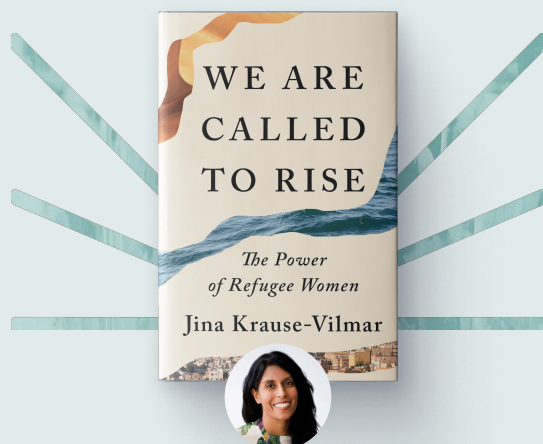




We Are Called to Rise

by Jina Krause-Vilmar

The Power of Refugee Women

Five Questions with Author Jina Krause-Vilmar

By Melinda French Gates

Stories can change everything.

The stories people tell us about their lives. The stories we tell ourselves about what's possible. The stories we come across on a page.

And change is exactly what *We Are Called to Rise: The Power of Refugee Women* invites readers to be a part of.

The latest title from [Moment of Lift Books](#), *We Are Called to Rise* shines a light on the lives of some truly remarkable women, as well as the persistent, overlooked challenges that keep safety and stability out of reach for so many. In telling their stories, author Jina Krause-Vilmar invites you to think more deeply about power, freedom, and what it takes to create meaningful progress.

After I read *We Are Called to Rise*, I wanted to go deeper, so I asked Jina few questions about its most important takeaways.

Melinda: One of the reasons you wrote this book was to challenge people's perceptions about refugee women. What do you wish more people understood about their lives? And what do we tend to get wrong?

Jina: I wish more people understood that refugee women are not passive recipients of aid waiting for someone else to solve their problems. Rather, they are experts in navigating complexity in environments that offer them few choices.

If we listen to refugee women, we can learn not only how to better support women who've been displaced, but how to design systems that give all women more safety, economic power, and genuine choice.

Melinda: You introduce us to some unforgettable women in *We Are Called to Rise*. Tell us about one whose journey has stayed with you.

Jina: I often think about Aamina, an Ethiopian refugee I met in Nairobi.

She made and sold injera to nearby shops and hotels, saving what she could when business was good because she knew there would be days she couldn't work—like on Fridays, when police patrolled the neighborhood, confiscating goods or demanding bribes.

Her story changed how I think about opportunity. It isn't simply about finding work; it's being able to move safely, do that work without harassment, and keep what you earn.

Melinda: Refugee women often overcome extraordinary challenges on their journeys to safety, only to encounter new barriers once they arrive in a new country. What are some of the biggest obstacles that keep them from rebuilding their lives?

Jina: Refugee women often encounter three intertwined barriers: limited legal rights, access to resources, and social permission—all of which shape the choices available to them.

More than half of refugees cannot legally work in their country of refuge, pushing many into informal economies where they have greater exposure to exploitation, such as withheld pay, sexual and physical abuse, or predatory customers. Meanwhile, access to jobs, housing, and childcare often depends on social networks that refugees may not have the time, safety, or spaces to build.

And then there are the gender norms that determine what work a woman can get, what compensation she can expect, what she can wear, where she can travel. Displacement can force women to accept the social consequences of stepping outside those norms, because they have few options but to enter public spaces, and take on work.

Melinda: I believe that if you lift up women, you lift up everyone. I came away from your book thinking that's especially true for refugee women. Can you share some of the ways communities and economies benefit when refugee women have the support they need?

Jina: Absolutely. One study that I find especially compelling found that closing employment and earnings gaps for refugee women could add as much as \$1.4 trillion to global GDP every year—roughly the annual GDP of the Netherlands or Indonesia.

Equally important, refugee women are pushing systems to change; in Lebanon and Jordan, for example, refugee women have advanced labor protections such as standardized working hours, minimum wages, and the right to retain their travel documents. They are showing us how to build a better system for everyone.

Melinda: Even though you don't turn away from the heartbreaking challenges that refugee women face, this book left me feeling hopeful; it made me think that change is possible if the right people take action. What exactly will it take to create more opportunities for refugee women to thrive?

Jina: I want every person to walk away knowing that each of us can create change—and that change often begins with small acts. A person who speaks up, shares a job lead, challenges an unfair practice, or stands beside a refugee woman can make a difference. We don't always see the impact immediately, but those actions amplify.

But this does require us to be in relationship with one another—to be the social connective tissue that makes action possible. When women build community, they create forms of support that formal systems often don't provide. They become one another's childcare, job leads, translators, crisis responders, and advocates.

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