

## Refugee Olympic Athletes from Syria

Photos and video are available at <https://media.unhcr.org/olympics>

### Rami Anis, 25

- Country of origin: Syria
- Country of asylum: Belgium
- Sport: swimming, 100-metre butterfly

Rami Anis started formal swimming training as a 14-year-old growing up in Aleppo. As bombings and kidnappings there grew more frequent, his family put him on a flight to Istanbul to live with an older brother who was studying Turkish. As months turned to years, Rami used the time to hone his swimming technique at the Galatasaray Sports Club. Yet, without Turkish nationality, he was unable to swim in competitions. Determined to prove himself, Rami rode an inflatable dinghy to the Greek island of Samos. Eventually he reached the Belgian town of Ghent, where he's been training nine times a week with former Olympic swimmer Carine Verbauwen.

### Yusra Mardini, 18

- Country of origin: Syria
- Country of asylum: Germany
- Sport: swimming, 200-metre freestyle

Before the war in Syria, Yusra was a competitive swimmer who represented her country in international competitions. As the conflict intensified, she and her sister fled their home in Damascus, first reaching Beirut, then Istanbul and finally Izmir. They boarded a dinghy to cross the Mediterranean, but the flimsy vessel started taking on water and threatened to capsize. Yusra jumped in the water and began pushing the boat towards Greece. After arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos, she travelled north with a group of asylum-seekers, occasionally turning to people-smugglers, and reached Berlin in September 2015. Since then, Yusra has been training with the club Wasserfreunde Spandau 04.

### Syria background

Now in its sixth year of conflict, Syria has become the world's largest refugee-producing country. An estimated 11.7 million Syrians had been forced to flee their homes by the end of 2015 – including 4.9 million refugees, 6.6 million internally displaced people and nearly 250,000 asylum-seekers. Some 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, and an entire generation of children is at risk of being a lost generation. UNHCR is on the ground coordinating a massive refugee response throughout the region and leading efforts to protect and provide shelter for those displaced inside Syria – working with partners across conflict lines to provide life-saving assistance under extremely dangerous circumstances.

For more information, visit the Syria Regional Refugee Response data portal:  
<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

## Refugee Olympic Athletes from South Sudan

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### Yiech Pur Biel, 21

- Country of origin: South Sudan
- Country of asylum: Kenya
- Sport: Athletics, 800m

Forced to flee the fighting in southern Sudan – present-day South Sudan – in 2005, Yiech sought protection in Kakuma refugee camp, in northern Kenya. He began playing football, but eventually turned to running, as it gave him more independence. In 2015, he learned that the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation was organizing athletics trials in Kakuma. He participated, showed promising results and was selected to join the foundation, where he has been training ever since.

### James Nyang Chiengjiek, 28

- Country of origin: South Sudan
- Country of asylum: Kenya
- Sport: Athletics, 400m

At the age of 13, James fled his home in what was then southern Sudan to avoid being kidnapped by rebels who were forcibly recruiting child soldiers. As a refugee in Kakuma camp, in northern Kenya, he attended school in a highland town known for its runners and joined a group of older boys training for long-distance events. UNHCR told him about the trials being held by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation, which he joined in 2013.

### Anjelina Nadai Lohalith, 21

- Country of origin: South Sudan
- Country of asylum: Kenya
- Sport: Athletics, 1500m

Anjelina Nadai Lohalith was forced to flee her home in southern Sudan when she was six years old. She has not seen, or spoken to, her family since. After arriving in Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, she began winning school competitions in athletics. She was soon selected for a special training camp organized by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation, where she has been training with professional coaches.

### Rose Nathike Lokonyen, 23

- Country of origin: South Sudan
- Country of asylum: Kenya
- Sport: Athletics, 800m

Rose and her family fled the violence in southern Sudan and in 2002 and settled in Kakuma refugee camp, in northern Kenya. Her parents returned to their home country in 2008, but

she and her siblings stayed in Kenya. She was discovered during a school competition and joined the training camp organized by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation in Nairobi.

## **Paulo Amotun Lokoro 24**

- Country of origin: South Sudan
- Country of asylum: Kenya
- Sport: Athletics, 1500m

Just a few short years ago, Paulo was a young herder guarding his family's few cattle on the plains of what is now South Sudan. He fled the unrest in his home country and joined his mother in Kakuma refugee camp, in the north of Kenya. Living in the camp, Paulo excelled in school sports and ultimately gained a spot on the refugee squad that has been training near Nairobi under the guidance of Tegla Loroupe.

## **South Sudan background**

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan just over five years ago, in July 2011, but its short history has been a troubled one. Conflict erupted in December 2013, causing immense suffering and producing one of the world's worst displacement situations. A peace agreement formally ended the civil war in August 2015, but instability has spread to previously unaffected areas in the Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal regions. This past month, July 2016, deadly clashes throughout the country caused over 41,000 South Sudanese to flee. Some 2.5 million South Sudanese are now displaced, including 1.69 million people inside the country and 831,500 refugees seeking protection in neighbouring countries, primarily in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda.

In addition to the runners competing for the Refugee Olympic Team, this year for the first time a team will participate in the Olympics under the South Sudanese flag.

For more information, visit the South Sudan Situation data portal:

<http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php>

## Refugee Olympic Athletes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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### Yolande Mabika, 28

- Country of origin: Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Country of asylum: Brazil
- Sport: Judo, middleweight

Fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) separated Yolande from her parents when she was a young child. She remembers little else from that time but running alone and being picked up by a helicopter that took her to the capital, Kinshasa. There, living in a centre for displaced children, she discovered judo. She represented the DRC in international judo tournaments. After years of training under repressive conditions, she decided, along with her friend and teammate Popole (see below), to seek asylum in Brazil during the World Judo Championships in Rio in 2013. She currently trains at the Instituto Reação in Rio de Janeiro.

### Popole Misenga, 24

- Country of origin: Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Country of asylum: Brazil
- Sport: Judo, middleweight

Popole was just nine years old when he fled fighting in Kisangani, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Separated from his family, he was rescued after eight days in the forest and taken to the capital, Kinshasa. He lived for years in a centre for internally displaced people, where he discovered judo and honed his skills. He began representing the DRC in major competitions but decided to seek asylum in Brazil during the 2003 World Judo Championships in order to escape the ongoing violence in his home country. He currently trains at the Instituto Reação in Rio de Janeiro.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo background

Fighting between the Congolese army and rebel forces has forced tens of thousands of people to flee the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and seek refuge abroad. There are currently close to 517,408 refugees from the DRC in the surrounding region, which was the sixth largest source country of refugees at the end of 2015. Another 1.5 million people are displaced inside the country, including more than 610,000 in North Kivu.

The nation is also host to a large number of refugees. The crises in Burundi, Central African Republic and South Sudan have forced 62,400 people to seek asylum in the DRC during the past year, bringing the country's total refugee population to 383,100. At the end of 2015 it ranked ninth among refugee-hosting countries.

For more information, visit the DRC Regional Refugee Response data portal:  
<http://data.unhcr.org/drc/regional.php>

## Refugee Olympic Athlete from Ethiopia

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### Yonas Kinde, 36

- Country of origin: Ethiopia
- Country of asylum: Luxembourg
- Sport: Athletics, marathon

Yonas has been living as a refugee in Luxembourg for the past five years. He works as a sports masseuse to earn a living, and trains as much as he can to become a better runner. He has competed in many marathons and reached the qualifying standards for Rio during the Frankfurt in October 2015, which he completed in the impressive time of 2 hours and 17 minutes. He currently trains at the national school of physical education and sports in Luxembourg.

### Ethiopia background

At the end of 2015, about 736,100 people were seeking refuge in Ethiopia, principally from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. The country thus hosts the fifth-largest refugee population in the world, as well as the largest refugee population in sub-Saharan Africa. Some Ethiopian citizens individuals, like Yonas, have claimed asylum abroad in the past years for mixed reasons.