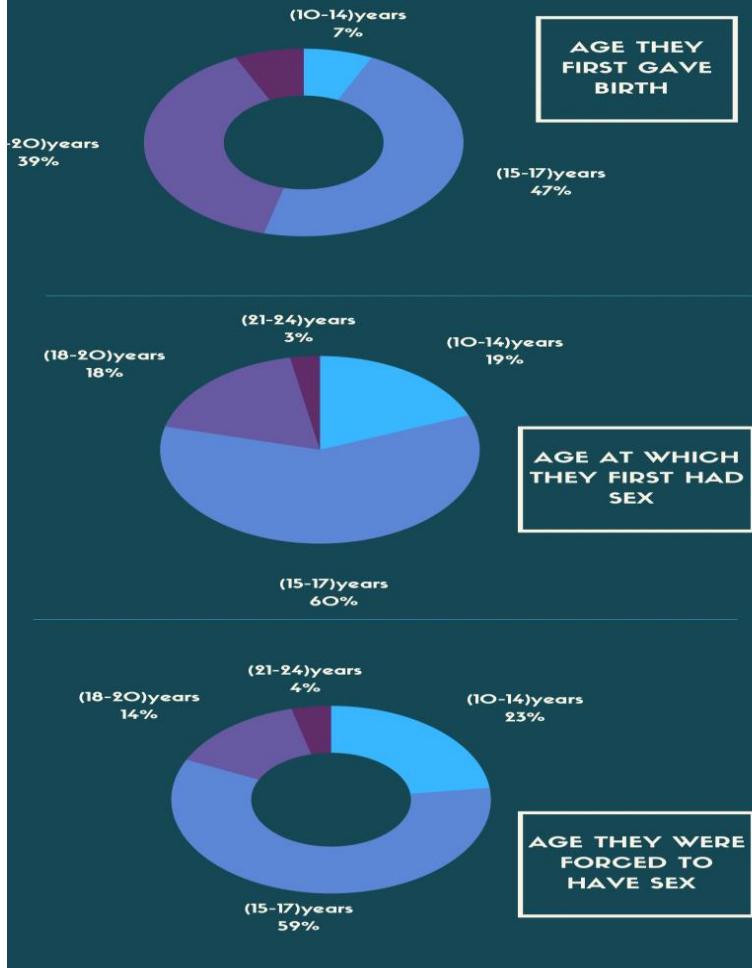
***Transactional sex -Sexual exploitation, (child Prostitution).***

Of the study participants, (36%) claimed to have engaged in transactional sex before COVID 19, of these 31% continued even during the pandemic. From the study, youth were introduced into transactional sex by mainly friends (62%) and themselves (30%); external characteristics for example looking for money to feed themselves and their family, to buy basic needs like sanitary towels and clothes. Transactional sex took place mostly in lodges and hotel (66%), and brothel 23%. A few, 11% did it from home. The slum youth engaging in survival sex and having peers involved in the sex trade were statistically significant risk factors (69%) for children to engage in prostitution. Having between (1-5) sexual partners accounted for 87%



The figure above shows the average number of partners the slum youth have, where 87% have between 1-5partners while 13% have more than 6 partners. This not only puts them at

**A COMPARISON CHART SHOWING THE AGE DIFFERENCES IN SEXUAL ACTIVITIES FROM A STUDY CONDUCTED BY UYDEL**



high risk of contracting and spreading sexually transmitted diseases, having unwanted pregnancies and having no idea of the parent but also increased abuse of drugs and alcohol in order for them to engage sexually with all their partners because of money.

From this chart, it is very clear that most of our respondents started having sex below 18 years when they were still children and what makes it worse is that they

were mostly forced to have sex at a very young age and further still most gave birth when they were still very young. This not only torments them psychologically but they end up losing faith or hope in a better future and hence only focus on sexual activities.

## **Negative coping**

We established that there a lot of negative coping among these groups especially heightened sexual involvement, transactional sex, engagement in multiple sexual partners; use of alcohol and substance abuse; tendency of criminality. This had a bearing on suicide and victimization as well. Most clients received by UYDEL are mainly girls. Girls are more vulnerable because they drop out of school early as such start getting in early sexual risk behavior. (Unprotected and condom less sex sometimes with multiple sexual partners, transactional sex for in kind or money to meet basic needs such as shelter, food and pay for their kids, use of alcohol and drugs to caution and replace worries and stress which affect behavior conduct and make them more vulnerable).

Street youth faced unprecedented levels victimization abuse and Parenting status showed a mixed of monogamy and polygamy which presents a mixture of different child upbringing. The homes appeared to be economically struggling as many of the young people had dropped out of school at primary level 52%. We established that another 59% had left home to live with others. Most of the new places of stay were either in bars and exploitation where their safety and health are not guaranteed.

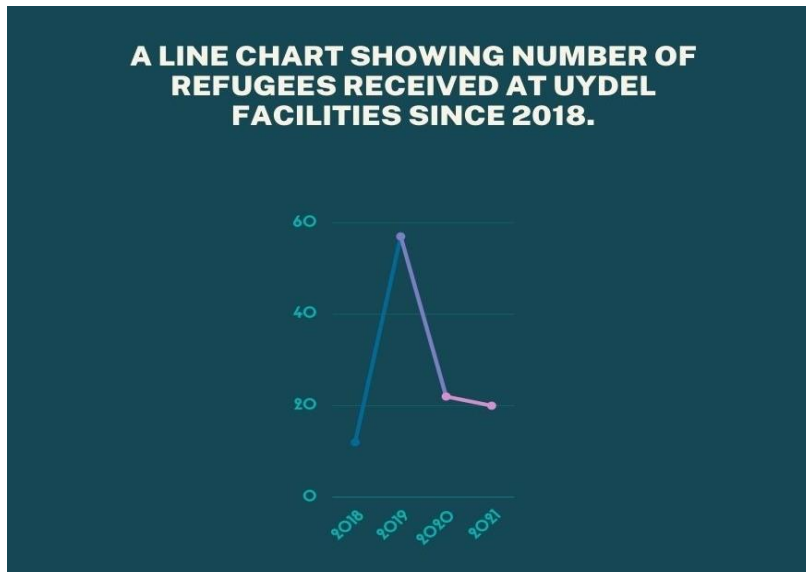
This population was left far worse off and, in most cases, abandoned, given and received a low deal. We noted that slightly over a quarter of our study participants had been recruited for work for pay in homes or service industry by friends or guardians to meet their basic needs and support their families. Struggling families are likely to offer their children for work as a source of complement to their survival irrespective of the challenges and problems encountered at work places. Many girls who are out of school are prone and turn out to be good candidates for traffickers and innocently facilitated mainly by relatives and pimps to move to new exploitative situation.

## **4.0 Refugees**

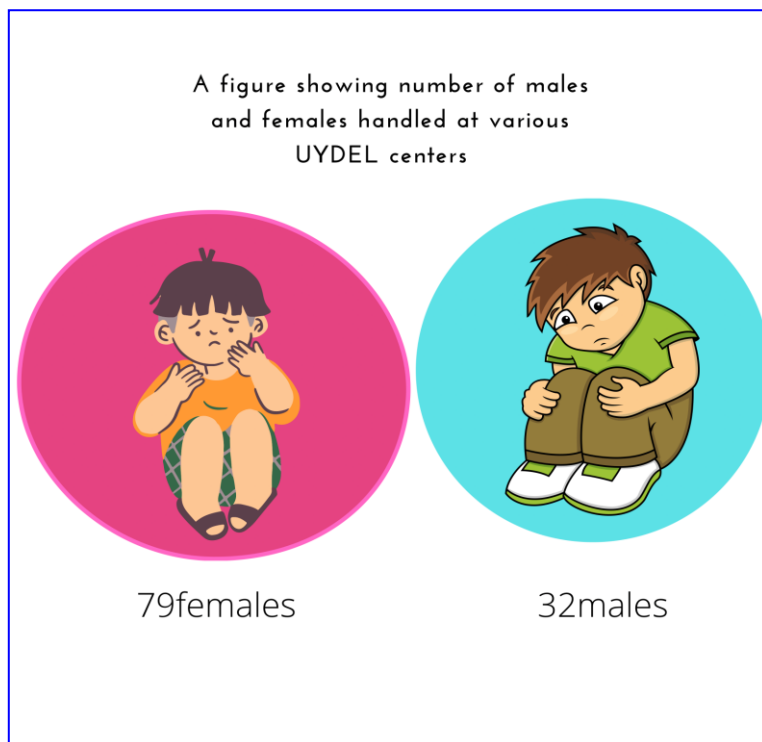
Uganda currently hosts almost 1.4 million refugees, with more than 1 million who fled South Sudan. (Margini, F. 2020). Beyond this massive displacement into northern Uganda, many settlements in the southwestern part of the country are also seeing steady influxes of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and elsewhere.

This section highlights the challenges faced by refugees and services offered to them when they reach the UYDEL centers. A total of 111 refugees were received at UYDEL (79 females

and 32 males) who were placed and enrolled at various UYDEL safe spaces in the past four years.



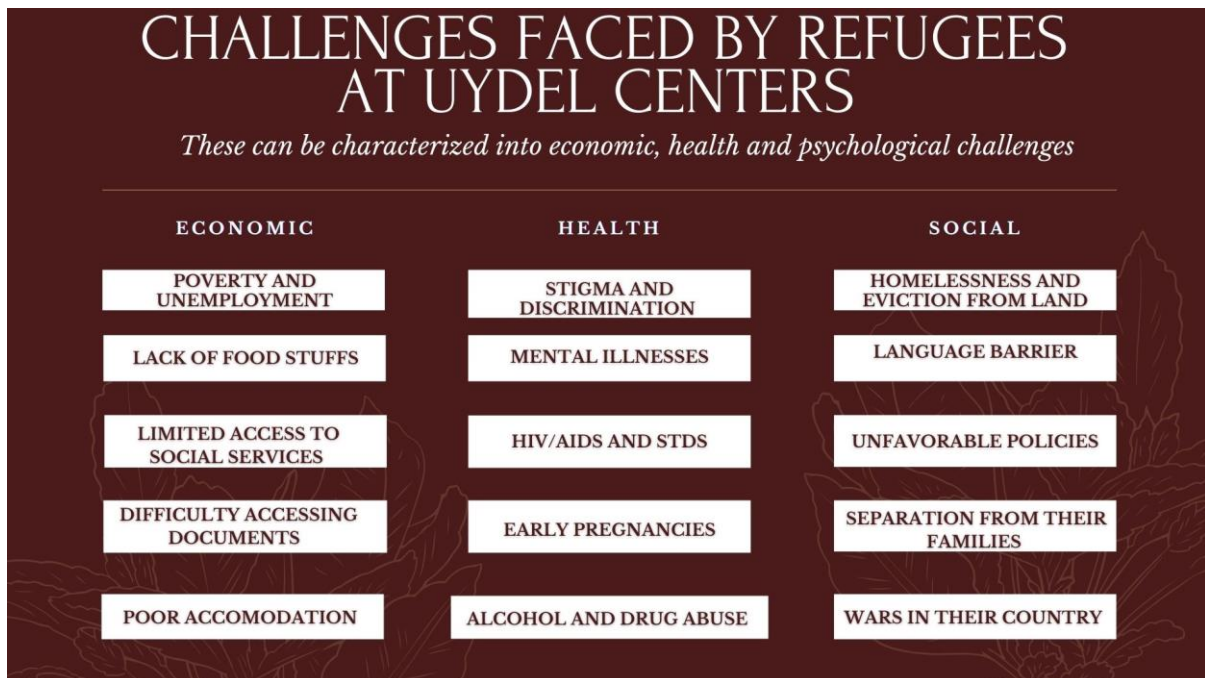
The number of enrolment of refugees that were enrolled in 2018 were 12 and in 2019 there was a high increment due to the services that UYDEL provides that greatly help refugees cope within Uganda, in 2020 and 2021, the numbers dropped due to the effects of COVID 19 including the restrictions on movements into and within the country.



Males were 32 and Females were 79 totaling up to 111 refugees.



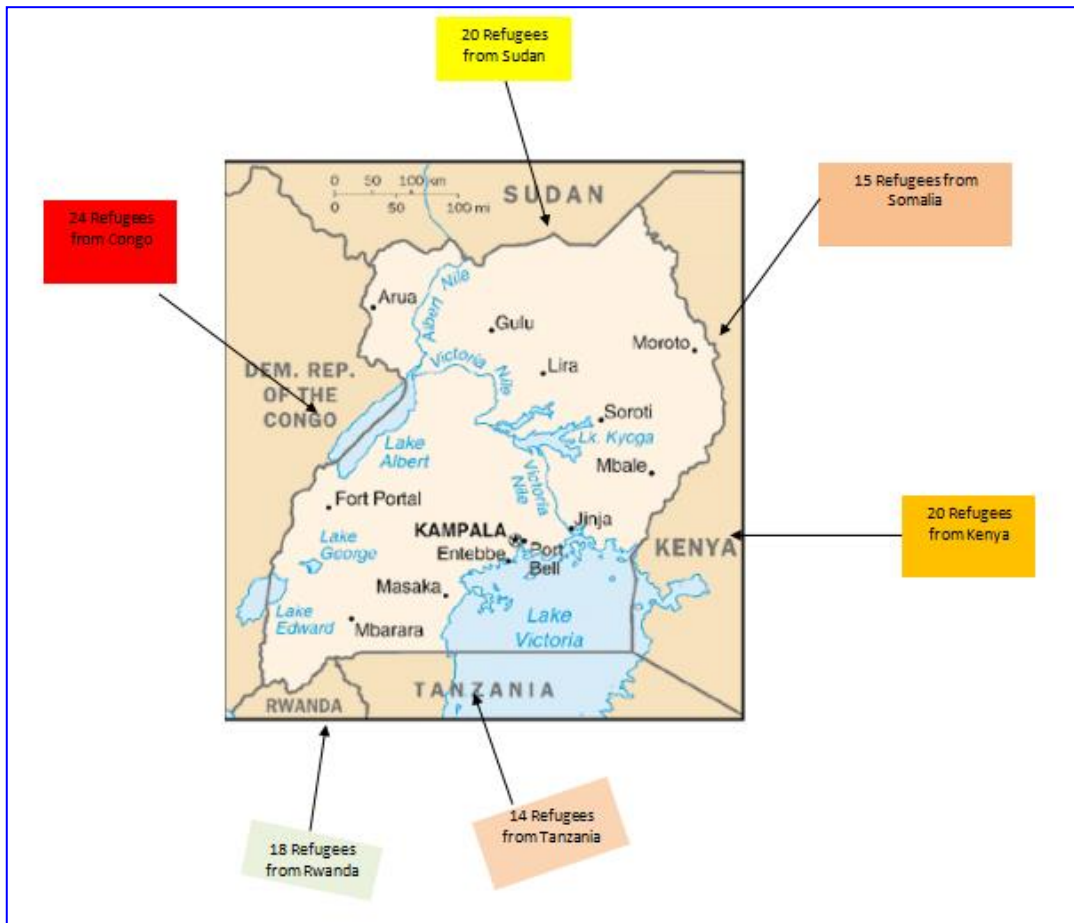
The ratio of female refugees is slightly higher than that of males because they are more interested in being enrolled compared to their male counterparts. Girls face a lot of challenges that can lead them into sexual activities for example; a lot of violence, unemployment, need to feed the family, hardships at home compared to men. But this doesn't mean that this makes the males less vulnerable, since some suffer the same challenges.



There are many services provided to refugees in the UYDEL centres mainly focusing on the challenges they face. Since most of the challenges are closely related to their mental health, in one way or another they always need psycho social support in order to cope up. The vocational skills and short

term skills come in as means to empower them economically since they face challenges of poverty and unemployment.

## Map of Uganda showing Number of Refugees entering Uganda received and given services by UYDEL

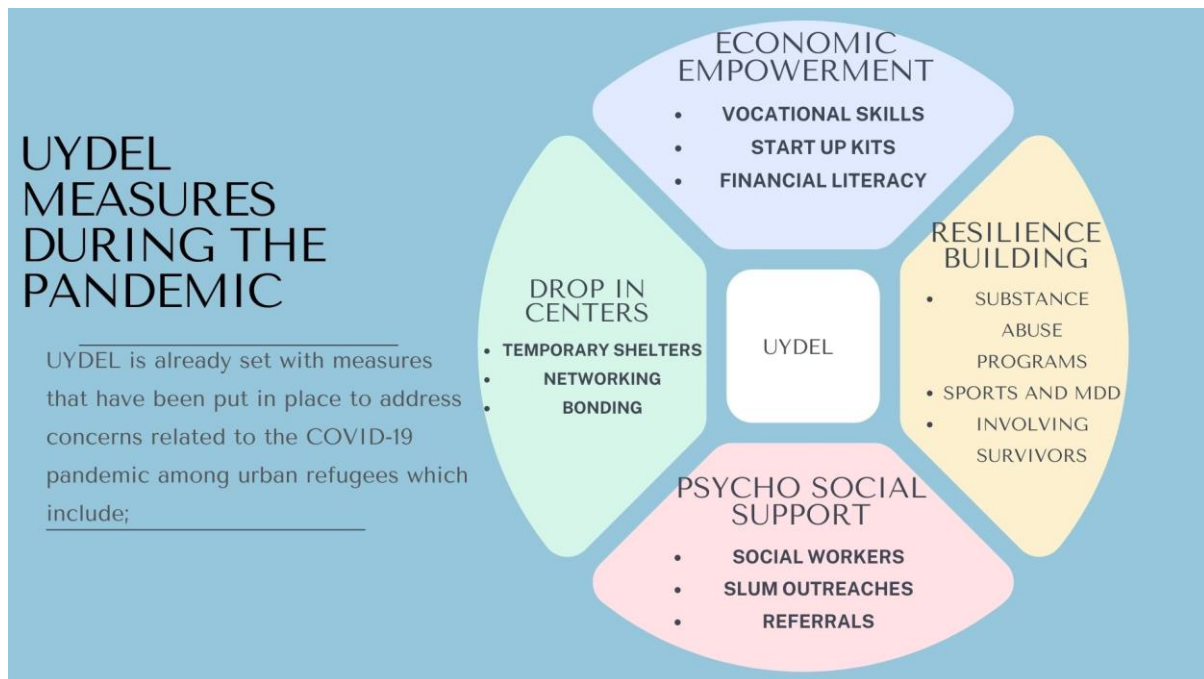


### COVID-19 AND REFUGEES

Data at UYDEL and the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities urban young people who are refugees in Uganda are facing. Consequently, as Uganda battles the COVID-19 pandemic, preparedness and response should be holistic considering the entire population including urban refugees. Special cognizance of the plight of the refugees is important given their vulnerability and unique circumstances. A holistic response to this pandemic demand's appreciation of the psychosocial and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 to all vulnerable groups including urban refugees. Sub-optimal attention to the plight of urban refugees during preparedness and response plans for COVID-19 pandemic will not only exacerbate the devastating impacts of COVID-19 to this group but also poses greater risks and challenges to the host communities.

UYDEL, is already doing the most to ease the challenges that refugees being enrolled at their centres face but the numbers are still low compared to the number of refugees within the country. The organisation faces challenges including limited resources and funding since refugees are a special group of vulnerable people they need a lot of attention. The

psychosocial and economic impacts of COVID-19 to the urban refugees in Uganda have led to posing the question of what we should do to protect vulnerable refugees from suffering harm during this period of COVID-19.



### Lessons Learnt;

- Exploitation, trafficking and refugees are areas that should be taken with maximum attention because day by day the challenges they face keep increasing, refugees face a high risk of exploitation and trafficking, this is because of their unique attributes especially poverty and unemployment. Unemployment on the other hand puts young nationals at risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking because they are looking for money to take care of themselves and their families. There is need for harmonised efforts between different organisations that address these issues including UYDEL to come up with means to come up with preventive measures that will help these groups in being victims of trafficking and exploitation.
- COVID 19 has only exasperated the situation where by these groups of people; survivors and victims of exploitation, trafficking and refugees are at high risk of being infected with COVID 19 since the SOPs are not easily preserved and having them vaccinated comes with challenges since most do not have documents. The impact of COVID 19 also

comes with its challenges including increased unemployment that can make them and their families vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

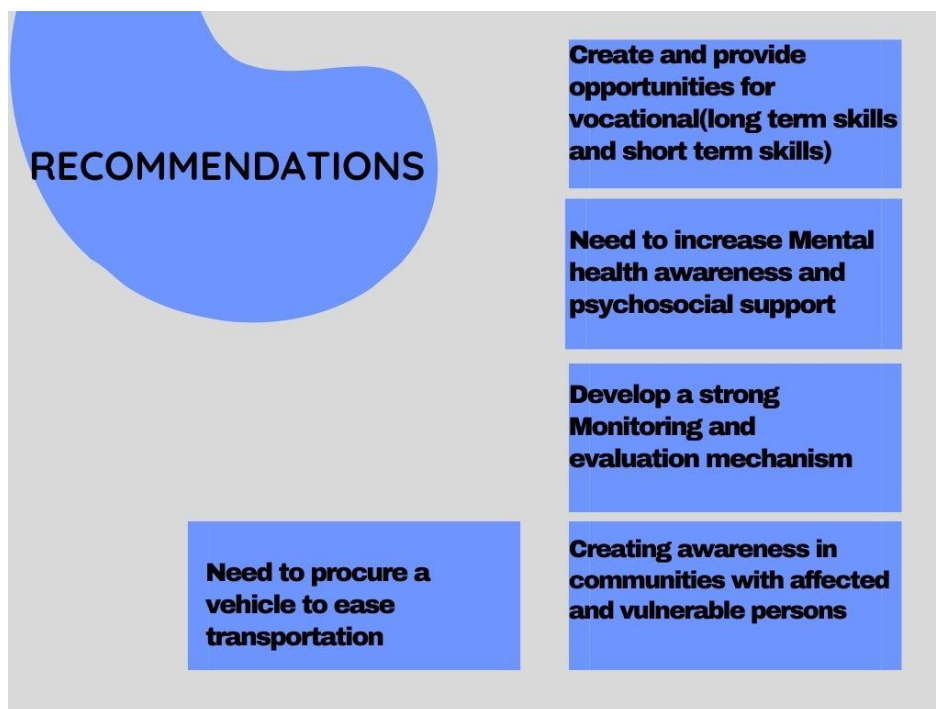
- Psycho and economic empowerment provided by UYDEL, has greatly helped survivors of sexual exploitation, trafficking and refugees since they go through situations that make it hard for them to cope within the society. There is need to build capacity of social workers that empower these groups of people for them to provide a holistic approach to most of the problems they face and further understand their needs.
- UYDEL drop-in centres give the young people a source of belongingness, until they are empowered enough to go out and face the society but what happens to these young people in situations like COVID 19 because the centres close and yet some children were got from the streets with nowhere to stay. This puts them at risk of going back to their old ways of sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse
- Social integration takes time and needs more than one stakeholder. Youth experience different adversities, need individual approach. Multiple interventions (individual, parents and communities). Training of social workers to identify the needs such as stigma. Dropouts and relapse to drugs may re- occur on going support is key. Identify champions amongst the clients to support your work.

### Summary of lessons learnt



### Recommendation;

There is a need for multi- component interventions to address the multiple challenges experienced by street/slum youth since one intervention cannot work on its own. These may include;



### *Recommendations explained*

*Create and provide opportunities for vocational (long term skills and short-term skills)* since most of the challenges they face are around poverty and unemployment, these skills will turn make them employable. It is also important to provide start up kits, job placements and internships for sustainability of the skills learnt.

*Mental health awareness and psychosocial support is very important* when dealing with street /slum youth since it helps them adapt, adopt and cope positively. Hence there is a need to have social workers with expertise in mental health in order to build resilience among the youth. and behavioural skills This is important in order to find out the status of survivors and to avoid a relapse to drugs and prostitution. Further still there is a need to build a strong referral pathway in case the victim needs services that UYDEL doesn't have expertise in.

There is a need to develop a strong *Monitoring and evaluation mechanism* to support with follow ups and track progress of young people this will not only be sustainable but also bring out a sense of quality for the services provided to the young people.

*Creating awareness in communities with affected and vulnerable persons.* Knowledge is power and creating awareness on issues the young people face is a preventive, reduction and curative measure to various challenges including those that slum/street youth face.

Support UYDEL with a grant to improve form logistical support. This can be used to procure a vehicle that will be used to resettle back the youths that need transport to urban places to their homes or to the refugee settlements,

In conclusion, UYDEL is appreciated for the constant efforts of enhancing socio economic transformation of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people to exploitation and at risk to HIV/AIDs infection through advocacy, psychosocial and skills development for self-reliance and re integration.

**This work has been supported directly in the past and UYDEL is very grateful**

- 1) ECPAT France
- 2) ECPAT International
- 3) United Nations Office Drug and crime
- 4) Terres Des Home
- 5) Plan Uganda
- 6) IOM Uganda Country Office
- 7) The Japanese Embassy
- 8) International Labour organisation ILO/IPEC
- 9) MILDMAY Uganda
- 10) Lutheran World Federation and Partners
- 11) Human Trafficking Institute/JJ University.

## References:

1. Swahn, M.H., Culbreth, R., Masyn, K.E. *et al.* The Intersection of Alcohol Use, Gender Based Violence and HIV: Empirical Findings among Disadvantaged Service-Seeking Youth in Kampala, Uganda. *AIDS Behav* **25**, 3106–3114 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-021-03301-0>.
2. Culbreth R, Masyn KE, Swahn MH, Self-Brown S, Kasirye R. The interrelationships of child maltreatment, alcohol use, and suicidal ideation among youth living in the slums of Kampala Uganda. *Child Abuse Neglect*. 2020;112:104904.
3. Citation: Rogers Kasirye and Barbara Nakijoba\*. Victimization, Suicide and Coping Among Vulnerable Slum Youth in Uganda During Covid 19 Crisis. *Sch J Psychol & Behav Sci*. 5(5)-2021. SJPBS MS.ID.000221.DOI: 10.32474/SJPBS.2021.05.000221
4. Swahn MH, Gressard L, Palmier JB, Kasirye R, Lynch C, Yao H. Serious Violence Victimization and Perpetration among Youth Living in the Slums of Kampala, Uganda. *West J Emerg Med* [Internet]. 2012 Jan 1 [cited 2015 Sep 10];13(3). Available from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9h4660nd>.
5. Swahn MH, Culbreth R, Tumwesigye NM, Topalli V, Wright E, Kasirye R. Problem Drinking, Alcohol-Related Violence, and Homelessness among Youth Living in the Slums of Kampala, Uganda. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* [Internet]. 2018 Jun [cited 2018 Sep 5];15(6). Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6025561/>.
6. Rogers Kasirye and Barbara Nakijoba. Victimization, Suicide and Coping Among Vulnerable Slum Youth in Uganda During Covid 19 Crisis.

7. Margini, F. (2020). A synthesis of key aspects of health systems and policy design affecting the refugee populations in Uganda: Report Structure.