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John Mariak Manyoun, UN Refugee Volunteer Youth Activist, during an awareness session on early pregnancy with young refugee girls in Kakuma.

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Together we heal, learn and shine: Refugee UN Volunteers take charge in Kenya

This year, focusing on the power of inclusion, we celebrate World Refugee Day by sharing the stories of UN Volunteers who are refugees themselves, or who serve to uplift refugees. In this article, meet three refugee UN Volunteers serving with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Kenya. They share how they are making visible changes among the refugee population under this year's theme for the day: together we heal, learn and shine.

Together we heal: We heal together when we all get the care we need

Adow Mohamed Ibrahim is a Somali Refugee UN Volunteer for Youth Activities. Since October 2020, he has been serving with UNHCR in Dadaab in youth programmes.

Adow has significantly contributed to establishing a youth leadership structure across three refugee camps and developing reporting requirements and monitoring procedures for youth activities, to promote peace and harmony. His work also includes conducting a stock-taking exercise of the effectiveness of youth programmes, in collaboration with partners, and providing support to the roll-out of special youth projects.

His educational contribution amid the COVID-19 pandemic is ensuring that refugees get the care they need. He has also addressed high school students on child marriage in Dadaab Refugee Camp

“ Educating the community on widespread COVID-19 misinformation and myths has been the most memorable part of my assignment. --
Adow Mohamed Ibrahim, Refugee UN Volunteer for Youth Activities with UNHCR, Kenya

Indeed, with the mobilization of the community and the formation of COVID-19 response committees, he has stabilized the situation during the most challenging time.

Together we learn: When we learn together, we build a stronger community

James Maker Atem Mading, a South Sudanese Refugee UN Volunteer, serves as a Tertiary Connected Learning Coordinator with UNHCR in Kakuma Camp, Kenya. His role is assisting in the day-to-day running of the Turkana West University Campus and Technical institution implementation.

He also supports the planning, implementation and reporting of the Microsoft Project inputs into the campus. James has been responsible for managing projects funded by Microsoft and providing oversight and direction to the ICT coaches at the camp's Instant Network Schools and Youth Centres. Despite the COVID-19 uncertainty, he is working to equip refugees and the host community with digital literacy skills.

“ Volunteering has been pretty much instrumental in my life because it has enabled me make new friends, expand my professional network and boost social skills. Volunteering also strengthens my ties to the community and broadens my support network. --James Maker Atem Mading, Refugee UN Volunteer Tertiary Connected Learning

“ Coordinator with UNHCR, Kenya

James enthusiastically took over additional responsibilities. Recently, he participated as an expert speaker in UNV webinar [21st Century Social Contract: Building inclusive state-society relations](#). By sharing his experiences, he highlighted the needs of vulnerable segments of the population, particularly refugees, indigenous people and persons with disabilities, in line with the development of the 2021 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report (SWVR).

Together we shine: We shine when we play together as a team

John Mariak Manyoun is a 30-year-old South Sudanese refugee in Kenya. He has been in the camp for almost 25 years since he fled South Sudan due to the Sudanese civil war. He is now serving as a Refugee UN Volunteer Youth Activist with UNHCR, covering youth protection.

His role is to monitor youth activities in both the Kakuma refugee camp and the Kalobeyei settlement. He also conducts meetings and focus group discussions to identify the problems that youth face.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, John participated in an initiative to raise awareness about drug abuse and early pregnancy, aiming to reduce the number of early pregnancy cases and avoid youth getting into drug abuse at the critical time of the pandemic.

John believes in the power of sports; he has prior experience organizing sports tournaments to promote peace and enable networking among youth in the refugee camp. He now highlights sports activities as a method to check the improvement.

“I am excited and happy when youth appreciate my efforts for the improvement of youth sports development and other activities in the camp. Indeed, I can see that the cases of fighting during football leagues have reduced,” says John.

He is playing an instrumental role in building trust between UNHCR, partners and refugee communities. “I would recommend that refugees be given an opportunity in the UN system, as they can build trust between the UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and the refugee community — refugees know their challenges and problems more than anyone,” John sums up.

“ If you give one refugee an opportunity, it is the community that you have changed. --John Mariak Manyoun, UN Refugee Volunteer Youth Activist with UNHCR, Kenya

In 2019, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, in partnership with UNHCR, piloted the Refugee UN Volunteers special initiative, offering a pathway to professional employment to high-skilled refugees over the age of 22 and promoting refugee empowerment through volunteerism. The initiative facilitates the engagement of persons of concern as UN Volunteers for assignments that require specific skills or insights within the local refugee community.



• World Refugee Day • UN Refugee Volunteer

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)