



Art work by refugees at the Antonio Guterres Urban Refugee Community Centre in Kampala, Uganda.

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The value of volunteering – exploring the experiences of young refugees in Uganda

The role and impact of volunteering on the lives of young African refugees will be explored over the next two years as part of a major project, led by [Professor Matt Baillie Smith](#) of Northumbria University.

Funded through a grant of more than £860,000 from the [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) (GCRF) and [Economic and Social Research Council](#) (ESRC), the project will explore whether volunteering can build skills and reduce inequalities among young refugees in Uganda.

There are currently more than 70.8 million people displaced around the world, with 1.2 million of those seeking refuge in Uganda – the majority of them young people.

It is hoped the project will highlight the volunteering roles these young refugees are currently involved with, and the impact such volunteering has, both on local communities and the refugees themselves.

Professor Baillie Smith, co-director of Northumbria University's [Centre for International Development](#), is leading an international team of researchers.

They include Dr Aisling O'Loughlen of Northumbria; Dr Frank Ahimbisibwe and Dr Robert Turyamureeba of [Mbarara University of Science and Technology](#), Uganda; Professor Peter Kanyandago, Dr Cuthbert Tukundane and Dr Moses Okech of [Uganda Martyrs University](#); and Dr Sarah Mills of [Loughborough University](#).

The team will work closely with young people based in four settlements across Uganda, which are home to refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Somalia. All have fled their home countries due to conflict, disease and economic hardship.

Professor Baillie Smith said: "There can be a tendency to think about refugees as needing help, or as beneficiaries of aid. But we know many of the young refugees in Uganda are actively involved in volunteering themselves, and so we need to understand how this might benefit their communities as well as improving their skill set.

"They may not have the same access to skills and opportunities as other people their age, but by taking part in volunteering they are potentially making a real difference, to themselves and others around them.

"Although much research has been carried out into the role of volunteering generally, there is very little knowledge about this particular group of volunteers, so we are very excited to be working with these young people to understand more about their experiences."

Over the coming months the researchers will be carrying out interviews with the refugees and the organisations that work with them, as well as

conducting group workshops and surveys.

They will also be asking the young people to document their experiences of volunteering through participatory photography – giving them cameras and asking them to photograph their day-to-day life experiences.

These photos will then go on display to the public as part of a travelling exhibition, allowing the results of the research to be communicated all over the world.

As well as working directly with young refugees, the team will also collaborate with global South refugee NGOs, volunteers and leading global volunteering and development organisations.

Professor Baillie Smith said: “We are incredibly excited about working with such a great team on a topic of this importance.

“Volunteering is often discussed in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, but too often, it focuses on international and ‘gap year’ volunteers.

“By focusing on the different forms of volunteering undertaken by young refugees in Uganda, we can develop new knowledge of the potential role of volunteering in helping build their skills and livelihoods.

“Through this, and by working with our network of Ugandan and global partners, we hope to contribute to efforts to support young refugees, as well as ensuring their ideas and experiences of volunteering reach wider audiences and help challenge established thinking.”

Northumbria’s [Centre for International Development](#) has developed a reputation as a centre of excellence for sustainable development.

Over the last five years, academics from the Centre have worked on a variety of projects exploring volunteering, civil society, learning and care in the global South.

This includes research supported by the British Academy/Global Challenges Research Fund on young people and sustainable development in the

Occupied Palestinian Territories, a large collaborative research project on volunteers in conflicts and emergencies with the Swedish Red Cross, co-authorship of the International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent's (IFRC) Global Review on Volunteering, work on young people and climate change as part of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) GCRF Living Deltas hub, and collaborative PhDs with organisations including IFRC, Christian Aid and VSO.

The [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) (GCRF) is a five-year £1.5 billion funding stream, announced as part of the Government's 2015 spending review. It forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment, to support cutting-edge research which addresses the most pressing problems faced by developing countries.

Find out more about the Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda project at ryvu.org and read a blog from the project team about volunteering at ryvu.org/category/blogs/

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