

SOCIAL INCLUSION OF REFUGEES

BACKGROUND GUIDE
CHALLENGE TOPIC #3



The MUN Refugee Challenge is an initiative launched by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to encourage students worldwide to shape solutions for people forced to flee their homes. This guide was drafted to help students prepare for their debates.

Anaïs, Vincent, and their son César, host Afghan refugees Zulfeqar and Battarine in Saint-Briest. The Afghan couple are like second parents to the French toddler.
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THE CHALLENGE

Including refugees in the societies where they have found refuge after fleeing conflict and persecution is the most effective way of helping them to rebuild their lives. Inclusion can take many forms: having the same rights as citizens, forging ties and friendships, being able to apply for local jobs or go to local schools, and having access to different services like housing or healthcare. Social inclusion allows people to fully participate in their community and fosters peaceful societies.

Social inclusion requires solidarity - the belief that we have more in common than that which divides us. But social inclusion can be a challenge in societies that reject groups that come from a different culture, religion or ethnicity than theirs. As a result, refugees face obstacles that hinder their participation in the social, economic and political life of the host communities where they live.

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Inclusion means different things to different groups of people forced to flee.

Resettled refugees

Some refugees are permanently resettled to a third country because they are classified as highly vulnerable and are unlikely to be able to go back to their country in the near future. Each year, resettled refugees constitute less than one percent of the total number of refugees. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country.

Refugees in protracted situations

Most refugees are hoping to go back home but they cannot because there is a war ongoing in their countries. 78 per cent of refugees live in protracted situations, which means that they have been in exile for over 5 years. Refugees from Somalia have lived in refugee camps for 30 years.

Internally displaced people

50 million people were displaced within their own countries at the end of 2019. IDPs reside in their own country and remain under the protection of their government, but they may also face challenges to be included by communities in other regions.

Asylum-seekers

An asylum-seeker is someone who is seeking refuge and international protection in a new country but whose status is not determined yet. Each year, around one million people seek asylum and wait for an answer for months or years. Some are kept in detention centers. This often leaves asylum-seekers feeling isolated, lonely and hopeless.

"Refugees must feel like they are bound to the values of the community and that their place in that society is respected".

—UN Secretary-General
António Guterres

Xenophobia and Fear



Refugees often suffer from discrimination in the countries where they have found refuge. This often comes in the form of narratives centred on a phobia of the outsider – based on ethnicity and race, religion, income, language and any signs of “otherness”. As a result, refugees and migrants may be perceived as a threat to the local culture, economy and security. This can lead to social exclusion and even to violence. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic UNHCR has reported an increase in incidents of assaults and hate speech towards refugees.

Tensions over Resources



Sometimes, tensions between host communities and refugees result from concern over the use of local resources. In low to middle-income countries, some communities are already struggling to meet their needs and are concerned about refugee arrivals. For example, the refugees fleeing the violent Islamist group Boko Haram in Nigeria to find safety in Niger spoke the same language as the local population. Yet, tensions arose over issues such as how humanitarian aid would be distributed. This is why UNHCR makes sure to help both refugees and host communities.

Inclusion in the Economy



The inability to find work is a significant barrier for refugees’ successful integration into society. While the right of refugees to work is embedded in the 1951 Refugee Convention, half of the member States do not recognize the rights of refugees to work legally or benefit from labor protections. Even States that grant the right to work usually impose conditions. In addition, most refugees have no access to financial services - for example they cannot open a bank account, which makes it difficult to save or borrow money and start a business. The difficult economic situation of refugees has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to Healthcare



Refugees often come from countries facing war or poverty and they embark on long and exhausting journeys to seek international protection. This often increases their vulnerability to diseases and mental health issues. Most refugee populations have limited access to health services and do not have the funds to get adequate treatment if needed. In order for refugees to be healthy and contribute actively to the development of their host community, they need to have access to quality health services.

Inclusion in the Education System

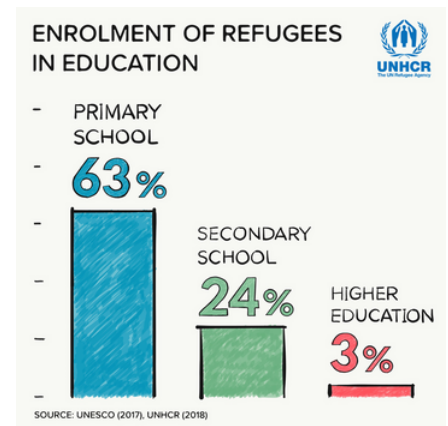


Refugee children in many parts of the world face discrimination when it comes to education. According to UNHCR, 3.7 million refugee children are out of school. Education allows refugees to recover a sense of purpose and dignity after the trauma of displacement, violence and persecution. Education also allows refugees to enter the labor market and become economically self-sufficient, breaking the dependency cycle. Thus, the lack of access to education puts refugees at risk of economic dependence and social exclusion.

“Especially now as we face COVID-19, education is everything to refugee children and they should not be left out.”

— Mo Salah, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador

Being unable to speak the local language of the host community is another barrier to social inclusion, since learning the local language is key in order to fully participate in all aspects of society.



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

—Sustainable Development Goal 16

UNHCR



- UNHCR highlights the role of refugees and how it benefits host communities. For example, during COVID-19, UNHCR featured stories of refugees who have been contributing heroically on the frontlines as doctors, cooks, soap makers and supportive neighbors.
- UNHCR hosts global events that encourage the international community to include refugees within their societies. For example, UNHCR hosted the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, which was attended by 3,000 participants, including international organizations, businesses, heads of states and ministries. The participants made 100 pledges in support of inclusive national policies, such as expanding access to quality education for refugees and improving access to jobs and livelihoods.
- UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees in host communities. UNHCR encourages states to offer more durable solutions, such as resettlement to a third country for the most vulnerable refugees, or local integration for refugees in protracted situations - with ultimately, the possibility of acquiring the nationality of the country of asylum.

Host Community



- Host communities can teach refugees their official language by offering language courses and tutoring sessions. Several student-led campaigns provide educational support to refugees. For example, Paper Airplanes is a nonprofit organization in the US that matches refugees with personal tutors for virtual learning sessions.
- Host communities can house refugees. [No Stranger Place](#) is a UNHCR project that features a series of stories profiling refugees and their hosts across Europe. One of the examples features Hussam, a Syrian refugee who fled Syria and found Lucien's welcoming home in Lyon, France.
- Host communities can create programs to enhance refugees' leadership and professional skills. For example, the Bristol City Stepping Up program was launched in 2018 to help underrepresented groups move into more senior roles in their chosen field. As a result, refugee participants are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and strive to achieve career improvement.
- Host communities can gather and distribute items that refugees need, and organise events at which refugees and host communities can meet and interact. For example, FoodBlessed is an initiative by the Lebanese community that provides food assistance to vulnerable families, including Syrian refugees.



NGOs and Civil Society

- NGOs can create encounters between refugees and host communities and encourage contact between refugees, migrants and host communities. For example, Jusoor NGO in Lebanon gives Lebanese young adults the chance to volunteer at educational centers across Lebanon. In Denmark, the Red Cross' Buddy program pairs newly arrived refugees who hold residence permits with a buddy in their host community in order to nurture friendships and ties.
- NGOs can help reduce tensions between refugees and host communities. In 2014, Search for Common Ground supported UNHCR to reduce tensions caused by the arrival in Niger of refugees fleeing Boko Haram. The organization created better information channels to reduce rumors about the distribution of humanitarian aid and supported community initiatives such as soccer games and theater performances.

Businesses



- Businesses can provide educational services to refugees. For example, Vodafone has partnered with UNHCR to establish the Instant Network Schools to address educational resource needs throughout marginalized refugee communities in Africa by providing them access to the internet and digital learning content.
- Businesses can employ refugees. During the pandemic, global companies have joined the Tent Partnership for Refugees, a network of 130 major private businesses, to hire refugees, support refugee entrepreneurs or create financial services that are more accessible to refugees.

Governments



- Governments can revise their laws to include refugees in society. For example in January 2019, Ethiopia's parliament revised its refugee law to enable refugees to obtain work permits, access primary education, obtain drivers' licenses, legally register life events (such as marriages), and access financial services.
- Governments can include refugees in their public healthcare systems. For example, Jordan allows refugees to access national health services and has included them in its response to COVID-19.
- Governments can create economic integration programs. For example, Sweden and Norway have state-sponsored integration programs along with housing and employment assistance.
- Governments can increase the capacity of their national educational systems to accommodate additional refugee students.



Refugees

Inclusion is a two-way process, so refugees also play a role in facilitating their own integration.

- Refugees can learn the language of their host country and teach other fellow refugees the local language. This fosters understanding and acceptance between refugees and host communities. This also increases their access to economic opportunities.
- Refugees often give back to the community in their host country, which improves their acceptance in society. For example, Shadi Shhadeh, a Syrian refugee in Switzerland, took the initiative to run errands and do grocery shopping for the vulnerable elderly community in Switzerland to protect them from contracting COVID-19.



Policeman German Dosseh escaped Ghana and spent 14 years in refugee camps before he was resettled to the United States. Resettlement in America provided Germain the opportunity to build a peaceful life and receive an education. He decided to fight for the US army in Afghanistan and later joined the Phoenix police force.

Jim Estell, a life-long entrepreneur and now CEO of an appliance company, helps employ refugees in Guelph, Ontario. His homegrown programme called Ease Into Canada is a way for refugees to earn a steady income at Estill's warehouse and learn on-the-job English. Estill trained newly arrived refugees and aimed to place them in jobs as closely related to their field as possible.



Questions to Guide the Debate

- How can we fight xenophobia, hate speech and disinformation about refugees? How can we ensure that refugees who are victims have access to justice and psychological counselling?
- How can we improve the social inclusion of different groups of people: resettled refugees, refugees in protracted situations, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people?
- How can we best support refugees in protracted situations, who have been living for years or sometimes decades in another country?
- How can we make sure that resettled refugees are properly welcomed and integrated?
- What role can local citizens of the host communities play to support refugees?
- How can businesses support the inclusion of refugees in their communities?
- How can we ensure refugees' access to education in host countries?
- How can we boost the social and cultural inclusion of refugees?
- How can we ensure refugees' inclusion in health systems?
- How can we boost the economic inclusion of refugees?

Useful Resources

- [UNHCR Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion of Refugees](#)
- [UNHCR Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis](#)
- [UNHCR Press Release: Inclusion during Pandemic](#)
- [UNHCR 2019 Global Refugee Forum](#)
- [UNHCR: No Stranger Place](#)