



# Integration of city-centric approaches into national policy processes: Kampala's case

## Climate Mobility Context

Across Africa, climate change is increasingly recognized as a major driver of migration, displacement, and planned relocation. In 2024, close to 20 million people were internally displaced in sub-Saharan Africa, 8 million due to disasters ([IDMC, 2025](#)). Similarly, migrants and refugees have been rising across the continent ([UN, 2025](#)), with climate change contributing significantly, and mostly expected to head toward urban areas. This places cities at the center of climate mobility dynamics, including those in Uganda.

As the capital and largest city of Uganda, Kampala is home to 1.7 million night-time residents (4.2 million at daytime) and has one of the fastest rates of urban population growth in Africa and the world ([OECD et al., 2025](#)), experiencing higher rural-urban migration connected to climate-related livelihood losses and cross-border inflows. As of mid-2025, the city hosts over 157,000 refugees and asylum seekers (over 59% being women and children), most of them self-settled across Makindye, Central, Rubaga, Kawempe, and Nakawa divisions.

While this dynamic brings people and labour to Kampala, it also creates persistent challenges for the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and for those arriving, such as: limited access to affordable housing and rapid response during emergencies, as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene services; frequent flooding and drainage failure; competition for informal jobs; and tensions between arriving and host communities. Furthermore, climate hazards, particularly floods and heat stress, worsen vulnerabilities in informal settlements such as Bwaise, Kisenyi, Katwe, and Kinawataka, where both refugees and low-income residents live in high-risk environments.

*“How can we strike the right balance between ensuring essential services for refugees already present in the city while also managing migration patterns in a way that does not unintentionally incentivize secondary movements? These challenges underscore the importance of strategic coordination, long-term planning, and sustainable resourcing.”*

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Migrants and refugees moving to Kampala are mainly looking for employment opportunities and services: over 51% of urban refugees work in informal enterprises (food vending, trading, boda-boda transport, and retail). Therefore, it is essential for the KCCA to develop robust frameworks that integrate mobility considerations into urban planning and management, and to widen policy processes on human settlement, climate change, adaptation, livelihoods, and resilience-building.



## Approach

The KCCA has adopted a holistic, city-centric, and resilience-focused approach to climate-related human mobility with four major pillars to develop intervention:

1. Climate-smart livelihoods and skills development: Supporting refugees and host communities to generate income, build resilience, and enhance food security by strengthening opportunities for employment and livelihood generation, and skill development and training.
2. Inclusive service provision and social protection: Providing refugees with access to city-managed health centers, public schools, and job matching.

3. Urban planning, human settlement management, and climate change adaptation: Understanding the nexus between these areas and design evidence-based actions on climate-related displacement (e.g., storm water management), social safeguards, risk-sensitive planning, and mitigation measures, aligned with Uganda's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP).

4. Policy frameworks and institutional development: Aligning work in Kampala with Uganda's refugee protection policies (2006 Refugee Act and 2010 Refugee Regulations) as well as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the Uganda Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and the National Development Plan IV, inter alia.



As policy integration, the Kampala City Emergency Response Plan (KCERP) 2025-2030 has been developed as an operational guide for managing city emergencies, connected with Uganda's National Land Policy (2013). This reinforces disaster management by ensuring that land use planning accounts for disaster risks in areas prone to landslides, floods and droughts, and supports institutional coordination to respond to land-related emergencies (KCCA et al., 2025).

The KCCA also works with other cities across Uganda (e.g., Arua, Gulu, Mbale, Mbarara, Fort Portal, Jinja, and Hoima) under frameworks such as the Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA), the National Urban Forum, and the UGCities4Resilience Network. These collaborations support the alignment with Uganda's CRRF and its NDC and NAP, improving knowledge-sharing and joint planning.

## Impact to Date

he KCCA has initiated to develop a Refugee and Migration Settlement Ordinance to guide city-level management, coordination, and integration. Additionally, the city is establishing Migration/Refugee Management Desks in the divisions of Makindye, Central, Rubaga, Kawempe, and Nakawa to strengthen case management and improve service referrals. Furthermore, Kampala is exploring to upgrade and expand trading spaces to better accommodate migrant and refugee entrepreneurs, and ensure their access to livelihoods and economic participation.

## Funding

Kampala mostly receives funding from: own-source revenue generation, fiscal transfers from the central government via the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and external aid. In 2026, KCCA's has ongoing funding from the World Bank under the Greater Kampala and Metropolitan Urban Development Program, and the Africa Development Bank under the Kampala City Roads Rehabilitation Project (both funding infrastructure development: roads, drainages, and markets).

## Learning

Although policy encourages refugees to remain within their designated settlements, where services and resources are planned to meet their needs, their high influx and continuous turnover obliges the city to plan for them. In this case, enhanced urban support systems can attract additional movement, not driven by vulnerability but by the benefits associated with being in the city.

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