

## **HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY INFLUENCE ON ACCESS AND RESILIENCE FOR SOUTH SUDANESE STUDENTS FROM BIDI BIDI SETTLEMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Under Agenda 2030 Uganda has developed an education response plan (ERP) that supports education for refugees and host communities at all levels. The ERP development process, in principle, embodies higher education policy formulation for refugees. This has strong implications for refugees' higher education access and resilience, especially for South Sudanese students, who make up the majority of refugees in Uganda, with many of them in protracted situations. Using a qualitative, exploratory case study design, within the advocacy/ participatory world view philosophy, and an Intersectionality Theory, this study sought to obtain answers to the following two main questions: (1) how higher education policy formulation influences access and resilience; (2) how higher education policy practice influences access and resilience, for South Sudanese from Bidi Bidi settlement in Uganda. The findings reveal that despite Uganda's desire to support access for refugees to all levels of education, the ERP has no objectives and activities for higher education. This study also found that while the higher education policy formulation took on a multi-stakeholder integrated approach, it did not involve refugee students, or higher education institutions that are central to student access and resilience. Additionally, the higher education policy formulation draws upon informative but non-binding international policy, and general and fragmented provisions in national refugee social protection policies. HE policy formulation traverses a value chain with intersecting complexities that include among others; refugee demographics, donor preferences for basic education and emergency interventions, negative perceptions about returns from higher education, host community hostility, refugee exclusion, and students' personal challenges. As a result, higher education is relegated to the fringes of the state ERP, leaving support to refugees largely to higher education institutions and non-governmental organizations, which operate in silos, within their independent guidelines. This study includes recommendations that can inform higher education policy formulation and enhance refugee access and resilience, especially in light of the UNHCR 15 by 2030.