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SEARCH
FOR **COMMON**
GROUND

CONFLICT SCAN

Uganda

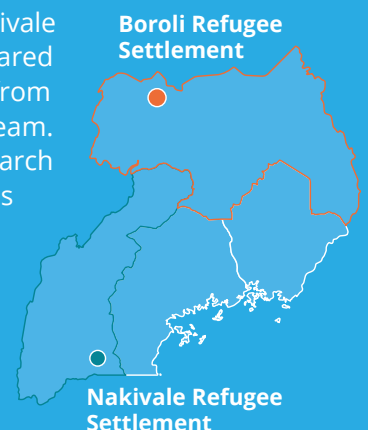
February 2022

Introduction

Uganda has had a long history of hosting refugees. Today, approximately 1.5 million refugees live in Uganda, making it the highest refugee-hosting country in Africa and one of the top five hosting countries in the world.¹ The country has a strong legal and regulatory framework for refugee rights. The 2006 Refugee Act and 2010 Refugee Regulations gives refugees the right to work and freedom of movement.² Refugees have the right to the same social services as Ugandans, including health care and free primary education. They are not confined to camps but can also live in urban areas. There are, however, tensions between refugees and their hosts over a number of conflict drivers including competition over natural resources, livelihoods and land. These tensions have sparked a few violent incidents, and if not properly addressed could escalate into broader conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these tensions as needs continue to rise. Some refugees have lost their sources of livelihood or depleted their savings and are now adopting negative coping strategies to survive.

Data collection and analysis

Data for the fourth conflict scan report for Uganda was gathered between 24th and 26th September 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, [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](#) & [here](#).



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* This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

1. UNHCR, "Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal", October 2021.
2. The Judiciary, "Act Supplement", 2006.



Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

Uganda was affected by a third wave of COVID-19 in the middle of the year. While the surge in COVID-19 cases was initially centered around Kampala, it increasingly affected other areas of the country, including refugee-hosting districts. With increased pressure on hospitals and intensive-care units (ICUs), the government imposed further restrictions on 6 June 2021 to curb the spread of COVID-19, including a 42-day nation-wide lockdown starting 18 June 2021. As of 26 October 2021, there have been 125,788 cases of COVID-19 with 3,200 deaths. As of 11 October 2021, a total of 2,378,171 vaccine doses had been administered, with only 1.28% of the population being fully vaccinated.³ Vaccination continued albeit at a slow pace due to the global shortage of vaccines. Also, some sections of society still doubt the authenticity of the vaccines.⁴

The lockdown was partially lifted after 42 days on 31 July after considering a decrease in cases, positivity rates and hospital admissions, the degree of adherence to safety procedures by the population, and the effects of a continuous lockdown on the economy and on residents. However, there are still restrictions even with this partial lifting of the lockdown. Curfew time is maintained at 7pm, and the lockdown of schools remains until some essential workers including health workers, security personnel, teachers, and those over 45 years old, are vaccinated. Public transport was allowed to resume with half the normal number of passengers and private vehicles are only allowed three occupants.

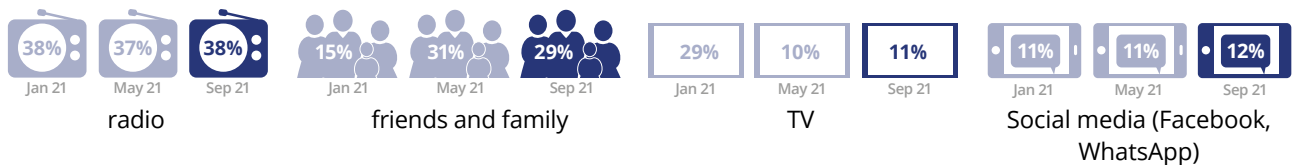
Refugees and host communities have been particularly affected by the effects of the COVID-19 resurgence. Most of the 1.5 million refugees living in Uganda prior to COVID-19 were considered highly vulnerable and many were already dependent on assistance. On 22 June 2021, the Office of the Prime Minister announced the suspension of travel to refugee settlements, except for partners cleared by the Department of Refugees carrying out life-saving services. In line with this directive, humanitarian partners were instructed to stop all non-life-saving activities in refugee settlements until 30 July 2021. Over the past reporting period, the following measures were applied:

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

COVID-19's Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

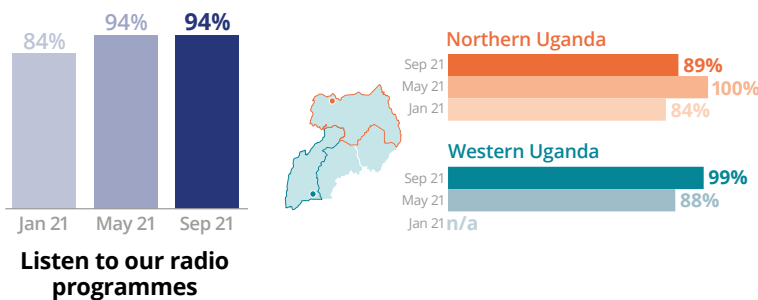
The rise in cases and nationwide lockdown negatively affect trust in the media, and information-sharing on COVID-19 remains very high.

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



It's interesting to note that radio stations have remained a very reliable source of information, whereas trust in TV has significantly dropped, and friends and family have become a more important source of information over time. Social media consistently scores low in Uganda as a reliable source of information.

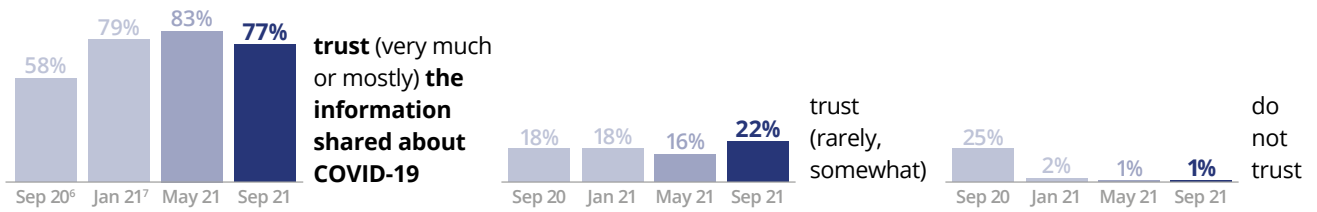
Search produces radio programmes to provide a platform for listeners to learn about COVID-19:⁵



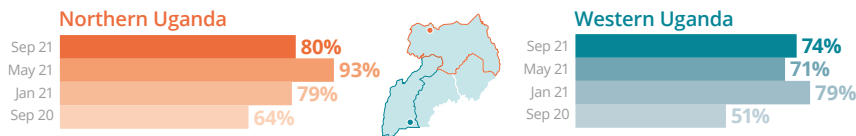
More people from Western Uganda listened to our media programming during the last reporting period which is normal as radio programs in Northern Uganda came to an end by 10 July, whereas in Western Uganda they ended in October 2021.

3. WHO, "COVID-19 Portal", October 2021.
 4. AFRO, "A pan-African series of national public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, and society", 2021.
 5. Search produced 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 partnered with Voice of the Nile and Radio Amani; in Western Uganda, we partnered 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

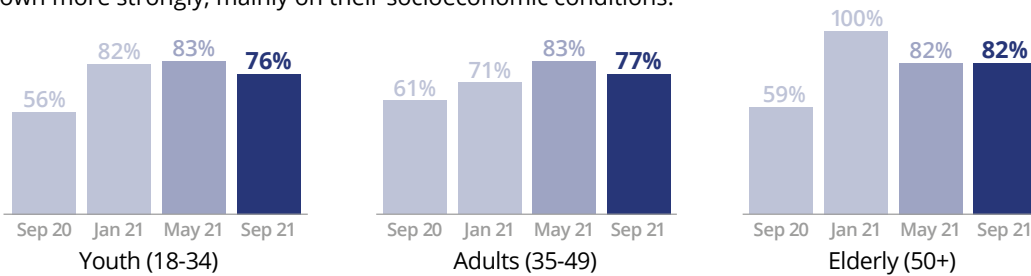
Trust levels decreased since the previous round, driven by a decrease in Northern Uganda.



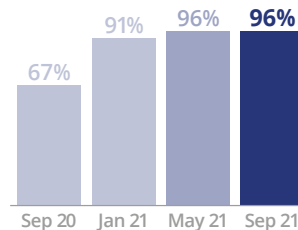
Our radio programs in Northern Uganda ended in mid-July when the country was facing a new wave of COVID-19. People began losing trust in the media, as a result of their negative feelings about the lockdown. In Western Uganda, the radio programs continued and people realized that COVID-19 was real from the number of people who died (especially at the peak in August, including high profile personalities from the region and people heard death announcements on the radio very frequently). This may explain the sudden drop in trust levels in Northern Uganda (but still remaining higher than in Western Uganda).



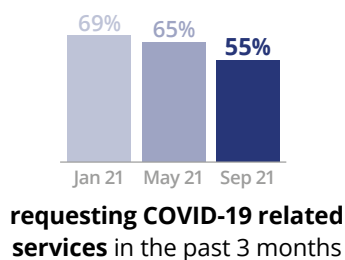
Elderly people maintained their high levels of trust in our media programming, while it dropped slightly among youth and adults. This may be because younger people and adults feel the secondary impacts of the pandemic and the lockdown more strongly, mainly on their socioeconomic conditions.



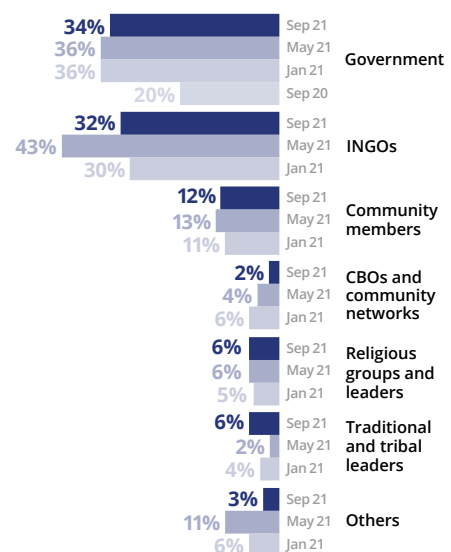
Information sharing on COVID-19 remains very high, 96% of respondents are sharing information heard on trusted media with friends or family.



Trust levels in the government and non-governmental actors declined for the first time amid a heavy third wave and a restrictive lockdown



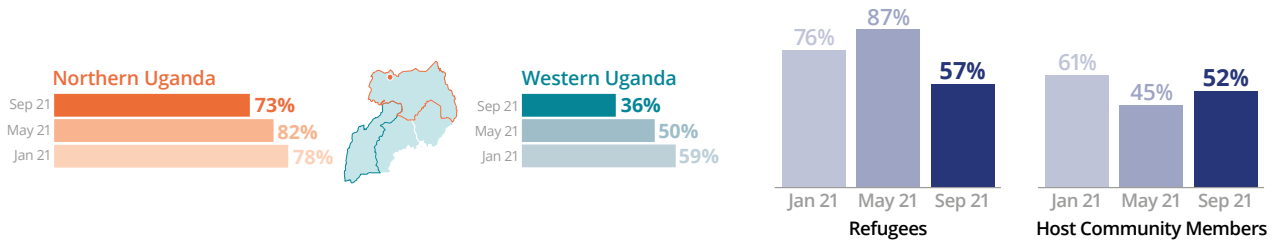
Overall, 55% of respondents requested COVID-19 related services in the past 3 months. This is a decrease from 65%, and could be a result of the lockdown, as service facilities were not accessible during the reference period. Moreover, people felt that the government was overwhelmed with such a high caseload, increasing pressure on the health system and ensuring the procurement of vaccines.



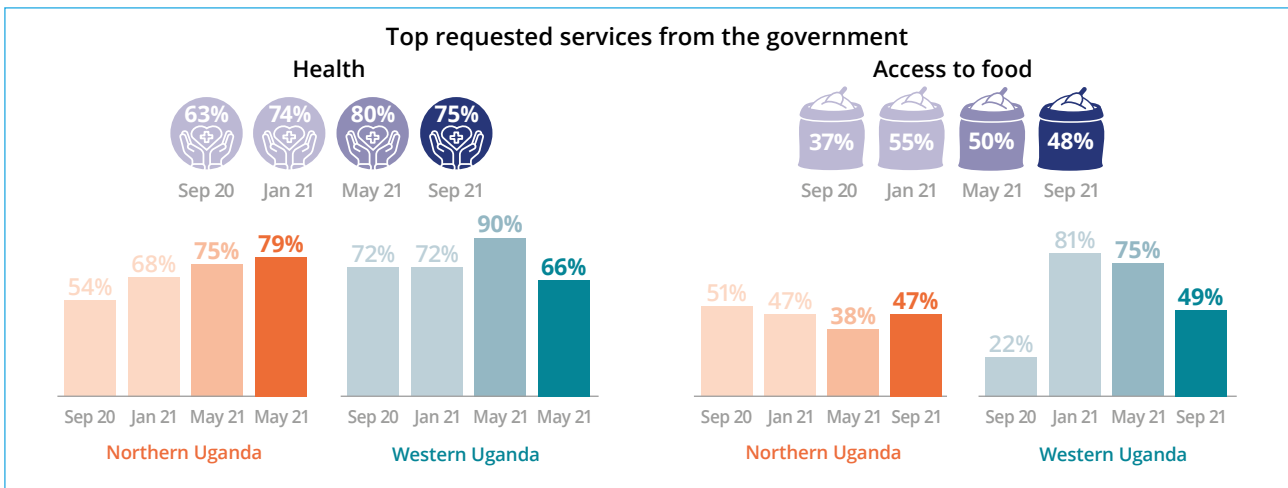
6. In September 2020, Search had not yet started broadcasting our programs, so the question was asked about trust in COVID-19 information heard on radio stations in general.
 7. In January 2021, respondents in Western Uganda were still asked about trusting COVID-19 information heard on radio stations in general, as we had not yet started broadcasting there. In Northern Uganda, the question was about our media programmes specifically.

Many more people in Northern Uganda requested services compared to Western Uganda (from all service providers combined as well as from the government specifically), although we saw a drop in both regions. Similar to previous rounds, refugees continue to depend on INGO services more than host community members, but there has been a significant drop in requests from the refugee population (to all service providers combined), which may be a direct consequence of the government limiting service provision in refugee camps during the lockdown. On the other hand, requests among host communities have slightly gone up.

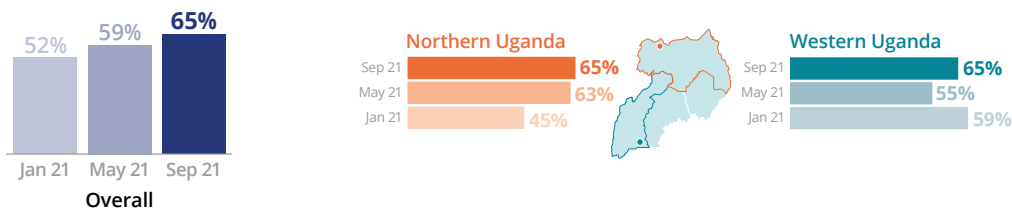
Requesting COVID-19 services from any provider



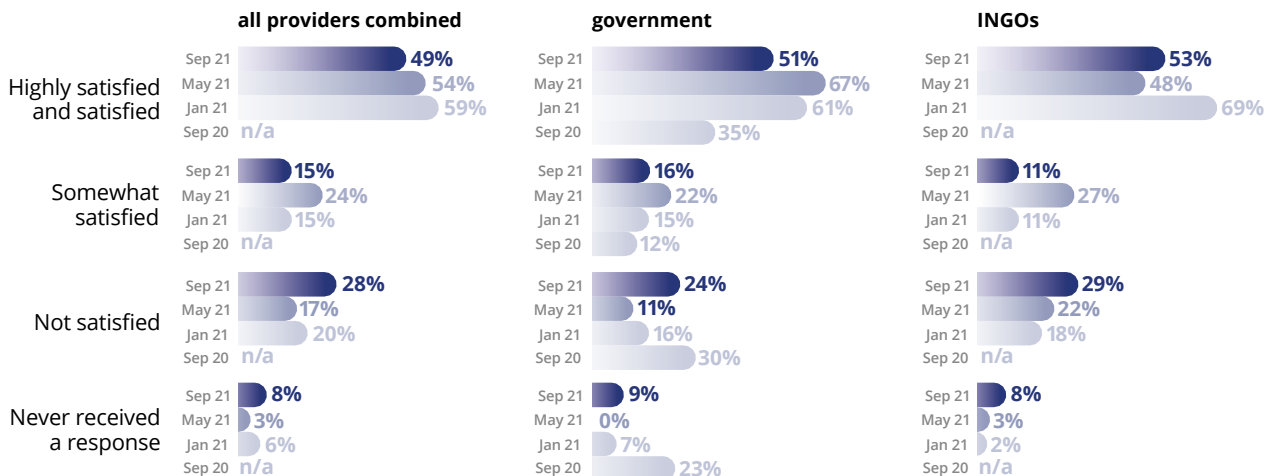
Top requested services from the government



Socio-economic needs continue to increase, and 65% of all respondents (or a member of their household) now report having **fully or partially lost the main source of income during the pandemic**.

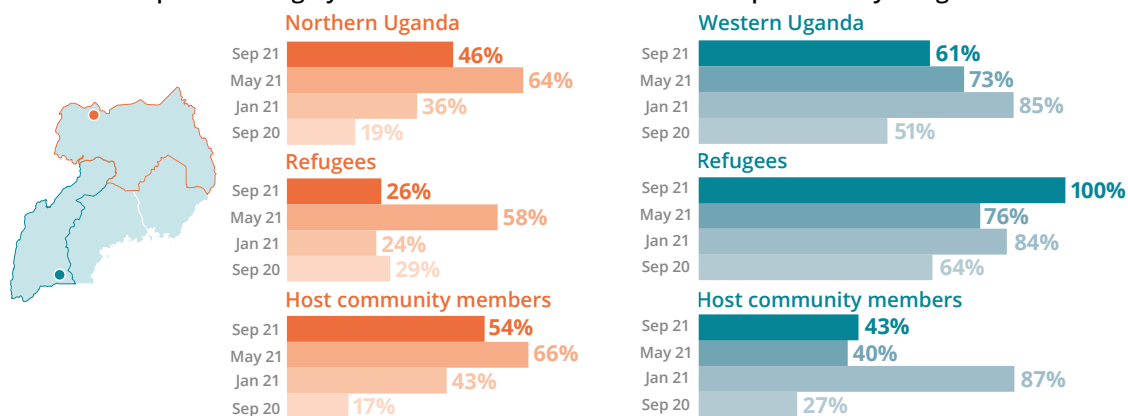


Overall, **satisfaction level with services provided by any provider** is decreasing since the beginning of this year. This is driven by different factors varying between lack of funds, limited ability to meet the increasing needs and the cuts of food rations. **Satisfaction with government-provided services decreased**. On the contrary, **satisfaction (highly satisfied or satisfied) with services provided by INGOs increased** again, as emergency health and relief services by INGOs were permitted to be distributed despite the lockdown measures. At the same time, the percentage of people who were not satisfied with services from INGO providers or who never received a response went up.



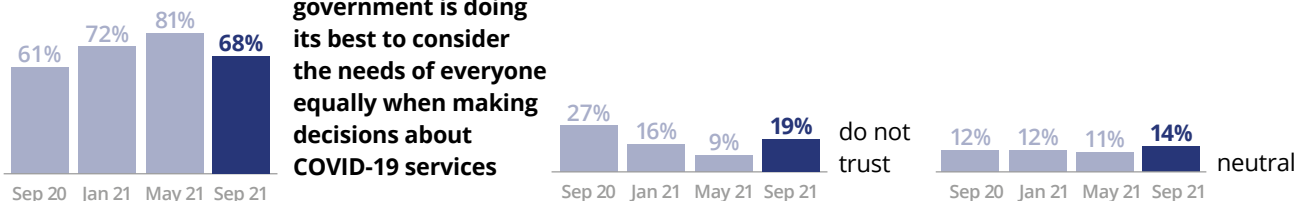
Satisfaction levels decreased in both regions during this round, with a dramatic decrease in Northern Uganda, in both refugees and host communities groups. It is clear that **over the past year people in Northern Uganda are less satisfied with governmental services than in Western Uganda**. As mentioned in previous reports, there are prevailing perceptions in Northern Uganda that the government prioritises citizens in Western Uganda.⁸ Besides the secondary impacts of COVID-19, **the prolonged drought in Northern Uganda is becoming a serious challenge**, leading to increased food insecurity among refugees and host communities.⁹

Respondents highly satisfied and satisfied with services provided by the government



For the first time, overall trust levels in the government and non-governmental actors have declined. In the previous reports, these trust levels had notably increased each round. The inability to meet the increasing needs resulting from the pandemic, associated with climate changes, particularly the drought in Northern Uganda, contributed to this decline in trust levels. On top of that is the people's negative feelings towards the strict 42-days lockdown.

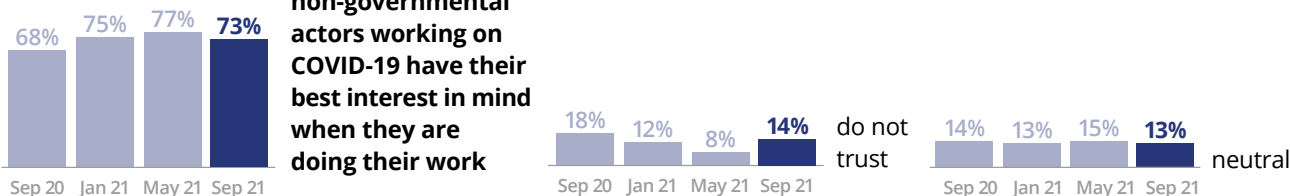
trust (strongly agree or agree) that the government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about COVID-19 services



Trust levels decreased in both Northern and Western Uganda, and trust in the government saw the biggest decline in the West.



trust (strongly agree or agree) that non-governmental actors working on COVID-19 have their best interest in mind when they are doing their work



Interestingly, trust in non-governmental actors dropped sharply in Western Uganda, while it actually increased in the North.

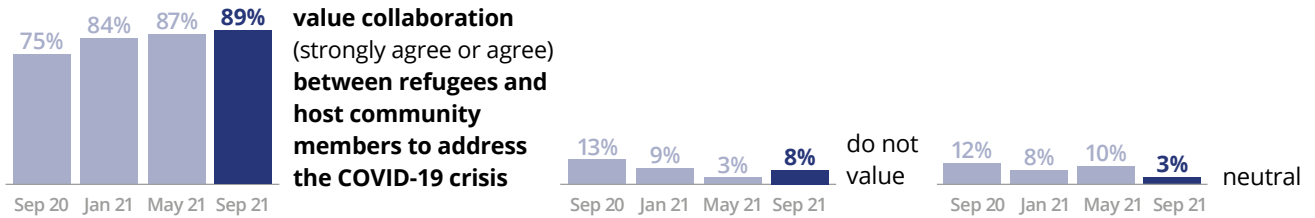


8. Search for Common Ground, [Uganda Conflict Snapshot](#), May 2021.

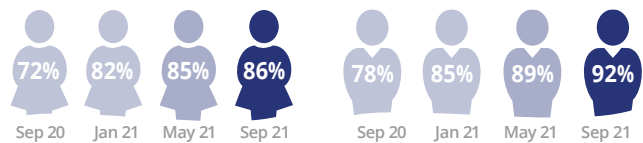
9. All of Africa, "Uganda: Prolonged Drought in Northern Uganda Creates Uncertainty", September 2021.

Horizontal cohesion remains high but increased needs put horizontal cohesion at risk, especially among men

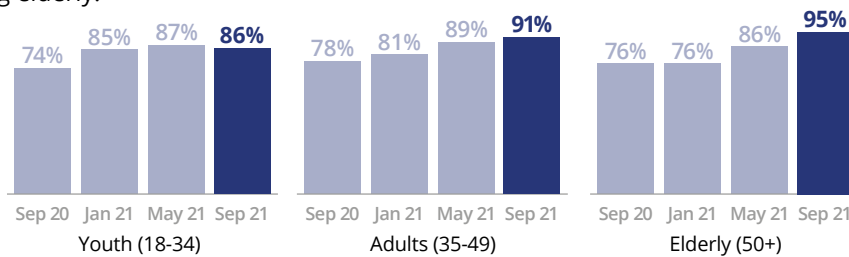
Overall, the value for collaboration continues to rise slightly, but we also see the percentage of people who do not value this collaboration go up. Moreover, actual levels of interaction are decreasing, and feelings of unsafety when interacting are on the rise, especially among men. The recent lockdown directly impacted the interactions between refugees and host communities. Increased competition over limited available resources is pointing at potential tensions across divides, particularly for men.



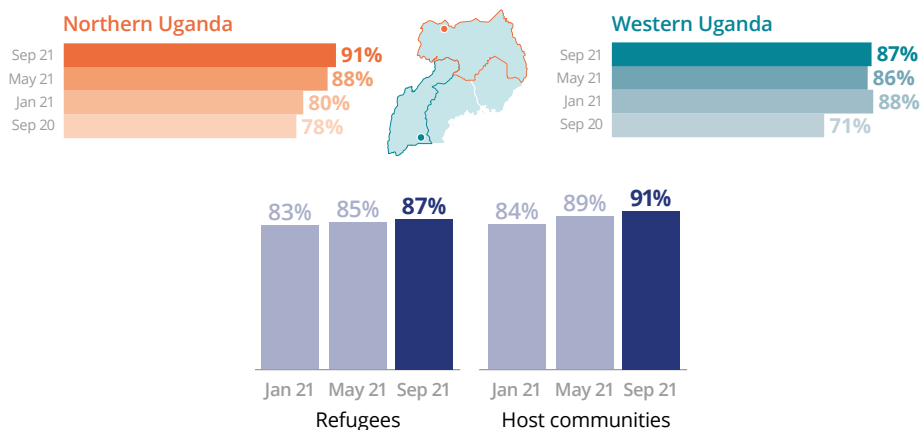
As in all previous rounds, value for collaboration between refugees and host communities is slightly higher among men than among women.



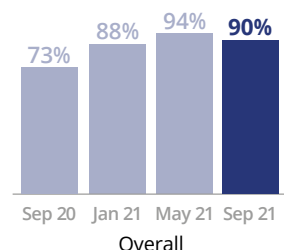
Value for collaboration has continued to increase over time among all age groups, with most notable increases among elderly.



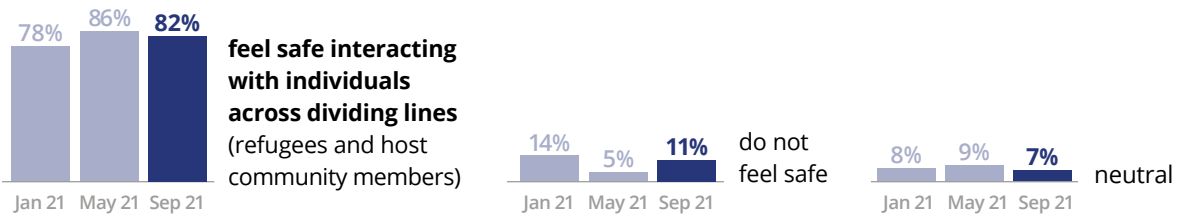
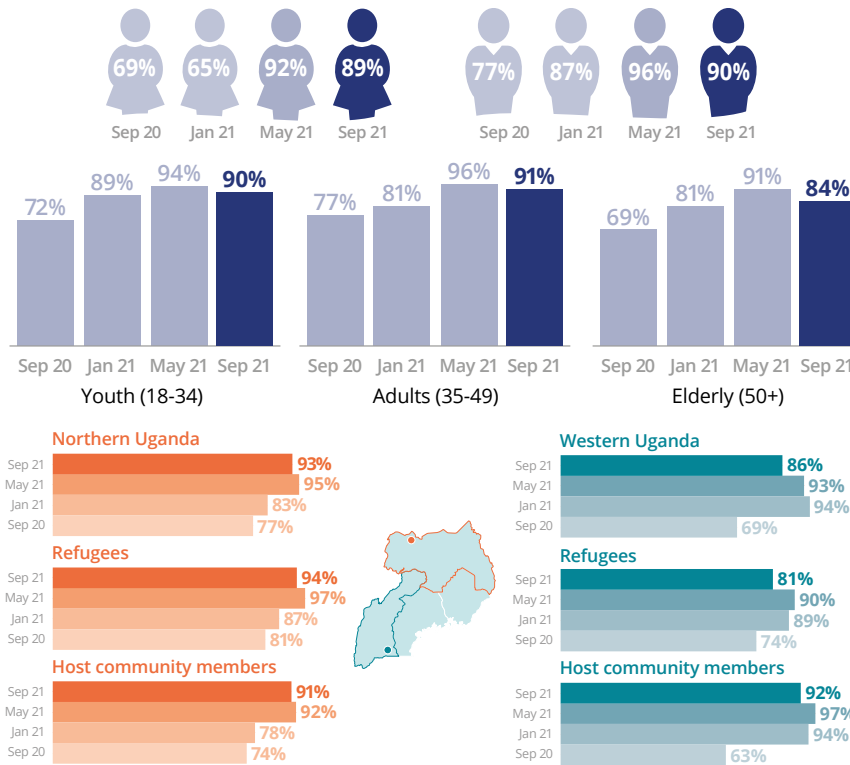
Value for collaboration is highest in Northern Uganda and among host populations, but the differences with respondents in the West or with refugees are small, indicating a high degree of openness to collaborate among all groups.



Overall, **interaction with individuals from another group** (host community members and refugees, respectively) **decreased for the first time since the start of the pandemic but remains high**, with 90% of respondents now reporting having had such interaction in the past three months, either remotely or in person.



Interaction between host community members and refugees decreased most notably in Western Uganda and for all gender and age groups, as a direct result of the lockdown, with elderly still having the least interaction. In Western Uganda, refugees in settlements and host communities live at a greater distance from each other, and due to the restricted lockdown there were fewer opportunities to interact. In this region, refugees' movement was affected more negatively than that of members of host communities. Refugees depend mainly on public transportation which was suspended during the lockdown, while members of host communities have access to other means of transport (private vehicles) of their own, neighbors, friends, etc.

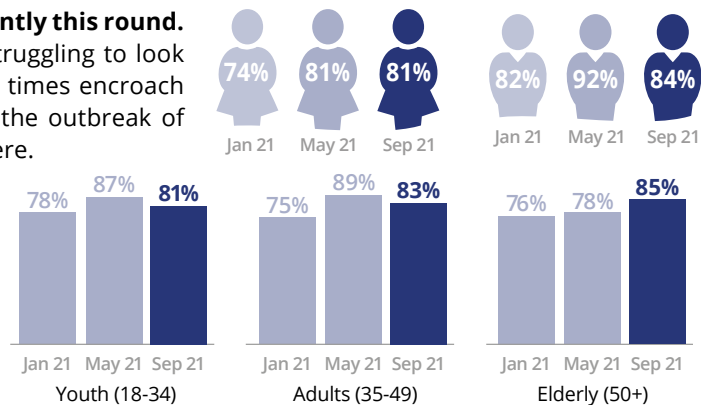


These reduced levels of feeling safe in this kind of interaction are pointing at a fragile horizontal cohesion across divides. The dire socioeconomic situation and the increased competition over limited resources are the main triggers for this declined level of intergroup trust.

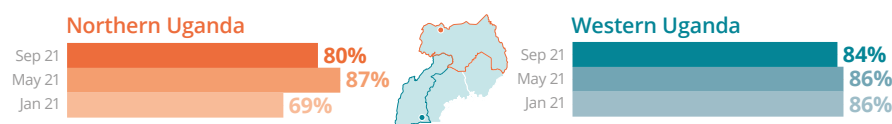
Men's feelings of safety decreased significantly this round.

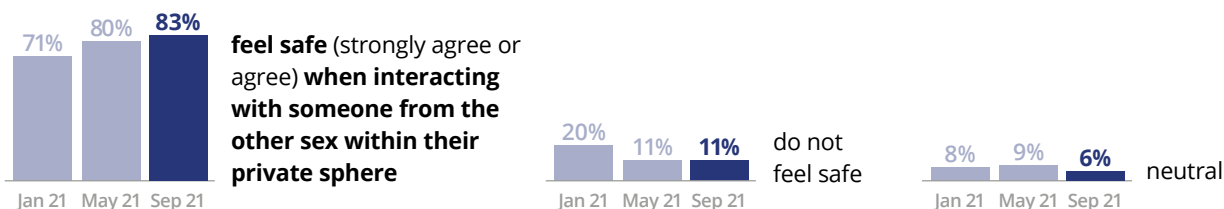
As poverty continues to increase, men are struggling to look for resources to sustain their families and at times encroach on other people's fields/gardens, leading to the outbreak of violent conflicts and the rebuttal can be severe.

Old respondents recorded a significant increase in feelings of safety, from reporting the lowest feelings of safety in round 1 to the highest in this round.

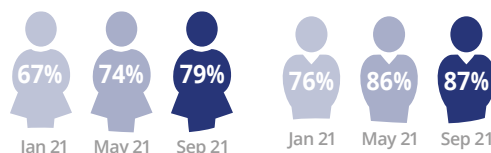


The levels of feeling safe decreased more notably in Northern Uganda. The situation in the North was worse as it is an arid region and gardens did not yield much crop this year; hence people had to fight over resources, resulting in localised clashes.





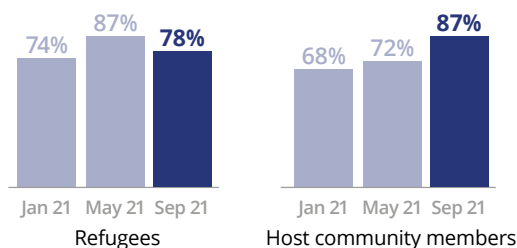
The percentage of women feeling safe slightly increased and men's levels remained stable. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many actors (including Search) focused on issues concerning the increased rates of GBV. This increased emphasis on GBV response may have contributed to increased feelings of safety among women, but it remains to be seen how sustainable these results will be.



We see a considerable increase in feeling safe when interacting with the opposite sex in Western Uganda (+9 percent points), but a decline in Northern Uganda (-6 percent points).



This round recorded a notable decrease for refugees feeling safe in this kind of interaction (-9 percent points), whereas there was a significant increase among host community respondents (+15 percent points). From our observations on the ground, there are more GBV incidents reported among refugees than among host communities, which may be linked to the fact that the deterioration of household's economic situation is worse in refugee settlements.¹⁰



Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts

Response providers should continue their media programming, particularly related to conflict sensitivity messaging, despite the decline in COVID-19 cases

- As we have observed in Northern Uganda, levels of confidence in the information related to COVID-19 heard on our media programming declined. The radio programme ended at a time when the COVID-19 cases dramatically increased and the country entered into a confrontation with a third wave.
- Although there is currently a notable decline in COVID-19 cases (after conducting this round of data collection), awareness raising on COVID-19 management and prevention by all actors should continue. These awareness activities should consider conflict sensitivity and the implications on social cohesion, particularly horizontal cohesion.

Response providers should focus on addressing the increased needs resulting from COVID-19's secondary impacts, as well as climate changes.

- Our data shows that trust levels in both the government and non-governmental actors working on the COVID-19 response have decreased for the first time in a year. The pandemic's secondary impacts and the restrictive lockdown have limited access to highly needed services. All actors should take into account in their interventions the vast increase in needs of the population (host and refugee communities alike) as a result of the pandemic, as well as climatic changes, especially in Northern Uganda. Interventions must take into account gender differences and should be context-specific.

Response providers should pay attention to reduced levels of horizontal cohesion among men amid subsequent waves of COVID-19

- Though value for collaboration across divides has continued to increase over time, actual interaction between refugees and host communities (online or in person) has decreased during the reference period as a direct result of the lockdown. A key indicator we measure is the level of feeling safe in this interaction, which also showed a decrease for the first time since the beginning of this year, most significantly among men. This is a serious warning sign that puts the relatively high reported levels of support for collaboration into question. Horizontal cohesion among men could be more vulnerable due to the dire socioeconomic situation, as a staggering 65% of respondents now report full or partial loss of income and increasing needs are leading to more competition over limited resources and leading to outbreaks of localised violent conflict.

10. UNHCR, "COVID-19 poses a major threat to the life and welfare of refugees in Uganda", June 2021.