

Building solidarity in crisis

Somewhere on the African continent, a war rages, a village floods, an economy collapses. Without warning and often for reasons not of their doing, people are forced to flee their homes, farms, and villages to seek refuge wherever they can, often ending up in neighboring countries.

With her neighbours experiencing constant bouts of war and insecurity, Uganda is often the country many flee to. Currently Uganda has over 1.6 million refugees, the largest in Africa with refugee hosting settlements across the country.

With continued conflict and dwindling hopes for peace and thus repatriation, refugees must find a way to build a new life in their host countries. But to do that they face a gamut of challenges unique to their status.

JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) seeks to accompany refugees as they navigate these varied challenges. Founded in 1980 JRS and has a presence in 58 countries. In Uganda, JRS operates in two locations, Kampala, and Adjumani in the West Nile Region.

World Refugee Day is an opportunity for us to share the needs and dreams of refugees, help mobilize political will and resources so that refugees can not only survive but thrive. While it is important to protect and improve the lives of refugees every single day, international days like World Refugee Day help to focus global attention on the plight of those fleeing conflict and persecution. World Refugee Day creates opportunities to advocate and raise support for refugees.

The 2024 theme of World Refugee Day is "Solidarity with Refugees" and JRS core activities seek to accompany, serve, and advocate for the needs and plights of refugees.

Our programs aim at building resilience, restoring dignity, fostering peace and harmony, and equipping displaced persons with the tools for self-determination. We offer services encompassing basic needs, education, mental health & psychosocial support, livelihoods, socio-economic integration, pastoral care, peacebuilding, and

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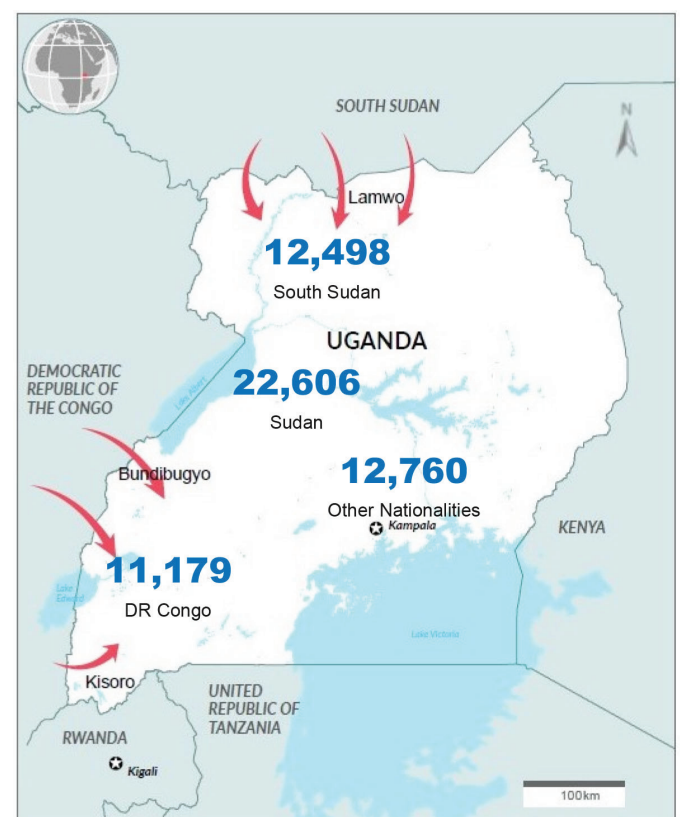
Every JRS program is born of a real need, initially starting with English lessons to help refugees integrate but soon grew to include basic needs support like food, rent support and medication, then expanded to education which covers scholarships then Mental Health and Psychosocial Support as well. Our Livelihoods Departments are one of the biggest departments with business courses, Arts and Crafts, Fashion and Design, Building and Concrete Practice, Welding and Metal Fabrication and Carpentry as well as Catering and Hair Dressing.

JRS's eventual goal is to see each refugee return to their home country with the skills they need to rebuild their lives and communities after peace returns. This is a concerted effort requiring the collaboration of the refugees, their host communities, governments, and international organizations working together to bring peace where there is conflict, build skills and knowledge where there are gaps and support fledgling communities until stability and sustainability are established.

Until then, continued support for refugees is essential. We believe in their potential and the value of our programs to bring lasting and sustained impact. Through our various donors, sister organization and government partners we continue the work started over 30 years ago, a calling driven by determination and rooted in compassion and the belief that every refugee deserves an opportunity for dignity and self-actualization.

JRS Uganda is part of a global JRS network operating in over 50 countries

- **JRS Uganda has been working in Uganda for over 30 years**
- **JRS Uganda has two project locations in Kampala and Adjumani**
- **Since 2022 JRS had directly reached 25,000+ refugees across both projects**



Restoring Hope and Dignity: A JRS Story

Tumusifu Lemesha is a refugee who came to Uganda 15 years ago after fleeing insecurity in her home country of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

She says she was never good at school and preferred to work with her hands and so was drawn to mechanics because it was practical and engaging. And so, at the age of 15 she started learning mechanics in her home country of DRC.

When she fled to Uganda, she resorted to selling African print fabric to make a living until, through JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) she was able to reignite her passion, enrolled and later completed a 7-month course in motorcycle repair and mechanics. Ironically, she almost did not get considered because she was mistakenly registered as male, but once this clerical error was found, she

was immediately admitted.

When asked about why she chose mechanics, she had this to say,

"It does not make you tired and I had an interest in it since I was young. It is the kind of work, which is easy to do, and it has a lot of money. Women fear it for nothing." She says adding, "I wanted a field of work which is unique in its own. And I knew one day in the future it will benefit me and my family."

Though it was a male dominated field, she says she never once felt threatened and instead "I feel much protected working with men and gain more experience." Now she runs her own repair shop in Kyebando, a suburb of the capital city and employs three (03) apprentices.

Tumusifu Lemesha, like thousands of other refugees, contribute to the economies and communities that they call home. With some support and guidance, refugees can become productive members of society.

But this work would be impossible without the partnership of other organisations and the Government of Uganda's progressive policies for refugees. Programs like the ones JRS runs are a cornerstone, helping refugees rise above the tragic circumstance they often find themselves in.

