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SEARCH
FOR COMMON
GROUND

CONFLICT SCAN

Uganda

September 2021

Introduction

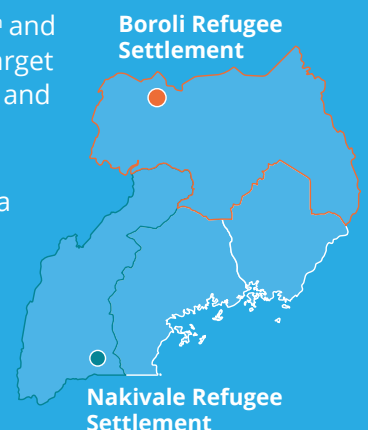
Uganda remains one of the largest refugee-hosting nations in the world and has been hosting refugees and asylum seekers since it attained independence in 1962. Today, the country hosts approximately 1,5 million refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Rwanda, and Burundi, who escaped from war and violence and now mostly live in refugee settlements in different parts of the country.¹ More than 61% of these refugees are from South Sudan, while 29% are from the DRC.² The Ugandan borders have remained closed for asylum since March 2020 due to COVID-19.

Refugees and host communities try to maintain respectful relationships and share a number of social services, including land, schools, and hospitals. The Government of Uganda (GoU) tries to ensure self-reliant and resilient refugee and host community households in refugee hosting districts. Despite the relatively positive relations, tensions have always existed between refugees and host communities mainly due to competition over local resources like land and firewood. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these tensions as needs continue to rise.

Data collection and analysis

Data for the third conflict scan report for Uganda was gathered between 14th and 18th May 2021 in refugee settlements and host communities in the following target zones: Boroli Refugee Settlement in Adjumani District (Northern Uganda) and Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District (Western Uganda).

This report was prepared by the Search for Common Ground (Search) Uganda team, with support from Search's COVID-19 Response Programme Team and Institutional Learning Team. For more information on the data collection methodology and tools used by Search for this research, click [here](#). This report is part of a series of regular conflict scans aimed at providing quick and actionable answers to a set of specific questions. The previous reports for Uganda can be found [here](#) & [here](#).



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1. UNHCR, "Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal", June 2021.
2. Ibid.



Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

As of the end of June 2021, COVID-19 infections drastically increased, rising from 200 cases per day in April, to over 1,000 cases per day in May 2021.³ While the capital city of Kampala records the highest cases, refugee-hosting districts have been increasingly affected.⁴ By the end of June, a total of 90,656 cases and 2,062 COVID-19 related deaths had been reported among Ugandans.⁵ Moreover, 628 refugees have tested positive to COVID-19, with 419 recoveries and 11 deaths.⁶ The government instituted a 42-day lockdown in June amid high hospitalization and death rates among all age groups,⁷ with the most affected group being people between the ages of 20 and 39. The number of severely and critically ill COVID-19 patients is higher than it was in the first wave, and the situation has strained the health system, particularly the available oxygen supply.⁸

The sharp increase in infections can be attributed to a number of factors including; the emergence of a new wave, reluctance to get the vaccine, and laxity in observing prevention measures. The Government of Uganda (GOU) has put in place various measures to contain the spread of the virus and is periodically announcing restrictions to movements and other measures as the country undergoes its second wave. COVID-19 prevention and awareness have now been integrated in most stakeholder activities across the country. Over the past reporting period, the following measures were applied:

	Schools open
	Teleworking not mandatory
	Borders/airports open
	All services/sectors open
	Mask wearing mandatory

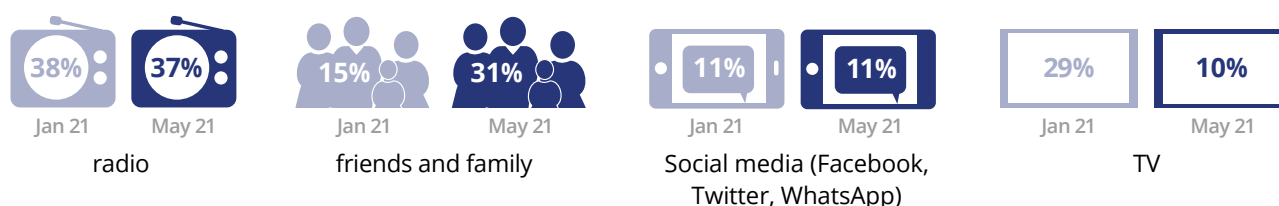
Refugees and host communities continue to be heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic related to the loss of income and livelihoods. While there has been no reported large-scale outbreak of COVID-19 in the refugee settlements, refugees and their host communities remain at risk as some locations still lack adequate quarantine, testing, and isolation/treatment facilities. Refugees have adopted negative coping strategies to meet their basic food needs, such as skipping or reducing meals and raiding gardens of surrounding communities. Moreover, child labour and domestic violence have also increased.⁹

A nation-wide COVID-19 vaccination exercise (with AstraZeneca) began in March 2021 for both nationals and refugees and so far 1,058, 084 people (both refugees & host communities) have been vaccinated, representing 2% of the total population.¹⁰ Health workers, elderly above 70 years, and those with underlying health conditions are being prioritized. However, there is noted vaccine hesitancy in the population and also among refugees,¹¹ as reported by Settlement Commanders in both Northern and Western Uganda during discussions with the Search Uganda Team during data collection.

COVID-19's Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

Trust in media reporting on the pandemic increased

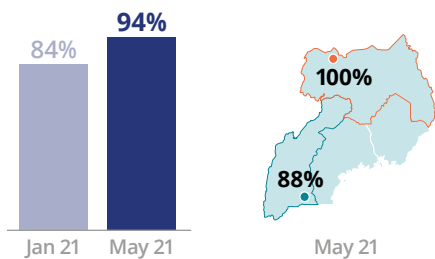
Overall, the top most trusted sources to get information about COVID-19 are:



Economic hardship in the wake of the pandemic has led to a decline in TV subscriptions. At the same time, family and friends have become a more important source of information on COVID-19 compared to last round.

3. VAO News, "Uganda Sees Sharp Rise in COVID-19 Cases", May 2021.
 4. Reach, UNHCR & ACTED, "Rapid Briefing Note: Impact of the COVID-19 resurgence in refugee-hosting districts Uganda", July 2021.
 5. Ministry of Health, "COVID-19 Status", July 2021.
 6. UNICEF, "Press Release: Joint Press Release: Uganda refugee response partners", June 2021.
 7. VOA News, "Uganda Imposes a 42-Day COVID-19 Lockdown," June 2021.
 8. Republic of Uganda, "COVID-19 Response Info Hub", consulted in July 2021.
 9. Reported by the Assistant Camp Commandant of Boroli during a discussion with the Search Uganda Team during data collection in Northern Uganda.
 10. Ministry of Health, "COVID-19 Status", July 2021
 11. Africa News, "Covid-19: Uganda faces challenges in vaccinating 20M people", April 2021.

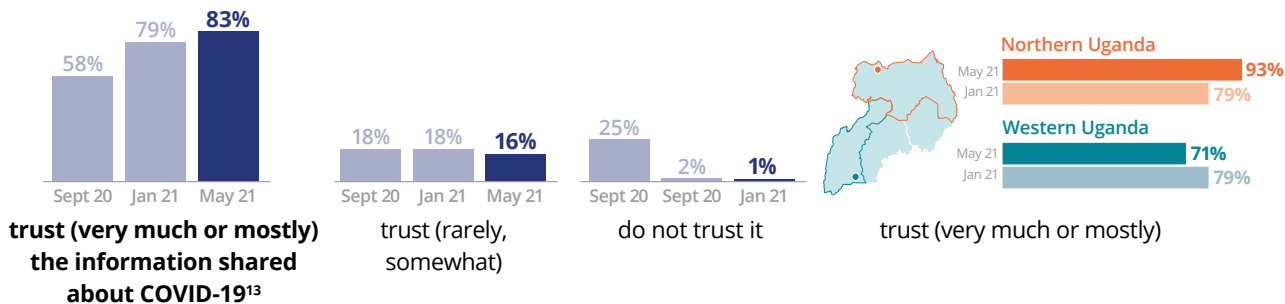
Search produces radio programmes¹² to provide a platform for listeners to learn about COVID-19:



Listen to our radio programmes

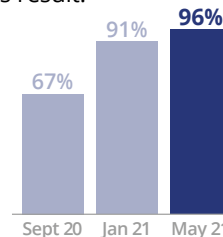
This shift likely reflects Search’s efforts to increase listenership, including the creation of more listenership groups as well as increased boda boda (moto taxi) street broadcasts, which tend to reach more listeners in accessible ways, including women. Moreover, our team is working with local leaders to improve the relevance and resonance of radio topics for listeners. This has been particularly important for reaching the most affected communities, especially in Western Uganda, where our radio programmes started in February 2021.

Out of those who listen to our programmes:



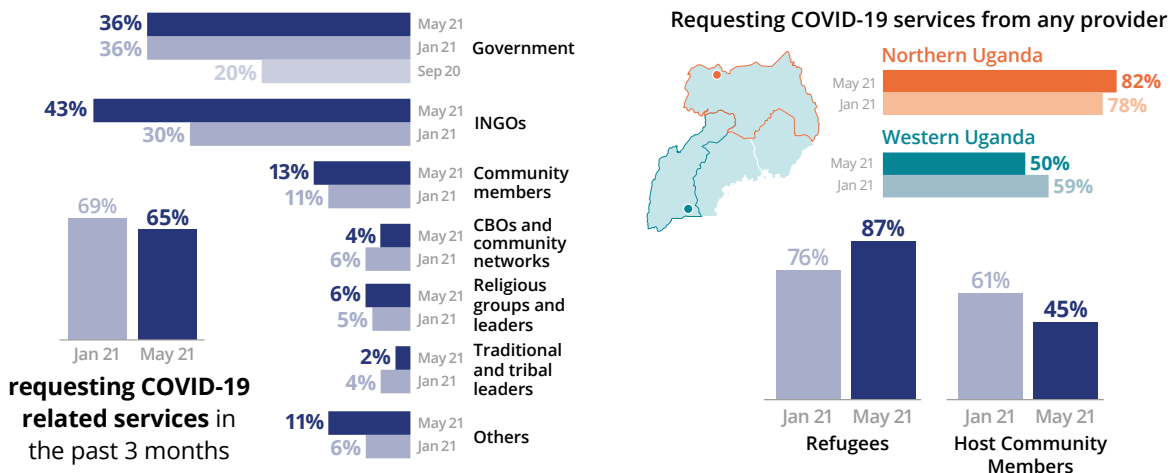
Trust levels increased since the previous round, mostly in Northern Uganda. In Northern Uganda, most of the radio programmes are developed in collaboration with the community members, and the information is disseminated in local languages. In Western Uganda, trust levels actually decreased slightly between rounds. During this round of data collection, the Search Uganda team engaged respondents who are based deeper in the refugee settlements of Nakivale (about 30km deeper), where radio coverage is more limited, which may partially explain this result.

Information sharing on COVID-19 continues to increase. Increased information sharing is likely due to strong information sharing and awareness raising by the government and other actors. Additionally, the lifting of travel restrictions between districts allows people to move around and share information more easily with friends and relatives.



Trust in government and satisfaction with governmental services continues to rise; but NGOs become top COVID-19 service providers amid heavy second wave

For the first time across all our multi-country reports, the government is not the top-requested service provider. This shift to greater reliance on non-governmental service providers is likely due to the limited capacity of the government to adequately meet needs during a heavy second wave. People realised that the Government was overwhelmed and seemed to be concentrating on the procurement of vaccines, ambulances, oxygen cylinders and ICU beds. For instance the government made an appeal to citizens to donate to a COVID-19 relief fund, which may have created doubt among citizens in the government’s capacity to respond to service requests.

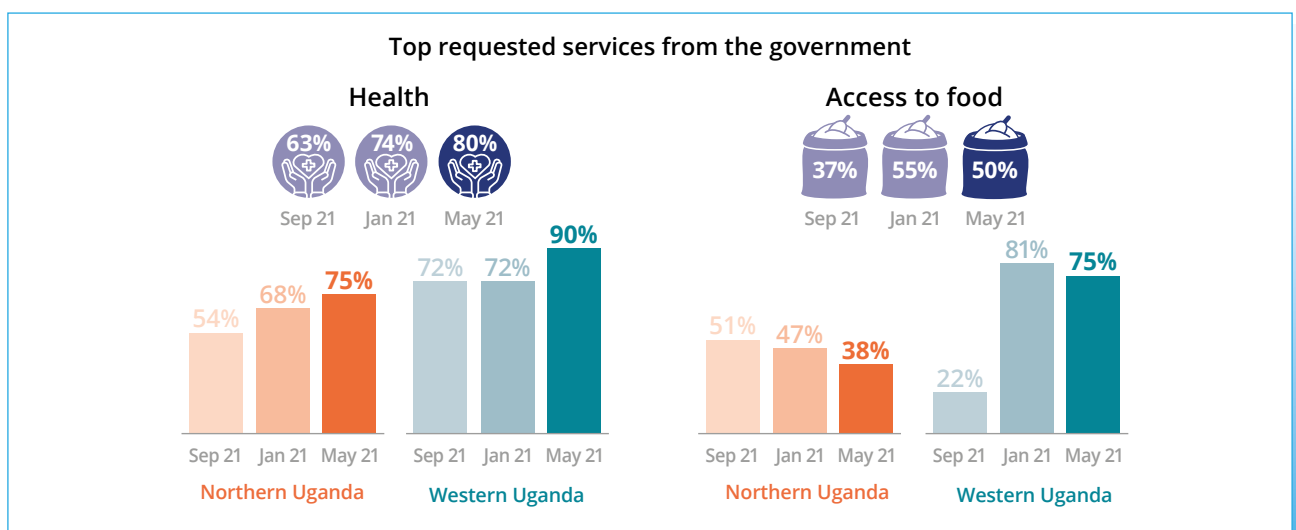
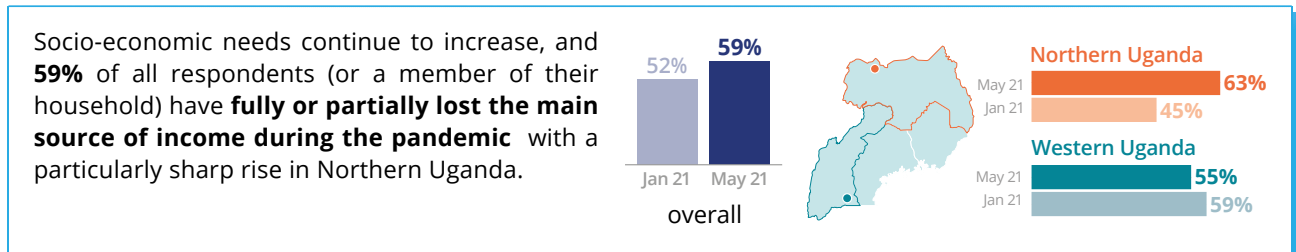


12. Search produces public service announcements and short radio spots, radio dramas, magazines and joint broadcasts in different languages (Swahili, Juba Arabic, Madi, Dinka, Nuer, and Bali). In Northern Uganda, Search partners with Voice of the Nile and Radio Amani; in Western Uganda, we partner with Voice of Kamwenge, Radio Nyumbani, Radio West, and refugee community Radio Neema Sauti, run by a local church and whom Search equipped with basic materials (speakers, amplifiers, microphones, etc.).

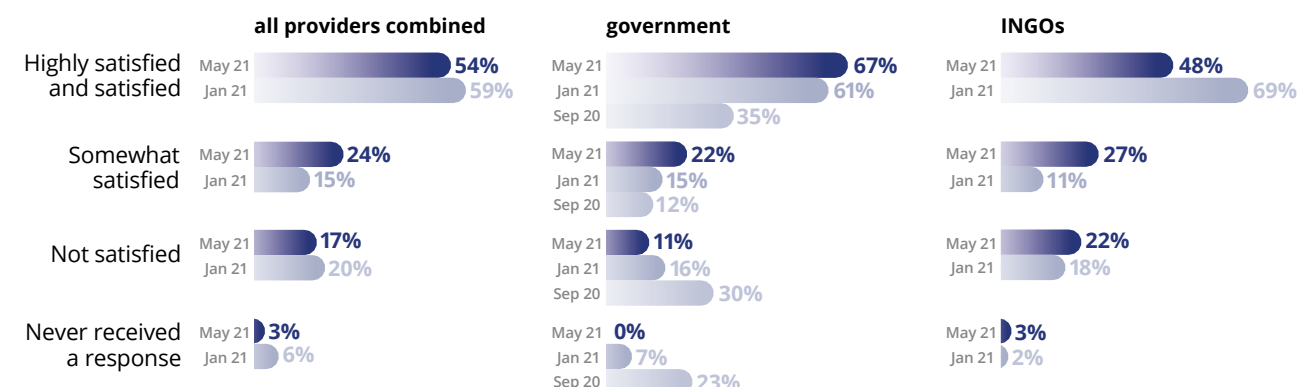
13. In January 2021, respondents in Western Uganda were asked about trusting COVID-19 information heard on radio stations in general (like in the first round of data collection in September 2020), as we had not yet started broadcasting there. In Northern Uganda, the question was about our media programmes specifically. Overall, levels of trust in COVID-19 information heard on our media programmes and on radio stations in general are very similar.

During this round of data collection, **we saw an increase in service requests in the North**, but a drop in the West. This shift is likely an indication of the deteriorated economic situation in the North. Similar to previous rounds, refugees continue to depend on INGO services more than host community members, **and we saw a sharp increase in refugees' requests to INGOs (from 41% in Jan to 75% in May 21)**, but a slight drop among host communities (from 16 to 11% over the same period).

Moreover, refugees are also increasingly relying on government services (with requests going up from 27 to 35%), possibly explained by the reduction in food rations and other services offered by INGOs. Moreover, while host community members continue to rely primarily on their government for support, we have seen a decrease there, possibly because people perceive that their government is overwhelmed by the pandemic.

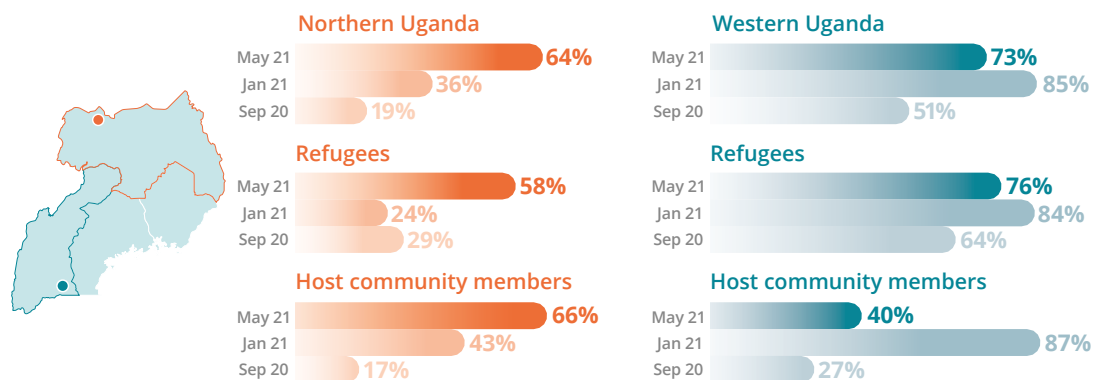


Satisfaction level with services provided by any provider has slightly decreased since the last round, particularly due to a notable **decrease in satisfaction with INGO services**. For the first time, people are more satisfied with services provided by the government than by INGOs. As mentioned above, the reduction in food rations and other cutbacks among INGOs due to lack of funding, combined with increased requests for support from the population to INGOs, is likely driving this decrease. Overall, **satisfaction with government-provided services increased**.



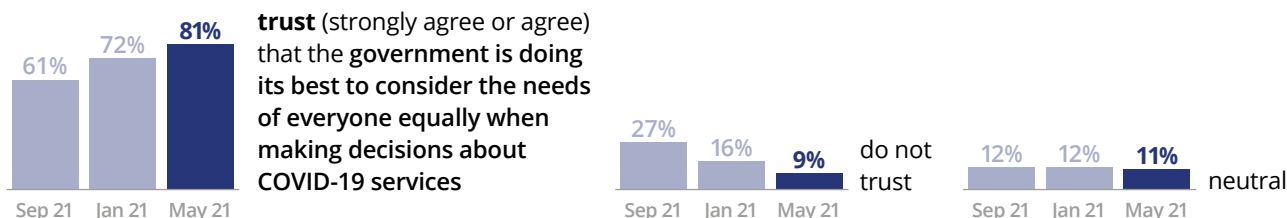
There remain notable variations between Western and Northern Uganda in levels of satisfaction with governmental services: **satisfaction with governmental services increased dramatically in Northern Uganda, whereas it decreased in Western Uganda.** At the beginning of the pandemic, services were offered to Western Uganda as well but gradually reduced to cater more for Northern Ugandan which is considered more vulnerable. We see these same trends reflected among the refugees and host communities in both areas. The government typically only supports refugee communities directly through land provision, making it less relevant to compare satisfaction levels with governmental services between refugee and host communities. However, as vaccination initiatives are underway, which cover refugee populations, trends among these groups will be important to monitor over time.

Respondents highly satisfied and satisfied with services provided by the government

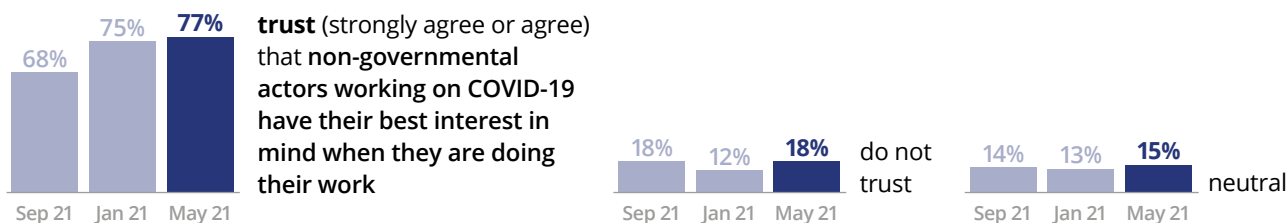


Over time, trust in government has notably increased each round. Moreover, trust in non-governmental actors has also increased each round; albeit, at lower rates. For the first time, **trust in government is higher than trust in non-governmental actors.** Increased trust in the government's response, including vaccination initiatives, may be due to rising case numbers and growing health concerns related to the virus – previously many citizens doubted the existence and/or severity of the virus. The start of the vaccination campaign over the past months, and the fact that the GoU made the vaccine freely available for everyone may have also contributed to increased trust.

Respondents' Trust in Government:

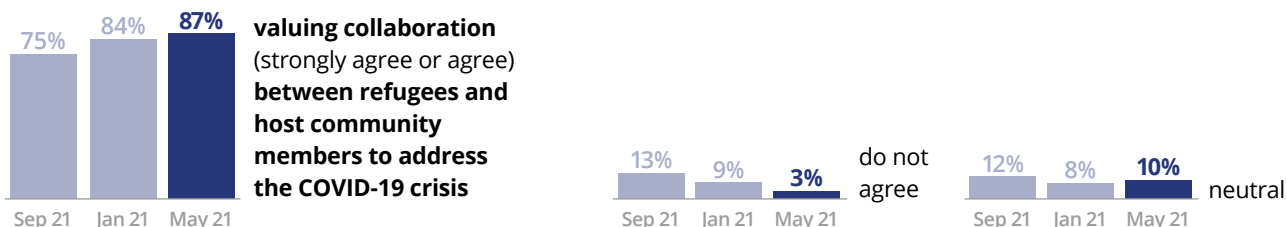


Respondents' Trust in Non-governmental actors:



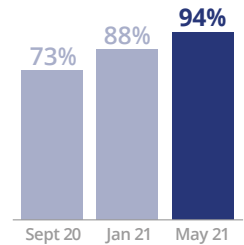
Horizontal cohesion remains high and is driven by increased needs, with less regional and gender variations

This round of data collection showed less differences between Western and Northern Uganda in terms of horizontal cohesion, measured by how much respondents value collaborating with people from other groups.¹⁴ Neither are there noticeable differences between respondents from refugee versus host communities (in the past, refugees often tended to value collaboration with host communities more than the other way around).

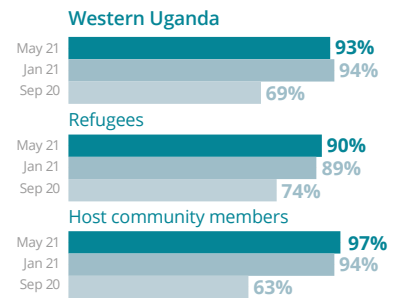
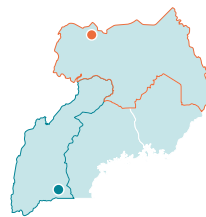
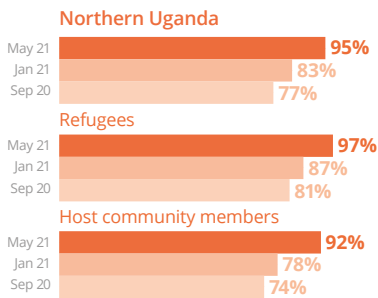
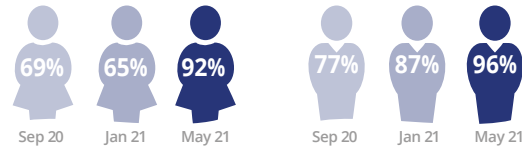


14. In the Uganda context, horizontal cohesion is assessed across the dividing line between refugees and host communities.

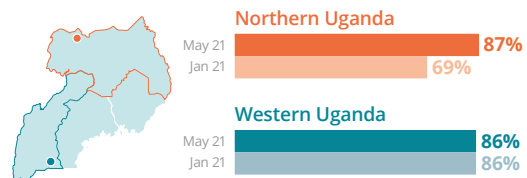
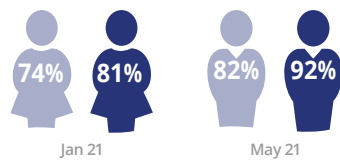
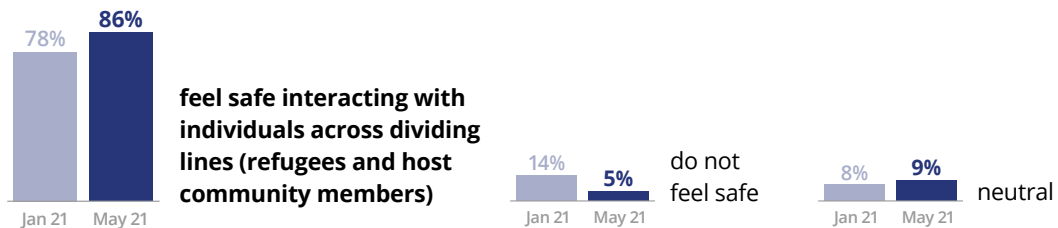
Overall, interaction with individuals from another group (remotely or in person) continues to increase since the start of the pandemic. Interaction between host community members and refugees increased most notably in Northern Uganda and for women.



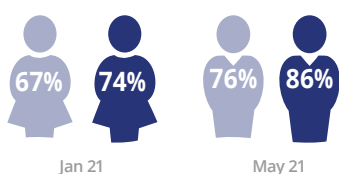
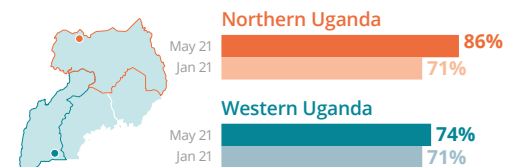
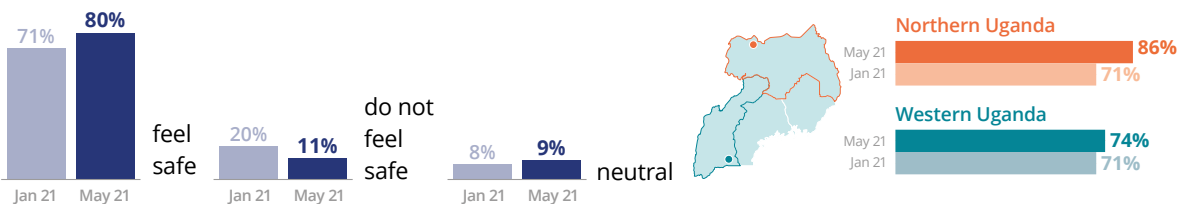
Increased needs may be driving women to interact more with people from other groups, especially amid the heavy second wave. The pandemic may also be providing a connecting factor, where women (like men) may be demonstrating increased inter-group solidarity, especially as the government and NGOs were struggling to meet everyone's needs



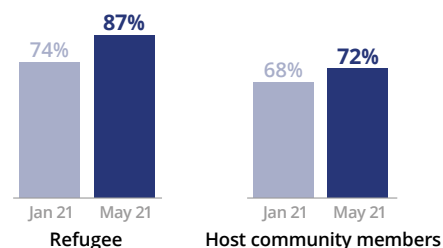
As the value for collaboration goes up and actual interactions increase, so do feelings of safety when interacting with other groups.



Feelings of safety when interacting with someone from the other sex within their private sphere:



Less women feel safe compared to men. However, there has been a notable increase for both groups compared to last round.



More refugees feel safe in this kind of interaction, compared to host community members.

Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts

Response providers should adapt communication strategies given shifts in the information channels citizens trust the most to receive information on COVID-19

- In the wake of economic pressures and loss of livelihoods due to the pandemic, there has been a notable reduction in the number of respondents who rely on TV to receive information about the pandemic, as many citizens have cut their TV subscriptions. As a result, many more respondents report that family and friends are a primary source of information on COVID-19, rising from 15% last round to 31% this round. Response providers should adapt their communication strategies to accommodate this shift, focusing on radio, which continues to be a top-trusted information channel among respondents, as well as informal networks (i.e. word of mouth) as information sharing continues to be high and trusted among family and friends. For instance, Search has increased listenership rates for our radio programmes by broadcasting via boda boda (moto taxi) drivers. Other tactics such as distributing flyers at the marketplace or installing informational murals or billboards within public spaces, can reach large segments of the population. Additionally, training trusted community leaders to raise awareness and share accurate information among their respective constituent groups can also be a good tactic for reaching citizens through informal networks.

Response providers should capitalise on growing trust in the government as well as work on improving satisfaction levels with service provision among all service providers

- Our data shows a variety of trends in trust and satisfaction levels among both governmental and non-governmental service providers. First, there has been a dramatic increase in trust levels with the government overall, which presents an opportunity for the government to strengthen response measures. For instance, increased government-led information and awareness raising about the vaccine might continue reducing vaccine hesitancy given that citizens have greater confidence in response efforts. Satisfaction with government-provided services also continues to increase, but when disaggregating the data, satisfaction actually decreased among respondents in Western Uganda. Where capacity gaps and limitations exist, the government should remain transparent with citizens and refugees to manage expectations as well as seek partnerships with non-governmental response providers to manage capacity limitations.
- Despite having the highest rate of service requests among respondents, exceeding requests for government services for the first time in our reports, satisfaction with INGO-provided services drastically decreased from the previous round. Moreover, trust in non-governmental service providers in general remained relatively the same since the last report. Additionally, for the first time, trust levels are lower for non-governmental responders compared to governmental responders. Therefore, we advise non-governmental response providers to integrate strategies to improve trust and satisfaction levels.

Response providers should continue strengthening and nurturing relatively high levels of horizontal cohesion for improved response efforts

- Value for collaboration across divides has continued increasing, and so has actual interaction across divides (online or in person). Response providers have the opportunity to continue strengthening and maintaining horizontal cohesion through collaborative and participatory approaches to response efforts. Maintaining intergroup relationships and trust will be important as the socio-economic effects of the pandemic continue to take root, such as loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and other challenges, which may create perceived fear and competition among and between groups. Therefore, it is imperative that the GoU and development partners offer necessary assistance to refugees and vulnerable members of the host communities so that they are able to access economic opportunities as the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.