

JOINT ESCR CSO UPR ADVOCACY FACTSHEET: **PROTECTION, PROMOTION AND RESPECT OF ESCRs IN UGANDA**



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS (ISER)

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is an indigenous Non-Government Organisation human-rights organisation founded and registered in 2012 to advance the recognition, accountability and realisation of social and economic rights in Uganda and the wider African region. Through research, capacity building, social mobilisation, advocacy, community empowerment and engagement with justice and accountability mechanisms, ISER works to strengthen legal, policy and institutional frameworks, expand access to remedies and promote equitable resource distribution. ISER envisions a society that advances social and economic justice for all.

Emerging Human Rights Issues

Growing public debt

Increased government domestic borrowing with short maturity periods has pushed Uganda's debt-to-GDP ratio to 54.3 percent from 51.3 percent recorded at the end of June 2025. Yet, when debt becomes too high, it strains investment in key social services like schools, hospitals, water, and social protection that ultimately deprives the populace of every day rights. Between FY 2021/22 and FY 2026/27, for example, statutory interest payments averaged UGX 8.42 trillion annually and rose from 13.0 to 21.7 per cent of total expenditure. By FY 2026/27, interest payments exceeded the allocation to Human Capital Development, which covers health, education, water and sanitation, and social protection. Without minimum social-spending safeguards, this trend risks reducing service availability, shifting costs to households and disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalised groups.

Declining Official Development Assistance (ODA) and shifting donor priorities

The abrupt withdrawal of United States assistance from January 2025 severely disrupted Uganda's donor-dependent ESCR programming, approximately 80 per cent of which is financed by development partners. Documented effects include health-worker layoffs, interruptions in antiretroviral distribution and pre-exposure prophylaxis, and termination of health-research programmes. Further United States-supported HIV-service awards are due to expire from September 2026 without confirmed replacement funding, threatening continuity of treatment, prevention and community-based services.

Climate Shocks and Anticipatory ESCR Protection

Climate shocks have become a recurrent threat to food, water, health, education and livelihoods. The 2024 census found that 63.5 per cent of parishes reported drought, 38.8 per cent floods and 12.2 per cent landslides. Yet climate planning and financing remain uneven, while responses frequently commence only after communities have suffered displacement, service disruption and livelihood loss.

Recommendations

- Establish and publish minimum social-spending floors for essential health, education, food, water, sanitation and social-protection services.
- Increase domestic resource mobilisation through adoption fair tax regimes and harnessing revenue from natural resources to ensure continued financing of ESCRs.
- Establish anticipatory-action triggers and dedicated financing for emergency social protection, food, water, health and school continuity in climate-affected districts.

Right to Education

Partial Implementation

Learner enrollment, retention and completion have fallen since the previous review. Primary school level declined enrollment from 80% to 77.9% and secondary school enrollment fell from 27.3% to 23.2% during the financial year 2019/20–2023/24 despite accepted commitments.

Despite Uganda's adoption of the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2025, private sector dominates service provision with weak government oversight, leading to unregulated school fees that price out majority of the learners, especially those from poor households.

The above notwithstanding, Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda, 2020 obscures continued access to education to pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

Recommendations

- Remove any barriers to continued access to education for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers, including mandatory pregnancy testing.
- Guarantee at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, prioritising underserved communities through publicly funded ECCE units attached to UPE schools.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive sexuality education policy to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy in line with the High Court's decision.
- Increase the capitation grant allocation to UPE and USE schools to at least the National Planning Authority's recommended threshold.

Right to health

Partial Implementation

Health budget financing remains at 6.2–7%, far below the 15% Abuja target, leaving gaps in primary health care. 12% of Ugandans do not seek facility-based care due to cost, distance, and drug stock-outs. 54% of the population seek care at private facilities while only 27% go to public health facilities and 19% resort to traditional medicines

The National Health Insurance Bill has stalled since 2019, exposing over 41% of households to catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditure.

Maternal mortality and morbidity 189 deaths per 100,000 live births as of 2024 national data far above the SDG 3 target 3.1 of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Weak regulation of private actors involved in the provision of health services has contributed to increased patient abuse, exploitation and denial of emergency care which have collectively undermined progressive realization of equitable access to health.

Recommendations

- The Executive should assent to the National Health Insurance Bill 2019, passed in March, 2021, by the Parliament of Uganda to achieve universal health coverage for all Ugandans.
- Prohibit detention of patients by health facilities for non-payment of medical bills.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive sexuality education policy to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy in line with the High Court's decision.
- Progressively increase public health financing towards the Abuja commitment of at least 15 per cent of the national budget.

Right to Social protection

Partial Implementation

Even with a National Social Protection Strategy (2024–2029) in place, Uganda still lacks a comprehensive social-protection law. Furthermore, with the eligibility threshold under the Senior Citizens Grant for older persons still maintained at 80 years of age, those between the ages of 60–79 remain excluded.

The mandatory requirement of a digital national Identity card as a prerequisite to accessing national social protection benefits coupled with inaccurate bio data records and biometric failure compromises inclusive enrolment and access to benefits, particularly for older persons, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities among others.

Recommendations

- Enact a comprehensive Social Protection Act to give domestic effect to the AU Protocol on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security.
- Fund and implement the Cabinet decision lowering Senior Citizens Grant eligibility to 65 years, and regularly review and index benefit levels.
- Establish and progressively expand lifecycle social-protection benefits for children, persons with severe disabilities and maternity, and integrate eligible refugees into national schemes.

Business and Human rights

Partial Implementation

Despite the adoption of the 1st National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, published reporting on its implementation remains centres on activities and future targets, without consolidated data on business compliance, grievances resolved or remedies delivered.

We commend Uganda for the implementation of the Mining and Minerals Act 2022. However, persistent gaps in community participation, access to effective remedy, and livelihood restoration remain unchecked.

Recommendations

- Adopt a costed successor plan for the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights with clear institutional responsibilities, a dedicated budget, measurable indicators, annual public reporting and meaningful participation by affected persons.
- Establish mandatory human-rights and environmental due diligence for high-risk business operations, with public disclosure and enforceable standards for consultation, compensation, livelihood restoration and remedy.

Right to adequate food and nutrition

Partial Implementation

Despite the government's efforts toward strengthening food and nutrition governance, approximately 473,000 people, that is 37 % experience acute food insecurity across Uganda.

Although Uganda adapted WHO African Region Nutrient Profile Model, it has not enacted binding regulations for front-of-pack warning labelling, marketing restrictions on unhealthy foods targeted at children, or nutrition standards for public food procurement, leaving consumers, particularly children, inadequately protected from poor dietary choices.

Recommendations

- Implement a funded response plan to acute food insecurity and child malnutrition with published treatment-coverage and outcome targets.
- Enact and implement comprehensive food-and-nutrition legislation and complete the review of the Uganda Food and Nutrition Policy, 2003.
- Adopt and enforce front-of-pack nutrition-labelling requirements and restrictions on marketing foods and beverage

Women's Rights

Partial Implementation

Uganda has taken positive legislative reforms to protect, promote and respect women's rights, particularly, through the enactment of the Succession (Amendment) Act 2022. However, the Marriage and Divorce Bill, 2024 remains stalled, Parliament has as of March 2026 withdrawn the Sexual Offences Bill and the National Legal Aid Bill, 2022 compromising comprehensive state protection of women against sexual violence-related offences

The 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey found that 54 per cent of ever-married women had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their current or most recent partner, yet, only 32 per cent of women had experienced physical or sexual violence had received remedy/justice.

Such violence contributes to school withdrawal, physical and mental-health harm, loss of livelihoods and economic dependence, yet survivor services remain underfunded and unevenly available.

Recommendations

- Enact comprehensive marriage and sexual-offences legislation consistent with Uganda's international human rights obligations, ensuring non-discrimination, equality, survivor protection and effective remedies.
- Strengthen and enforce gender- and equity-responsive budgeting across health, education, social protection, labour and local government, and publish annual compliance, expenditure and outcome data.
- Fund gender-based violence prevention and guarantee accessible, survivor-centred shelters, health care, psychosocial support, legal aid and economic reintegration in every region.

Children's Rights

Partial

Uganda has taken steps to strengthen child protection through continued implementation of the National Child Policy 2020, adopted the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2025, expanded electronic and mobile birth registration and included unregistered children in the national identification mass-enrolment exercise.

Recommendations

- Pilot universal, child sensitive cash transfers targeted at primary caregivers of children as essential buffers against child poverty.

Despite this progress, child labour remains persistently high effectively depriving approximately 6.2 million children of their right to education, health and other attendant rights.

Financing for Children's rights remains inadequate and unevenly distributed.

Birth registration and certification of children into the national registry remain low with only 10.3 per cent of children under five enrolled onto the national registry by the time of this report.

Effective protection is further constrained by shortages of probation and social-welfare officers, safe accommodation, rehabilitation facilities and case-management resources. Refugee children, children with disabilities, street children and children in rural or hard-to-reach areas face additional barriers.

- Introduce mandatory human rights due diligence obligations for businesses to ensure periodic reporting.
- Establish protected national and district child-protection budget lines, with capital investment and staffing standards for probation and social-welfare services.
- Guarantee free and timely birth registration and certification through health facilities and mobile services, and publish annual coverage and processing-time data.

Human Trafficking and Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Partial Implementation

In December 2023 and March 2026, government launched a five-year National Communication Strategy and the National Migration Policy respectively to raise anti-trafficking awareness. Despite this progress, survivor-centered protection remains inadequate due to weak victim protection laws, insufficient reintegrated financing, and fragmented data.

New trafficking tactics have emerged over the reporting cycle to include deceptive online recruitment, forced criminality in scam operations, confiscation of identity or travel documents. These forms require effective implementation and cross-border cooperation

Recommendations

- Allocate dedicated resources for the implementation of the National Action Plan on trafficking in persons including establishment of accessible survivor-centred shelters and provision of legal aid services.

Right to work and labour rights

Partial Implementation

The 2021 National Labour Force Survey found that 92 per cent of Ugandans are informally employed, four in five employees lack workplace benefits including social-security.

Further, Uganda has approximately one labour inspector for every 452,000 workers, far below the ILO's recommended ratio of one inspector for every 40,000 workers. Relatedly, Uganda's Industrial Court has only two judges serving the entire country limiting access to labour justice.

Although the Markets Act 2023 introduced positive reforms in market governance, street vending remains criminalised without a clear framework protecting the right to work and informal workers face legal barriers to forming and joining trade unions, collective bargaining and industrial action.

Recommendations

- Ratify and domesticate the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
- Establish an independent sector-based minimum-wage mechanism tied to the cost of an adequate standard of living.
- Ratify the ILO Decent Work in the Platform Economy Convention, 2026 (No. 193) and extend enforceable wage, contract and social-protection standards to platform and other emerging forms of work.
- Complete the legislative and institutional implementation of ILO Convention No. 190, and enforce domestic-worker and labour-migration regulations.



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