

20 June 2022

John Manyun and Adow Mohamed Ibrahim, Refugee UN
Volunteers

John Mariak Manyun (centre), Refugee UN Volunteer Activities Coordinator with UNHCR Kenya, during the visit of the president of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) to the youth chess project in Kakuma and Kalobeyei settlements, held at Angelina Jolie Girls Primary School student Hall.

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The power of us: Refugee UN Volunteers reporting from within their communities

20 June is World Refugee Day. Today, we pass the mic to those who know the challenges and issues of refugees best: Refugee UN Volunteers. Meet John and Adow, who share their reflections on serving within their refugee communities.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), one in every 78 people on earth is now displaced. UNHCR's [Global Trends Report](#) demonstrates this alarming trend, with the total number of people worldwide who were forced to flee their homes due to conflicts, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations standing at almost 90 million at the end of 2021, doubling over the last decade.

Volunteering is increasingly recognized as a legitimate and inclusive pathway to address these emerging challenges. Consequently, UNV established a stand-alone [Refugee UN Volunteer](#) category specifically tailored to the legal, socio-economic and cultural context of refugee populations across the world. This initiative with UNHCR was aimed at supporting the integration of refugees in their host communities to gain a strong sense of civic engagement and bring about positive transformation in their host communities.

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Today, we share two stories of Refugee UN Volunteers serving in their communities.

"We should never allow statelessness to constrain anybody's ambitions and dreams."

My name is John Mariak Manyon and I am a South Sudanese refugee. I have been living in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, for almost 25 years now since I moved from my home country, Sudan, before South Sudan became independent.

While in Kenya, I managed to acquire education and graduated from Masinde Muliro University with a Bachelor of Business Administration, through a scholarship supported by the Government of Germany. The scholarship was facilitated by UNHCR and implemented by [Windle International Kenya](#).

I am currently serving as Refugee UN Volunteer Activities Coordinator with UNHCR Kenya. My assignment entails supporting youth activities both in Kakuma refugee camps and the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya. My role includes monitoring youth activities in the refugee camps to identify the gaps and opportunities for programmes targeting refugee populations.

To achieve this, I regularly conduct focus groups discussions with refugee youth populations to discuss their challenges and raise awareness of harmful practices and social ills in the community, such as drug and substance abuse, child marriage, forced marriage and early pregnancy. In turn, I advocate for positive social behaviours such as sporting and healthy living.

One of my greatest achievements has been the establishment of refugee football leagues (for both, girls and boys) in Kakuma camp that are now part of the regional and national football leagues of Kenya. I believe that my contribution has also promoted peaceful coexistence and social cohesion among and between the refugee youth and those in the host community.

“ As a UN Volunteer working for the rights and wellbeing of refugees, I strongly believe that refugees should be given similar education and employment opportunities as any other segments of our societies. We should never allow statelessness to constrain anybody's ambitions and dreams. It is also essential to involve refugees in decision-making processes within local communities where they live, as they can be positive agents of change whenever given the right opportunities. --John Mariak Manyon, Refugee UN Volunteer from South Sudan, serving with UNHCR in Kenya

"We should always strive to ensure those who are forcibly displaced are fully protected and safe."

My name is Adow Mohamed Ibrahim. I come from Somalia and currently live in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. I am serving with UNHCR Kenya as Refugee UN Volunteer Youth Community Assistant. I hold a diploma in Secondary Education and Bachelor's degree in Community Health from Moi University in Kenya. My volunteering and academic qualifications have motivated me to serve as Refugee UN Volunteer.

Volunteering has always been an admirable vocation to me. Through most of my life, I have served as volunteer in several communal projects and programmes, mainly contributing to the establishment of youth leadership structures in various roles. In my current role, I participate in mobilizations of community members for key activities such as hygiene, health education, Covid-19 prevention and peace promotion.

Through closely collaborating with refugee youth populations and with the support of UNHCR colleagues, we have established youth leadership structures that are currently fully engaged in routine planning and undertaking voluntary activities in the Dadaab refugee camp. These activities include health awareness and clean-up campaigns, COVID-19 prevention messaging, community empowerment forums and home visits to address emerging issues such as human trafficking, school dropouts and early and forced marriages.

“ In my volunteering experience as a refugee, I have been able to interact with refugee populations, identify their needs and take actions to help address them. Through volunteering, I have gained necessary experience and skills to promote peace and development in a refugee setting. --Adow Mohamed Ibrahim, Refugee UN Volunteer from Somalia, serving with UNHCR in Kenya

As Nelson Mandela once said, "Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great, and we can be that generation". The only way we can be a great generation is by ensuring we leave no one behind and work together to build truly inclusive societies. We should therefore never have people forcefully displaced from their homes, and if we do, we should always strive to ensure they are fully protected and safe.

Learn more here: [Refugee UN Volunteer](#) category.

 East and Southern Africa

• World Refugee Day • Refugee UN Volunteers

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