

2024



Labor Mobility Pathways for Refugees in **Uganda**



01

Introduction

Refugee labor mobility programs require both employer demand as well as refugee talent. This report explores refugee talent from the lens of Uganda, sharing lessons and recommendations that can be applied more broadly as candidate recruitment and support efforts continue to grow worldwide.

Refugee situation in Uganda

Uganda is host to [more than 1.6 million refugees](#), including from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Eritrea, Burundi, Sudan, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. Uganda has a unique refugee [settlement policy](#), where refugees live either in dedicated settlements or in urban areas.

Those who are registered and live in settlements receive a small allotment of land to live on and to cultivate. Many of Uganda's refugee settlements are located close to Uganda's border areas, remote from Uganda's urban centers, and often with limited access to services and internet. Refugees living in settlements receive limited assistance, in addition to their land allotments, while refugees in urban areas do not receive rations or other



TBB Registration Fair, Kampala, Uganda, 2024

forms of aid. Refugees have freedom of movement and the [right to work](#), though refugees may struggle to access gainful employment given economic conditions in Uganda.

With rapidly decreasing resources available to refugees in Uganda, third country solutions become even more important. Opportunities for relocation through resettlement, family reunification, or refugee labor mobility demonstrate support for refugees and host communities. Opportunities for refugees to relocate also creates opportunities to send remittances to relatives who remain in Uganda or in countries of origin.

Introduction to refugee labor mobility

Millions of refugees around the world have skills and experience that make them well-equipped to address labor demands in countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States. Yet, millions also live in countries where legal systems prevent refugees from working at all, from working in skilled professions, or from gaining long-term status and stability, even if they have the right to work, as in Uganda. Globally, [governments consider far less than one percent of refugees for resettlement each year](#). Employment-based immigration pathways can expand durable solutions for refugees. In recent years, several governments have implemented programs that enable refugees to relocate on employment-based immigration programs and access durable solutions.



Families that have relocated through TBB report a 750% increase in income.

Refugee labor mobility can provide refugees with access to long-term residency, allow refugees to use their skills and training, and benefit employers and refugees' new communities. Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) has pioneered refugee labor mobility alongside policy makers and the private

sector in countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. TBB has demonstrated that by enhancing access to employment-based visa programs, refugees can access durable solutions using their skills and address labor demand in destination countries.

Families that have relocated through TBB report a [750% increase in income](#). 93% of employers who participated in TBB's program said that they were either "extremely likely" or "very likely" to recommend TBB's program to other employers. Refugee labor mobility benefits refugee communities overseas; 70% of relocated candidates [send remittances](#) to family and/or friends in difficult circumstances. Refugees fill a needed role for their employer, and also pay taxes on their income and purchases in their new communities.



Building refugee labor mobility programs means:

- Identifying employers in destination countries with labor demand and identifying roles they seek to fill through refugee labor mobility pathways.
- Identifying refugees with an interest in refugee labor mobility

opportunities. TBB developed a bespoke matching platform, the [Talent Catalog](#), where more than 100,000 refugees have registered their skills, experience, and interest in international employment opportunities.

- Matching refugees registered in the Talent Catalog with employers in need of their skills.
- Supporting refugees and employers in recruitment, visa application, relocation, and integration processes, ensuring compliance with ethical recruitment principles.
- Working with governments, employers, and licensing organizations to address obstacles that prevent qualified refugees from accessing visa pathways.

Refugee labor mobility pathways are employer-led, meaning that a refugee will have opportunities for relocation only if their skills and experience align with an employer's labor demand and they are selected by the employer.

Pathways for refugees in Uganda

Labor mobility pathways that may provide pathways for refugees in Uganda include:

- Australia: [Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Program](#), which allows refugees to access employment-based visas with accommodations for displaced individuals.
- Canada: [Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot](#), which provides permanent residence to displaced people with job offers from Canadian employers.
- United Kingdom: [Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot](#), which operates through the UK's Skilled Worker Program.

- **United States:** [Welcome Corps at Work](#), a hybrid resettlement, sponsorship, and employment program. Candidates may also relocate to the United States through employment-based visas.

Each pathway has its own requirements for eligibility criteria for those who can relocate through the program, the employers who can hire, and the roles that can be filled.

02 Refugee Labor Mobility in Uganda

In 2022, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) began partnering with Finn Church Aid (FCA) in Uganda to conduct outreach and to support refugees in Uganda to access employment opportunities internationally. With support and collaboration from TBB, FCA, and UNHCR, 2,063 refugees in Uganda registered on the Talent Catalog prior to April 22, 2024.

Candidate engagement fair in April 2024

In April 2024, Talent Beyond Boundaries [organized a fair for refugees in Uganda](#) to share information with refugees who are potential candidates for refugee labor mobility and to support their registration on the Talent Catalog.

The fair was supported with financial resources from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration through a consortium with the International Refugee Committee, and co-led by Finn Church Aid. UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council provided significant logistical and staffing support as well.

The registration fair advanced three purposes:

- First, to inform at least 250 potential refugee candidates about labor mobility opportunities and to support at least 250 members of refugee communities in Uganda to register on the Talent Catalog.
- Second, to advance TBB's understanding of the professional background of refugee candidates in Uganda. Refugee labor mobility is employer-led, and a deep understanding of candidates' professional skills and expertise is vital to TBB's effective engagement with employers.
- Third, to strengthen ties with partner organizations in Uganda, with on the ground collaboration between TBB, FCA, UNHCR, IRC, and NRC.

On each of four days (two in the Kyaka II settlement and two in Kampala), event staff provided presentations about refugee labor mobility and Talent Catalog registration followed by personalized support for Talent Catalog registration.



FCA and UNHCR identified candidates for invitations to the candidate engagement fair based on information about their professional experience, and refugees who were not specifically invited were also included to participate.

Candidates' professional experiences

During the four days of the fair, we introduced **over 400** refugees to opportunities to relocate abroad for work and we helped those interested to register their skills in TBB's Talent Catalog. Additionally, **more than 200** candidates with existing Talent Catalog registrations received one-on-one support to strengthen their CVs. Moreover, since the conclusion of the registration week, the high rates of registration have continued, with **more than 400** registering or updating their profiles again in the week following the registration fair.

The key areas of candidate experience among those who registered during the fair are:

- Healthcare workers (pharmacists, nurses, physicians, etc)
- Social workers and aid workers
- Computer programmers and information technology specialists
- Skilled trades (electricians, construction workers, plumbers, mechanics, skilled manufacturing)
- Engineers (civil, electrical, and mechanical)



03

Opportunities

This section identifies opportunities for stakeholders to expand refugees' access to refugee labor mobility pathways.

Internet access

Many settlements in Uganda have limited access to internet connectivity. While refugees often have internet access via mobile phones, challenges include limited wireless access, limited or infrequent access to electricity, and limited funds to pay for phone data.

Additionally, while many candidates have strong familiarity with internet access and digital literacy on phones, many have limited experience working from a computer or typing on a keyboard.

This means that organizations and networks supporting refugees have significant opportunities to expand access to pathways, from registering on the Talent Catalog or updating the Talent Catalog profile, to accessing courses or opportunities for training, corresponding with service providers about training or employment opportunities, and accessing interviews.



Refugees may have registration fatigue or demonstrate understandable frustration at being asked to provide similar information multiple times.

Other opportunities lie with service providers to improve the accessibility of our own systems. Several refugees expressed that, to attend the registration fair, they were requested to register their attendance, in addition to their refugee registration, and then to register again on the Talent Catalog (in addition to any other registrations that they may also be requested to complete for other pathways or programs). Refugees may have registration fatigue or demonstrate understandable frustration at being asked to provide similar information multiple times.

In addition, service providers including TBB can take steps to ensure that our software, training opportunities, and access to pathways, are accessible for individuals with intermittent or limited internet access, and to strive for continuous improvement of the Talent Catalog's user experience.

Language

Most candidates in Uganda are multilingual. Many Congolese candidates, for example, speak Kikongo or Lingala, Swahili, and French. To expand the number of candidates who are competitive for refugee labor mobility roles, service providers can promote training opportunities to build candidates' English skills. However, service providers like TBB who engage in advocacy with governments and employer recruitment can also expand labor mobility opportunities by generating pathways to countries for people with other language skills. For example, supporting employers who seek to fill roles for French speakers can expand opportunities for candidates who speak French but not English.



Vocational training

Similarly, expanding the number of refugees who can access pathways should involve sharing information about pathways to ensure that refugees who may benefit from refugee labor mobility pathways know how to register on the Talent Catalog.

But service providers can also expand training opportunities that assist refugees in maintaining their professional skills, document their existing skills, or develop new skills. One key opportunity is to identify vocational training already occurring for refugees to engage in the Ugandan labor market, where they are authorized to work, and to ensure that individuals receiving training are informed about opportunities to access labor mobility pathways. Another opportunity is to develop vocational training that aligns with work opportunities in Uganda and in places like the United States. For example, solar panel installation training could benefit candidates who seek to remain in and work in Uganda as well as those who seek third-country immigration options.

Partnerships

Finally, supporting candidates to access employment opportunities requires engagement of a variety of stakeholders. Organizations that provide on-the-ground support for refugees in Uganda need ongoing funding and support to maintain and expand their services. Efforts to provide individualized candidate counseling and support are effective, yet resource-intensive.



Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) have a unique pulse on the communities in Uganda, including new arrivals, and can be activated to support the referral of refugees to refugee labor mobility pathways [...]

As more countries invest in labor mobility pathways and more employers sign on to hire, additional support is required by on-the-ground partners, who have responsibilities to counsel and register candidates, nominate candidates for specific job opportunities, gather significant information from candidates, and provide support with interview preparation, securing internet access and technology to attend the interview, and counseling the candidate through a decision to relocate once a job offer is extended.

Additionally, the opportunity to engage refugee led organizations as a key part of these efforts should not be missed. Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) have a unique pulse on the communities in Uganda, including new arrivals, and can be activated to support the referral of refugees to refugee labor mobility pathways, as well as dissemination of key information to refugee communities. Their voices can be uplifted and included in the design and implementation of programs to ensure program success and high quality experiences for refugee candidates.

Notes

Funding for this publication was provided by the United States Government. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.