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ARUA

*Strengthening Mechanisms for Receiving, Managing
and Integrating Involuntary Migrants Within the
Municipal Council*

Implementing Partner: AVSI Foundation in partnership with Arua Municipal Council (AMC) and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)

Location: Arua, Uganda

Duration: December 2019 – November 2021

SUMMARY

The project strengthened the structural and institutional mechanisms for reception, management and integration of involuntary migrants within the Arua Municipal Council. It included collecting accurate data on Arua Municipality's population to inform planning; using mechanisms such as municipal and division development forums to promote dialogue and build capacity among all stakeholders; and partnering with financial institutions to help migrants and host communities become more self-reliant and improve their livelihoods.



THE CITIES ALLIANCE GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON CITIES AND MIGRATION

The Strengthening Mechanisms for Receiving, Managing and Integrating Involuntary Migrants within the Arua Municipal Council project is part of the Cities Alliance Global Programme on Cities and Migration, which focuses on migration management in secondary cities in low-income countries and is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The project in Arua is one of a global portfolio of nine cities that includes Amatitlán and San Marcos, Guatemala; Jendouba and Kairouan, Tunisia; Jinja, Uganda; Adama and Jigjiga, Ethiopia; and Kakuma-Kalobeyei in Kenya.

CONTEXT

Arua Municipality is situated in Uganda's West Nile region, approximately 12 km from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and 50 km from the boundary with South Sudan. Arua has an estimated total population of 61,962, as per census 2014. In 2021, Arua was upgraded from a municipality to a city status, increasing the jurisdiction from 10 sqm to over 400 sqm. Due to its location, Arua has become a hub for trade and commerce within the West Nile region as well as with both the DRC and South Sudan.

This proximity to international borders has also brought Arua an influx of involuntary migrants seeking access to social services, livelihoods, and support. Arua Municipality estimates that self-settled refugees make up 24% of its total population. These migrants are not accurately documented by municipal authorities, and they are not included in the census.

Urbanisation is real and migration is real. People flock from villages to towns, people will come intentionally and unintentionally. But governments know little about how many people are coming. The issue of data is very key in planning for these people.

– Ms. Sarah Nandudu, National Coordinator, Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda

This situation makes it very difficult for the city to adequately plan for all its residents at the municipal level and is straining Arua's ability to provide services to its host communities. With accurate data, Arua can approach the central government for additional fiscal transfers to provide more adequate social services and opportunities for both migrants and host communities.

RESULTS

As the refugee influx increases, so does the need to support host communities who live under similar or worse conditions and already struggle for resources. The project piloted strategies and approaches to support Arua Municipal Council, as well as institutional and community stakeholders, to better structure and manage the reception and integration of involuntary migrants by engaging all stakeholders in a coordinated and effective way.

It also built municipal authorities' capacity to plan for, and effectively respond to, the challenges of migration and helped them adopt sustainable approaches to integrating migrants and enhancing livelihoods.

Result 1: Accurate data and documentation on Arua's population to inform planning

The project collaborated with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics to conduct a municipal-wide census of migrant households that also documented the situation and experiences of migrants and host communities. In total, 13,000 households were enumerated, covering all six wards of Arua municipality.

The process also resulted in a common agreement among the stakeholders on the definition of a refugee for the survey, making the results more accurate. Currently, the Ugandan government only recognises urban refugees in Kampala, which means that the tens of thousands of refugees in secondary cities such as Arua do not receive assistance or services.

In a final report on the survey, UBOS confirmed the presence of large numbers of refugees in urban centres and encouraged the central government to expand its recognition of urban refugees beyond Kampala.

Arua is already using the data gathered in the survey to inform municipal planning, budgeting, advocacy and community engagement efforts.

The municipality is sharing its experiences across different stakeholders and partner forums, and other West Nile cities have shown interest in an urban refugee survey to be replicated in their cities.

“ We need to have planned migration, not unplanned migration. Planned migration will make us organise ourselves and make sure host and migrant communities benefit from it. We are talking about refugees because normally they are not captured in our budgets, which limits the services we can provide to the refugees and the host communities ... A lot is being done for refugees in districts but not for those in cities. We need a deliberate effort to ensure that urban refugees are captured in our programmes.

– Mr. Isa Kato, Mayor of Arua
from 2017–2021

Result 2: Municipal and division forums that engage and strengthen the capacity of the Arua Municipal Council and stakeholders

The project team engaged, supported, and further built the capacity of the Arua Municipal Council to improve the coordination and responsiveness of community structures and stakeholders through the city's Municipal Development Forum (MDF). Its activities cascaded down to separate forums in each of Arua Municipality's two sub-divisions, Arua Hill and Oli River. Both forums are representative and inclusive to ensure the engagement of both migrants and host communities. They provide a platform for dialogue, identifying community needs, and social accountability through which the concerns of the most vulnerable migrants and host community members can be consultatively identified, planned for and addressed.

Result 3: Develop and model sustainable livelihoods approaches

This part of the project expanded economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods by helping migrant households and host communities become more self-reliant and self-sustainable. The approach involved building their capacity to anticipate, mitigate and adapt to their situation while taking advantage of available opportunities.

“ We are actually the biggest of the ten new created cities in Uganda. But as a city, as an entity, our biggest challenge here is the government, the central government policy not recognising urban refugees. It only recognises urban refugees in Kampala. The fact of the matter is, the urban refugees are here.

– Jobile Cornelius,
Arua Deputy Town Clerk



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