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OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN REFUGEE SETTINGS

This Education Brief provides guidance on developing programmes to enroll refugee out-of-school children (OOSC) in school, and to improve initiatives for children not attending school regularly. It provides information on OOSC needs assessments and highlights cross-sectoral linkages. Information provided in this Brief can be applied in both protracted and emergency contexts.

Children and youth who are not in school do not benefit from their internationally established right to basic education, and are at greater risk of exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence, early marriage, child labour, and recruitment into armed groups. Participation in certified education services including formal, non-formal and informal education¹ contributes to durable solutions for refugees. From a solutions perspective, UNHCR prioritizes programme access to national education systems in the host country when possible and feasible.

¹ Formal education refers to a curriculum designed and endorsed by a Ministry of Education that leads to certification. Non-formal education takes place both within and outside educational institutions and caters to people of all ages, and does not always lead to certification. Informal education refers to education activities that include literacy, numeracy, life skills and recreational activities, but are not certifiable by a Ministry of Education and are not bound to an age or target group.



GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

Several global commitments support refugee access to education and can be used for advocacy purposes. These include:

- The [1951 Convention on Refugees](#) guarantees the right to education for refugees.
- [Article 22](#) of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** secures the provision of education for refugee children and access to national systems.
- **Sustainable Development Goal #4** 'To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030' policy documents, the [Incheon Declaration](#) and the **Framework for Action**, commit to developing more inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults affected by conflict and crisis, including internally displaced persons and refugees.
- UNHCR's Division of International Protection has complementary [Education](#), [Child Protection](#) and [Sexual and Gender Based Violence](#) Global **Strategies** that provide a comprehensive protective framework for refugees, with a focus on children and youth.

UNDERSTANDING OOSC AND CHILDREN AT-RISK

UNHCR employs the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) definitions for OOSC:

- ❶ Children who have **no access** to education.
- ❷ Children who have access to a school but are **not enrolled**.
- ❸ Children who are enrolled in school but **do not attend regularly**.
- ❹ Children who have **dropped out** of school.

Depending on the context, the following groups of children may be particularly at risk:

- Children engaged in child labour, including domestic labour
- Children with disabilities
- Children who have experienced trauma
- Separated or unaccompanied children
- Orphans or children in child-headed or female-headed households
- Children associated with armed groups, or child soldiers
- Children who are married, pregnant girls or young mothers
- Children who belong to minority groups

Refugee children and youth are often excluded from school due to:

- Exclusionary legal or policy frameworks
- Missing identity-related documentation required for school enrollment or examination eligibility
- Language barriers
- Being over-age
- Limited or insufficient number of schools
- Discrimination and bullying
- Gender attitudes
- Early pregnancy and/or marriage
- Poverty and child labour

DATA AND ASSESSMENTS FOR OOSC

While significant progress has been made towards global OOSC enrolment targets since 2000, UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (UIS) reports the decline in OOSC figures has slowed since 2005. Global data from 2014 suggests that 58 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 years and 63 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 years do not have access to education.² If current trends continue, 43% of OOSC – 15 million girls and 10 million boys – are likely to never enroll in school.³ Furthermore, **over one-third of the world's out-of-school primary aged population lives in conflict-affected states.**⁴ Children affected by conflict are more likely to be displaced either in their home countries or as refugees, which has a direct effect on school attendance and completion. Refugee children are not included in global statistics, though UNHCR continues to advocate for their inclusion.

Refugee children have unique educational needs. Joint assessments conducted with government and education partners will clarify real, rather than perceived, reasons refugee children and youth may be out of school, and establish strategic approaches to addressing their needs. It is possible to generally calculate refugee participation in educational programming through enrolment data provided by partners, but **it is critical to conduct an assessment to understand the specific barriers refugee OOSC face in each displacement context.**

Assessments should be **inclusive** and ensure consideration of all children regardless of age, gender, or disability, and should capture a **range of ages** that include early childhood to tertiary education needs. Assessments should adopt both **quantitative and qualitative** methodologies, including surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Assessment teams should be comprised of both **men and women**, and also include **the refugee community** from planning through results stages. Staff or partners conducting assessments should be guided to facilitate discussions that do not raise unrealistic expectations of communities.



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Assessment tools

- **ProGres:** UNHCR's registration database *proGres* provides age and gender disaggregated data for registered refugees of all ages. It is important that registration teams capture educational history (last school grade level completed; highest education qualification), and that age-and gender-segregated data is pulled from *proGres* to calculate possible Net Enrolment Rates (NER), Gross Enrolment Rates (GER), and the likely number of over-aged children who require primary school access. Comparing existing enrolment data to registration data can also provide a preliminary OOSC estimate.
- **Secondary data review:** Existing assessments by UNHCR, sister agencies and partners, including child protection partners that examine the level of educational participation amongst refugees and host community students, and identify persistent issues, including quality issues, related to local or refugee-specific access and retention.

² http://www.unicef.org/education/bege_61659.html.

³ <http://goo.gl/HgSllq> (2014).

⁴ UNESCO (2015). *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. Paris: UNESCO.

- **UNHCR's Needs Assessments in Refugee Emergencies (NARE)** is designed to assist UNHCR operations with initial multi-sectoral needs assessments. The NARE includes an education checklist that provides guiding questions on pre- and post-influx data review and analysis. The checklist also offers guidance on interviews with community key informants, focus group discussions, and household key informants, in addition to guidance with community observations and education infrastructure visits.
- The **Joint Education Needs Assessments**, produced by the Global Education Cluster, consolidates the information needed to make programmatic decisions in the early phases of an emergency. These assessments may capture limited information on OOSC and may be more appropriate for a sudden onset emergency. Subsequent in-depth assessments may be necessary.
- The **Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit** produced by the Global Protection Cluster captures the linkages between protection concerns and low education enrollment and attendance.
- The **Global Out Of School Children Initiative (OOSCI)** is a partnership between UNICEF and UNESCO Institute of Statistics that serves to improve data, analysis and create detailed OOSC profiles. If UNICEF and UNESCO at country-level are planning to conduct an **OOSCI national assessment**, UNHCR should advocate for the inclusion of refugee children.

Programming Interventions to Consider for OOSC in Refugee Settings

Using the assessment outcomes, **specific targeted interventions should be designed to establish or increase enrollment of OOSC** in appropriate educational programmes, with elements that support them to stay in school. Interventions should respond to educational access and quality, and should promote safe learning environments.

Below are a **few examples of some common interventions**. This is not an exhaustive list. It is important that interventions are designed and contextualized for each individual refugee context, and are accompanied by sufficient budget allocation.

Ensuring access to education: Advocacy at national level

- Negotiate with education authorities to waive school fees for national schools, to provide education programmes that accommodate the special needs of refugee OOSC and recognition of prior learning through placement tests.
- Establish robust data management systems and/or work with national partners to ensure that Education Monitoring Information Systems (EMIS) capture education statistics for refugee children, and establish appropriate funding allocations in national education plans for regions where refugee populations live.
- Advocate for certification of education programs by the Ministry of Education. Children and youth need education that is certified, providing opportunities to participate in secondary education and beyond.
- Promote the creation of education programs for all ages including early childhood, primary/basic, accelerated, secondary, tertiary, non-formal and adult.

Ensuring access to education at family and community levels

- Establish referral mechanisms and/or specialized services such as refugee information networks that provide information about how to access education services.
- Launch livelihoods activities for parents, education grants or other sustainable direct assistance that may support vulnerable families and cover education costs, such as uniforms, materials or registration fees.
- Work with communities to support identification of OOSC and monitoring attendance of refugee boys, girls, at-risk children and vulnerable groups.
- Involve communities in identifying at-risk children, and facilitate community participation in planning, designing, monitoring and assessing educational activities.



- Start sensitization activities that respond to misconceptions or information gaps. Examples include targeted sensitization on girls' education, early marriage or child labor.
- Identify education champions who can work with community members of influence such as religious leaders to promote school attendance and achievement.

Ensuring education quality and protection at school level

- Provide teacher training and professional support to build basic teaching skills for unqualified teachers and amplified skills for trained teachers in areas such as classroom management, psychosocial support, or language acquisition.
- Provide language classes for refugee children, and the wider community, especially in contexts where refugees do not speak the language of instruction.
- Establish and monitor participatory teacher codes of conduct, school policies that protect children from violence or corporal punishment in school, and programmes to combat bullying and discrimination, including Peace Education programmes.
- Adjust school timetables to accommodate refugee children who might work at home or elsewhere.
- Maximize existing school infrastructure to meet population needs by using double, girls-only or other appropriate shifts.
- Identify mentors and role models who can increase children's motivation, particularly girls. Teachers and staff should be representative of the student body, and include women and ethnic minorities.
- Provide Accelerated Education Programmes for over-age children who have been out of school and need to be placed in a level appropriate to their age.
- Facilitate representation of refugee parents in Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) and school governance bodies.
- Establish community support for school participation, for example by encouraging community mechanisms that arrange to accompany groups of children to school if routes are considered unsafe.
- Provide safe learning environments with adequate WASH facilities, classroom infrastructure, and teaching and learning materials.

Cross-Sectoral Issues to Consider

Schools are places where sectors can converge to meet children's educational needs. Life-saving information is critical in refugee contexts where children are at risk of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, recruitment into armed groups and other forms of abuse and exploitation. Through partners, UNHCR staff can ensure such information is shared with children, their families and communities to protect children in fragile contexts. Life-saving information communicated in school contexts about landmines, basic health and WASH practices such as safe hygiene and hand washing can benefit all refugees.

→ **Child Protection**⁵: psychosocial training for education personnel can better equip them to identify and support children with significant psychosocial needs. Establishing child protection monitoring mechanisms can minimize violence and discrimination against children in school.

→ **Sexual Gender Based Violence**: SGBV partners can support operations to consider the gender-specific needs of children, such as safe school routes; gender-separated latrines with secure, private spaces for menstruating girls; Codes of Conduct that ensure harassment-free zones for both boys and girls; female teachers and role models.

→ **Health and Nutrition**: health personnel and nutrition specialists can share information on vaccination campaigns and other health services, and health and nutrition education can be integrated into teaching.

→ **Water, Sanitation, Hygiene**: WASH specialists can ensure that children and youth have access to dedicated, clean, gender-separated latrines, hand-washing facilities with soap, and safe drinking water.

⁵ Child Protection Minimum Standards, standard 20; CP and Education

RESOURCES

In addition to *UNHCR's Education Strategy 2012-2016*, the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) **Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies** offers guidance, which can be adapted and contextualized in all types of emergencies, and guide staff to ensure equitable access to education for all children.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS BY THEMATIC AREA

- UNHCR Needs Assessment in Refugee Emergencies [Education Checklist](#).
- UNHCR- IRC's e-learning module: ["Safe Schools and Learning Environment: How to prevent and respond to violence in refugee schools and IRC's Healing Classrooms."](#)
- Working in Conflict: INEE's [conflict sensitive](#) education materials.
- [School safety](#): UNICEF "Towards Safer Schools" assessment methodology.
- Back to School: UNICEF ["Back to School Guide"](#) for emergencies.
- Girls Education: United Nation's Girl's Education Initiative's ([UNGEI](#)).
- Teaching and Learning INEE's [teaching and learning](#) guidance materials.
- Education Supplies and Procurement: UNICEF's emergency [education supplies](#).
- Early Childhood Care Development: INEE's tool kit for in emergencies ([ECCD](#)).
- Child Protection Minimum Standards in Emergencies: ([minimum standards](#)).