



SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS

Despite progress in enrolment and retention of refugee children in primary education services in recent years, **access to secondary education for refugee adolescents remains a critical gap across UNHCR operations**. This education brief outlines key information on secondary education programming for refugees.

- ➔ Globally, **only one in four refugee adolescents are in secondary school**, with large numbers of young refugees, a majority of them girls, out of school.
- ➔ In many refugee operations **secondary education services are meeting a fraction of the demand**. In Dadaab camps in Kenya for example, there are 33 primary schools, but only seven secondary schools, running at double their capacity to accommodate just 13% of the adolescent population.
- ➔ In 2015, **UNHCR will spend just 13% of its total education budget on secondary education, about one-third of spending allocated for primary education**. Where resources are constrained, the common practice in operations has been to give priority to supporting primary education, resulting in chronic neglect of secondary education services for refugees.



This briefing note has been produced by the Education Unit, Division of International Protection, for field operations and partners as a quick reference note on key thematic education issues.

? DOES UNHCR SUPPORT SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES?

Yes, absolutely. Active promotion of and programming for secondary education is in line with objective 3 of UNHCR's Education Strategy (2012-2016), to "Improve access to formal secondary education opportunities for refugee young people". This objective also aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goal target 4.1: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."

Since the needs of forcibly displaced adolescents and youth vary, formal **secondary education should be considered as one element of a range of education options that should be available to meet the needs of refugee adolescents and youth**. Secondary education offers a critical opportunity for young people to complete formal education; however, other programmes should also be considered, depending on the profile of the out-of-school adolescent population and in consideration of their future prospects. A range of education programmes, designed in close consultation with refugee adolescents and youth, might include:

- accelerated education (AE) for adolescents who have dropped out or who have never been to school
- relevant technical and vocational training
- basic literacy and life skills courses

? WHY DOES SECONDARY EDUCATION MATTER FOR REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH?

Secondary education for refugees provides a critical bridge from primary education to higher education and professional or vocational training, contributing to the development of human capital of refugee communities, self-reliance and solutions. It's an essential step in ensuring that young refugees have the foundation for increased earning power and the skills to rebuild their communities. In addition:

- **Secondary education is fundamentally protective, especially for girls.** Without access to secondary education, refugee adolescents are vulnerable to child labour, exploitation and the negative coping behaviours (drugs, petty crime, etc.) associated with idle time and hopelessness. In some contexts out of school boys are especially vulnerable to recruitment to armed groups. The opportunity for girls to continue education can protect them from early marriage and/or pregnancy and risks of sexual exploitation. Secondary education provides a safe space for personal development and positive social networks for adolescents whose transition to adulthood has been disrupted by instability and violence.
- Secondary school is a **critical step in the education continuum to livelihoods and professional training and higher education** options for young people, contributing to durable solutions. Successful completion of secondary education provides a competitive and eligible pool of candidates for tertiary education and scholarships, and opens access to higher level skills training.
- The option to continue and complete secondary education **improves children and families' motivation and engagement in education** at lower levels, incentivizing retention and successful completion of primary education.
- The longer-term **benefits of education for individuals and communities are fully realized with completion of secondary education, especially for girls and their families.** Women with a secondary education are more likely to ensure that their children go to school, and to raise healthier families. It's estimated that if all women had a secondary education, the instance



of child marriage and infant and maternal mortality would be significantly reduced, and preventable child disease and deaths would be halved. Secondary education also leads to higher wage earnings, a narrowing of the pay gap between men and women, and an opportunity for families to break from the cycle of poverty.¹

“ Before, I felt hopeless. I was just a girl in a hopeless situation. But now, inside me has changed. Because I have graduated from secondary school, my family and our neighbours have a new respect for me. They know I am educated and they cannot disgrace me. I am knowledgeable and have a job because of this education. Education has become my pride. I have seen how other people live outside the camp. I have the confidence to speak out and be a leader. The benefits of this education are endless. I just wish all girls had my opportunity because having this, it changes your life forever.”

Angelique, 19, a Congolese refugee who received a scholarship to complete secondary education in Rwanda

WHY AREN'T MORE REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS GOING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL?

Both supply and demand barriers prevent refugees from accessing secondary school.

Supply barriers

- ➔ **Exclusion from national education systems:** In some contexts refugees are excluded from national secondary schools, either due to explicit policy exclusion, or because access (registration places and capacity) for refugees has not been negotiated with national authorities. Many of the barriers listed below also relate to exclusion from national schools.

- ➔ **Cost:** Secondary education costs more, as a result of the need for more teachers, classrooms and textbooks per child, than primary education. Secondary education also requires specialised infrastructure and equipment for science and computer laboratories and libraries. In many countries the cost of school fees and charges, textbooks, uniforms and school supplies effectively lock children out of secondary education. In some locations where distance is prohibitive, costs for transport or boarding rapidly escalate the cost of attending secondary school.

- ➔ **Distance:** Especially in rural and remote locations, secondary schools are few and far between, limiting access for both host country and refugee children. Transport options are not always available or affordable. Distance also raises protection risks, especially for young girls.

- ➔ **Language:** For young refugees hoping to transition to secondary school in a new country of asylum, a new language of instruction can present a significant barrier, especially due to the increased complexity of concepts and vocabulary expected at this level.

- ➔ **Documentation:** Recognized certification showing successful completion of primary education, as well as other types of documentation like birth certificates, is usually required to enter secondary school. In many cases refugees do not have identity or education documents, and this problem is often exacerbated by a lack of cross-border recognition of certificates and equivalencies.

- ➔ **Capacity (especially in camp settings):** Secondary services demand greater resources and higher levels of technical capacity than primary education services, including more specialised and qualified teachers, and skilled administrators and programme officers with capacity for the complex planning and time-tabling of the multiple, simultaneous lessons required at secondary levels.

Demand barriers

- ➔ **Low primary completion rates:** In some refugee contexts the low rate of participation and quality at upper primary levels lead to low numbers of children successfully passing primary examinations, making them ineligible to continue on to secondary education.

¹ UNESCO (2013). *Education Transforms Lives*. UNESCO, Paris.



- ➔ **Opportunity costs:** Under the stress and pressures of displacement, many adolescents and/or their families prioritize the short term benefits of early marriage, domestic labour at home or elsewhere, or wage-earning activities. This is especially true when high secondary education costs take away from household resources.
- ➔ **Cultural norms:** Cultural practices and beliefs, especially around girls' access to schooling and early marriage, keep young girls out of secondary school, particularly where primary education is considered to be an adequate level of schooling for a girl. Boys may also be under pressure to drop out of school to work and provide for their families.
- ➔ **Value of secondary education:** In some cases young people and their families simply don't see the benefits of pursuing secondary education, especially if they have experienced poor quality primary education, or perceive the efforts required to access secondary (distance, cost, language, etc.) to be too difficult. Peer pressure, family responsibilities, recruitment into armed groups, and a lack of understanding of the long-term benefits of secondary education can discourage transition to secondary school.

PLANNING FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SIX STEPS:

❶ DETERMINE HOW MANY REFUGEES (AND HOST COMMUNITY) CHILDREN WILL NEED SECONDARY SERVICES IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Assess current and project future demand for secondary education: How many refugee (and host community children if mainstreaming) are expected to require secondary services in the next 3-5 years?

- Calculate the number of children who are expected to successfully complete primary school in the current academic year OR in emergency contexts, the number of eligible candidates ready to start or continue secondary education.
- Project demand: Study enrolment rates in upper primary and estimate numbers of refugee students requiring secondary services annually over the next 3-5 years. Be sure to check if the demand is expected to increase due to targets for enrolling out-of-school children, large class sizes at lower primary levels or new schools that will produce their first graduating classes in the next years.
- Assess and project host community demand for secondary education in the coming 3-5 years in cases where mainstreaming in national schools is an option, or where host community children might access camp-based schools.

❷ ENSURE THAT ADEQUATE SECONDARY EDUCATION SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET NEEDS

Assess secondary education supply and quality: Is mainstreaming refugees in the national system possible? Do national secondary schools in the area have capacity to absorb refugee students? If national schools are not available, are experienced, qualified partners available to manage secondary services in camp settings?

- Work closely with the Ministry of Education at national and local levels, as well as other key partners like UNICEF and UNESCO to advocate and negotiate for inclusion of refugees in national secondary schools.

- Determine measures and funding required to enhance capacity of national schools to mainstream refugee students, including building new classroom spaces and recruitment of additional teachers, training and orientation for the school community (teachers, students, parents) and language classes and orientation for refugee students.
- Camp based schools are not recommended, but are sometimes the only option available. Ensure that implementing partners have sufficient expertise to manage secondary schools. Ensure funds are allocated to meet the cost of adequate numbers of qualified, specialised teachers (minimize use of untrained teachers), and additional resources necessary for secondary education including classroom spaces to accommodate a complex timetable, science labs, libraries and computer labs. Advocate with the Ministry of Education to deploy national qualified teachers to camp schools.

Please refer to Education Brief 4 on Mainstreaming refugee children in the national education system for more details.

❸ ENCOURAGE A HIGH RATE OF PARTICIPATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Provide targeted support for 100% transition rate from upper primary to secondary: What are the barriers that prevent every upper primary school child from transitioning to secondary?

- Analyze the percentage of children successfully passing primary examinations and transitioning to secondary education. Using available data and focus group discussions, assess the main barriers for boys and girls that prevent transition from primary to secondary school.
- Consider the following examples of programme response:
 - Increased support to education quality at upper primary levels and preparation for examinations through qualified, trained teachers, analysis of examination results, remedial classes, etc.

- Mentorship and accompaniment programmes to provide academic support and counselling for students, especially girls, to successfully finish primary and transition to secondary.
- Advocacy campaigns with the community on the importance of primary exams and the many benefits of secondary education. This can include the engagement of role models within the community to champion secondary education, including higher education students (DAFI or other) and graduates.
- Material support to enable secondary school attendance including cost of school fees, transport, uniforms and textbooks, sanitary materials for girls, etc. Consider cost sharing with refugee families where possible and also consider the use of cash-based assistance to support access to secondary, especially in urban areas.
- Language classes, negotiations around documentation requirements, etc. to facilitate access to secondary schools.
- Work closely with protection and livelihoods colleagues to design cross-sectoral interventions that address household pressures that pull adolescents out of school and re-direct them to work, marriage, household help, etc.

4 IDENTIFY BARRIERS STOPPING ADOLESCENTS FROM SUCCESSFULLY FINISHING SECONDARY, AND ENSURE THAT POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS EXIST

Monitor and support retention and completion of secondary, and support transitioning students to post-secondary education options.

- Assess factors contributing to drop-out at the secondary level and design programme interventions to address these issues. Examples include: mentorship for girls; bicycles to facilitate transport to school where distance leads to drop out; academic support to ensure successful transition to upper secondary; continued community advocacy on the benefits of completion of secondary; cash grants where families are likely to pull students from school to save household resources.

- Working with livelihoods colleagues, ensure pathways to post-secondary vocational and skills training are available, as well as opportunities to continue on to higher education. Post-secondary education opportunities increase student motivation and consequently retention and completion of secondary school.

5 ASSESS HOW MUCH MONEY IS NEEDED TO ASSURE SECONDARY SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND IDENTIFY SOURCES OF FUNDING

Advocate for and raise funds for secondary education for refugees.

- In line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 target 4.1 on increasing access to both primary and secondary education for all children, advocate with national partners for access to secondary services for refugee children. Cost sharing or material contributions to the national education system may be necessary.
- In many refugee operations, secondary education has been deprioritized due to a lack of funds. Active leveraging of funds for secondary education is recommended, based on clear, evidence-based proposals that project numbers of beneficiaries and accurate costs over the next 3-5 years.
- Where possible, work with UNICEF to identify development agencies active in the country who may be approached to support secondary education. JAICA and the World Bank are two examples, in addition to working with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to ensure that national education sector plans make provision for refugee education. This option is especially promising where refugees are being mainstreamed into national schools, and the programme can be cast in terms of enhancement of national capacity for secondary education.

6 MEASURE PROGRESS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES

The following indicators from UNHCR's Results Framework are relevant to secondary education. Minimum indicators that should be selected by operations are highlighted in **bold**.

Rights Group	Basic Needs and Essential Services
OBJECTIVE: POPULATION HAS OPTIMAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION	
Impact Indicators	% of secondary school-aged young people enrolled in secondary education
	Extent persons of concern have access to national education systems
OUTPUT: SECONDARY EDUCATION PROVIDED OR SUPPORTED	
Performance Indicators	# of students enrolled in lower secondary education
	# of students enrolled in lower secondary education in the correct grade for their age
	# of students enrolled in upper secondary education
	# of students enrolled in upper secondary education in the correct grade for their age
	% of female secondary education teachers
	% of lower secondary school graduates (successful completion of final grade)
	% of upper secondary school graduates (successful completion of final grade)
OUTPUT: USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION SERVICE PROVISION EXPANDED	
Performance Indicators	% of secondary schools providing students daily access to computers
	% of secondary schools providing students daily access to e-books, tablets or other similar devices
OUTPUT: ADVOCACY CONDUCTED	
Performance Indicators	% of PoC for which country of origin learning achievement is recognized (secondary school)
Output	Measures to improve primary education quality and learning achievement implemented
Performance Indicators	% of primary school graduates (successful completion of final grade)

Additional disaggregated data to consider, important for programme planning include:

% of girls and boys transitioning from primary to secondary school

% of girls and boys enrolled in secondary school (Gross and Net enrolment rates)

% of girls and boys transitioning from lower to upper secondary school

Sample quality and protection indicators

% of teachers with recognized teacher qualifications

Average Pupil-teacher ratio

Average Pupil-classroom, gender-segregated latrine, textbook, computer ratios

% of schools with adequate science lab, computer lab, library facilities and equipment

% of schools with active community involvement (parent-teacher association etc.)