

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

**Standing Committee**  
69<sup>th</sup> meeting

Distr.: Restricted  
7 June 2017  
English  
Original: English and French

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## **Update on education**

*Summary*

This paper provides an update on developments that have occurred in education for refugee and other displaced children and youth since the report to the sixtieth meeting of the Standing Committee in 2014 (see EC/65/SC/CRP.13). It focuses on UNHCR's support to improve accessibility to, and the quality of, educational opportunities for populations of concern.

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## I. Introduction

1. Of the six million refugees of primary and secondary school-going age, at least 3.7 million do not have access to education. At the primary level, at most 50 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in school, compared to nearly 90 per cent of children globally. At the secondary level, 22 per cent of refugee youth attend school, compared to 84 per cent of youth globally. Less than 1 per cent of eligible refugees have access to tertiary education, compared to 34 per cent globally.<sup>1</sup> In many of the regions experiencing large-scale displacement, refugee children and youth miss out on school for an average of 3 to 4 years, if they have in fact ever attended school at all.

2. In addition to teaching refugee children and youth skills to live productive, fulfilling and independent lives, participation in education delivers critical protection outcomes. In particular, it provides a safe place for them to learn and connect meaningfully with peers and mentors. These conditions can mitigate against known protection risks such as early marriage and child labour. The existence of secondary and tertiary opportunities also serves as an incentive for the completion of lower levels of education. When emphasis is placed on gender equality and the inclusion of girls, especially in secondary education, benefits can include decreased infant mortality, improved family nutrition, and growth in per capita income.<sup>2</sup> While these benefits can support development in host countries as well as countries of origin, a lack of access to education can lead to poverty, inequality and alienation.

3. More than 80 per cent of refugees are hosted in developing countries where education services are often already stretched to meet the needs of citizens. With the population of school-age refugees growing by an average of 600,000 persons per year since 2011, many host countries need additional support to meet the educational needs of refugee and host community children and youth. This includes cohesive and appropriate action from the onset of an emergency, with a view to providing access to school or school-readiness programmes within the first three months of displacement.

## II. Policy settings

4. The aim of UNHCR's education strategy is for refugees to have sustainable access to national education systems and lifelong learning. Partnerships, particularly with ministries of education and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are central to achieving this. UNHCR's other key objectives include: building the capacity of UNHCR and partner staff to better assess and plan for the needs of refugee learners and teachers; improving data collection, with a view to also improving the monitoring and evaluation; and developing innovative approaches to increase access to, and the quality of, education for refugee and host community children and youth. Additionally, UNHCR seeks to align its country-level education strategies with multi-year national education sector plans **so that separate education strategies for refugees can gradually be phased out.**

5. Building on existing international law and standards, two significant advances in the global policy environment will have a positive impact on the delivery of education in the context of humanitarian crises, including for displaced persons. In 2015, States adopted the "2030 agenda for sustainable development", with sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4) aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Incheon Declaration, which underpins international cooperation to achieve SDG4, specifically commits States to develop appropriate education systems to meet

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2016), "Missing out: Refugee education in crisis", available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0>

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2013), "Education transforms lives", available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002231/223115E.pdf>

the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This will help ensure children affected by conflict are accounted for in educational planning and monitoring, with a focus on inclusion in national systems.

6. In September 2016, United Nations Members States recognized the need for greater responsibility-sharing to protect and assist refugees and support host States and communities by adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which includes as an annex the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF). Education is an important component of the New York Declaration, with emphasis placed on inclusion in national systems and multi-stakeholder partnerships. In Uganda, education is at the centre of the CRRF, with a broad partnership under development to address key gaps in education access and student retention. The central objective is ensuring local institutions can sustainably support both refugee and host community children and youth.

7. The pledges made by a number of States to further improve refugees' access to educational opportunities during the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in New York in September 2016 were another positive step forward. Noting conflict-affected countries spend approximately 3 per cent of their national budgets on education and the education sector currently receives less than 2 per cent of total humanitarian aid globally, these pledges are an important, practical way for States to support refugees and share responsibility with host countries.

### **III. Improving access, innovation and inclusion in national systems**

8. UNHCR supports the inclusion of refugees in national education systems as a means of ensuring quality assurance, providing access to accredited examinations, promoting social cohesion, investing in existing programmes and infrastructure, and achieving SDG4. Together, UNHCR, States and other partners have made considerable progress in ensuring refugee children and youth are included in national education systems. In Chad, for example, UNHCR has worked with the Government to facilitate a transition for Sudanese refugees from the Sudanese to the Chadian national Arabic curriculum. As part of this process, more than 340 refugees obtained professional qualifications as teachers and more than 300 specialized Chadian teachers were deployed to camps and other sites serving both refugee and host community populations.

9. UNHCR has also worked with the Ministry of Education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure local schools are supported to include refugees from Burundi, as well as other displaced children. In Turkey, the Government has released a "roadmap" promoting the progressive inclusion of refugee students into its national education system.

10. In 2016, UNHCR and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) signed a memorandum of understanding to further strengthen collaboration to support the inclusion of refugees in national multi-year education plans. UNHCR is increasingly participating in GPE activities with relevant ministries of education. This includes representation in local education groups in countries with significant refugee and IDP populations. Specific countries for collaboration in 2017 include Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania.

11. In Chad, where refugee children have access to the national education system and the Government is committed to educating refugees and local children together, the Ministry of Education requested and received \$6.95 million in emergency support from the GPE in 2016 for the Nigerian refugee situation around Lake Chad. These funds were used to train more than 800 teachers and benefit more than 8,500 children, including from refugee, displaced, returnee and host communities.

12. However, even in contexts where refugee inclusion in national education systems is supported, non-recognition of refugee status and lack of equivalency procedures for displaced students, particularly those without proof of prior learning, is common. To counter this trend, it is important for States to develop and implement policies to assess students' competencies in situations where official documentation is unavailable and to support appropriate inclusion in education services. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, has formalized a regional equivalency system under which refugees have been included in national education systems in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger. As part of this process, student achievement prior to displacement is recognized without the need for formal documentary proof. This type of approach supports sustainable education programming by strengthening existing systems rather than setting up separate, refugee-specific education services that do not benefit host community students and may not fit within development agendas.

13. Refugee children and youth require access to education programming that takes into account their day-to-day realities without closing the door to further educational opportunities. In practice, this has involved national initiatives such as the accelerated basic programme available to refugees in Ethiopia; orientation and bridging programmes to accompany national systems as in Rwanda; and intensive language of instruction training as a preparation for inclusion in the national education system, such as that currently being provided by Turkey. It has also involved flexible school hours to accommodate students who support their families financially or are raising children, two approaches which have been implemented in community schools for girls and young mothers in Nyarugusu refugee camp in the United Republic of Tanzania.

14. Difficulty in accessing quality learning, education, and skill-building opportunities was one of ten key issues highlighted by refugee youth during the 2016 Global Refugee Youth Consultations.<sup>3</sup> To further improve refugees' access to primary education, UNHCR has partnered with the Education a Child (EAC) programme, which helps tens of thousands of refugee children to attend schools in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In 2015, EAC and UNHCR launched a new three-year partnership that will provide access to education for more than 710,000 children affected by conflict and forced displacement, including in Chad, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda and Yemen.

15. In Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, where 95 per cent of the Somali refugees who arrived in 2011 had never had access to education prior to displacement, access to the national education system and investment from the private sector and development partners have resulted in an increased demand for, and delivery of, secondary education services for both refugees and host community children. A collaborative proposal submitted to the "Education Cannot Wait" (ECW) fund is due to result in the opening of three new secondary schools for host and refugee youth in Gambella and Assosa in Ethiopia.

16. To facilitate greater access to higher education, connected learning programmes have been expanded to include 11 partners, with 6,500 students now completing courses in Afghanistan, Chad, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan and Thailand. UNHCR,

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<sup>3</sup> The full list of issues highlighted by refugee youth during the 2016 Global Refugee Youth Consultations is as follows: 1) difficulties obtaining legal recognition and personal documents; 2) difficulty in accessing quality learning, education and skill-building opportunities; 3) discrimination, racism, xenophobia and "culture clash"; 4) few youth employment and livelihood opportunities; 5) gender inequality, discrimination, exploitation and violence, including for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth; 6) poor access to youth-sensitive health care, including psychosocial support; 7) lack of safety, security and freedom of movement; 8) challenges for unaccompanied youth; 9) lack of opportunities to participate, be engaged, or access decision makers; and 10) lack of information about asylum, refugee rights, and available services.

in collaboration with the University of Geneva, is coordinating with a consortium of connected learning partners to facilitate further growth of this initiative.

17. In 2016, over 4,300 refugees received DAFI scholarships to undertake tertiary education in 37 host countries, an increase of almost 90 per cent compared to 2015.<sup>4</sup> Refugees who undertake post-secondary education are well positioned to give back to their host communities and countries of asylum. Several Afghan recipients of DAFI scholarships in Pakistan, for example, are now contributing to the reconstruction of Afghanistan in their roles as government officials. DAFI refugee students in Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon and Uganda are also providing a range of services to their communities, including remedial support for secondary school students, literacy classes for women, and medical and legal information and advocacy.

18. Innovative approaches are often required to help meet the educational needs of refugee students. UNHCR's innovations in education focus on improving learning outcomes and increasing access so that refugee students can attend national schools, even where the language, content and teaching methods may differ from those in their country of origin. National and international non-governmental organizations, as well as academic institutions, are important partners for UNHCR and support efforts to further improve the quality of, and access to, education for displaced populations. Finn Church Aid and Columbia Teachers' College, for example, are completing a training, coaching and mobile mentoring programme in Kakuma camp in Kenya that supports teachers throughout their training. Noting these teachers already reach 100,000 students, UNHCR is working with partners to further expand the programme. In February 2017, UNHCR also joined Save the Children and Pearson, the world's largest education company, to establish "Promising practices", which calls for governments, businesses and individuals to submit ideas to further improve access to, and the quality of, refugee education. The submissions will be documented in a report launched later in 2017.

19. Since 2015, UNHCR has been working in a unique partnership with UNICEF and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on a "Human education accelerator initiative" (HEA), with the goal of supporting and documenting the process of scaling early stage innovations to fully developed and replicable programmes. Five innovative projects to improve education access and learning in conflict affected contexts are being supported, with a broad partnership of actors involved in developing a global scaling framework.

20. UNHCR has also convened a multi-agency working group on accelerated education to develop agreed principles and guidance for programmes that provide pathways for refugee children and youth to quickly re-enter formal learning environments. Accelerated education programmes are currently underway in a number of refugee host countries including Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania.

21. UNHCR has expanded its network of partners to deliver more cost-effective support for educational initiatives. Under the auspices of the ECW fund, UNHCR, the Interagency Network for Emergency Education (INEE) and the global education cluster have joined forces to develop tools, guidance and recommendations that can be adapted by humanitarian actors to suit different emergency contexts, including mixed refugee and IDP situations. This will help improve coordination between humanitarian and development actors so partners can support fast and coherent education outcomes in alignment with the priorities identified by national education sector plans.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR's higher education scholarship programme, funded by the German Government, is best known by the acronym DAFI, which stands for "Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlings Initiative Albert Einstein" (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund).

22. In collaboration with the Vodafone Foundation, UNHCR has used information technology to establish “Instant network schools” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. Instant network classroom kits, first launched in Kenya in June 2015, provide schools with localized digital content, tablets, projectors and audio systems powered by solar batteries and satellite or mobile networks.

23. In Burundi, Jordan, Lebanon and Malaysia, UNHCR is also working with partner organizations to trial new educational resources and approaches, with a focus on maximizing the opportunities afforded by technology. One such example is the “Teachers for teachers” programme, which enables refugees working as teachers to communicate with experienced educators worldwide using mobile phones. This provides them with the support networks necessary to address a range of challenges, including methods for teaching classes with large numbers of students.

24. Against a backdrop of ongoing and large-scale forced displacement, student visas, scholarships, internships and apprenticeship programmes complement the traditional protection and education strategies being implemented by UNHCR, States and other partners. For example, UNHCR is supporting the “Japanese initiative for the future of Syrian refugees”, under which 100 Syrian students will be sponsored over five years from 2017 to complete masters’ degrees in Japan. The Japanese Government has guaranteed these students’ protection under international law until employment or further study opportunities become available, either in Japan or elsewhere.

## V. Way forward

25. To further increase access to primary, secondary and tertiary education for refugee and other displaced children and youth, UNHCR is committed to the following activities:

- Supporting the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, noting this creates opportunities for effective use of humanitarian funding so that it contributes to quality teaching and learning, accredited examinations, social cohesion and investment in existing programmes and infrastructure to the benefit of both refugee and host communities.
- Ensuring that education is an integral component of the CRRF, as well as the broader humanitarian and development partnerships on which the CRRF is based.
- Supporting States and other partners to further improve the quality of education planning, programming and monitoring for children and youth from refugee and vulnerable host communities.
- Advocating with donors for the commitment of multi-year, predictable funding for education from the early stages of emergencies so that no refugee children or youth are excluded from education due to lack of funds, and so that existing host community education programmes affected by displacement receive additional humanitarian and development support.
- Maximizing partnerships with private companies and individuals, as well as civil society and NGOs, to continue to design context-relevant, innovative and sustainable ways to meet the educational needs of refugees and vulnerable host community students.