

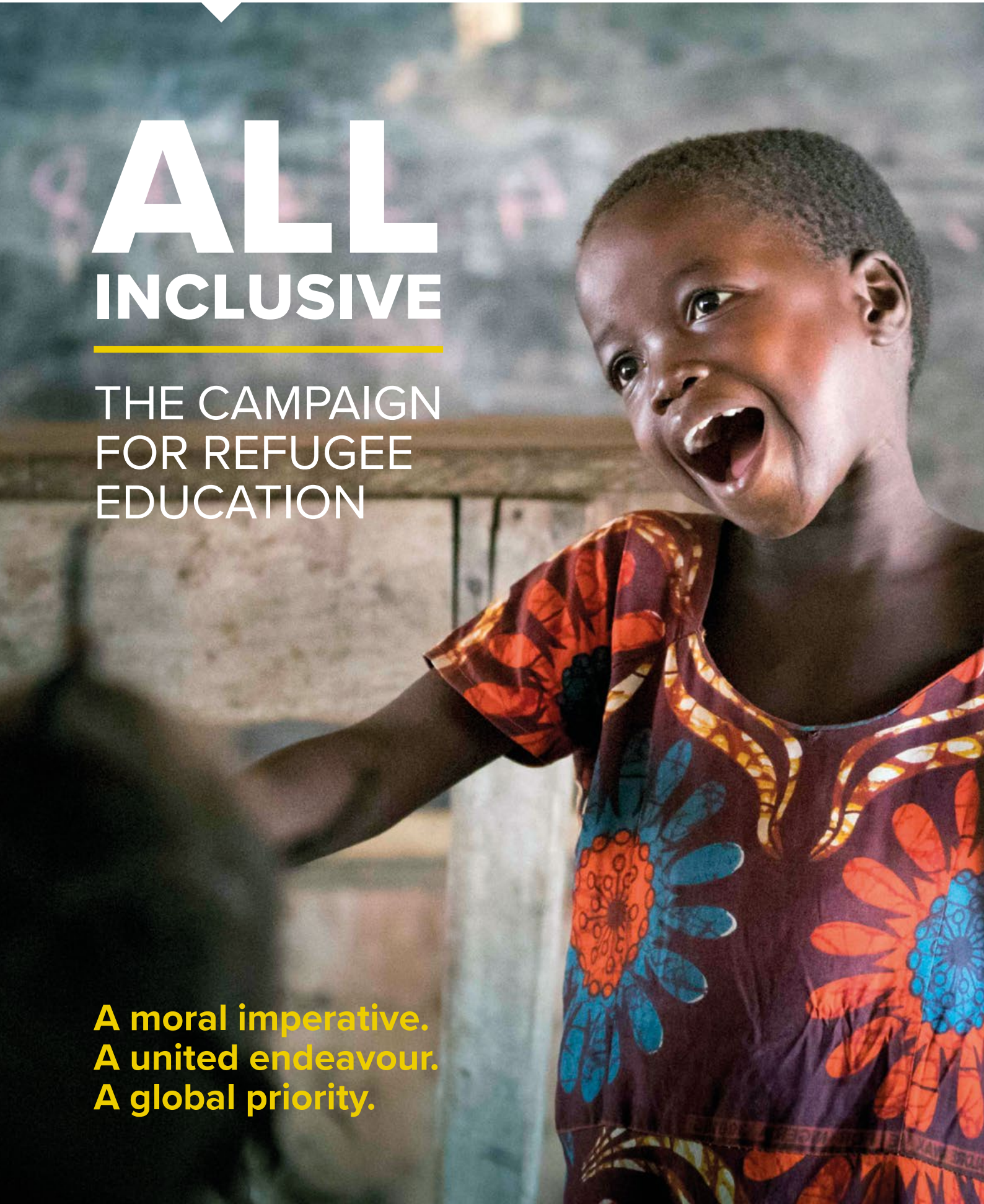


UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

ALL INCLUSIVE

THE CAMPAIGN
FOR REFUGEE
EDUCATION

**A moral imperative.
A united endeavour.
A global priority.**



ABOUT THIS REPORT

The 2022 UNHCR Refugee Education Report tells the stories of some of the more than 10 million refugee children of school age¹ under UNHCR's mandate, including school-aged Venezuelans displaced abroad. It also highlights the aspirations of refugee youth eager to continue learning after secondary level, as well as the hopes and ambitions of teachers in refugee and host communities. It advocates for strong partnerships to break down the barriers to education for millions of refugee children, and calls for a renewed effort to include refugees, including refugee teachers, in national education systems.

Data on refugee enrolments and population numbers is drawn from UNHCR country operations and refers to the 2020-2021 academic year. The report also references the latest available data on enrolment and out-of-school

children and youth from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

The increasing complexity of humanitarian emergencies involving forced displacement presents several challenges when it comes to data collection. In addition, commendable progress in the incorporation of refugees in national education systems creates additional challenges, such as a lack of data on student enrolment disaggregated by protection status – an issue that is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Where refugees are incorporated into national systems, it is often difficult to keep track of when and where they are accessing education. In other contexts, where some refugees attend camp schools and others public schools, data reported by country operations is only on camp-based populations (and thus not representative of all school-aged refugees).

With such limitations taken into account, the data received gives us a picture – albeit an incomplete one – of the state of education for refugee learners. The message is clear: we are still a long way away from the full participation of refugees in exercising their right to education.

¹ Calculated for 2021, counting the number of children of pre-primary, primary and secondary age in countries reporting data and applying the ratio to the global population of refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad – for more information on refugee demographics, see UNHCR's annual report *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021*. This out-of-school data does not account for the Ukraine refugee situation since the conflict began in February 2022.



📷 Cameroonian refugee children and their Nigerian host-community peers play together at St Peter's Primary School in Cross River State. © UNHCR/Lucy Agiende

CONTENTS

Foreword by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees	4
The numbers that tell the story	6
What we can learn from the data on refugee enrolment.....	6
The rate of change is not changing the game.....	6
Inequality influences access to education.....	7
Amid a learning crisis, glimmers of success.....	8
Classrooms that are full to bursting.....	8
Case study: Budding Ukrainian architect is building her future in a Polish school	10
A refugee’s journey: How I never gave up on education, my first husband	12
Case study: Teachers team up to boost learning power	14
Case study: Chad embraces refugee learners but new schools run out of room	16
Into the fold: The Case for Inclusion	18
A User’s Guide: Building inclusive education systems	20
Case study: Lawful reality moves closer for scholarship girl with visual impairment	22
Keep taking the tablets: digital project brings world closer to learners	24
Case study: Schoolteachers in Honduras face threats in the classroom and out	26
Forces for change: How to finance refugee education	28
The Final Word by Sir Lewis Hamilton	30



FOREWORD

INCLUDE REFUGEES IN THE DRIVE TO TRANSFORM GLOBAL EDUCATION

BY FILIPPO GRANDI
UN HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

National education systems must find a place for children and youth who have been forced to flee home if they are to have a chance of rebuilding and succeeding

Talent is universal. Opportunity is not.

Over the past few months, as I have travelled around the world to see the impact of humanitarian emergencies and the pernicious effects of protracted situations of forced displacement, I have often reflected on this saying. Because for millions of refugee children and youth, it accurately describes their reality.

No matter where they are, when people are forced to flee their homes, the lives of children are always thrown into turmoil. I have met many young refugees who had been attending school or university, acquiring fresh knowledge and skills, seeing friends, revising for exams – in short, preparing for their futures. All it took was one day, one moment when their lives were in danger, for all that to be taken away.

Once access to education has been lost, it is not easy to reclaim it. More than four in five refugees live in low and middle-income countries, and more than a quarter are located in the world's least developed countries.² Some young learners simply may not have a school to go to. Others have to balance the cost of books, stationery, transport and fees against the cost of eating, seeing a doctor, having a roof over their heads, or keeping the lights on at home.

In such circumstances, the concept of “opportunity” must seem alien and remote.

Many refugee children live in protracted crises, and even before the COVID-19 pandemic, roughly half were not in school. With the numbers of forcibly displaced rising every year for the past decade, millions of refugee children and youth are being squeezed out of educational opportunities.

Unless this is addressed, UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 – “to ensure inclusive and equality quality education and promote lifelong learning for all” – will not be fulfilled.

² *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021* - UNHCR.



How do we turn the tide?

We need a massive collective effort to ensure that refugee children and youth are educated by well-trained and qualified teachers, using formal, up-to-date and accredited curricula, with access to learning materials that are relevant and of good quality. That means developing and enacting strong policies that ensure the inclusion of young refugees in host countries' national education systems.

In turn, those countries need the financial resources to be able to include displaced children in their systems. Education is an investment in development, human rights and peace. This is not a time to reduce overseas development aid and thus cut the resources for education; it is a time to invest in human futures – in budding builders, creators and peacemakers. In the case of refugees, it is an investment in the people who will rebuild their countries of origin when they are able to safely return home.

On the ground, UNHCR and its many partners need continued and increased support so we can press on with our work: ensuring that teachers get paid; building, extending and renovating school infrastructure; working with communities to understand the value and rewards of education for their children and youth; providing safe access and transport to and from schools; and many more tasks.

The past few years have yielded some significant progress. The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees has done an enormous amount to muster support for the work of UNHCR and its partners in the field of education – notably by inspiring the crucial policy changes that are broadening the inclusion of refugees in formal education systems. Now we need to match these changes with substantial and sustained financing, and to press home the advantage on policies of inclusion.

This year, UNHCR's annual education report coincides with the Transforming Education Summit, convened by the UN Secretary-General and taking place during the 77th session of the General Assembly. The Summit aims to mobilize action, ambition, solidarity and solutions with a view to transforming education between now and 2030 – ideals and ambitions I wholeheartedly endorse.

It is essential that refugee children and youth are included in this transformation. Investing in their education is a collective task with far-reaching collective rewards. It will contribute to a more peaceful, more resilient world. It will close that yawning gap between talent and opportunity. The costs of failing to do so will be immense.

“Over the past few months, from Ukraine to the Sahel to Bangladesh and beyond, I have met refugees brimming with enthusiasm and a hunger to learn.”

📍 High Commissioner Grandi with teenage Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. © UNHCR/Kamrul Hasan

This is not a question of refugees lacking interest in education. Over the past few months, from Ukraine to the Sahel to Bangladesh and beyond, I have met refugees brimming with enthusiasm and a hunger to learn. These young people have a right to an education – and not just a few lessons in a makeshift school covering a couple of subjects, but a quality education over a full cycle within an official education system.

The importance of including refugee children and youth in formal education systems, and of strengthening those systems, cannot be overstated. Even before the pandemic, the share of children who cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10 was estimated by the World Bank³ at 57 per cent in low and middle-income countries, and 86 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where millions of refugees live. Poor quality education and lack of access to schools and colleges are hardly issues confined to refugees – they affect hundreds of millions of children. But there is no doubt that young refugees suffer from them acutely.

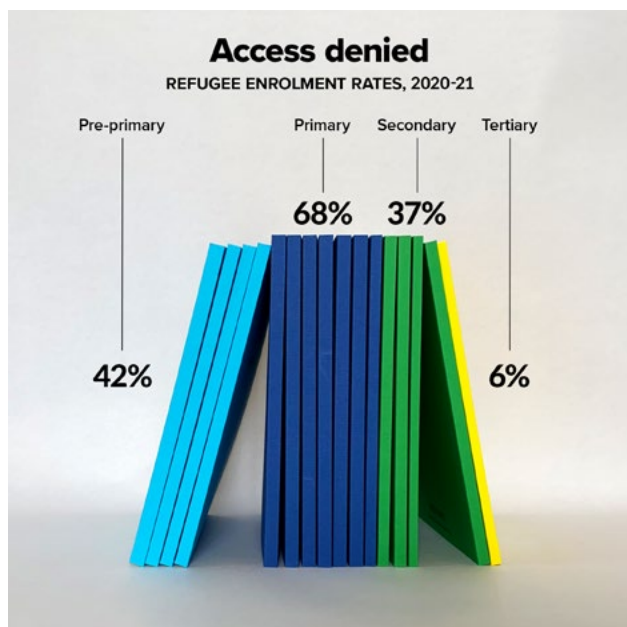
³ *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update* - World Bank & others.

THE NUMBERS THAT TELL THE STORY

What we can learn from the data on refugee enrolment

Data from more than 40 countries across the world has enabled UNHCR to paint the clearest picture yet of the state of refugee education – and illustrate how refugee children and youth are falling behind their non-refugee peers when it comes to access to an inclusive quality education.

The rate of change is not changing the game



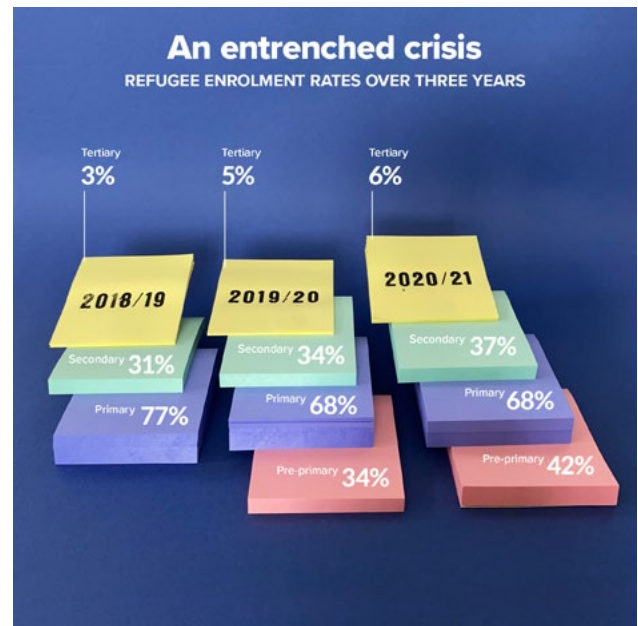
Average gross enrolment rates⁴ at primary level stood at 68 per cent, almost unchanged from the previous year. For secondary education, however, the rate is significantly lower at 37 per cent. At pre-primary level, the enrolment rate was 42 per cent.

Enrolment at tertiary level has risen to 6 per cent.⁵ While this is well below global levels, particularly in wealthier countries, this is still a considerable improvement on recent years, when refugee enrolment at the tertiary

⁴ Gross enrolment rates are defined as the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education (UNESCO-UIS, 2020).

⁵ There were 33 countries reporting higher education data for the academic year 2020-21.

level stood as low as 1 per cent. UNHCR continues to work towards 15 per cent enrolment of young refugees in tertiary education by 2030 (the [15by30](#) target), with the [DAFI programme](#) the cornerstone of this ambition.⁶



Refugee boys do slightly better than girls in terms of enrolment, with 68 to 67 per cent at primary level and 36 to 34 at secondary.⁷

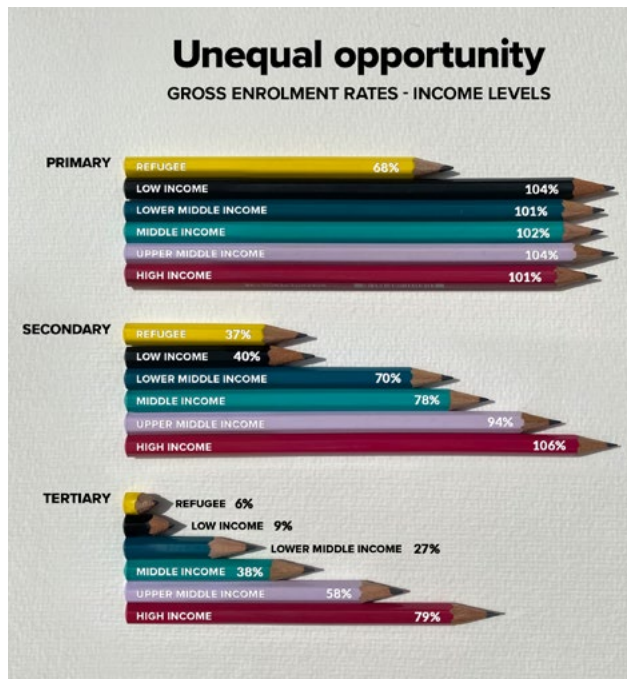


⁶ In 2021, 43 per cent of DAFI students were studying in Ethiopia, the Republic of Türkiye, Pakistan, Kenya and the Islamic Republic of Iran, countries that host some of the largest refugee populations worldwide.

⁷ Calculated average for countries reporting gender-disaggregated data. Not all reporting countries providing enrolment figures provide gender-disaggregated data; hence the slight discrepancy with the overall secondary enrolment rate.

Although there are many difficulties in gathering complete and accurate data in these challenging environments, according to the latest estimates in a report by Education Cannot Wait, the UN's global fund for education, around half of all school-age refugee children (48 per cent) are not in school.

Inequality influences access to education



Given that enrolment rates vary greatly around the world, depending on the financial resources and infrastructure available to different countries, a direct comparison with the international average does not tell us very much. Fairer, and more revealing, is a comparison of enrolment with different income levels around the world – and it is clear just how far young refugees have to go before they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

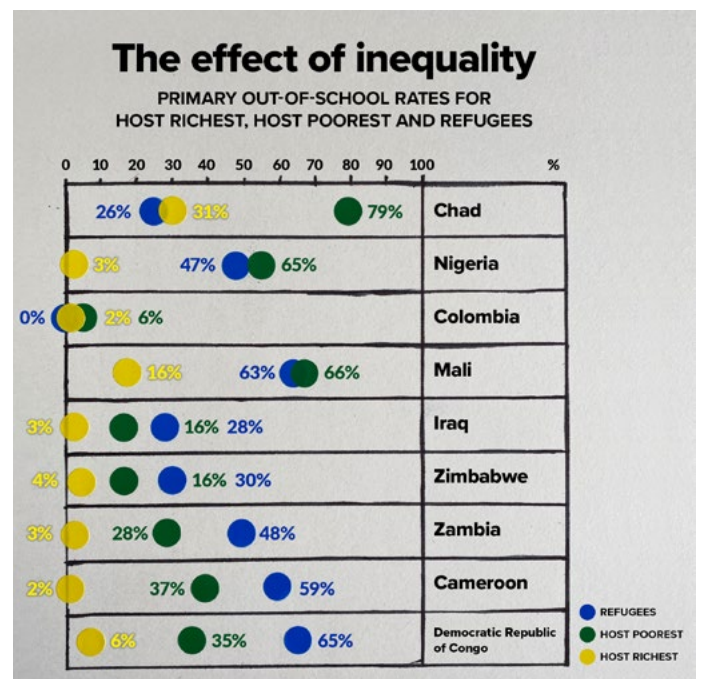
Across the board, from low to high-income states,⁸ primary gross enrolment rates are close to 100 per cent, far above the level for refugees. At secondary level, however, the picture is different: enrolment rates drop off according to which income bracket a country is in – and only low-income countries have a rate that is closer to the corresponding figure for refugees.

⁸ The figures reflect the income groups of the World Bank currently in use by UNESCO-UIS: 1) low income; 2) lower-middle income; 3) middle income; 4) upper-middle income and 5) high income.

Refugees are among the most disadvantaged

To put matters in an even sharper context, this year we took nine countries and compared the proportion of out-of-school refugee children with the proportion of host-country children from the lowest and highest income brackets.

This helps to illustrate just how restricted educational opportunities are for refugee children and youth, as well as for the poorest host community children – in other words, refugee children and youth fare as badly as their non-refugee peers in the poorest sections of society.



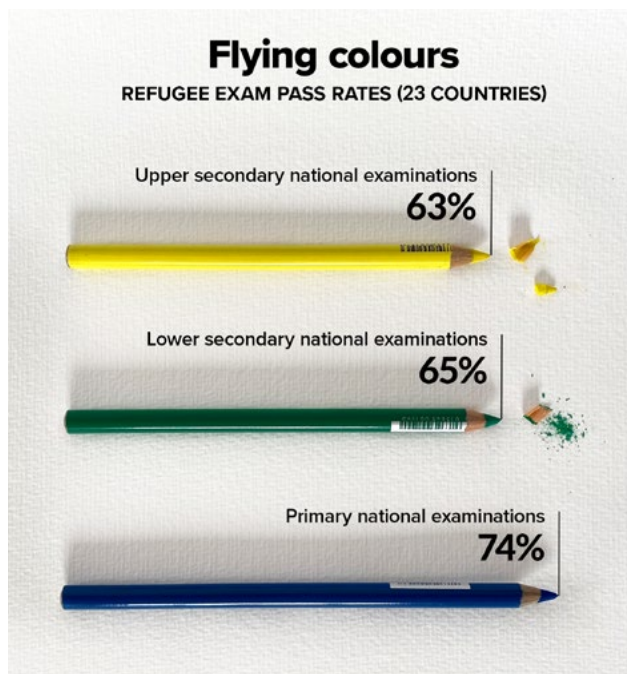
But in some cases, refugees fare even worse. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which had a refugee population of around 490,000 in 2020, the out-of-school rate for refugees is 65 per cent, while the rate for children from the lowest income quintile (that is, the poorest 20 per cent) of the population is “only” 35 per cent – and 6 per cent for the wealthiest quintile, demonstrating the huge discrepancy between the three groups.

Amid a learning crisis, glimmers of success...

For the first time in UNHCR’s education report, we are presenting data on national academic assessments to better understand how refugee students are faring as learners. This is vital to measure since many countries are undergoing a learning crisis: more than half of children in low and middle-income countries are unable to read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school, with the level as high as 80 per cent in low-income countries.⁹

Learning inequality disproportionately affects the most vulnerable – a problem that was exacerbated when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools across the world to shut. Because 83 per cent of refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad are hosted in low and middle-income countries,¹⁰ the potential consequences of this inequality are clear.

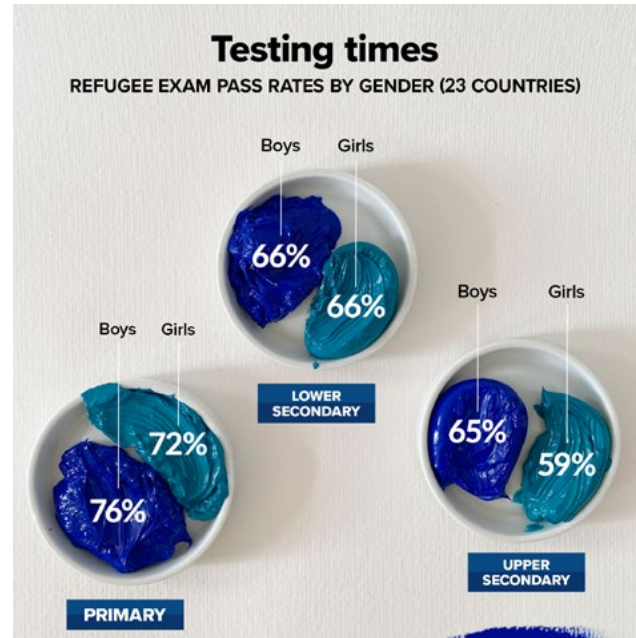
However, going by the measure of exam results, refugee students can point to a record of success. In 23 countries that reported results, 74 per cent of primary-level refugee students passed national tests, while the figures for lower and upper secondary were 65 and 63 per cent respectively.



⁹ *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update* – World Bank.

¹⁰ *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021* - UNHCR.

Of course, the numbers of refugees taking national tests is often very low – in Cameroon, for example, a pass rate of 74 per cent at lower secondary level is based on only 154 refugee students sitting the exams. But it does reinforce the point that where they get the opportunity, refugee students grasp it with both hands.



When it comes to taking exams, however, there is a clear gender imbalance: at primary level, of those refugee students who sat national tests in our reporting countries, only 39 per cent were girls. For lower and upper secondary level exams, the figures for girls were 44 and 43 per cent respectively.

Classrooms that are full to bursting

Learning among refugee children and youth frequently takes place in a crowded environment, such is the contrast between demand and supply. Data on teachers is patchy and very difficult to collect, but a few countries have reported on teacher/pupil ratios in refugee communities – and the picture is one of hugely overcrowded classrooms, above recommended ratios, all of which has a negative impact on both teaching and learning experiences.

In eight countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, pupil-per-teacher ratios were markedly higher for refugee children and youth than for nationals. In Burkina Faso, for instance, there were 40 national learners to every teacher, but for refugees that rose to 60:1. In Zimbabwe, the ratio for nationals was 36:1 but for refugees it was 59:1. In all cases, the classes were crowded enough to make effective teaching difficult – evidence both of the demand for education but also of the stresses and strains on capacity.



*“I was constantly telling myself:
you must do whatever it takes to succeed.”*

Raïssa fled the Central African Republic in 2013, ultimately settling in Chad. Even as a young mother struggling with money, she managed to complete high school. Then she won a scholarship on the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) programme, supported by Germany, Denmark and the Czech Republic, as well as UNHCR and other private donors. DAFI has supported over 21,000 young refugees to undertake tertiary studies since 1992.

Now 24, Raïssa recently graduated in Communications and Marketing at Emi Koussi University, in N'Djamena. “My son goes to school, I go to university,” she says. “It is just the two of us and we keep going.” Marketing suits her, she adds. “I want to be creative, to be a leader. I am always keen on learning new things. I am always on the move, doing something. There is never a dull moment.”

© UNHCR/Antoine Tardy



CASE STUDY

“ I told my grandmother it was just a matter of a couple of weeks ... and I'd be back in Ukraine.”

BUDDING UKRAINIAN ARCHITECT IS BUILDING HER FUTURE IN A POLISH SCHOOL

Since the international armed conflict began, hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainians have been forced to flee. Ensuring that they all have access to education presents a massive challenge to neighbouring countries such as Poland



When Sofia fled her home in Ternopil region, western Ukraine, shortly after hostilities began on February 24, she thought she would be gone for perhaps a few weeks.

Months later, even regions well away from the front line are still affected by the war, and Sofia knows she may have to make plans for a future in Poland's capital Warsaw, where she now lives. "I've realized it may be forever and if I return to Ukraine one day, it could be as a guest," she says with the composure of someone who has taken time to reflect on her life ahead – even though she is all of 13 years old.

Leaving home, family and friends was hard but with explosions already rocking the region, Sofia's parents agreed she should head for the border with a friend's family and stay with her grandmother, who had been living in Poland for 30 years.

After a freezing 14-hour journey through the night on several buses crammed full of fellow refugees, Sofia found Zola, 55, waiting for her.

With Sofia out of danger, her grandmother was keen to find a school for her as fast as possible – not only so she could continue her studies, but also so the teenager would have somewhere safe to be while Zola worked long hours as a cleaner.

Yet to begin with, Sofia was reluctant. "It wasn't a priority for me – I told my grandmother it was just a matter of a couple of weeks then the war would be over and I'd be back in Ukraine," she said.

Zola added: "We did not know how long the war would last – but children need to go to school."

A nearby school was offering special classes for refugee children who did not speak Polish. “The first days were difficult,” Sofia recalls. “I didn’t know the language, I was surrounded by students and teachers speaking Polish. But the second day I felt calmer and a week later I got used to it.”

Wieslawa Dziklinska, director of Sofia’s school, said students who did not speak Polish followed the normal curriculum and got support from teaching assistants who translated and explained subject matter.

“For some it is a struggle,” Dziklinska said. “For others, it is very easy and natural. Some resist, especially children who had ambitious plans like going to [specialist] music schools, taking language exams... It is a clash between what they had planned and reality.”

In class, Sofia is reserved but attentive, and her answers to teachers’ questions are thoughtful and often lengthy – a reflection, perhaps, of the time she has spent weighing up her options and making tough choices.

Sofia is just one of more than 400,000 school-aged refugee children from Ukraine registered so far with a Polish government identity number (PESEL), presenting the country’s authorities with a huge challenge.¹¹ The government has guaranteed the right to an education for refugees from Ukraine, but the scale and speed of this crisis has strained the country’s school capacity and infrastructure.

By the end of the 2021-22 academic year, more than 180,000 Ukrainian learners had entered Polish schools, according to official figures. Of those, 80 per cent have joined mixed classes with Polish students. The remainder have attended “preparatory classes”, a system that exists in some form in most EU countries to help foreign children transition into host country public schools.

In preparatory classes in Poland, pupils follow the national curriculum and get intensive courses in Polish. Before the war, there were 15 students to a “prep” class; that has soared to 25.

Even with these solutions, hundreds of thousands of young refugees could need a place in a Polish school this coming academic year. The picture is clouded, however, by the ongoing war, which is preventing displaced Ukrainians from making long-term plans:

¹¹ UNHCR Data Portal on Ukraine: <https://bit.ly/3cbP9IG>

¹² *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine.*



📷 Sofia gets to grips with her studies at her new school in Poland, where she is living with her grandmother Zola. © UNHCR/Rafal Kostrzynski

according to a recent UNHCR survey,¹² two-thirds expect to stay in their host countries until hostilities subside. Some have also travelled on to third countries.

Refugees can also choose to have their children follow the Ukrainian curriculum online, virtually attending lessons made available by Ukraine’s Ministry of Education and Science – an option many families have taken in the hope they will be able to return to their former schools soon or enter Ukrainian universities in the future. Indeed, some families like their children to follow the Ukrainian curriculum online while they are also enrolled in a school in a hosting country.

For her part, Sofia is keen to press on with her education. Although her favourite subjects are a mix of biology, mathematics and literature, she dreams of becoming an architect. “I like the process of building houses, the process of designing a house using a computer program,” she says, rattling off a list of technical terms she has learned by watching videos online.

Sofia still often thinks about home. “I like it here, but I’d like to go back,” she says. “This [life in Poland] is new to me and I miss my village, my friends, the shops in Ukraine...”



A REFUGEE'S JOURNEY

HOW I NEVER GAVE UP ON EDUCATION, MY FIRST HUSBAND

For nearly two decades, Mary Maker lived in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya after fleeing her home as a small child. Here she recalls how family tragedy, unpaid school fees and a fear of failure nearly ended her chances of an education – and how a refusal to give up ultimately won the day...

It was a walk of shame.

The shame would start when the school principal came into the classroom and read out a list of names – not of students who had not done their homework, or who were wearing an illegal item of uniform. But of students whose parents had not paid the fees.

My father cared passionately about my education. “Education is your first husband,” he would tell me. “Never let a man tell you how to live your life.”

📷 Mary Maker, shortly after beginning tertiary education, makes a return visit to Kakuma refugee camp to talk to secondary school pupils. © UNHCR

It mattered to him so much that he enrolled me in a boarding school outside Kakuma, the refugee camp in Kenya where I grew up. But my father passed away long before I finished my secondary education, and although his friends chipped in to meet the costs, their support was erratic.

And so I was constantly on the principal’s list, and I got used to walking the walk of shame.

My fellow “non-payees” and I would be paraded out of the classroom and into the school grounds, and unless we had a good explanation we would be sent home for the rest of that half-semester. For me, being stuck at home was torture, so I’d sneak off out of sight and get back into the classroom by climbing in through the window.

Having 60 or 70 other students in the room made it easier to hide, but unfortunately I am quite tall, which made me stick out. (If they spotted me, some of the more unpleasant teachers would order me to the front and make me do punishment exercises in front of the class.)

I minded the walk of shame much less than I minded being sent home. But the constant disruption to my education set me up for failure, and I did not graduate with the grades I needed to get into university. The four years I spent struggling to rectify that – walking from one school to another, begging headteachers to let me in so I could retake the exams – were four of the longest, hardest years of my life.

You have no idea how slowly and wearily time passes when your future has been put on hold. For politicians and policymakers, four years is nothing – it's time for meetings and white papers, time to build consensus, forge alliances, find funding.

For someone desperate to take the next step in their education, it's time in agonizing limbo, time spent in a state of not knowing.

It is true that I have a good news story at the end of this long wait. In 2018 I successfully applied for a two-year study programme in Rwanda, with the possibility of a scholarship to a US university at the end of it – if I got good enough grades. If I didn't, I'd be back to square one, and it was this fear of failure, and the consequences of failure, that drove me on. From Kakuma refugee camp – my home for nearly two decades – to Rwanda, to Minnesota, where I am studying today after winning a place at St Olaf College in 2019.

“ You have no idea how slowly and wearily time passes when your future has been put on hold.”

But the number of opportunities available to refugee students in my position is minuscule compared to the number who are hungry to go to school and university. Most of the friends with whom I graduated from high school are still waiting for their chance.

In my own small way, I am trying to even up the odds. Three of us who made it to US universities, along with our former teacher, have set up Elimisha Kakuma, a programme to give high-school graduates in Kakuma intensive academic instruction, exam preparation, mentoring with current college students and guidance through the often arcane process of applying for a university place. Given the time difference, it means a lot of late nights for us, but since our first cohort of 12 students have all succeeded in winning places, it is definitely worth it.



© UNHCR/Amos Halder

Yet when you consider how much demand there is, it is only a drop in the ocean. There are 27 primary schools and nine secondary schools serving a population of more than 230,000 people in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. The facilities for science subjects are often poor or non-existent, and yet come exam time these budding scientists are competing with other Kenyan students who learn in national schools with better resources.

In my rooms in Minnesota, I think right back to my time in primary school in Kakuma. As a young child, I had walked to the camp from the territory of what would become South Sudan with my mother and sisters to flee the war. When we arrived, I remember listening in wonder to the peace and the silence – no more planes dropping bombs, no more panicking, no more need to hurl ourselves into our makeshift bomb shelters. Instead, there came the sounds of singing, playing games, learning new things and making new friends...

Today, that little girl is studying in a liberal arts college in America, trying both to make her own way in life and to pull other refugees up the ladder with her. Without school, without teachers, without funding, without scholarships, I would have remained without hope. But I like to think that I have shown what a refugee child can accomplish if given the chance – the same chance that millions of non-refugee children get as a matter of course.

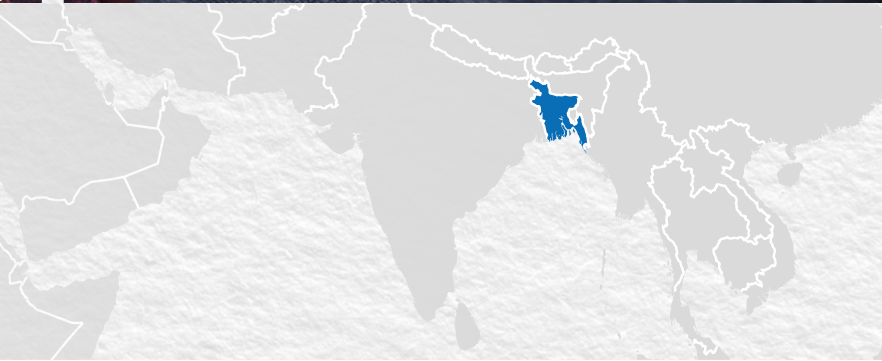
Mary Maker is a UNHCR High-Profile Supporter and co-founder of the Elimisha Kakuma educational project for refugee students. For more on the programme, including details of how to support, see www.elimishakakuma.org



CASE STUDY

TEACHERS TEAM UP TO BOOST LEARNING POWER

After years of delays, the limited learning options for school-age refugees from Myanmar are at last beginning to broaden



For as long as he can remember, Shah Alum has wanted to teach. Yet his own education ended abruptly when he was forced to flee the violence that erupted in his native Myanmar in 2017.

Like so many other Rohingya, he and his family found safety in a refugee camp in Bangladesh, but there was no opportunity for Shah to complete high school. As for university and a teaching qualification, that was nothing but a dream.

Yet five years since he fled home, Shah, now 22, is leading a class of about 40 Rohingya children seated on the floor of a bamboo-framed classroom in Kutupalong camp, home to some 750,000 Rohingya refugees.

While Shah teaches the Myanmar language at the front, Minhar Begum, a 24-year-old from the Bangladeshi

community in Cox's Bazar District, moves around the room making sure everyone is following instructions.

Shah and Minhar have been working together as teaching assistants at this learning centre for the past two years. While neither is a fully qualified teacher, they have received training from UNHCR and between them they have been covering an informal curriculum that consists mainly of basic literacy and numeracy, as well as some life skills and the Myanmar language.

Rohingya refugees and local Bangladeshis have formed teaching partnerships at 5,600 learning centres throughout Cox's Bazar. "We have a shortage of teachers among the refugees because very few Rohingya were able to complete higher education in Myanmar, due to restrictions on their movements and other rights," says Haruno Nakashiba, Senior Protection Coordinator with UNHCR.

“So for some of the subjects, like English or mathematics, we decided to hire Bangladeshi teachers. This also means we’re creating jobs for them.”

With the Rohingya largely confined to the camps, these partnerships are also one of the few chances for refugees and local Bangladeshis to come together.

“We are like siblings, we understand each other very well,” says Shah of his relationship with Minhar. “At first, we didn’t communicate much, but now we talk about strengths and weaknesses and how we can improve.”

For years, young Rohingya refugees have only had an informal curriculum to follow, with four levels catering to learners aged 4 to 14 – leaving a critical gap for older children.

At long last, change is afoot. After years of UNHCR and partners raising concerns about the lack of any formal education in the camps, the Bangladeshi government approved a shift to the Myanmar curriculum.

“*We are like siblings, we understand each other very well.*”

That switch was due to happen in January 2020 – right before the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed all the learning centres (among other locations) and put the plans on hold. They came to life again with a pilot programme late last year for 10,000 children, and a second phase has just begun. By July 2023, it is expected that all school-age children in the camps will be following the Myanmar curriculum.

The change will reduce the level of partnership between Rohingya and Bangladeshi teachers but not end it entirely. Rohingya teachers will be trained to teach most subjects in the Myanmar language, while host community teachers will focus on teaching English and helping with training.

Without certification issued by Myanmar’s Ministry of Education, the new syllabus still cannot be considered a formal education. Nonetheless, UNHCR’s Haruno describes it as vital for the vast majority of Rohingya refugees, who wish to return home to Myanmar when it is safe to do so.

“Refugees say they want to prove they belong to Myanmar,” she explains. “They say, ‘when my children learn to read and write in Burmese, my children will be recognized as belonging there.’”

Shah and Minhar have been working together as teaching assistants at a learning centre in Kutupalong camp, covering an informal curriculum. © UNHCR/Amos Halder

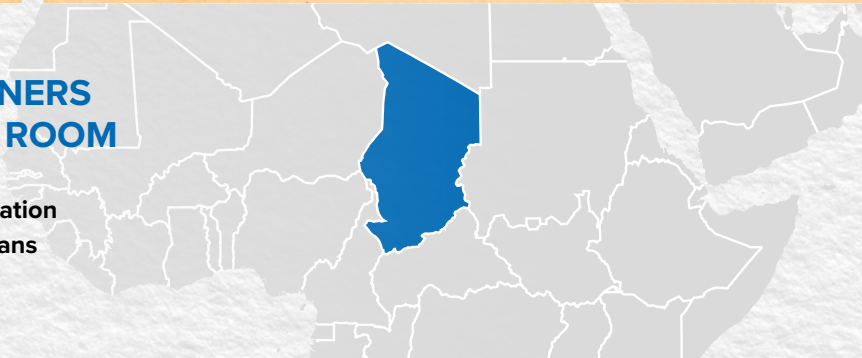




CASE STUDY

CHAD EMBRACES REFUGEE LEARNERS BUT NEW SCHOOLS RUN OUT OF ROOM

Young Sudanese are brought into the national education system on arrival, but the increasing population means huge class sizes and not enough capacity



It's only 7.30 am in Kouchaguine-Moura refugee camp, near Chad's border with Sudan, yet the thermometer is already approaching 40C.

Despite the heat, dozens of children assemble, take off their shoes and sit on a large carpet in the scant shade of a leafless acacia tree. In front of a chalkboard propped against the trunk, a young woman in a flowing dress and headscarf greets the children and gestures for them to sit.

Assaniah, 28, is a teacher at Al Nour School – one of two primary schools in the camp – leading a class of more than 100 children aged 6 and upwards. Originally from Gnouri in the Darfur region of Sudan, Assaniah arrived in Kouchaguine-Moura just over two years ago with her husband and son after fleeing intercommunal violence.

A psychologist by training, she attaches great importance to learning, which she sees as a bulwark against conflict and extremism.

“My journey has been marked by repeated and indiscriminate violence that I believe is the fruit of ignorance,” she says. “I am convinced that access to education and knowledge for children will help break the cycle of violence in Darfur.”

Kouchaguine-Moura camp hosts around 14,000 Sudanese refugees who, like Assaniah, have fled clashes in Darfur since February 2020. In addition to welcoming and protecting the refugees, the Chadian government, UNHCR and partners ensure refugee children's access to education upon arrival through their full inclusion in the national education system.

Soon after the camp opened in 2020, UNHCR built two schools, which are used for primary in the morning and secondary in the afternoon. They accommodate about 2,500 pupils, with 16 latrines, two solar-powered boreholes, and staff office and storage rooms. Working with the Ministry of Education and UNHCR's education partner, Jesuit Refugee Service, a staff of 38 refugee and host-community teachers have been trained on the Chadian curriculum.

The camp also offers a literacy programme for young people, which currently includes 108 refugee girls and 61 boys who have never attended school.

“ *This is a place to teach and guide... From youngest to oldest, the children are in harmony.*”

Chad has become one of the most inclusive countries in the world when it comes to educating refugees. Since 2014, for example, all refugees have followed the Chadian curriculum and had access to national examinations, and since 2018 all schools in refugee camps have been granted official status. In the 2021-22 academic year, over 102,000 young refugees attended formal school – more than ever.

But the camp continues to grow, with nearly 4,000 new arrivals since the start of the year. The average primary class exceeds 160 pupils per teacher, and ten classes are held in the open air for lack of space indoors.

With renewed conflict across the border in Sudan forcing more people to seek safety, staff fear that the pressure on an already overstretched system is set to increase. At the same time, UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs face a critical lack of funding, with the \$510 million 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan for Chad severely funded. The education component of that plan has received only a fraction of the \$34 million needed.

Beyond capacity constraints, teachers are alert to the risks of absenteeism due to the precarious living conditions faced by many families in the camp.

“We need to make sure that children have a healthy and balanced diet,” says Brahim, a host-community teacher. “And some students don't come to school on certain days because they don't have proper shoes or clothes.”

For Assaniah, building new classrooms is the top priority. “While trees provide shade, they are not as effective at protecting students during the rainy season,” she says.

Nevertheless, her outdoor classroom remains a precious place of learning. “This is a place to teach and guide,” says Assaniah. “From youngest to oldest, the children are in harmony, as if they all had the same mother and father. There are no disagreements – we are all refugees.”

📷 Assaniah and her pupils study in the sparse shade of a tree in the school grounds even in the heat of the Chadian morning.
© UNHCR/Colin Delfosse



INTO THE FOLD: THE CASE FOR INCLUSION

Bringing refugee children and youth into national education systems produces benefits across the board – if backed up with strong and sustainable support

Millions of refugee children and youth are displaced for their entire education cycle, from pre-primary to higher education. Very often, they live in countries that are already struggling to deliver quality education, among other public services.

In order to meet this challenge, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees places predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing at the heart of the international refugee protection agenda, to the benefit of refugees and hosting communities alike. This means that when governments and host communities welcome refugees into their schools, others step in with predictable financing, resources and support to build the resilient, sustainable education systems that will bring benefits to both refugees and host communities – in other words, systems that embrace everyone, refugees included.

What does inclusion mean?

It means that refugee education is fully embedded in the host country education system, with the same cost drivers and constraints that determine quality and efficiency. In terms of teacher quality, school infrastructure, financing, access to learning materials and other resources, inclusion means “no better, no worse” than education for everyone else.

From the start of humanitarian emergencies, to protracted situations of displacement and through to development planning, inclusive education is critical. Including refugees in national education systems – and making those systems more resilient – is the only sustainable way to address both their educational needs and those of their host communities. At each stage, there are opportunities for national education systems to become more inclusive *and* drive sustainable development.



So getting refugee children and youth 'into the building' is not enough?

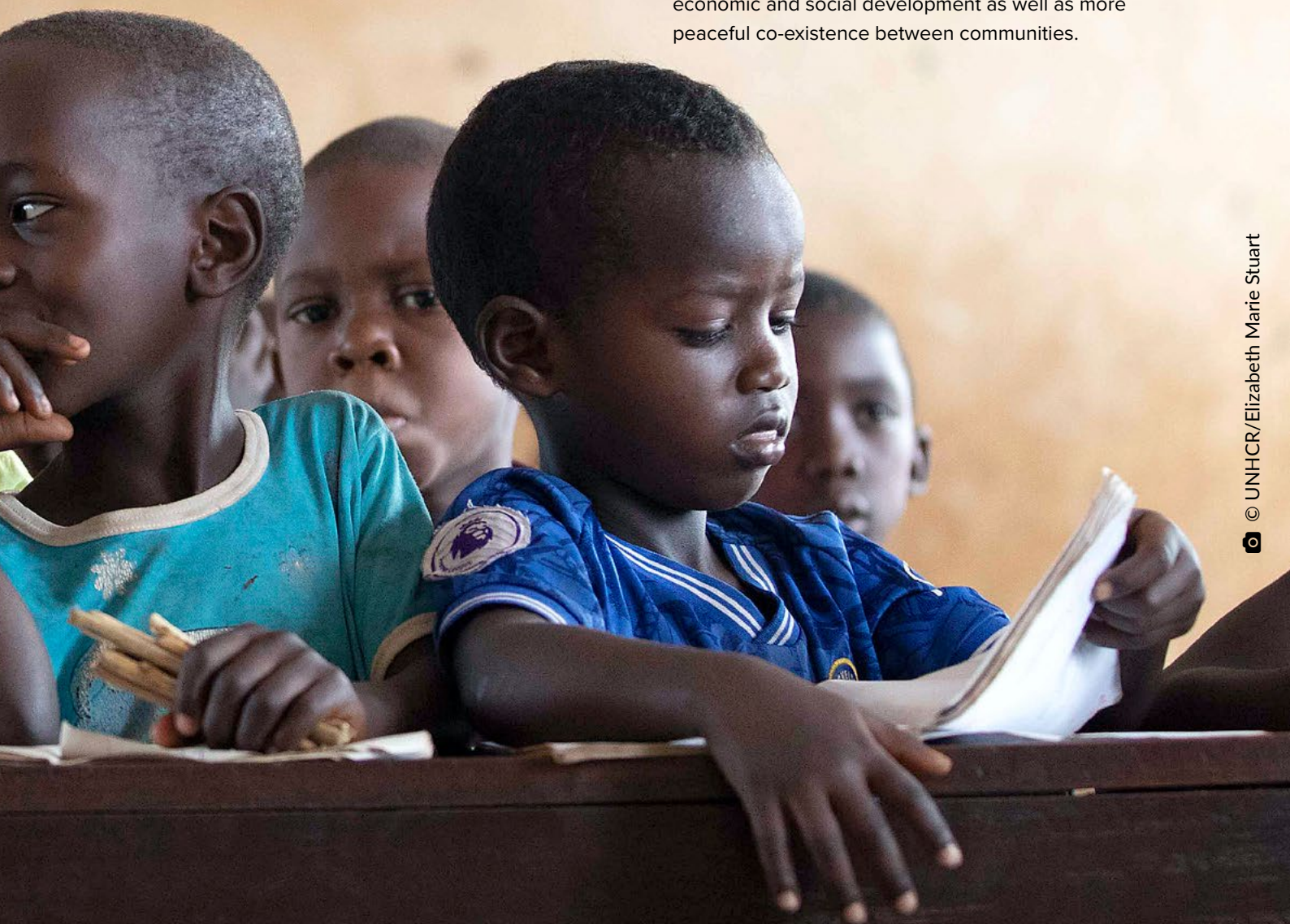
No – giving refugees physical access to the same schools as nationals is indeed essential, but a place in the classroom does not automatically translate into inclusion. Inclusion covers reliable and sufficient financing of refugees' education, administration – including data systems and assessment – teachers, teaching quality and quality assurance, infrastructure such as fully equipped classrooms, and sanitation and hygiene facilities, adequate and relevant learning materials, access to examinations and certification, and closing the digital divide affecting refugees. It may also require additional support for students' transition, such as language learning, or mental health and psychosocial support.

Is there a “one-size-fits-all” model for all refugee-hosting countries?

Because of the increasingly protracted nature of global displacement, education for refugees is both a humanitarian and development challenge. As a consequence, inclusive education is a spectrum of policies and approaches, and identifying and prioritising inclusion activities is highly dependent on context.

Key considerations include: the political, economic and development trends in the host country; existing national development programmes and plans (among other questions, do these include refugees already?); national policies and laws affecting refugees more generally; arrangements and agreements between the authorities, UN agencies and their partners, education-focused organisations and others that concern refugees; and existing international aid and financing.

At each stage along this journey, however, there are clear opportunities for national education systems to become more inclusive. The rewards are clear: quality, equitable education is closely linked to positive economic and social development as well as more peaceful co-existence between communities.



A User's Guide: Building inclusive education systems

Progress on inclusion of refugee learners into national education systems can be mapped along a spectrum. Some states have fully embedded refugees in national systems, but others have several steps to take before reaching a level that is no better, no worse than education for host-country learners.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

- Beginning with child-friendly spaces
- Becoming increasing formal, limited accreditation
- Primarily using home-country curriculum
- Schools are UN/NGO-led, financed, and managed
- Teaching positions are primarily held by informal caretakers
- No access to professional development pathways for teacher

TAKE ACTION

POLICY & ADVOCACY

- Advocate for inclusive refugee education policies, including costs of infrastructure and data collection
- Incorporate inclusion standards and best practices into national education policies
- Implement the national curriculum for all learners

PLANNING & PROGRAMMING

- Develop costed plans for inclusive systems and match donor funding against them
- Broker dedicated development funding for refugees
- Ensure wraparound support for language, psychosocial needs, support classes
- Develop professional pathways for refugee teachers on a par with national teacher development

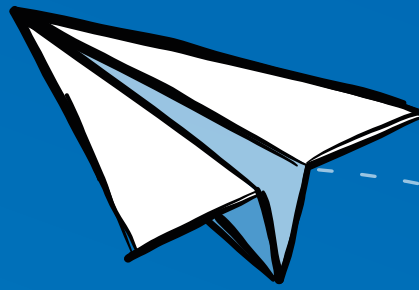
Inclusion in Practice

Chad

Refugee teachers are included in national teacher training and coaching initiatives and have access to national training centres. Newly arrived refugee teachers in camp schools are trained to immediately teach the Chadian curriculum to refugee children, thus enabling their immediate inclusion in the national education system. For instance, in early 2022, following the new refugee influx from Cameroon, over 60 Cameroonian primary school teachers were trained on the Chadian curriculum.

Mexico

The right to an education for all is guaranteed by the Constitution and a legal framework that supports the inclusion of refugees. However, challenges persist in access and capacity. In response, Mexico adopted a Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) to strengthen national schools and promote inclusion in refugee-hosting communities. Steps to achieve this include detecting out-of-school students, implementing re-enrolment campaigns and training education personnel – per a 2019 GRF pledge.



TURNING THE CORNER

- ☞ Increasing integration of refugee and host-country students in the same schools
- ☞ Host-country curriculum used in instruction
- ☞ Schools are registered by the Ministry of Education
- ☞ UNHCR/NGOs are designated to finance and manage
- ☞ Professional pathways for teachers are limited and do not always lead to certification

EMBEDDING INCLUSION

- ☞ Formal accredited schooling within national education systems across quality, infrastructure and financing
- ☞ Schools are registered and managed by the Ministry of Education
- ☞ Financing is split between UNHCR/NGOs and the national government.
- ☞ Teachers are certified by the host-country national education system
- ☞ Teachers have full access to professional development pathways

MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

- Monitor the implementation of inclusive practices
- Establish country-led payment systems for core costs, e.g. teacher salaries, infrastructure
- Set up relevant financing mechanisms

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

- Coordinate planning between national ministries, NGOs, UNHCR and partners
- Develop cost-sharing MoUs and agreements to share responsibility for school registration, financing and management

What are concrete steps to build inclusion and how are inclusive practices implemented around the world?

Pakistan

To transition to a single national curriculum for all students, Pakistan has prioritised custom teacher training and resources for teachers in Refugee Village schools in partnership with PITE (the national institute for professional teacher development).

Iraq

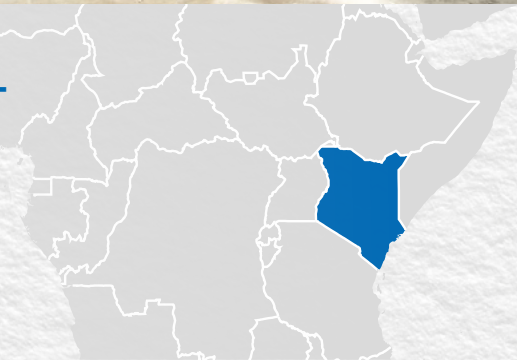
The Ministry of Education will roll out a Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) in September 2022 to expand refugees' access to the Kurdistan Regional Government's formal and non-formal education system. In consultation with refugee communities to develop the policy, language and overcrowding were identified as barriers for many refugee learners. This highlights the importance of providing Kurdish classes for refugee children and extending classrooms to enable inclusion.



CASE STUDY

LAWFUL REALITY MOVES CLOSER FOR SCHOLARSHIP GIRL WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

After studying alongside students without disabilities, Magartu has been rewarded with stellar results, a new school and a boost to her legal ambitions



Scrolling through her phone and checking messages from her friends, Magartu looks like any other teenager enjoying a break from schoolwork.

But her warm smile belies this 17-year-old Ethiopian refugee's determination. Magartu lost her sight at a young age but has learnt to adapt to life without it (for instance, her phone is voice-activated and she is using an accessibility app to navigate between her social media accounts).

And her aim now is to finish secondary school – top of her class, she intends – and then win a place in law school. “I want to be a lawyer because I want to defend people who have been denied their rights, like people with disabilities, orphans and widows,” she says.

Magartu was just eight when she and her older brother and sister fled conflict in Ethiopia. When they arrived at Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, her siblings immediately enrolled her in Tarach Primary School, a school for children with disabilities.

“At first, school was stressful. I cried a lot because I did not understand the language. I felt like everyone was talking about me,” she recalls. But her teachers were patient, she adds, and helped her learn English, the official language of instruction in Kenya.

In sixth grade, she transferred to a mainstream school, where children with disabilities integrate with other learners. Through sharing a classroom with other students and joining in extra-curricular activities like sports and clubs, she found a new confidence. “I liked

my new school because I had competition,” she says. “I was courageous enough to believe that I could be first in my class.”

It is estimated that more than 12 million people with disabilities have been forcibly displaced worldwide, although the true number may be much higher. They are often at greater risk of violence, discrimination, exploitation and abuse, face barriers to access basic services, and can be excluded from education and opportunities to earn a living.

“ There will always be challenges in life but you know what? We can overcome them!.”

UNHCR and education partners Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Finn Church Aid and Humanity & Inclusion have successfully implemented inclusive education in primary and pre-primary schools in Kakuma camp and the adjacent Kalobeyei settlement, including Magartu’s former school.


All signs are that Magartu is on track to meet her goals. Last year she sat the national primary final exams and was among the top students in her class – and one of the top learners with a disability in the country.

On the strength of that performance, she was awarded a UNHCR scholarship and started at Kibos Special School in Kisumu, western Kenya, where she and two other refugee students with disabilities study alongside their Kenyan peers. She is due to graduate in late 2024.

Magartu is already honing her advocacy skills. In March this year, she addressed the European Humanitarian Forum, calling for education for all refugees, including those with disabilities, and has spoken at several events in Kakuma, including on World Disability Day.

She urges people with disabilities to work towards their dreams and never give up.

“Be courageous and keep working hard,” she says. “There will always be challenges in life but you know what? We can overcome them!”

 Magartu’s exam performance won her a UNHCR scholarship to a secondary school in western Kenya. Below, Magartu learns using Braille while a student at primary school in Kakuma. © UNHCR/Hannah Maule-ffinch



TECHNOLOGY

Keep taking the tablets: digital project brings world to learners

It's science time in Mugombwa refugee camp, southern Rwanda, and children sit in a sun-filled classroom with heads bowed, focused on the human digestive system.

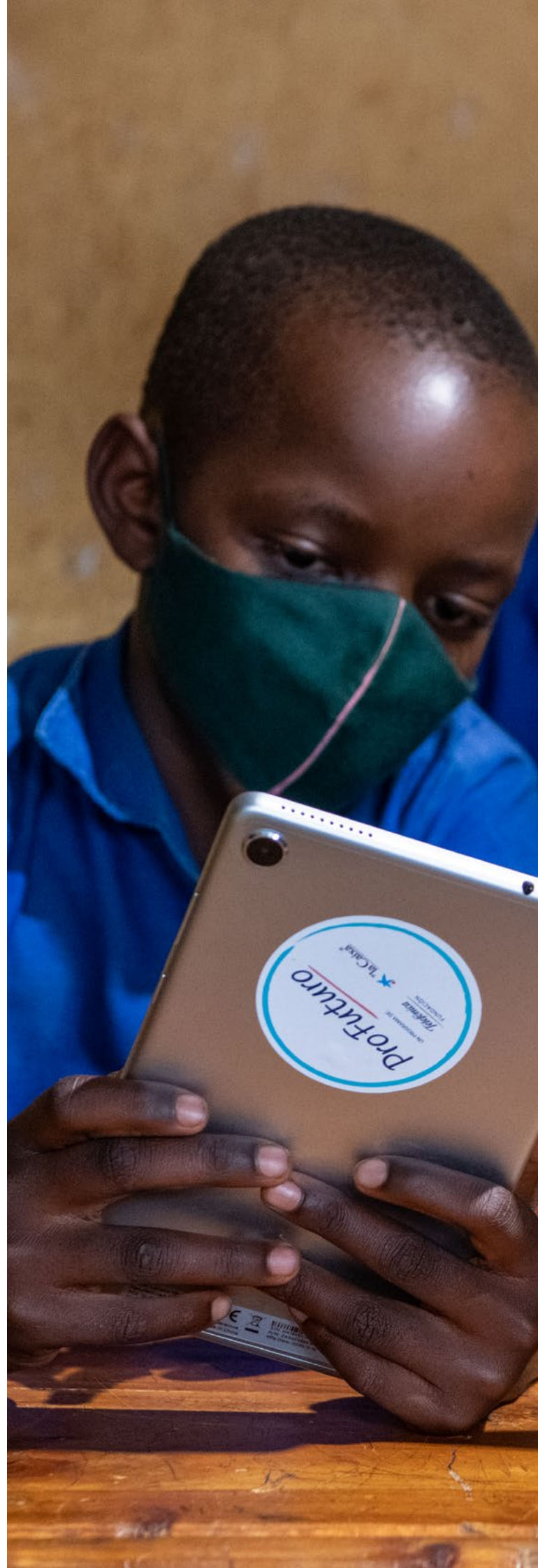
“We do not get many books because we live in such a remote and rural area,” says Alex Nkurunziza, head of studies at Groupe Scolaire primary school, as he watches the students, a mix of refugees and youngsters from the local community, tapping and scrolling.

“But this way of learning, using technology, gets [the children] interested in coming to school.”

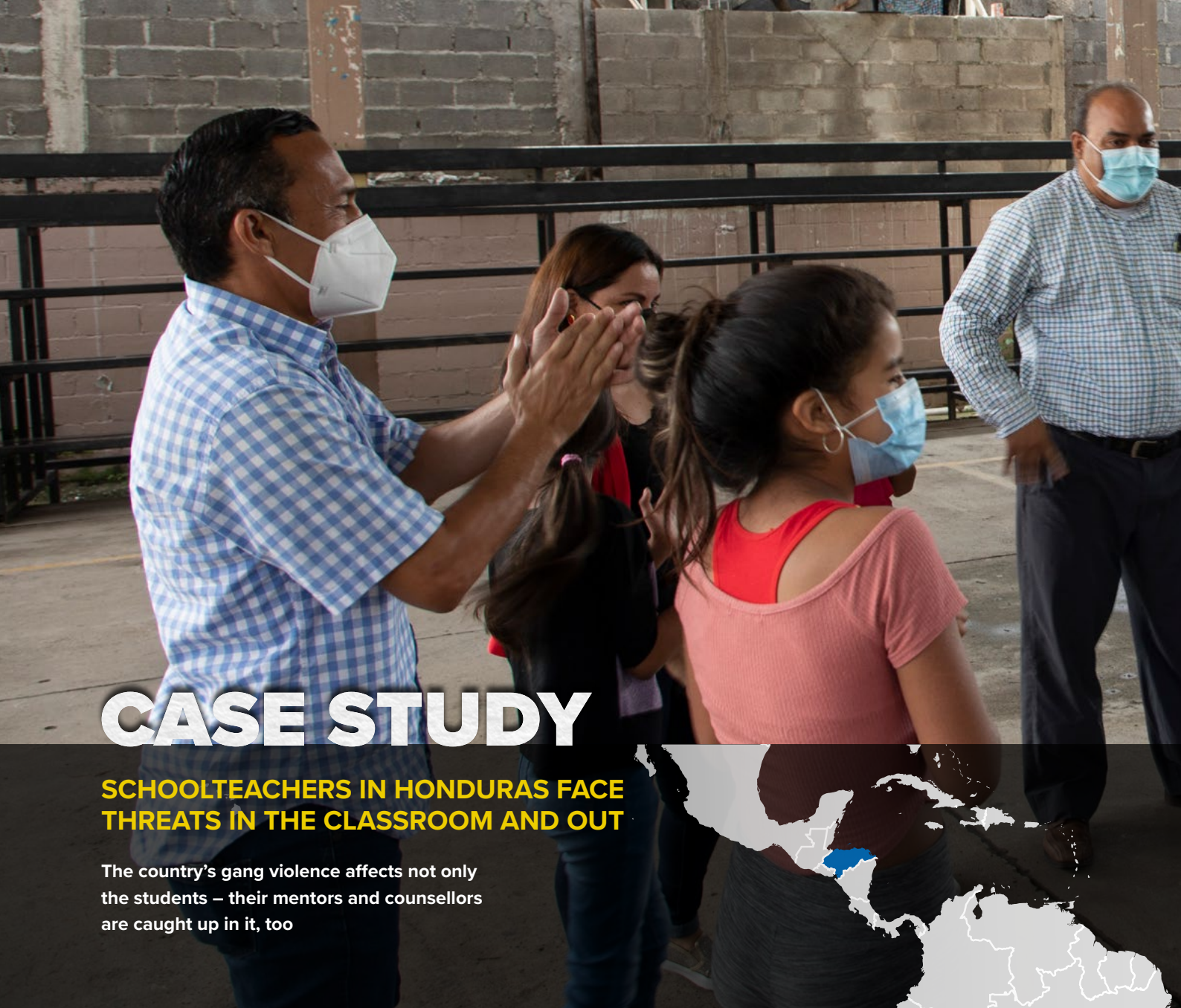
At the beginning of 2021, the ProFuturo Foundation partnered with UNHCR to help improve the quality of education for refugee and host community primary school children in Rwanda. The programme, launched by the Telefonica Foundation and “la Caixa” Foundation, includes the provision of technology such as computers, tablets and projectors, an educational content platform, and a training and capacity-building programme for more than 300 national teachers – Nkurunziza among them – including instruction on how to make the most effective use of technology in lessons.

In its first year, the programme reached more than 13,000 children in 15 schools. In 2022, the partnership expanded to Nigeria and Zimbabwe, as well as continuing in Rwanda, with the aim of reaching more than 25,000 learners.

“We realised that with ICT, children can not only explore what's happening around them but also what's going on around the world,” Nkurunziza says.







CASE STUDY

SCHOOLTEACHERS IN HONDURAS FACE THREATS IN THE CLASSROOM AND OUT

The country's gang violence affects not only the students – their mentors and counsellors are caught up in it, too

At the start of each school year, principal Horacio Montes* braces not only for the arrival of his returning students but for much less welcome visitors: members of the gang that controls much of the Laureles* neighbourhood of the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, where Horacio's school is located. He knows they will come, too, demanding he hand over the keys.

It has become common throughout Honduras for gangs to use schools as safe houses to stash illicit drugs or weapons. Horacio's nursery-through-Grade Nine school is no exception.

"We've had kids practically stumble upon weapons [in school]", he said. "They've found bullets and cartridges and they bring them to us." Other schools that the gangs have managed to infiltrate have become hubs for drug trafficking, he added.

School "takeovers" are but one of the dangers that teachers in Honduras face. Some have to pay bribes to get to work every time they cross the invisible borders that separate rival gangs' territories. Others are victims of extortion, intimidation, sexual harassment or assault.

“ We have seen several of our colleagues killed in the line of duty.”

Teachers also find themselves among the country's 250,000 internally displaced, and more than 220,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. Many say students come to talk to them about being threatened – but just having those conversations can mean getting caught up in potentially deadly gang conflicts, forcing them to flee as well. It is believed that hundreds of teachers have been internally displaced or are at risk of having to flee.



“We have seen several of our colleagues killed in the line of duty,” said Esperanza Flores,* a preschool teacher who is also a member of the Comité Docente, an organization that represents Honduran schoolteachers.

The group has been working since 2016 to find solutions to these threats and challenges. The aim is to keep teachers in their jobs and in their home communities, but those in the greatest danger are referred to UNHCR, which works to relocate them to safety, either inside or outside Honduras.

Alba Flores,* assistant principal of a Tegucigalpa elementary school, admitted it was a dangerous job. “The truth is that it’s very risky for us,” she said, “because without meaning to, we wind up knowing all about the lives of our students.”

📷 Teachers and students are at risk of forced displacement due to street gang violence, with forced recruitment, sexual harassment, extortion and physical assault a daily reality. © UNHCR/Biel Calderón

But, she added, teachers willingly carried on. “We are always going to be their teachers and their friends [because] we love them and it’s because of them that we do this work.”

**Names and locations have been changed.*

FUNDING AND FINANCE

Forces for Change: How to finance refugee education

Recent progress on inclusion now needs to be matched with the money and other forms of support that will enable much-needed policy changes to have a large-scale impact

For decades, financing for education for refugees has too often been short-term, fragmented and unpredictable. It has also frequently been funnelled towards specific – usually temporary – projects that exist outside durable national education systems.

All that is changing. In recent years, more and more people have acknowledged that the key to success is including refugee learners in host-country national systems. Yet where governments have made the essential and far-reaching policy shifts, this has rarely been accompanied by the necessary finance, support or systems that would share responsibility across the international community.

To solve this, we need a new approach. State education sector plans should be expanded to include refugees, with clear costing and financing targets. Thanks to the longstanding generosity of many host governments, such plans exist in many countries. But they are not yet met by the predictable, multi-year financing required to give them full effect.

Here are four ways to change that.

1 Making a difference costs less than you think

A 2021 World Bank-UNHCR report, [The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education](#), gave a series of estimates for the cost of educating refugee children¹³ in the countries in which they reside.¹⁴

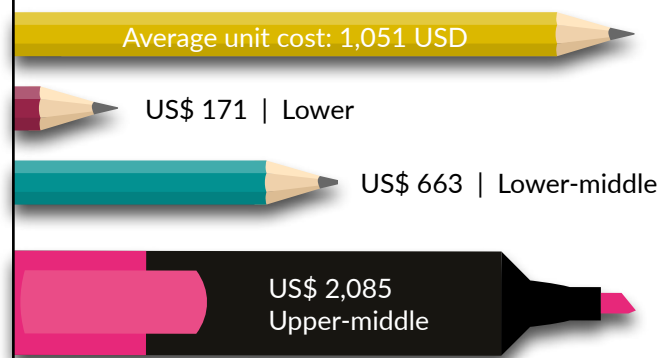
The annual cost for all refugee students in low, lower-middle and upper-middle income host countries is

estimated at USD\$4.85 billion, or a total of USD\$63 billion over 13 years, from the first year of primary to the final year of secondary.

This might seem a lot. In fact, it is only 3.8 percent of the average host country public expenditure on education.¹⁵ Although there are big differences between individual countries, in 36 out of the 65 countries studied, the cost of inclusive refugee education amounted to **less than 1 per cent** of annual public spending on primary and secondary education.

Exceptions exist in countries experiencing large inflows of refugees that historically have lower public spending on education. For instance, the cost of inclusive refugee education amounts to nearly 60 per cent of public expenditure on primary and secondary education in South Sudan and Lebanon, indicating both the large refugee population and the current level of spending on education.

The Case for Investment



Unit cost per refugee learner to complete an education cycle (K12), by country income category – lower, lower-middle and upper-middle.

Source: World Bank/UNHCR

As the chart shows, the cost varies enormously depending on the economy of the host country and how much it spends per student. But one consequence of this is that prioritizing global investment in lower and lower-middle income countries would ensure that over half of all school-age refugee children would receive an inclusive education.

¹³ Specifically, it estimates the annual cost of providing education to all refugee children in their current host country from the first year of primary to the final year of secondary. It focuses on 65 low and middle-income countries that host over 7 million refugees aged 5-17. As refugees are concentrated in developing countries, this methodology accounts for almost 80 per cent of the refugee population - and nearly 100 per cent in low and middle-income countries.

¹⁴ In this analysis, “refugees” refers to asylum-seekers, refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad who are registered with UNHCR, unless specified otherwise.

¹⁵ This figure equates to 4.7 per cent, 2.1 per cent and 4.3 per cent in low, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries respectively, although significant differences exist between individual countries.

While those countries account for half of the school-age refugees, their share of the financing envelope is only 20 percent. In other words, **a fifth of the total cost would cover more than 50 per cent of school-age refugee children.**

2 A broader donor base is needed

Refugee education funding is over-reliant on three sources of development aid: the US, EU and Germany. But some key alternative forms of funding have emerged.

-
- ➔ **The World Bank** has committed to scaling up and coordinating support for refugee education in collaboration with other international and local partners (via its Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities, under the bank's International Development Association).

 - ➔ **The Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** works with countries in crisis and conflict, helping to strengthen capacity and resourcing. In 2021, 62 per cent of [GPE implementation grants](#) were allocated to partner countries affected by fragility and conflict.

 - ➔ **Education Cannot Wait (ECW)** is a global fund dedicated to education in both emergencies and protracted crises. Since its inception, ECW has disbursed US\$680 million in grants to 71 entities working in 46 countries.¹⁶ Its 232 emergency responses and 55 multi-year programmes have reached over 33 million children.

 - ➔ **Philanthropic foundations and the private sector**, particularly when financing is provided through partnerships, offer good examples of supporting high-impact programmes that focus on refugee education. These include the LEGO Foundation's cooperation with the [Sesame Workshop](#) and Vodafone's support for [Instant Network Schools](#); at a different level, examples include private sector contributions to the Global Partnership for Education (e.g., Open Society Foundation, Dubai Cares and Stichting Benevolentia (Porticus)), and to Education Cannot Wait (e.g. the LEGO Foundation and Dubai Cares).

The task now is to direct far more of these resources towards education for refugees – particularly those in long-term displacement situations, where development planning is as important as emergency action.

3 But new ways of funding are needed as well

As outlined above, aid is better targeted to low-income countries. To increase the resources available for middle-income countries, therefore, we need a range of innovative financing mechanisms. Ideas include loan buy-downs, where a third party buys down all or part of the interest of a loan; and the Internal Finance Facility for Education, which would use guarantees and grants from contributors to generate increased education financing by development banks and reduce lending terms for states. This facility, which aims to generate US\$10 billion, is set to become operational this year and creates the opportunity to include specific funding for the needs of refugees who are outside existing national systems.

4 By funding the whole cycle of education, the rewards are that much greater

As UNHCR's data shows, refugee enrolment in secondary school is at 34 per cent, well behind primary level enrolment (at 68 per cent). The older a refugee child gets, the less likely they are to be in school.

This matters. Secondary education is the gateway to higher education and improved employment opportunities. Each additional year of school can raise a girl's future earning power by 12 per cent,¹⁷ while the global poverty rate would be more than halved if all adults completed secondary school.¹⁸ Adults with higher educational attainment live healthier and longer lives, have a reduced rate of early pregnancy, lower risk of HIV infection and lower birth rates. They are also the people who develop new apps, find cures for diseases, build smarter buildings...

All this benefits host countries and refugees alike. And reliable access to secondary education increases the incentive to stay in and complete primary school, as it gives a child something more to aim for.

¹⁶ ECW grant database, reviewed 17/03/2022

¹⁷ C.E. Montenegro and H.A. Patrinos (2014), *Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling Around the World*, Policy Research Working Paper, World Bank (2014)

¹⁸ UNESCO Policy Paper 32/Fact Sheet 44. (June 2017), *Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education*.



THE FINAL WORD

Sir Lewis Hamilton

‘Education for all’ must mean what it says – refugees included

As the incredible Nelson Mandela once said, “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Education is a key that can unlock many doors, but not everyone is guaranteed equitable access to quality education. I struggled at school, no matter how hard I tried. In part, that was because I had dyslexia, which went undiagnosed until I was 17, but it was also because I had my confidence knocked by teachers who told me I wasn’t smart enough and that I wouldn’t amount to anything. They looked at me, my background and the colour of my skin and put a cap on my potential.

It’s a feeling that is familiar to many young people, particularly those from marginalised communities whose talents and abilities are dismissed out of hand before they’ve had a chance to prove themselves. For too long,

a person’s educational path has been influenced by their background – their looks, their family’s social and economic profile, their religion, and similar factors.

And no one knows this better than a young refugee, because many of the factors that determine their future are totally out of their control.

The list of barriers is a long one. Not only are there practical issues such as a lack of schools, qualified teachers, learning materials or computers. Refugees also face the challenges that come with being displaced – language barriers, separation from their support networks of friends and family, prolonged absence from the classroom, discrimination and alienation...

In my case, I managed to prove the doubters wrong. Today, thanks to the support of my family and many others, I travel the world doing my dream job. As a racing driver, I’ve reached the highest level of my sport. Though my education didn’t get off to the strongest start, it has played a key part in every aspect of my career – and I’m still learning, working alongside Formula 1 engineers, mechanics and data scientists. It’s an exciting and fulfilling industry, and one that anyone should be able to access if they have the skills, passion and determination. And yet, right now, it’s an industry that isn’t reflective of wider society.

“ I had my confidence knocked by teachers who told me I wasn’t smart enough and that I wouldn’t amount to anything.”

Year after year, I have looked at the end-of-season photographs of the ten F1 teams. Pictures of brilliant men and women – yet so few people of colour. When I became the first Black Formula 1 driver, I thought it would encourage kids from more diverse backgrounds to get involved in the sport. Sadly, this hasn’t been the case – and I had to ask myself, why? So I began to look deeper into the reasons.

The Hamilton Commission is a research project I founded in partnership with the Royal Academy of Engineering. This highlighted the challenges within the motorsport industry, but it also identified a number of persistent barriers within education. To my surprise, many of the problems I experienced at school were still affecting marginalised young people’s access to, and inclusion within, education today. The Hamilton Commission’s report raised questions about fairness, opportunity and diversity, and about the urgent need to tackle the inequality facing disadvantaged young people.

These lessons have global resonance. Today, there are more than 10 million school-age refugees around the world, young people who are missing out on the life-changing opportunities education can provide. If they are not part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 – to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – that goal will remain unfulfilled. “For all” must mean what it says.

“ I’m proud to lend my voice to the campaign for refugees to get fair and equal access to a full quality education.”

Education doesn't just widen people's horizons and present them with opportunities they would otherwise never dream of getting. It counteracts the damaging effects of systemic injustice. And it's not just about creating better life chances for young people, helping them to find their purpose and forge their own futures. It's about the knock-on effects of that: greater diversity in positions of leadership and influence, in the world of work, in sport, culture, politics.

Nelson Mandela understood this better than anyone. In 2004 he claimed to be retiring from public life but in reality he was a campaigner until the end of his days. As he put it: “As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.”

Unless we address these injustices and inequalities, a fairer society will remain an empty campaign slogan and injustice will prevail.

That's why I'm proud to lend my voice to the campaign for refugees, no matter where they are or where they're from, to get fair and equal access to a full quality education.

📷 Ukrainian children and their teacher at a learning centre in Bucharest, Romania, set up by PepsiCo in the first weeks of the Ukrainian refugee emergency. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Report compiled and produced by: Olga Sarrado, Cirenía Chavez Villegas, Kristy Siegfried, Cedric Kalonji Mfunyi, Samuel Otieno, Maria Rubi, Alanna Heyer, Charlotte Jenner, Becky Telford and Barney Thompson.

To contact the education team at UNHCR for more information on our education work or to discuss donations, funding, scholarships, data, partnerships and other forms of collaboration, please email Becky Telford at telfordm@unhcr.org

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We lead international action to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

We deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place called home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

We work in over 130 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for millions.

© UNHCR, September 2022

Cover photo: © UNHCR/Elizabeth Marie Stuart

Layout and design: BakOS DESIGN