

# **EDUCATION FORUM INITIATIVE**

**INnovative Strategic Partnerships In Refugee Education**

**(INSPIRE)**

***- Working Together For Protection And Durable Solutions -***

**EDUCATION UNIT  
UNHCR GENEVA  
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## **Justification:**

The international community, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, in 2000, committed to “*ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances (including those affected by war) and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality*”.

All 180 countries present in Dakar reconfirmed their commitment to the goal of **Education For All (EFA)**. In addition to EFA commitments, education is also a basic right that is clearly established in major international declarations and agreements such as *The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocols, The 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Geneva Conventions* and several Regional Agreements.

The goals of **Universal Primary Education (UPE)** and gender parity were adopted as Millennium Development Goals by the UN General Assembly on 6 September 2001.

Despite this international commitment, education in emergencies, and this includes education for refugees, remains widely undersupported and underfunded. Under-investment in refugee education results in continued low enrolment rates, gender disparity and low quality of education.

To date, more than 27 million children and youth affected by armed conflict, including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), do not have access to formal education (WCRWC, Global Survey on Education in Emergencies, February 2004).

Promoting the right to education is an obligation of Member States who have ratified the 1989 **Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, and almost all states have done so. Member States must promote the education of all children and adolescents within their jurisdiction, regardless of status.

The practical justifications for an educational response in emergencies and for refugees include:

- (1) Education helps meet the psychosocial needs of children and adolescents affected by conflict or disasters that have disrupted their lives, studies and social networks.
- (2) Education is a tool for protecting children in emergencies.
- (3) Education provides a channel for conveying health and survival messages and for teaching new skills and values, such as peace, tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, human rights, environmental conservation....
- (4) Education for All is a tool for social cohesion, whereas educational discrepancies lead to poverty for the uneducated and fuel civil conflict.
- (5) Education is vital to reconstruction for the economic basis of family, local and national life and for sustainable development and peace building.

## **Background:**

UNHCR's operational role, defined by its overall mandate for refugees, encompasses full responsibility and accountability to the international community and the refugees for all aspects of the complete life-cycle of a refugee situation – from early warning and contingency planning, to the **protection** of and **assistance** to refugees and to the achievement of **durable solutions**.

In UNHCR's Global Consultations on International Protection, education is described as "*an important protection tool*".

During the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee (EXCOM) in July 2003, on the Note on International Protection, par. 25 explicitly refers to refugee education:

*"With regard to refugee children, education is an especially useful tool to protect them from dangers such as military recruitment, sexual exploitation, abuse, violence, and trafficking. Education raises refugee children's awareness, provides a viable alternative to harmful options that may present themselves, and enables intellectual development and psycho-social recovery."*

Next to protection, access to services is the main challenge UNHCR is confronted with in a time of increasing demands and decreasing resources. Education is an important pillar of UNHCR's assistance programme.

The **Education Field Guidelines**, published in February 2003, clearly confirm UNHCR's policy commitment towards

*"safeguarding the right of refugees to education and implementing the six goals of Education For All (EFA) which include free access to primary education, equitable access to appropriate learning for youth and adults, adult literacy, gender equity and quality education"*.

Recent surveys, however, have shown that these ambitious goals cannot be met by UNHCR alone. Provisional UNHCR education statistics indicate that, in 2002/2003, out of a total refugee population of 1.9 million in the relevant age group of 5-17, only 1 million were enrolled into education programmes worldwide. These figures do not even reflect the high number of urban, mostly unregistered, refugees or the number of students not completing their UNHCR-funded studies. The statistics further indicate that school enrolment is not equal between grades, with 50% of all children enrolled in the four lowest grades and only 12% in the four highest grades. Refugee girls account for 46% of enrolments and are more concentrated in the lower grades. More than 80% of students surveyed in 66 selected camp locations in 2002/2003 do not have access to an adequate number of teachers, and out of these teachers only 60% have had the necessary qualification. These gaps need to be urgently addressed by UNHCR and its partners.

## Existing Partnerships:

UNHCR performs its operational role by implementing programmes directly or through partners, or cooperating closely with operational non-governmental and other organizations which are self-funded or have other sources of funding than UNHCR.

Operational partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGO) are formalized through the *Framework Agreement for Operational Partnership*. This agreement, based on the *Partnership in Action (PARinAC)* Process, aims to build an active operational partnership through a common commitment to understanding each other's roles and responsibilities, thus leading to better coordination and improved services to refugees. UNHCR is funding education programmes in 97 countries, with a total budget of over USD 38 million in 2003. Worldwide, 200 international and local organizations, including UN agencies and government departments, are implementing education programmes on behalf of UNHCR. Out of these 163 are NGOs, UNHCR's traditional partners.

But UNHCR also maintains operational partnerships with a number of international and inter-governmental organizations, based on their respective mandates, on a global or situation-specific level. Governments, in direct cooperation with UNHCR, have shown their support to the plight of refugees in many cases, sometimes hosting large numbers of people having fled their home countries over a protracted period of time.

In the field of education, UNHCR entertains close cooperation with UN sister agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and WFP. Global *Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)* with UNICEF and WFP have been revised or are under revision and a number of country-based *operational agreements* are in place. UNHCR is a founding member of the Interagency Network on Emergency Education (INEE) and actively participates in the Working Group on Minimum Standards. A stand-by agreement for the rapid deployment of professional staff to emergency education operations is in place with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Education programming in areas of conflict is impossible without the creativity and resourcefulness of communities. Working with School Management and Village Education Committees as well as refugee self-help groups is the key to any successful and efficient assistance programme. Only a **community-based approach** to education will help to improve the refugee capacity to meet their own needs and solve their problems.

Based on these existing partnerships UNHCR, in close cooperation with all stakeholders in refugee education, is now aiming at **developing new and innovative strategies in partnership development** with the objective to increase enrolment and community participation, seek gender parity and improve the quality of services.

The **Education Forum Initiative** is at the center of sharing the burden for and finding solutions to address gaps in education opportunities for refugees. Ownership is with all stakeholders participating in the initiative. **“Innovative Strategic Partnerships In Refugee Education” (INSPIRE)** is the project charged with moving the process ahead and implementing pilot activities.

## **New Initiative:**

During a **Planning Meeting** with selected NGO in December 2003, UNHCR's Education Unit in the Division of Operational Support (DOS) called for a new approach

*“ to strengthen and develop partnerships, capacity and networking in order to enhance quality of and increase access to refugee education”.*

The discussions underlined the need to follow up on the UNHCR Education Guidelines by concrete action in order to address gaps in the implementation of the **Education For All (EFA) Strategy**. Similarly, there is the recognized need to improve strategic and integrated planning with NGOs, government, UN agencies and local partners. Furthermore, the lack of a systematic and shared data collection mechanism as well as the need to build on good practices and learn from one another became apparent. Lastly, lobbying governments to take over more actively their responsibilities, either as hosts of refugees or providing education to returnees, was discussed in the meeting.

In order to achieve the overall goal of building effective and solution-oriented partnerships, representatives from AfriCare, CARE, CTRC, INEE, IRC, JRS, LWF, NRC, RET, WVI and GTZ agreed to form an **Education Forum** and support the overall goal through **INSPIRE** .

## **Main Objectives:**

The Planning Meeting formulated the following objectives for **INSPIRE** :

1. To analyze successful/effective national coordinating structures with a view to replication of the effective ones;
2. To ensure that all partners and stakeholders are involved in the development of the Country Operations Plan (COP) in order to guarantee a systematic, common statement of intent in the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP);
3. To encourage the systematic collection of baseline data for refugee education in conjunction with other agencies who are also collecting data;
4. To develop strategies that will help to maximize local, national and international potential and actual resources for education programmes, providing innovative initiatives and creating comprehensive, high quality education programmes for all refugee children;
5. To ensure that the tools for implementation (guidelines, strategies, etc.) are developed and improved with the stakeholders to ensure shared ownership for all partners.

## **Forum Activities:**

A **Reference Group (RG)** for INSPIRE was established in January 2004, with UNHCR, IRC, JRS, LWF, NRC and RET being members. In March, INEE and UNICEF joined the RG to ensure a more broad-based representation.

Planned activities were coordinated through two RG telephone conferences on February 6<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup> and a meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at UNHCR Geneva. Since March 1<sup>st</sup>, a Project Consultant, based in the UNHCR Education Unit, is assisting the RG in the implementation of INSPIRE.

The RG gave itself **Terms of Reference (TOR)**, approved a **Work Plan**, developed **Guidelines/Criteria** and proposed to operationalize INSPIRE and organize two **Regional Education Fora** to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan and Kampala, Uganda.

Consultations with the relevant field offices, desks and bureaux have been initiated and are on-going.

The RG is in the process of establishing **local Reference Groups** to move the Education Forum forward on the country and regional level. Initially, the focus will be on countries in Asia and East Africa hosting Afghan and Sudanese refugees respectively..

## **Regional Education Forum:**

In order to pilot the initiative it was proposed to organize two Regional Education Fora to target two major repatriation or potential return operations in Asia and Africa, e.g. the **Afghan and Sudanese refugee caseload**. Pakistan was proposed to host the meeting in Asia and Uganda to host the meeting in East Africa.

These Fora will bring together all stakeholders within their respective regions, Governments, NGOs, the UN, refugee leaders, the private sector, bilateral and multilateral institutions alike, in order to present effective strategic partnerships and successful innovative approaches to refugee education.

Information from the regional meetings will then be disseminated to other regions with the aim of replicating **models of partnership** elsewhere.

**Locally established Education Forum Reference Groups** will assist in preparing the meetings and ensure implementation of recommendations from the meetings on the country and regional level.

## **Expected Outcomes:**

The outcome of the Regional Fora in Asia and East Africa will then determine on the future course of action, but it is expected that

- Models of effective cooperation and strategic partnerships as well as innovative approaches and good practices in the implementation of refugee education programmes are collected and documented and processes and locations for replication and follow-up are agreed upon.

It is further expected that all strategic partners on their respective level of operations (local, regional, international) will be more actively involved in

- Emergency preparedness;
- Integrated planning;
- Joint monitoring and evaluation;
- Sharing baseline data;
- Developing tools for implementation;
- Joint resource mobilization;
- Advocacy and lobbying.

The results of the meetings will be consolidated into a “*Strategy Paper on Partnership Development in Refugee Education*”, including recommendations for further Education Forum activities. On the regional level, the meetings will assist in improving strategic cooperation among partners and implementing agreed upon action plans.

## **Next Steps:**

- To send INSPIRE information materials to relevant Field Offices and solicit broad support for the initiative;
- To inform relevant in-house bureaux/desks and seek advice on the implementation of INSPIRE;
- To set firm dates and venues for the Regional Fora;
- To establish Country Reference Groups to drive the Forum process at the national level;
- To discuss subjects of meetings and finalize agenda;
- To send out Call for Presentations;
- To select participants and send out invitations;
- To organize meetings in Islamabad (June) and Kampala (June/July);
- To prepare and finalize Forum reports and distribute them to participants;
- To develop strategy paper on inter-agency collaboration and partnership;
- To organize follow-up Forum action according to the “lessons learned” from the pilot initiatives.