

Integration of Professional Refugees into Job Markets

Kiryandongo Job Fair Report



UNHCR Head of Field Office addressing the participants during job fare in Magamaga Youth Centre Kiryandongo photo taken by Christoper

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Report Outline.

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2. Project objective, outcome, and outputs.
3. Presentation of key deliberations.
4. Participants engagement
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1. Introduction.

The Kiryandongo Job Fair aimed to foster self-reliance among Sudanese refugees by bridging the gap between job seekers and potential employers. The primary goal of the event was to create pathways for sustainable livelihoods by connecting refugees with employment opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing their understanding of the Ugandan job market. The event emphasized equipping participants with the necessary information and tools to successfully navigate employment challenges and integrate into the local economy.

The one-day event attracted 157 participants, 60 women and 97 men. The participants represented a diverse array of professional backgrounds, reflecting the rich skill set within the refugee community i.e. Engineers (Electrical, Mechanical, Food and Manufacturing, Water, Civil engineering), Teachers (University lecturers, Professors, Secondary, Primary, Nursery and tertiary), Agriculturalists, Psychologists, Lawyers, Medical Doctors, Veterinary Doctors, Business, Chemists, Forestry experts, Media practitioners, Information & Library specialists, Humanitarian workers, Automobile and Social workers. In addition to Sudanese refugees, the event brought together development partners (Fin church Aid-FCA, LWF), Government officials (LCV, RDC, SCDO, Production, Commercial, and Health officers and Bweyale town council), and representatives from the private sector (Centenary Bank, Equity Bank, Post Bank and Vision Fund). This mix of stakeholders provided a comprehensive platform for dialogue, networking, and knowledge sharing, ensuring that the participants received well-rounded insights into employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Project objective.

The overall objective is to connect professional refugees from Sudan with potential employers in Uganda as part of an initiative to rebuild and enhance their livelihoods and resilience in Uganda.

2.1 Project outcome

1. Established comprehensive database of professional Sudanese residing in Kiryandongo and Kampala
2. Established partnerships between professional Sudanese refugee communities and local businesses.
3. Improved economic integration of Sudanese refugees into the Ugandan labour market.
4. Improved access to upskilling opportunities for professional Sudanese refugees in Uganda.

2.2 Project Output

NRC in partnership with UNHCR and Private sector actors organized a job fair with employers, Non-governmental Organization, Office of the Prime Minister, and Local Government in Kiryandongo. The event brought together private sector actors especially financial institution facilitating collaboration between business owners and organizations, facilitating professional Sudanese refugees' access to a range of job and business opportunities within Uganda.

3. Presentation of key deliberations

Key Highlights

Opening Remarks:

UNHCR Head of field office: He emphasized the importance of self-reliance and proactive engagement in the job market. They encouraged participants to think creatively about addressing community challenges, particularly in areas like household fuel and education. Highlighting the potential within the community. He also suggested practical business ideas such as starting English language schools and legal advisory services particularly for those who fled their home countries with the relevant skills and qualifications. Lastly, he underscored the importance of identifying market needs and teaming up to cause change, such as access to better cooking materials, and developing solutions that benefit both refugees and the host community.

Vice LCV Chairperson, Kiryandongo District Local Government: The Vice Chairperson opened the meeting with a message of unity, urging refugees and host communities to view each other as brothers and sisters. He acknowledged the resilience and dignity of the refugees despite the hardships they faced. Emphasizing the need for peaceful coexistence, he advised against religious divisions and highlighted the importance of patience and mutual support particularly in business engagements. He also conveyed the District Chairperson's greetings and reinforced the district's commitment to supporting refugee integration.



Figure 1 The Vice LCV Kiryandongo district local government addressing the gathering

Panel Discussions:

The panel featured representatives from various organizations/businesses, each sharing valuable insights and resources:

Finn Church Aid: Informed participants of the opportunities under their Complementary Pathways



project, which offers legal routes for refugees to relocate to third world countries for education, employment, or family reunification. They highlighted their recent successes, such as facilitating scholarships to Europe and employment placements abroad. The representative emphasized that while resettlement is limited to those with protection needs, complementary pathways are competitive and accessible to skilled individuals. He concluded that the advert for new intake will be in Feb 2025, feedback in May and

those who qualify their flight shall be between September and October 2025.

A staff member of FCA responding to some questions asked about the job & scholarship abroad.

Estrella Education Consultant: Focused on educational opportunities, the consultant explained their role in supporting students through the process of applying for international study programs. They offer career guidance, interview training, and assistance with scholarship applications. Participants were encouraged to remain flexible and proactive in seeking educational advancements, and contact information was provided for further support.

Dillis from Estrella Education Consultant elaborating on educational opportunities.



NRC (ICLA): During the panel discussion, the NRC Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance (ICLA)



Officer highlighted the different legal services NRC provides to refugees. These include legal counseling, support with business registration, and document translation services. The officer emphasized the importance of registering businesses to ensure legal recognition, which facilitates access to financial services and growth opportunities. NRC's collaboration with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) and NIRA was also mentioned.

NRC ICLA Officer responding to legal issues raised by Sudanese lawyers.

Equity Bank, Vision Fund Uganda, Centenary Bank, and Post Bank: Each financial institution outlined services tailored for refugees. Equity Bank emphasized the importance of financial literacy, and the steps needed to access loans and start savings accounts. Vision Fund Uganda discussed their savings group linkage products, which provide micro-loans without requiring traditional collateral. Centenary Bank highlighted their products including VSLA (Village Savings and Loan Association), free accounts opening for refugees and the support they offer to small businesses. Post Bank introduced their GROW loan, specifically aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs, and encouraged refugees to utilize available financial services to enhance their livelihoods, talked about employment opportunities for refugees as a banking agent and Wendi services, among others.



Figure 2 Left (Branch Manager Equity Bank presenting) Right (Relationship Manager centenary bank presenting).



Figure 3 Left (Branch Manager Post Bank presenting on the opportunities at the bank) Right (Customer care manager vision fund responding to some queries)

4. Participant Engagement:

The professionals made submission that revolved around need to access job but focusing at moving toward access to adequate standard of living in Uganda.

Issue raised around financial access and business support.

During the open forum, participants expressed concerns and aspirations related to starting businesses, accessing loans (grow loan), and practicing their professions in Uganda. One notable concern was the difficulty refugees face in securing startup capital and the high interest rates charged on loans by the different banks.

Response: Panelists addressed these issues by emphasizing the importance of starting small businesses, registering businesses to gain legal recognition, and leveraging group loan opportunities. They also clarified that while individual loans have stringent requirements, group loans are more accessible for many refugees. OPM offered to draft an introduction letter to help the refugees open bank accounts, however they decline any role in writing letters to acquire loans as that is outside their mandates.

Issue raised around legal practice for non-Ugandan.

What does it take to practice law in Uganda for Sudanese professionals?

Response: The panel explained that while foreign lawyers cannot practice without specific credentials, there are pathways, such as obtaining a special practicing certificate or enrolling in local law programs for a period of four years and later 9months at LDC, to gain eligibility. This highlighted the need for policy makers and Ugandan authorities to reassess the suitability of the current legal framework in term of legal practices for foreigners, especially the refugee. This discussion needs to be taken on with senior government line department and ministries to appreciate the opportunities that exist and hindrance to tapping the opportunity.

Issue raised around loss of academic documents.

There are many nurses, pharmacists, medical laboratories technicians, medical doctors and other medical professionals including veterinary doctors. They are well experienced and need to be supported to practice in Uganda.

Response: There are NGOs who are trying to support the professional to process practicing license, this needs to be scaled up and it will offer opportunity for the professional to access the job market through self-employment or seeking employment in private sectors across the country. The

alternative pathway is quite competitive, but they are registering to give it a test, but the high number renders the solution not the best approach.

Issue raised around loss of academic documents.

There was question of some refugee losing their certificate and document in Sudan while in transit to take refuge in foreign country, they seek any opportunity for partners to link them with their training providers in Sudan to provide them the certification based on institutional records.

Response: Some technicians offered to be tested and attained certification; this needs to be discussed further since this may only apply to technical aspects that can be done by the Directorate of Industrial Training. More dialogue needs to be conducted to understand the rationale and opportunity that comes with such action.

Issue raised around loss of academic documents.

Some professionals came along with their tools, all they need is capital and adherence to legal requirements to exercise their right to employment. There are telecommunication engineers who repair GPS sets and walktokies.

Response: There is need to check with telecommunication companies to assess their viability, some refugees were seeking opportunity to return to South Sudan where the technologies is widely used to work with some of their long-term partners. This needs to be discussed further and it's the mandate of OPM and UNHCR to deal with such requests.

Overall, the plenary was short and there are many questions without direct answers, the refugee is interested to dialogue and map opportunities for them to explore including professional who worked in NGOs in Sudan who are now purely engaged as community-based workers with majority of the partners. There is a good opportunity for them to learn work ethics and practices as they seek a higher role in NGOs to serve their own refugees.



Figure 4 Some refugees asking questions during plenary discussion.

4.1 Remarks from NRC and other Key Stakeholders: NRC Area Program Manager:

Announced plans for a national-level job fair in Kampala, providing an opportunity for settlement representatives to showcase their businesses and participate in panel discussions. He explained that the initiative aims to connect refugees with broader market opportunities and foster partnerships with the private sector that are within and other places like Kampala, Gulu and Masindi, among others.



OPM (Community Services and Livelihood):

Emphasized the importance of realistic expectations regarding resettlement and encouraged refugees



to focus on available opportunities within Uganda. The representatives acknowledged the community's diverse qualifications and urged participants to form professional groups for better support and resource allocation. They also clarified OPM's role in recommending refugees for bank accounts and other services, underscoring the need for collaboration with financial institutions on loans and other services being offered to group

reputations to be trusted despite being refugee.

OPM giving a remark during the Job Fair held on 28th of November 2024-Kirangdongo.

CAO Remarks:

Delivered a message of encouragement, urging refugees to be creative and proactive in addressing their needs. He called for the formation of interest-based groups to facilitate tailored support and training. The CAO emphasized that the government supports "the active poor" and encouraged participants to engage in income-generating activities. The local government can offer training in business areas to improve the performance of new entities established by refugees.

RDC Remarks:

The Resident District Commissioner of Kiryandongo District was represented by his deputy, he ably presented government commitment to providing security and he assured the population to engage in lawful activities to keep away from contact with the law. He also indicated the opportunity to access Kiryandongo FM with programs for refugees at no cost. On religion, he echoed God as being the umbrella and every segment of belief needs to keep peaceful and relate well. The last aspect of his

submission was relating to needs to keep diversity as a strength as Kiryandongo is hosting over 87 tribe and Sudanese is adding to the diversity.



Figure 5 Photo taken as the Deputy RDC of Kiryandongo district local government was closing remarks.

4.2 Lessons Learned

- Job Fair offered superb connections and information to job seekers thereby rebuilding hopes and motivations amongst refugees with professional qualifications
- The job fair is a catalyst platform to local integration, self-reliance life and durable solutions for displacement affected population
- Sudanese professionals possess qualification profiles which are unusual from what many refugees have been presenting (e.g. in the field of minding, engineering, chemists). These profiles were tailored to Sudan economy but can be very useful to Uganda economy when tapped.
- In a context of Uganda where employment is difficult to find, job fairs germinate, in the head of job seekers, now ideas on what to do.
- More engagement is required with PSFU for wider reach
- The Financial Service Providers needs to reach out to the population, there are opportunities that even Ugandan were not aware, and the dialogue brought it out clearly.

5. Recommendations.

- NRC to refine the existing list to include all refugees with different qualifications for future engagement.
- NRC to conduct a similar engagement at the community level for them to have a deeper discussion on Jobs in the labor market with the different cluster of professionals. Build their capacities to engage more in social support for the entire refugee population.
- NRC to support the linkage of refugee professionals to financial institutions to access financial services and potential private sectors with job opportunities.
- NRC to engage with policy markers during the advocacy meeting in Kampala to discuss the gap in the policies and how to support refugees have access to job opportunities in Uganda.
- Need for UNHCR and NRC to work with PSFU and local investors within the region to share with them opportunities in terms of existing labour in the professional to see how they can be engaged and OPM can clear travels outside of settlement based on opportunities that exist.

6. Conclusion:

Considering the project objectives and outcomes, it is worth noting that the job fair achieved its objective by contributing to the key outcomes. NRC in its follow up actions and UNHCR planning needs to pay attention to ensuring all the professional is captured in the comprehensive database of professional Sudanese residing in Kiryandongo. The list shall be used to link the professional to services locally and with private sector actors. The plenary discussion offered opportunity for the professional to engage providing a strong base for future partnerships between professional Sudanese refugee communities and local businesses. In line with the third outcome, there were key aspects of integration that need to be scaled up in Kampala Job Fare advocacy to overcome barriers to integration of professional especially medical practitioners (human and veterinary), lawyers and engineers. Interims of up skilling there is needs for technical assessment to evaluate the training needs of each profession based on the job requirement in Uganda, this can be factored in training needs to be spearheaded by UNHCR to help the refugee overcome skill gaps hindering the access to the employment.

Annex: Programmed for the day.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME FOR THE JOB FAIR		
TIME	ACTIVITY	RES. PERSON
8:30-9:00am	Arrival and registration	NRC
9:01-9:20am	Self-Introduction	Moderator
9:21-9:30am	Opening Remark	LCV
9:31-10:00am- 40 mins	• Setting the Scene; Communications (NRC, OPM&UNHCR) ○ UNHCR SDO (Overview, context, statistics) ○ Refugee Voice (Journey to success)	Moderator
10:01-10:30am	Tea Break	Hotel
10:31-11:00am	Overview of the project and NRC intervention in Kiryandongo	NRC
11:01-12:45pm	Plenary Discussions (all invites) key focus is on the job opportunities, key barriers to job access and suggestion for actions (private sector, policy makers and UNHCR).	Moderator
12:45-12:40pm	Review of key actions	NRC
12:41-1:00pm	Closure	RDC
1:01-2:00pm.	Lunch/Departure	
2:00 PM	Visiting the tents by attendees, One on one - Networking and Individual Meetings in the tents. Departure at will.	All