REFUGEE EDUCATION
RESEARCH DIGEST

The Education Research Digest features the latest evidence on refugee education, with a focus on thematic areas. The digest aims to provide a balanced and comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge and practice on each thematic area, as well as to identify gaps and priorities for future research and action. The recommendations for policy and practice and research made in this digest are taken from the cited literature. They reflect the findings of the authors of the literature and should not be interpreted as recommendations made by the authors of the digest or endorsed by UNHCR. The digest presents a brief overview of the main findings from a number of relevant publications, from academia and grey literature, with links to the full texts (where available). The publications covering are selected based on criteria such as relevance, quality, timeliness and diversity of sources and perspectives. The second and third parts of the digest include information on relevant resources and forthcoming events on refugee education

Latest Research

IN BRIEF

Challenges to the education rights of children on the move in Latin America: A scoping review

Author, Publication, Year: Diaz-Rios, C., Feitosa de Britto, T., Cuglievan-Mindreau, G., Abuleil, S., & Quintasi-Orosco, I., *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 2025

Abstract: Research on education in emergencies underscores the significant structural obstacles refugee children encounter in accessing education within low- and middle-income countries. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding the challenges confronted by transnational migrant children and the evolving nature of these challenges amidst shifting migration dynamics. To address this gap, the authors conducted a scoping literature review of 144 articles written in Spanish, Portuguese, and English examining transnational migration and

Colombia – Yukpa children at school
© UNHCR/Marina Calderon

education in Latin America, a region undergoing profound shifts in immigration patterns. The analysis, guided by Tomaševski's 4As framework (availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability), reveals that changing migration patterns activate new challenges for education rights. Migrant children face barriers compounded by assimilation and discrimination in schools, as well as physical segregation and marginalization influenced by governance structures. These findings anticipate challenges in implementing current policy recommendations for integrating refugees and other groups of children on the move into the regular education systems of Global South countries.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Reframe migration as an opportunity to strengthen education systems: Education policies should view migrant inclusion not as a burden but as a catalyst for broader system reforms—such as redistributing resources, redesigning curricula, and expanding participatory governance—to benefit both migrant and host communities.

Remove bureaucratic barriers to school enrolment: Ensure that inclusive policies are effectively implemented at the school level by eliminating documentation burdens and issuing clear guidance to frontline staff, particularly in systems unfamiliar with migrant inclusion.

Invest in long-term education system reinforcement: International actors should move beyond short-term emergency responses and support sustainable investments in national education systems to meet the needs of both migrants and marginalized host populations.

Support teachers through sustained professional development: Teachers require training to adopt culturally responsive pedagogies and manage diverse classrooms. This can enable inclusive practices and counteract deficit-based and assimilationist assumptions.

Address governance structures that enable subordinated inclusion: Policymakers should review how school choice, standardized curricula, and dominant national narratives structurally marginalize migrant students despite their formal inclusion in regular schools.

Recommendations for research:

Expand studies beyond overrepresented countries and corridors: Most research focuses on Chile and Argentina. Future work should investigate under-studied host countries like Peru, Ecuador, and Costa Rica to capture a fuller picture of migrant education dynamics.

Examine how intercultural education is implemented in practice: While intercultural frameworks are widely endorsed, empirical studies on actual implementation remain scarce. More research needed to assess how these approaches affect student outcomes, participation, and discrimination.

Investigate the role of language policies and multilingual classrooms: With the rise of extra-regional migration, further studies are needed on how language of instruction and mother-tongue preservation affect learning, belonging, and long-term integration of migrant children.

Analyze the effects of standardization and accountability mechanisms: Research should explore how test-based accountability and rigid curricula shape the inclusion or exclusion of migrant learners, especially in centralized or market-oriented education systems.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Basic Education / Emergencies

Determinants of refugee children's self-perceived educational performance: a comparative study of Lebanon, Turkey, and Australia

Abstract: This study investigates how differing educational frameworks across Lebanon, Turkey, and Australia influence the perceived educational performance of Syrian refugee children. The legal status granted to refugees in each country fundamentally shapes their respective education systems' responses. In Lebanon, refugees are generally classified as temporarily displaced persons, resulting in an emergency-based approach to education for the approximately 500,000 Syrian children present. By contrast, Australia has offered permanent resettlement opportunities to selected Syrian refugees, integrating them directly into mainstream schools. Turkey, meanwhile, has progressively shifted from emergency-based measures to policies oriented toward long-term integration. This research is based on survey data from 1298 Syrian refugee children across the three contexts. Findings from ordered probit regression analyses indicate that, beyond the legal duration of residency and the prevailing educational policy model (emergency versus long-term integration), variables such as the extent of educational segregation, the availability of preparatory and language support programs, and the socioeconomic status of families are also pivotal in shaping students' self-perceived academic performance. Parental factors, particularly mothers' educational attainment, parental encouragement, and parent–teacher communication, are additionally found to be important influences on how refugee children perceive their own educational outcomes.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Enhance teacher–student relationships: Train teachers to foster friendly, interactive environments, as hostile or disengaged practices significantly reduce refugee children's perceived academic achievement.

Expand preparatory and language support: Ensure access to bridging and language programmes that help refugee students transition into mainstream education, addressing the large gaps observed between Lebanon and Australia.

Address socio-economic and social segregation barriers: Provide financial assistance to families facing poverty and housing instability and promote integration strategies that reduce isolation in displaced-only neighbourhoods.

Strengthen parental engagement and capacity: Encourage regular communication between parents and teachers and invest in mothers' education and capacity building, as maternal education strongly predicts better outcomes.

Recommendations for research:

Compare outcomes across settlement models: Further analyse how emergency, medium-term, and long-term paradigms affect refugee children's educational trajectories.

Investigate preparatory programme effectiveness: Need to study how language and bridging classes improve integration and long-term learning outcomes of refugees.

Explore interlinkages between socio-economic stress and education: Examine how poverty, mobility, and neighbourhood composition affect school performance.

Assess gendered and intergenerational dynamics: Investigate the impact of gender on school outcomes, and how parental aspirations and intergenerational factors influence refugee learning.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Basic Education / Secondary Education / Emergencies

IN BRIEF

Disturbing disparity in education: refugees' self-positioning and resistance to barriers they face in Mexico

Author, Publication, Year: Amelia, S., & Wahyudi, R., *Language, Discourse & Society*, 2025

Abstract: This study aims to raise awareness of refugee education due to the increased shortage of educational access for refugees. The language interplays within educational discourse to discover the narrative in the speech. This study analyses Adriana Figueredo Costero's speech as a refugee representative in the United Nations conference under the discussion of refugee education. The study focuses on refugee portrayal based on the speaker's perspective on the discussion related to refugee education in Mexico. This research is conducted under a qualitative approach by using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which situates discourse within the interconnected levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice, together with Halliday's systemic functional linguistic approach, which examines language through its ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, to explore how discourse constructs meaning in social and institutional contexts. The result of the study indicates that the disparity in refugee education is triggered by unfulfilled basic needs, administrative adversity, and public sentiment toward refugees. Second, the conference is used as a means of negotiation from refugees toward the society and government. Third, the conference is used to construct a positive portrayal of refugees through the subject positioning. The speech also reflects the social perspective toward refugees. This research has contributed to the applied theories in language study and its involvement in discourse and society.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Strengthen access to education and basic services: Improve provision of electricity, internet, classrooms, and trained teachers, as lack of basic facilities exacerbates exclusion.

Reduce administrative barriers: Simplify documentation and asylum procedures to ensure refugees can enrol in schools without legal or bureaucratic delays.

Promote inclusive public discourse: Counter xenophobic narratives by supporting refugee voices in national and international forums, fostering empathy and solidarity.

Expand partnerships with NGOs and international programmes: Scale up initiatives such as DAFI, Yes We Can Foundation, and the Habesha Project to widen education access for refugees in Mexico.

Recommendations for research:

Discourse analysis of refugee self-representation: Examine how first-person refugee narratives shape public perception and policy debates.

Comparative studies on educational disparity: Investigate barriers to refugee education across Latin American host countries to identify commonalities and divergences.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Secondary Education / Tertiary Education / Emergencies

IN BRIEF

The impact of globalisation on refugees' education in Uganda

Author, Publication, Year: Akinkurolere, S. O., Ijadimine, O., & Saba, L. O., *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science,* 2025

Abstract: The role of globalization in different education systems keeps receiving attention and generates interesting academic discourse. This paper explores the impact of globalization on refugee education in Uganda, which hosts a

Refugee school in Kiryandongo Settlement, Uganda   © UNHCR/Yonna Tukundane

refugee population of 1,907,431 as of 31 August 2025. It highlights the potential challenges of sustaining inclusive education as a matter of social justice. In particular, the paper examines the influence of globalization, the provisions of existing policies, and the degree of policy responsiveness in addressing the educational needs of refugees. The paper employed a qualitative approach by systematically reviewing secondary literature on key words such as "globalization," "refugee education," "equity," "policy inclusion," "social justice," and "Uganda" that are relevant to the topic and answer the questions. It is found that Uganda's education system is impacted by the influx of refugees with diverse opportunities and constraining factors. Technology, particularly ICT, is noted as both an opportunity for expanding access and a constraint due to limited infrastructure and resources. Also, refugees' access to education provides a mediating role between globalization and social justice. The policies especially at national and local levels enhance the benefits of globalization for both nationals and refugees. Even though, further research could consider primary data from refugees, the paper provides insights to equity-based approaches that could benefit educational leaders and policy makers in maximizing the opportunities of globalization and minimizing the constraints through equitable and inclusive education to attain social cohesion and developmental goals. Therefore, it draws attention to the critical functions of access and policy for refugees in any host country.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Reform and update refugee education policies: Regularly review and adapt Uganda's Refugee Act(2006),which guarantee refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to social services including education, and related frameworks to address inequalities and sustain alignment with evolving global standards.

Increase funding and resources: Mobilise national and international investment to expand infrastructure, technology adoption, and teaching capacity for inclusive refugee education.

Expand higher education and vocational access: Provide scholarships, bursaries, and free skills training for refugees to strengthen socio-economic inclusion and future employability.

Introduce structured bilingual education: Implement bilingual programmes in settlement schools to support non-English-speaking refugee children and ease cultural transition.

Recognise prior qualifications: Develop mechanisms for validating refugee home-country credentials, supported by translation and culturally responsive teaching materials.

Recommendations for research:

Assess long-term impacts of globalisation on refugee education: Study whether globalisation-driven reforms in Uganda translate into durable gains in equity and inclusion.

Evaluate technology-enhanced learning: Examine how digital tools and contextualised innovations affect refugee students' integration and achievement.

Investigate higher education trajectories: Analyse barriers and success factors shaping refugee access to tertiary and vocational education in Uganda.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Basic Education / Secondary Education / Tertiary Education / Emergencies

IN BRIEF

Improving reading and writing skills of refugee primary school students via educational digital game: an action research

Author, Publication, Year: Güner Özer, M., & Belet Boyacı, Ş. D., *Education and Information Technologies*, 2025

Abstract: Due to recent migration movements, Türkiye has seen a continuous increase in diversity based on nationality, race, and culture, becoming a country that hosts a significant refugee population. For the integration of refugees into society, it is essential for them to learn the official language of the host country in the initial stages of education. Digital games, as a tool provided by technology, can effectively enhance language skills in refugee students, by integrating instructional activities into gameplay, offering immediate feedback, and embedding reading and writing tasks within meaningful cultural contexts. This action research explores how the reading and writing skills of refugee primary school students learning Turkish as a second language can be improved through educational digital game-supported instruction. The study was conducted with 10 refugee students identified as having reading and writing challenges. Six action cycles consisting of 60 sessions, each lasting 40 minutes, were implemented. Data collection instruments included a reading achievement test, a writing skills assessment rubric, researcher's journals, worksheets, observations, interview forms, and records from the validity committee. A three-dimensional educational digital game, "Journey to Turkish," was developed using the UNITY game engine, with instructional activities integrated into the gameplay. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired samples t-test and Kendall's W Test, while qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that, through action cycles, refugee students improved their reading and writing skills in Turkish as a second language. The study discusses the contextual factors contributing to these outcomes and their broader implications.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Integrate educational digital games into early language instruction: Structured, curriculum-aligned games like Journey to Turkish can enhance refugee students' literacy through interactive, motivational learning environments. Their implementation should be guided by pedagogical principles and adapted for local curriculum goals.

Adopt long-term, iterative teaching cycles to support language acquisition: The six-cycle action research model showed measurable improvement in refugee students' reading and writing skills. Structured cycles with monitoring and teacher reflection can ensure sustained learning gains.

Train teachers in game-based and inclusive pedagogy: Teachers need training in integrating digital tools and inclusive methods to support refugee learners, including managing classroom diversity and using adaptive strategies during language instruction.

Ensure cultural relevance in language materials: Embedding local cultural symbols and practices in teaching tools, as seen in the game design (e.g., Turkish cities, music, food), helped foster engagement and integration among refugee students.

Address emotional and motivational barriers to learning: The study found students previously reluctant to read/write became enthusiastic when supported by interactive digital learning and personalized feedback. Programs should prioritize enjoyment and agency in learning.

Recommendations for research:

Examine scalability of digital game-supported instruction: Future research should assess how such tools perform across larger, more diverse refugee populations and educational settings.

Explore comparative effectiveness across age groups: Most prior studies targeted adults; further work should explore whether primary, secondary, and adolescent learners respond differently to digital language learning tools.

Evaluate long-term impacts on literacy and integration: Follow-up studies could measure how language gains persist over time and influence broader integration outcomes, such as school performance and social participation.

Develop cross-contextual studies on teacher adaptation: Since teacher reflections were integral to this study's success, research should analyse how educators in other systems perceive and adapt to digital language instruction with refugee children.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Basic Education

IN BRIEF

Bringing refugees into vocational education and training: the challenges of a pre-apprenticeship program for integration in Switzerland

<u>Author, Publication, Year</u>: Felder, A., Fedrigo, L., Caprani, I., & Kammermann, M., *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 2025

<u>Abstract</u>: This paper examines the evolution of a Pre-Apprenticeship program for Integration (PAI) designed to prepare refugees for vocational education and training (VET) in two French-speaking Swiss cantons. Using qualitative interviews with PAI experts and document analysis, the study explores the structural and conceptual changes within the program since its implementation in 2018. Key challenges include inter-institutional coordination, inconsistent engagement with vocational schools, communication with companies, and the highly heterogeneous learning needs of refugee participants,

Nansen Refugee Award Laureate Maimouna Ba in Switzerland, supporting displaced women's livelihoods and children's education
© UNHCR/Anne-Laure Lechat

particularly in language and transversal skills. Findings show clear differences between the two cantons: in one, PAI is organized as a separate transition year with one-year contracts and only limited connections to vocational schools, while in the other it is embedded within the VET system as a year-long extension linked to apprenticeship contracts and closer cooperation with schools and companies. Both cantons introduced mentorship structures, but these differ in their institutional attachment and responsibilities. While both cantons implemented individualized support and efforts to align school-based learning with workplace expectations, tensions remain between policy expectations for rapid labor market entry and the time needed for foundational skill development.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Align PAI with mainstream vocational education institutions: Stronger institutional links with vocational schools can improve coherence between training content and actual VET expectations. Structural separation, as seen in one canton where PAI is organized as a stand-alone transition year, hampers curriculum adaptation, company recruitment, and student transition.

Integrate individualized mentorship and stakeholder coordination: Regular meetings between mentors, trainers, and teachers help ensure that refugee apprentices receive consistent support. Models that institutionalize this coordination improve program responsiveness and learner guidance.

Enhance preparatory language and transversal skill support: Language proficiency alone does not guarantee readiness for VET. Programs should also address social, organizational, and self-regulated learning skills, and offer targeted support to those with interrupted or limited prior education.

Base candidate selection on holistic readiness rather than test scores: Language test scores often fail to reflect practical communication or learning capacity. Alternative indicators—such as learning motivation, life stability, and self-organization—should inform admissions decisions.

Develop employer engagement strategies to secure placements: Ongoing collaboration with companies is critical to sustaining placements. Targeted communication, transparent role expectations, and co-developed training objectives can strengthen buy-in from employers.

Recommendations for research:

Compare integration outcomes across different PAI structures: Future studies should assess whether embedding PAI within VET (as in canton B) leads to better transition rates and learner outcomes than treating it as a separate track.

Investigate teacher training for refugee-specific pedagogy: Research is needed on how best to prepare teachers for working with refugee learners, especially in dual-language and vocational subject instruction.

Explore the role of cross-sectoral partnerships in refugee training: Studies should examine how municipal services, education authorities, and employers can collaboratively support refugee learners' transitions into work-based training.

Assess long-term employment trajectories of PAI graduates: Tracking refugee apprentices over time would provide evidence on whether current programs achieve sustainable labor market integration.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Tertiary Education

IN BRIEF

A qualitative exploration of the barriers asylum-seeking students face when accessing higher education in the UK

Abstract: Asylum-seeking students have historically been under-represented in higher education (HE) in the UK. This paper provides a qualitative exploration of the barriers they face when seeking to access and participate in HE. Based on twenty interviews with students enrolled across three universities, the research shows that the barriers experienced by students before and after entry to HE can be intersecting and cumulative. They include financial exclusion, limited access to pre-university courses, institutional discrimination, and mental ill-health. The findings indicate that the challenges faced by asylum-seeking students are ongoing and dynamic, and that students must work hard to advocate for themselves to overcome them. Participants reported not knowing that asylum seekers were able to access higher education, even when they had already completed undergraduate or master's degrees; others described receiving misleading or inaccurate advice from institutional staff or gatekeepers, which delayed applications or led them down unsuitable pathways; and some were offered university places only after scholarship deadlines had passed, forcing them to defer entry for a year or abandon the opportunity altogether. Students described spending extensive time searching for information, repeatedly explaining their asylum status to different offices, and relying on friends or charities for guidance and support. The paper concludes that the HE sector must develop coordinated approaches to widening participation and inclusion that are based on lived experiences and structural change.

Recommendations for policy and practice:

Expand access to student finance and scholarships for asylum seekers: Financial exclusion remains a core barrier. Targeted bursaries, fee waivers, and revised eligibility policies are essential to reduce structural inequity in HE access.

Improve visibility of preparatory and alternative pathways: Institutions should proactively promote access routes such as foundation years and bridging programs, especially for students with interrupted educational backgrounds.

Embed anti-discrimination training and accountability across staff roles: Students reported microaggressions and staff unfamiliarity with asylum-related policies. Institutional training and clearer support protocols are needed.

Establish specialist support services for asylum-seeking students: Tailored wellbeing, legal, and academic support can help mitigate the compounded stressors these students face across systems.

Support peer networks and belonging initiatives: Feelings of isolation were frequent. Structured peer programs and community-building activities can strengthen social support and retention.

Recommendations for research:

Study institutional policy variation and its effects: Comparative case studies could illuminate how different universities interpret and implement support for asylum-seeking students.

Track long-term outcomes beyond HE enrolment: Longitudinal research is needed to understand how HE experiences shape post-study integration, employment, and wellbeing.

Analyse the impact of legal status uncertainty on learning: Future studies should explore how immigration status precarity affects educational engagement, mental health, and identity formation.

Link: Download article [pdf]

Tag: Tertiary Education / Emergencies

Additional Reading

Other interesting readings selected by our team (*= not open access).

*Diab, J. L. (2025). Bordering belonging: A qualitative exploration of educational integration for Syrian refugees in Lebanon across perceived value and impact. Education, Citizenship and Social Justice.

*Le Pichon, E., Naji, M., & Hassan, M. (2025). From curriculum to classroom: enhancing STEM educational assessment for refugee students in Canada. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 1–14.

* Bektas, F., Hazir, O., Amac, Z., & Ozcan, M. (2025). Educating the displaced: inclusive education for Syrian Turkmens in Türkiye. Cambridge Journal of Education, 1–22.

Leckey, Y., Horgan, J., Sakr, R., Malone, A., Quinn, P., & McGilloway, S. (2025). Supporting young MENA refugees in Ireland during and after the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges in service provision and continuity of care. International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care.

RESOURCES

10 Principles to Guide EiEPC Financing Approaches: Recommendations for Multilateral & Bilateral Donors

Investing in Futures: 2024 Annual Results Report

Back to school, but who's teaching? A call to invest in refugee teachers

UNHCR Education Report 2025

Europe Region Quarterly Update — Education: a lifeline amid forced displacement (Q3 July - September 2025) | UNHCR Europe

EVENTS

[2025 International Conference: Refugee & Migrants in our Common Home: Mobilizing Academic Communities for Action](#)
Organiser: Villanova University's Strategic Initiative for Migrants + Refugees, Augustinian Secretariat for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Center for Migration Studies, RME Network, Jesuit Refugee Services, Scalabrini International Migration Institute, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Title: Refugee & Migrants in our Common Home: Mobilizing Academic Communities for Action
Date: October 1-3, 2025
Location: Augustinianum, Rome, Italy

[2025 Refugee Education Summit](#)
Organiser: Pennsylvania Department of Education's Refugee Education Program; Pennsylvania Department of Human Services; Center for Schools and Communities
Title: 2025 Refugee Education Summit — Welcoming, Supporting, and Engaging Newcomer Students and Families
Date: September 16–17, 2025
Location: Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA

Acknowledgements

The Refugee Education Research Digest was developed by Xiao Liu and Seun Adebayo.

Contact

Seun B. Adebayo
Pedagogical and Digital Inclusion Officer
DRS, Education Section
Email: adebayo@unhcr.org