

The ZFD Rwanda Refugee Programme

Supporting peaceful coexistence between host and refugee communities

The challenge

The recurring rebel atrocities against the local population in Eastern DR Congo and the 2015 election crisis in Burundi have led thousands of Congolese and Burundian citizens to flee their homes and seek refuge in Rwanda. As of November 2023, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counts 134,930 refugees in the country's four refugee camps, five refugee centres and urban areas.

As a result of the stressful experiences through which they are living, coupled with the need to adapt to a new environment, refugees face unexpected challenges and several vulnerabilities, such as insufficient resources and living space, restrictions on some of their rights and unemployment. This situation can lead to conflicts and violence both within refugee camps and between host and refugee communities.

Refugees and Rwandans live in close coexistence and often share the same infrastructure and the limited resources at their disposal, while prejudice and mistrust due to inequality and unequal treatment exist on both sides. Against this backdrop, in cooperation with the Rwandan Ministry in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) the Civil Peace Service (ZFD by its German acronym) refugee programme focuses its interventions on contributing to peaceful coexistence between host and refugee communities through violence prevention and conflict transformation.

Our approach

The intervention started in 2014 as a component of the GIZ Rwanda ZFD programme. In 2022 it became an independent programme. Contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), its two fields of activity are:

- Peace education and conflict transformation.
- Psychosocial support.

To strengthen a culture of peace among host and refugee communities, the ZFD programme builds on the expertise in peacebuilding of its local partner organizations: Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle (VJN), Ejo Youth Echo (EYE), Église Evangélique des Amis au Rwanda (EEAR), the Legal Aid Forum (LAF), the National Organization of Professional Trauma Counsellors (ARCT-Ruhuka) and Life Wounds Healing Association (LIWOHA). Through the use of creative and interactive methods, such as conflict sensitive media production, educational cinema, forum theatre, and sports, young people practice constructive ways of dealing with conflicts and promotion of dialogue and build mutual understanding. Additionally, the Programme trains service providers and works with local leaders from in and around the camps on conflict management techniques. Regarding psychosocial interventions, together with its partners, the Programme strengthens people's mental health and helps them overcome trauma. Using community-based psychosocial mechanisms, it promotes social skills, knowledge on mental health conditions, representation of interests and networking. The Do-No-Harm approach frames all these interventions.

The team involved in the Programme consists of four GIZ national personnel and three international peace advisors which support partners organizations' peacebuilding activities.

Project name	Promoting peaceful coexistence through psychosocial support, peace education, and non-violent conflict resolution for refugee and host communities
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Rwanda
Lead executing agency	Civil Peace Service (Ziviler Friedensdienst, ZFD)
Duration	2014 - 2026



L. to r. A group of couples living in the host communities realizes relaxations exercises in the framework of healing sessions organized by LIWOHA. A group of people in Mugombwa refugee camp read the magazine "Nyiramubande" entirely produced by young refugees and youth from the host communities with the support of Ejo Youth Echo.

The benefits

The ZFD refugee programme implements activities in and around Kigeme, Mugombwa and Mahama refugee camps as well as with Huye urban refugee population. Located in the Southern and Eastern Provinces of Rwanda, these camps currently host a total number of 90,869 refugees (UNHCR 2023), mainly from DR Congo and Burundi.

Two major changes have impacted the work of the ZFD partners in Mahama refugee camp, demanding a rapid adaptation of ongoing projects: the voluntary repatriation to Burundi of 29,525 Burundian refugees from Mahama refugee camp since August 2020 (UNHCR 2022) and the relocation of Congolese refugees from Gihembe to Mahama in December 2021.

The main target group of the projects implemented jointly by ZFD and its partners are young persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years, who get involved in cultural and sports activities, as well as community work. In doing so, they learn to analyse conflicts and identify their root causes, and how to manage them without resorting to violence. These youths become then role models, raising awareness on peacebuilding methods in their communities. When it comes to mental health, the ZFD programme is offering capacity building opportunities to community-based psychosocial workers who reach out to refugees and host community members. The Programme's partners train them on dealing with stress and trauma, active listening and different approaches to support individuals in crisis, couples in conflict and victims of violence. Another initiative is the organisation of peace dialogues in the three camps, a monthly forum in which leaders from the refugee camps and host communities exchange and take actions on issues affecting both camps and host communities.

In addition, the ZFD refugee programme strengthens its partners gender work, contributing to greater equity and the reduction of gender-based violence in and around the camps. By allying with key actors and other GIZ projects, it facilitates the access to employment opportunities, internships, apprenticeships, and junior positions for young refugees.

An example from the field

In 2012, Congolese families fled from the violence of armed groups in their home country to neighbouring Rwanda. While in a transit centre in the North of Rwanda, the Congolese youths began taking part in activities organized by VJN. This Rwandan organisation was founded in 2002 with the goal of developing talents and capacities

of young people for their involvement in the process of sustainable socio-economic development. It has been a ZFD partner since 2010 and it is both part of the Great Lakes ZFD regional programme (see different factsheet) and the ZFD refugee programme.

Staff of VJN offered these Congolese youths training on theatre and supported them in forming a theatre group. This is how *Mapendo* (love, in Swahili) was born. From the transit camp, the young actors and their families were relocated to Mugombwa refugee camp, in the South-East of Rwanda where they continue receiving training from VJN and get increasingly professional in their performing capacity. Currently, the group is formed by 30 young actors, living in the camp as well as in the surrounding communities. All of them are very proud to use their talents to contribute to dialogue in the communities and to support each other in these difficult times.

During the Covid-19 crisis, when participatory theatre performances were not possible, they started making short films about social issues affecting their lives (e.g., early pregnancies) and posted them on the group's own YouTube channel, so that they can still reach the community with their positive messages.



Four members of the theater group Mapendo and, in a blue vest, Bienfait Uwizeye, a Local Peace Advisor for the partner organization Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle, at the youth center in Mugombwa refugee camp.

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