AMAHORO COALITION

In partnership with

mastercard foundation

Pathways to Employment

South Sudan Report

Photo by el mahdi ben mekki

About the Authors

About the RLRH

The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford. The RLRH is based in the UK and Kenya, with a research office located in Nairobi at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). We create opportunities for researchers with a displacement background to lead primary and secondary research studies in the field of forced migration, from start to finish. Our main thematic interests in Refugee Studies relate to 1) livelihoods and self-reliance; and 2) leadership and participation of displaced populations in humanitarian response and policymaking. RLRH also offers a series of academic programmes which support graduate access and professional development for students with lived experiences of displacement. Visit our website for more information.

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Introduction

Executive Summary

- Refugee policies in South Sudan are open and progressive. The 2012 South Sudan Refugee Act provides for refugees' socio-economic rights, including the right to work and access public services. The law does not mention any provisions on freedom of movement, though in practice refugees move freely within the country. Those relocating from camps to other locations may need travel permits from the Commissioner for Refugee Affairs (CRA).

- Refugees in South Sudan do not require a work permit to seek employment. With only the refugee identity card issued to them upon entry, refugees have the same right to apply for jobs as South Sudanese nationals and follow the same recruitment processes. There are no reported document restrictions for refugees to access employment in South Sudan.

- The process of obtaining a refugee identity card (ID) is straightforward. The United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and CRA provide an attestation document at the point of entry in a settlement that can be used to access humanitarian assistance. The refugee ID, valid for 3 years, is then printed and issued to the refugees, with waiting periods of up to a month. Renewal of these IDs is currently on hold, as the government intends to begin issuance of biometric refugee IDs.

- Refugees have a right to access financial services including opening bank accounts. However, some have reported facing challenges opening accounts since some banks do not consider a refugee ID valid documentation to use banking services.

- There is no publicly available data on refugees in formal employment in South Sudan. The CRA reports that there are refugees working informally across all sectors. The labour market in South Sudan is mainly characterised by informal work in subsistence agriculture and a lack of technical, vocational and tertiary education. This limits formal employment opportunities for both nationals and refugees. Non-governmental organisations engage refugees as incentive workers in positions like community outreach volunteers, translators, and clinical assistants in exchange for a small stipend.

- There is no evidence of partnerships that support refugee livelihood and private sector engagement in South Sudan. There are new projects such as the Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Communities in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS) Project launched in April 2023, though their progress cannot be evaluated at this time.

- The report suggests that the government, NGOs and refugee-led organisations raise awareness on the rights of refugees to access employment and services to private sector actors.

- Humanitarian organisations should also consider formalising refugee employment by offering professional placements since refugees in South Sudan are eligible for formal employment.

Acronyms

CRA	Commission for Refugees Affairs
ESRH-SS	Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Communities in South Sudan
ID	Identity Card
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association

South Sudan Situation Snapshot

Country assessment:

- Highly open legal environment, but structural challenges limit refugees' access to the job market
- Limited publicly available literature, many gaps in knowledge.

Since gaining its independence in 2011, South Sudan has been both a country of origin and destination for refugees. According to UNHCR, more than 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees are currently hosted in neighbouring countries.[1] At the same time, as of July 2024, South Sudan is host to 483,601 refugees and 5,620 asylum seekers.[2] The majority of refugees in South Sudan are from Sudan (94.8%), followed by 2.9% coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo.[3] Since April 2023, at least 541,888 new arrivals have been recorded as a result of the ongoing civil war in Sudan.[4]

Majority of the refugees reside in refugee settlements and camps. More than half (52.2%) live in refugee settlements in the Upper Nile region, near the border with Sudan.[5] Close to 40% reside in Unity in Western Upper Nile.[6] There is no publicly available information about refugees living in urban centres in South Sudan.

Photo by Aboodi Vesakaran

1. UNHCR, Global Focus, "South Sudan Situation", 2024. https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/south-sudan-situation
2. UNHCR Operations. "South Sudan." Accessed April 19, 2024. https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd
3. Ibid.
4. Peter Caton, "Inside South Sudan's worsening refugee crisis, in Renk and Maban," Aljazeera, February 8, 2024 https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/2/8/photos-inside-south-sudans-worsening-refugee-crisis-renk-and-maban
5. Nyuar, Dr Kot Bol. "Briefing on Refugees Situation in South Sudan with Focus on Integration." Commission of Refugees Affairs Ministry of Interior Republic of South Sudan, 2019. https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/goss_0.pdf
6. Migrants & Refugees Section. "South Sudan." Migrants & Refugees: Country Profile https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/south-sudan/

Objectives

South Sudan's policy towards refugees' access to the labour market is open and progressive, but there are still challenges. The 2012 South Sudan Refugee Act provides refugees access to socioeconomic rights including the right to work.[7] Refugees' right to work is covered by section 33 (f) of the Act.[8] There are no particular provisions in the Act pertaining to refugee work permits and with respect to section 33 (f) of the same Act, any refugee in possession of a valid refugee identity card is entitled to seek employment.[9] Despite this progress, refugees in South Sudan face challenges to become self-reliant through access to formal employment or business.

Little is known about refugees' attempts to access livelihood opportunities in South Sudan, but there appear to be challenges due to the informality of opportunities. Due to the lack of technical and vocational tertiary education, the labour market in Southern Sudan is mainly characterised by unpaid work in subsistence agriculture, high levels of informal sector employment, and a lack of marketable skills.[10] There is no reliable data available regarding refugees working in the formal sector.[11] Jobs assessments and surveys conducted between 2019 and 2021 revealed that "an overwhelming majority of refugee businesses take place informally across all sectors."[12] This study looks at how refugees engage in formal employment in South Sudan. It looks at the differences between what is said in policy and what happens in practice. It also looks at how the private sector can be involved in this process, by asking:

1. What policies and legal frameworks govern refugees' access to employment in South Sudan?
2. What processes do refugees need to follow to find employment in South Sudan? What challenges do refugees face in following the needed steps to employment in South Sudan?
3. What are the challenges private sector actors face in order to employ refugees in South Sudan?
4. How can collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders be improved to create a more enabling environment for refugee employment in South Sudan?

This study, conducted in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, supports the Amahoro Coalition's mission to promote dignified and fulfilling livelihoods for refugees and displaced persons across Africa through multi-sectoral collaboration. It aligns with the Foundation's strategic objective of enabling 2.5 million young refugees and displaced individuals to access meaningful employment by 2030.

The research examines current policies, challenges, and opportunities affecting refugees' access to formal employment in host countries, identifying key barriers and recommending strategies to strengthen employment pathways and promote socio-economic integration into host communities. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Mastercard Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.

7. Jobs and Labour Market Assessment by Relief International in Maban in 2021 and by Danish Refugee Council in Jamjang in 2019 and the 2021 World Bank-funded Jobs, Recovery and Peacebuilding in Urban South Sudan study cited in UNHCR, "Refugee Policy Review Framework-Country Summary" 31 December 2021. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107230
8. South Sudan: Refugee Act of 2012, Act No. 20, 5 June 2012, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2012/en/91073
9. UNHCR, "South Sudan: Refugee Policy Review Framework", 31 December 2023.https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107230
10. UNHCR, "Refugee Policy Review Framework-Country Summary" 31 December 2021. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107230
11. Ibid.
12. See: Jobs and Labour Market Assessment by Relief International in Maban in 2021 and by Danish Refugee Council in Jamjang in 2019 and the 2021 World Bank-funded Jobs, Recovery and Peacebuilding in Urban South Sudan study cited in UNHCR, "Refugee Policy Review Framework-Country Summary" 31 December 2021. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107230

Research Methods

This South Sudan report is part of a 15-country study on hiring refugees, conducted by the Refugee-Led Research Hub, on behalf of the Amahoro Coalition. Data was collected in-person in July 2024.[13]

Data collection was mainly carried out in the Gorom camp for both relevance to the research objectives and for convenience, as it was easily accessible to the research assistant and in line with the budget available for data collection. The team conducted sixteen (16) interviews with refugees and stakeholders in South Sudan, including:

- **One (1) Government representative** from Commission for Refugees Affairs (CRA);
- **Four (4) International Organisations (INGOS)**;
- **One (1) Non Government Organization (NGO)** which manages the Gorom camp;
- **Eight (8) refugees**, including three (3) refugee leaders (a female refugee leader from Ethiopia, a refugee youth leader from Sudan, and a male Sudanese refugee leader who is responsible for overseeing the services provided by humanitarian agencies to refugees in Gorom camp, also from South Sudan). Other refugees we interviewed included a Burundian man who owns a small business in the Gorom camp market, an unemployed Sudanese male refugee, and three refugees (two men from Ethiopia and one woman from Sudan) employed by UNHCR partner agencies working in Gorom camp.
- **Two (2) private business enterprises** that hire refugees in the Gorom Camp.

We acknowledge that due to the limited scope and budget of the study, the sampling strategy is neither systematic nor representative of the refugee population. To reduce bias, we have attempted to triangulate the data with the literature as much as possible. However, most of the existing academic and grey literature focuses on South Sudan as a country of origin for displaced persons, rather than as a host country for refugees. As a result, this report does not provide a complete picture of refugee employment across South Sudan, but is intended to be useful as a basis for discussion and advocacy.

13. This study is covered by University of Oxford Project clearance [SSH/ODID DREC: C1A_23_083]. The research assistant received authorisation from the Commission of Refugee Affairs (CRA) to access the camp and carry out interviews.

1. Policies and Legal Frameworks That Govern Refugees' Access to Employment

Overview of policies and legal frameworks in South Sudan

The 2012 South Sudan Refugee Act is one of the most progressive in the region.[14] Since its independence, South Sudan has been implementing an open door policy for refugees and asylum seekers. It is a signatory to the 1951 convention, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.[15] Moreover, the country has also ratified the 2009 African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons and has also made commitments to the Global Compact on Refugees.[16] The South Sudan Refugee Act of 2012 (No. 20) is supplemented by the Refugee Status Eligibility Regulations of 2017, and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Refugee Status Determination of 2021.[17]

The Nationality and Passport Act 2011 allows for the naturalisation of refugees.[18] Any refugee is eligible to apply for naturalisation provided that they meet two basic conditions. The first condition is that the applicant must have resided in South Sudan for a minimum of 10 consecutive years. The second condition is that the applicant must have been legally married to a South Sudanese citizen for a minimum of 5 years prior to applying for naturalisation. Applications must be made by completing the relevant form, as described in Annex 1 C or Annex 1 B of the South Sudan Nationality Regulations of 2011, depending on which condition the applicant meets. Once completed, the form must be submitted to the Directorate Departments of Nationality and ID Cards, primarily in Juba.[19]

The research team found no evidence of refugees ever applying for naturalisation, partly because all eight refugee interviewees had been in South Sudan for less than 10 years, and partly because the government officials we interviewed could not provide evidence of any refugee applications.

The Act provides refugees access to socioeconomic rights including the right to work, freedom of movement, and public services.[20] Refugees' right to work is covered by section 33 (f) of the Refugee Act of 2012.[21] There are no particular provisions in law pertaining to refugee work permits and with respect to section 33 (f) of the Refugee Act, as "a refugee in possession of a valid identity card is entitled to seek employment."[22]

There are no provisions in law on freedom of movement for refugees. In practice, however, refugees enjoy freedom of movement within the country. As per the UNHCR, refugees who wish to move from certain camps to another location may need travel permits from the CRA. The goal is to prevent refugees from being arrested by police officers who are unaware of the refugees' right to free movement and the validity of their identification documents. However, this protocol is not applied uniformly to all refugees across settlements. Refugees in camps located far from Juba, where CRA administrative structures are either nonexistent or poorly established do not get these travel permits.[23]

14. South Sudan: Refugee Act of 2012, Act No. 20, 5 June 2012, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2012/en/91073
15. UNHCR, "Refugee Policy Review Framework-Country Summary" 31 December 2021. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107230
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Nyuar, Dr Kot Bol. "Briefing on Refugees Situation in South Sudan with Focus on Integration." Commission of Refugees Affairs Ministry of Interior Republic of South Sudan, 2019. https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/goss_0.pdf
19. The South Sudan Nationality Regulations, 2011, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2011/en/86891
20. Nyuar, Dr Kot Bol. "Briefing on Refugees Situation in South Sudan with Focus on Integration." Commission of Refugees Affairs Ministry of Interior Republic of South Sudan, 2019. https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/goss_0.pdf
21. South Sudan: Refugee Act of 2012, Act No. 20, 5 June 2012, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2012/en/91073
22. UNHCR, "South Sudan: Refugee Policy Review Framework'', 31 December 2023. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107230
23. Ibid.

Overview of Policies and Legal Frameworks in South Sudan

South Sudan recognises the qualifications (diplomas and certificates) that refugees possess.[24] Refugees who acquired their academic qualification in their home countries can use them to seek employment in South Sudan. Refugees with driving licences from their home country are also hired in UNHCR field operations to operate ambulances and heavy machinery.[25] Refugees who wish to validate and authenticate their academic certificates must first seek authentication from a relevant institution of the country that issued that particular certificate. They can then take the authenticated certificate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of South Sudan for authentication and validation.[26]

In practice, most humanitarian organisations employing refugees in Gorom camp make their own arrangements to validate foreign academic certificates, as it is difficult for refugees to get their certificates authenticated by government institutions in their countries of origin. In particular, organisations need translations of certificates that are not written in English to help them understand the level of academic qualification and the field of education stated on the certificate.

→ The South Sudan Refugee Act of 2012 promotes the integration of refugees into the labour market and into the host community, and there are no major gaps in implementation.

Juba, Sudan. Photo by UN Photo/Paul Banks

24. UNHCR, "Refugee Policy Review Framework-Country Summary" 31 December 2021. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107230
25. Ibid.
26. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of South South Sudan, https://mofaic.gov.ss/authentication/

2. Processes to Access Formal Work in South Sudan

Requirements

In South Sudan, refugees do not need a work permit to engage in formal employment. Refugees in South Sudan are allowed to work by following the same recruitment procedures as nationals, and there are no additional authorisation documents required to access formal employment. The main requirement is that refugees must have a refugee ID in addition to proof of their academic qualifications or skills. If the ID has not yet been printed, refugees can use their IDs to apply for a job and, if they meet the criteria, they can be employed like any other member of the host community. Employers do not have to justify why they want to hire refugees, nor do they have to inform the CRA that they have hired refugees.

Some actors, including banking institutions, sometimes do not recognise refugee IDs, making it difficult for refugees to open bank accounts. Some refugees have reported difficulties in opening bank accounts using their refugee IDs. However, it is not a general bank policy that people with refugee IDs should not receive banking services. It is on a case-by-case basis, depending on the bank and its internal policies. The Commission for Refugee Affairs sometimes provides letters of recommendation to banks on behalf of refugees in order to increase the validity of the refugee card.

Box 1. Refugee Policies

"There are no special permits given to refugees, they only use the ID which is issued to them upon arrival into the country. We have an open-door policy and non-encampment policy towards refugees. Refugees are allowed to live and work in the host communities' areas." – A key informant from the Commission for Refugee Affairs, July 2024

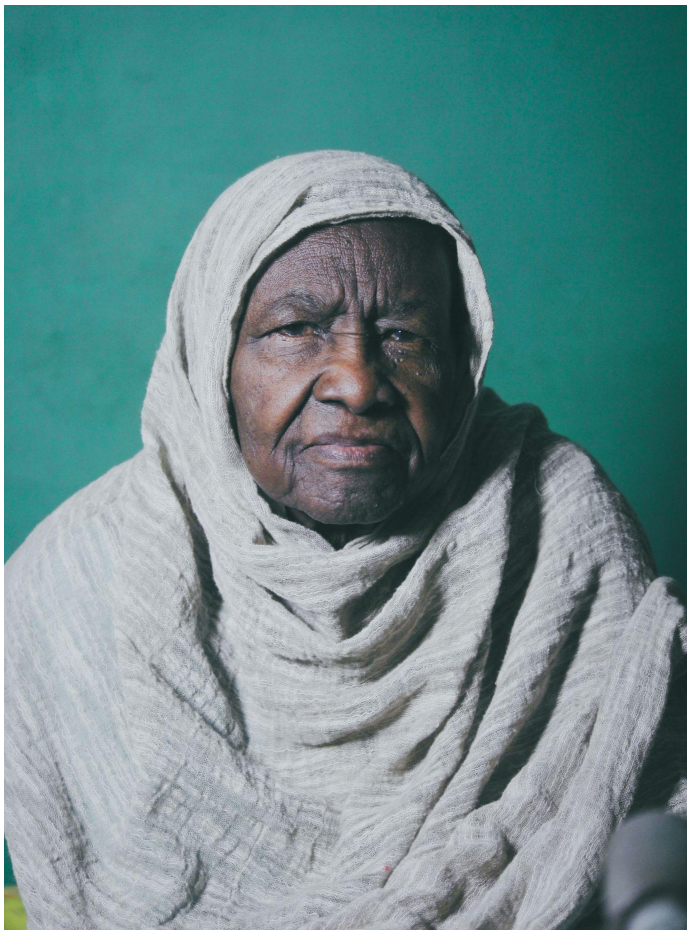

Photo by Yusuf Yassir

Obtaining a Refugee ID

The process of obtaining a refugee card is straightforward but can be delayed. When refugees report to the transit centre in the settlement, they are registered by UNHCR with the assistance of the CRA and are immediately issued with a certificate listing all household members who have arrived at the transit centre. This certificate allows the refugees to access all services (e.g. food distribution, training, volunteer work) while waiting for the ID card to be printed. The time frame varies from one (1) day to one (1) month depending on the availability of printing materials and the workload of the support staff. The Refugee ID Card is valid for three years and is renewable. Once a refugee ID expires, the refugee will report to their refugee community leaders who will then take the refugee's details and submit them to UNHCR's Registration Support Team for printing. This process can be done immediately or take at least two weeks before the new card is issued to the refugee.

The process of renewing refugee IDs is currently on hold since 2023 pending the start of the issuance of biometric/electronic refugee IDs. The Government of South Sudan is planning to change the type of refugee card to a new card with features similar to the South Sudanese electronic citizenship card. Discussions on these changes are in the final stages, pending approval from the Ministry of Immigration, Nationality and Passports.

→ There are no barriers to accessing employment since refugee identity documents (attestation and refugee ID) are readily accessible in South Sudan. The process for obtaining refugee ID cards is well-developed and effectively supported by both the UNHCR and the CRA.

Box 2. New Refugee IDs

"There are conversations ongoing on changing the Refugee ID to an electronic ID with features close to the Nationality ID of South Sudan. This ID will allow financial institutions and other private sector companies to recognize and serve refugees better. The discussions on these changes have already reached the Ministry of Immigration, Nationality, and Passports, and once the ministry approves, the process to issue new refugee IDs will start immediately." – A key informant from the Commission for Refugee Affairs, July 2024

"Today (29th June 2024) there are a number of refugees living in the camp with expired IDs because the renewal process is taking a long time and as leaders we raised this concern. However, the CRA told us that they are in the process of replacing the current IDs with new ones that will have the same features as the South Sudanese nationality ID and that is why the renewal process is taking longer than expected." – A male refugee leader key informant in Gorom Camp, June 2024

3. Challenges Faced by Refugees in Accessing Employment

Structural Challenges

Formal policies targeting employment opportunities for refugees remain limited. The government's focus has primarily been on urgent humanitarian assistance rather than long-term economic integration strategies. There is no publicly available data on the number of refugees who are currently employed in South Sudan. However, the CRA reported that there are refugees working in the informal sector in Juba.

Refugees who lost their educational certificates in their country of origin find it difficult to access formal employment. Most employers in South Sudan require job seekers to show evidence of their academic qualifications by attaching copies of academic certificates to their job application. Some refugees however do not have their academic certificates because they were left home or lost when they fled. Due to lack of proof of academic qualifications some refugees lose interest in searching for employment in both camps and urban areas.

Requirement of English language proficiency also hinders refugees from accessing employment. Before gaining independence, South Sudan's official language was Arabic, a language that is also spoken by Sudanese refugees. Upon gaining independence in 2011, the official language was changed to English,[27] the language which some refugees from Sudan, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) do not speak fluently. So, even refugees with higher education certificates may not apply for advertised jobs that require English proficiency.

Box 3. Government representative's perspective on refugees working in South Sudan

"As a government, I may not know specific individuals, but I am aware that there are a number of refugees from different nationalities who are working in different capacities with the NGOs and the private sector. For example, the Burundian refugees are working in vegetable production in Juba, some Somali refugees are running businesses at Konyo-Konyo market in Juba, while others have joined businesses with the host communities." – A key informant from the Commission for Refugee Affairs, July 2024

Another challenge for refugees in South Sudan is the competitive nature of the labour market. Jobs in South Sudan are very scarce and competitive. With an unemployment rate of 12.3% in 2023,[28] unemployed South Sudanese are also competing for the few jobs available in the country, including those advertised by humanitarian organisations working in refugee camps. The government cannot absorb all unemployed citizens into the public sector, so the private sector is important as it helps to create employment opportunities. Both citizens and refugees have access to employment opportunities in the private sector.

27. The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa, UNICEF 2016, https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org.esa/files/2018-09/UNICEF-2016-Language-and-Learning-South-Sudan.pdf
28. World data, https://knoema.com/atlas/South-Sudan/Unemployment-rate

Structural Challenges

However, some employers may favour hiring nationals, and will sometimes even clearly state in job advertisements that they will only hire South Sudanese citizens.

The situation is challenging for entrepreneurs as well. Most refugee-led Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) rely on Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) to access credit and capital for their businesses. However, in most cases contributions from VSLAs are not significant enough to spur growth or to achieve sustainability.

Photo by Yusuf Yassir

Box 4. Respondents' views on the impact of unemployment on refugees' access to employment

"Since I arrived in the country, I have only been able to work as a casual volunteer on an incentive basis. It's always difficult to be employed in the top positions because they always prioritise the host community and I feel that we are marginalised and it's very difficult to get formal employment here in the camp. This situation is not only for me, but also for my fellow refugees in the camp." – A male refugee key informant, June 2024

"It's not easy to get employed here because there are a lot of people looking for jobs, including the host community. What I have learnt here is that the online NGO forum (South Sudan NGOs Forum) only advertises national positions/jobs (they put in eligibility criteria saying "only South Sudanese nationals are eligible to apply"), so by default it has kicked us out as refugees, we can only apply locally here in the camp with implementing partners who in most cases rarely advertise or they bring people from Juba City to work here. Only a few of us have access to the job, which is only casual work (only paid incentives), which is very low compared to what the staff in the host community are paid." – A male refugee key informant, June 2024

Employer Challenges

Employers who want to hire refugees do not face specific challenges. The steps taken to hire and onboard refugees are the same as those taken to hire locals. Employers are not required to register with the Immigration Department or any other government agency when hiring a refugee.

Employment opportunities offered by humanitarian organisations operating in the settlements is mainly incentive work. While in the camps, some refugees work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on an incentive basis, which is the employment of refugees by NGOs and implementing partners, where refugees are engaged in tasks related to the provision of services or assistance to other refugees. These roles are typically compensated with a small stipend, often referred to as an "incentive," rather than a formal wage or salary.

Incentive workers perform essential functions, such as providing livelihood support, interpretation services, child protection services, GBV prevention, human rights protection, and community health services, among others.[29] NGOs working for refugees are aware that refugees have the same rights to employment as the nationals. These NGOs however hire refugees on an incentive basis to work in specified positions like community outreach volunteers, nutrition assistants, translators, and clinical assistants. As most NGOs in the humanitarian sector consider the refugees they recruit to be volunteers, they continue to be less interested in paying refugees a salary.[30]

To conclude, challenges related to competitiveness and the nature of the labour market limit refugees' ability to join the labour market, become self-reliant, and integrate with the host community. Refugees also struggle to find job opportunities in the humanitarian sector and rely on incentive work.

29. "Advocating for Refugee Incentive Workers: A Qualitative Research Study in Three Refugee Contexts in Africa - Kenya | ReliefWeb." Accessed November 12, 2024. https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/advocating-refugee-incentive-workers-qualitative-research-study-three-refugee-contexts-africa
30. UNHCR, "Discussion paper on UNHCR's policy and practice of incentive payments to refugees," 2014, https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/5491577c9.pdf

4. Collaborations and Partnerships

Collaborations and Partnerships

The government is shifting from short term humanitarian relief to a more sustainable development focused approach, as outlined in its Durable Solutions Strategy for Refugees.[31] However, the Strategy does not include the private sector and focuses mainly on returnees and internally displaced persons (i.e. South Sudanese nationals). There is also no evidence of private sector engagement for refugees' access to formal employment in South Sudan.

There is no existing mapping of activities that support refugee livelihood and private sector engagement in South Sudan. In a project note, the African Bank for Development (AfDB) stated that "no major development actors are intervening in the refugee areas of Maban and Jamjang on livelihoods and entrepreneurship."[32] Some NGOs are active, such as Inkomoko which supports refugee business developments in South Sudan, but limited information is available online.[33]

Box 5. Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Community in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS)

"The ESRHC-SS project aims to increase the socioeconomic empowerment of refugees and host communities in Maban and Jamjang by facilitating better access to vocational and skills training, encouraging women-led enterprise development, and promoting youth sustainability. Specifically, the project aims to increase access to vocational and skills training, create sustainable businesses to cope with shocks and risks, and improve service delivery through increased institutional capacity. The primary target groups are young (18-35 years) and women (18-60 years) refugees and host communities. Direct beneficiaries comprise a total of 3,590 people (1,300 youth, 2,200 Women, and 90 CRA staff). Of the youth, 50% are females and 50% refugees.

The project does not directly involve refugees in formal employment or formal business development, but provides the necessary skills and knowledge that refugees, individually or in groups, could use in informal businesses that could grow into formal businesses."[34]

31. Intergovernmental Authority on Development. "Strategy on Implementation of Chapter III of the R-ARCSS: Towards Durable Solutions for South Sudan Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (2020-2023)" June 2020. https://igad.int/download/strategy-on-implementation-of-chapter-iii-of-the-r-arcss-towards-durable-solutions-for-south-sudan-refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons-2020-2023/
32. African Development Bank. "Appraisal report - South Sudan: Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Communities in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS)." Accessed September 1, 2023. https://ews.rightsindevelopment.org/projects/p-ss-ia0-002-south-sudan-entrepreneurship-support-to-refugees/
33. "South Sudan – Inkomoko." Accessed September 1, 2023. https://www.inkomoko.com/what-we-do/communities/south-sudan/
34. Africa Development Bank Group and Map Africa, South Sudan - Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Community in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS) project. https://mapafrica.afdb.org/en/projects/46002-P-SS-IA0-002

Collaborations and Partnerships

Still, some developments may stimulate refugee entrepreneurship over time. In April 2023, the AfDB approved the Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Communities in South Sudan Project (ESRHC-SS) to enable entrepreneurship among refugee and host communities in Maban and Jamjang.[35] In April 2022, South Sudan became eligible to access resources from the International Development Association (IDA), Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) through the World Bank.[36] There is no publicly available information on developments related to this initiative since April 2022.

Although this project is well-documented online, in practice most of the staff of the implementing actors are not aware that the activities they are carrying out are components of this project. There appears to be a lack of detailed information flow from senior officials to field staff and stakeholders. The lack of detailed information may be partly because the project is new and not widely known. Most of the people we interviewed were not familiar with it. Project documents indicate that the project started in May 2023 and will end in April 2026.[37]

Box 6. Response on the ESRHC-SS

"The only hope is the implementation of Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Community in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS). We hope it will address structural issues such as weak private sector, conflict and instability, inadequate skills and education gap and inadequate legal frameworks that hinder refugees' access to employment opportunities and also focusing on enhancing economic rights and creating a conducive environment for refugees to work and safely improve the well-being of all refugees. These structural issues can be addressed by supporting initiatives that accelerate job creation, skill development, legal protection and support geared toward small businesses such as tax relief to all refugees operating businesses in the settlement just like now, we don't tax any refugee doing business within the settlement." – A key informant from the Commission for Refugee Affairs, July 2024

35. Early Warning System. "South Sudan: Entrepreneurship Support to Refugees and Host Communities in South Sudan (ESRHC-SS).(AFDB-P-SS-IA0-002)." Accessed September 1, 2023. https://ews.rightsindevelopment.org/projects/p-ss-ia0-002-south-sudan-entrepreneurship-support-to-refugees/
36. World Bank. "South Sudan Qualifies for Special Funds as It Plays Exemplary Host to Refugees." Accessed August 28, 2023. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/04/05/south-sudan-qualifies-for-special-funds-as-it-plays-exemplary-host-to-refugees
37. African Development Bank, "Project Appraisal Report," 2022, https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/south-sudan-entrepreneurship-support-refugees-and-host-communities-south-sudan-esrhc-ss-project-appraisal-report

5. Recommendations

Recommendations

1. **Humanitarian organisations supporting refugees should formalise employment of refugees.** Incentive-based employment is often practised in countries where organisations are subject to restrictions and are not allowed to hire refugees on a formal basis. This is not the case with South Sudan, where refugees have the right to work. Restricting refugees to low-paid incentive work when they have the right academic qualifications and skills can demoralise refugees' commitment to work, and it limits their progress towards self reliance. Instead, there should be a push to formalise refugee employment, ensuring fair wages and career development opportunities. International donors can support this shift by prioritising funding to organisations that facilitate the transition from incentive work to formal employment, ensuring that refugees have access to fair and sustainable employment. By formalising refugees' employment, humanitarian organisations can play a role in paving the way and sharing lessons with potential employers, and advocating for the benefits of refugee employment.

2. **The government should clarify when the process of issuing new IDs will begin.** At the time of writing, the government was not yet renewing expired refugee IDs. This meant that refugees with expired IDs were likely to miss out on employment opportunities should they become available. In general, the CRA and the UNHCR should communicate clearly about when IDs will be renewed. Not only would a public announcement about when the process will start give refugees hope, it would also enable them to provide proof to employers who may refuse to hire them because their ID has expired.

Recommendations

3. **The government should consider extending the ESRHC-SS and similar initiatives to other locations such as Gorom and Aweil Settlement to benefit more refugees.** Refugees face significant challenges in accessing formal employment due to limited employment opportunities. Self-employment appears to be a potential employment pathway for refugees, but refugees still have limited resources to access start-up capital. The ESRHC-SS is one of the initiatives that provides refugees with skills to engage in self-employment, but it is currently only being implemented in Maban and Jamjang. From November 2024 to October 2026, the government will be implementing the Sudan Refugee Crisis Response Project in South Sudan, funded by the African Development Bank Group, which aims to improve employment and livelihoods for refugees and host communities. We recommend that part of this funding be used to expand the ESRHC-SS to Gorom and provide refugees with start-up capital.

4. **The government should also consider integrating comprehensive digital skills training and improve access to technology in the ESRHC-SS and similar initiatives.** Refugees face significant challenges in accessing formal employment due to limited in-country job opportunities. To help refugees expand their sources of employment opportunities, another potential solution may be to equip refugees with digital skills that can help them access employment opportunities that allow people to work remotely around the world. As the ESRC-SS project provides vocational and skills training, it may consider introducing digital skills (e.g. digital marketing, graphic design, data analysis, web development), in all refugee camps where it is implemented. The Sudan Refugee Crisis Response Project could also include a digital skills training component.