

**Committee: Human Rights Council**

**Issue: Ensuring Access to Education in Refugee Camps**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the last decades, our community faces some of the biggest refugee crises in our history. Although these important humanitarian crises have led our community to cope with a wide range of difficulties, most of the countries dealing with this issue extensively focused on the proper access to education for refugees that have left their country. Nowadays, the situation has been improved; however, the problem continues to be the same with statistics remaining in an illegitimate point for our community.

According to a United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) report, 3.5 million refugee children aged 5 to 17 failed to attend school in 2016. Globally, the primary enrolment

rate reaches the 91%; however, the number lays only at 61% for refugee children. Continuing, the rate tends to fall dangerously, with 23% of refugee adolescents and 84% of world's adolescents having



access to secondary education. Lastly, the most important period of once education,

**Figure 1:** Burundian refugee attending class at Mahama refugee camp, Rwanda

the stage that our future citizens are formed and reinforced with essential skills, seems to be the worst and most neglected part of the crisis, with only 1% of refugees attending higher education, counter to the global 36%.

The aforementioned statistics must indirectly urge countries around the world to take the appropriate measures in order to tackle this issue, but unfortunately, no initiative has till been taken. There are only a few active refugee camps, nowadays, that provide education to refugee children and most of the times, not to all of them. One of the greatest examples is the Za'atari Camp in Jordan, which accommodates approximately 120,000 Syrian refugees. The Jordan Ministry of Education and UNICEF have effectively provided 2 temporary schools with a capacity of 5,000 students each. Still, this wasn't enough to eliminate the number of uneducated children in the camp, as 76% of girls and 80% of boys aged 6 to 18 couldn't attend school.

In conclusion, the significance of education was and will always be crucial for everyone. Lack of proper education could lead people and societies to great dangers such as vandalism and marginalization. For all those reasons, Member States should research and eventually tackle this issue.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Refugee<sup>1</sup>**

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

### **Migrant<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

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A migrant is a person who makes a conscious choice to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere. Before they decide to leave their country, migrants can seek information about their new home, study the language and explore employment opportunities. They are free to return home at any time if things don't work out as they had hoped, if they get homesick or if they wish to visit family members and friends left behind.

## **Displaced People<sup>3</sup>**

People forced to flee their homes but never cross an international border. These individuals are known as Internally Displaced Persons, or IDPs. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it—in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, even forests and fields. IDPs, which include people displaced by internal strife and natural disasters, are the largest group that UNHCR assists. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government.

## **Refugee Camps<sup>4</sup>**

A refugee camp is a temporary settlement built to receive refugees and people in refugee-like situations. Refugee camps usually accommodate displaced persons who have fled their home country, but there are also camps for internally displaced persons. Camps with over a hundred thousand people are common, but as of 2012, the average-sized camp housed around 11,400 people. They are usually built and run by a government, the United Nations, international organizations (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross), or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). There are also unofficial refugee camps, like Idomeni in Greece or the Calais jungle in France, where refugees are largely left without support of governments or international

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ssi.org.au/faqs/refugee-faqs/148-what-is-the-difference-between-a-refugee-and-a-migrant>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee\\_camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee_camp)

organizations. Refugee camps generally develop in an impromptu fashion with the aim of meeting basic human needs for only a short time. Facilities that make a camp look or feel more permanent are often prohibited by host country governments.

## Education<sup>5</sup>

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Refugee Crises

Refugee crises were always a quite problematic part of our society. Historically, humankind has experienced many refugee flows provoked by wars and many other contributing factors, but nothing can actually be compared with the



**Figure 2:** Syrian Internally Displaced People walk in the Atme camp

humanitarian outburst of the recent years.

In accordance with NGOs and the UN, in the last decade, many countries had to face the uprising number of 65.3 million forcibly displaced people

worldwide, with 54% of all refugees around the world coming from just three

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education>

**countries: the Syrian Arab Republic (4.9 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and Somalia (1.1 million). Countries with similar issues are also South Sudan (2.1 million), Venezuela (1.5 million) and Myanmar (905.000). Refugee crises have strong destabilizing effects for their greater region, as witnessed within Europe in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis.**

## **Education for Refugees**

**In the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted in 1948, it is mentioned in article 26 that: “everyone has the right to education”. Furtherly, the right to education of refugees is guaranteed by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee<sup>6</sup> (1951), which states that: “refugees should have the same treatment as nationals with respect to elementary education and treatment as favourable as possible with respect to other education levels”.**

**Although there are many more conventions and documents ensuring and highlighting the importance of access to education, many host-countries still tend to fail to distribute adequate education for refugees. Furthermore, even if they succeed in providing education, there are only a few examples that actually fulfil the whole spectre of refugee needs. Lastly, it has been observed through the time that even though national education ministries may be willing to provide education in refugee camps, up rise from the local population may be faced.**

**Fortunately, there are some refugee camps around the world that are successfully providing qualitative education to refugee children. For example, the largest refugee camp worldwide, Dadaab camp, has more than 73 thousand learners enrolled in primary and secondary schools. UNHCR and partners provide both formal and non-formal basic and secondary education to refugees, as they also have access to the local digital educational content and the internet over local mobile network. Furtherly, an organisation called ADRA**

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Convention\\_Status\\_Refugees\\_1951.pdf](http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Convention_Status_Refugees_1951.pdf)

has been working with refugees from Myanmar in Thailand through a vocational/technical training program, in order to help them develop certain skills. Through this program, not only do they become more employable but also they have better prospects for obtaining employment back home.

In conclusion, countries surely have to face other problems such as sanitation, famine and sheltering for refugees, but education should be one of the first priorities. Whilst some countries have shown willingness to offer those infrastructures, they often don't succeed, and for this reason, Member States should collaborate in order to achieve this goal.

### **Effects of uneducated people in our community**

History has proven that uneducated people can usually cause danger.. Furthermore, one of the frequent effects lack of education can call forth is marginalization and isolation from the society. Many people can often experience seclusion from their friends or acquaintances when they cannot follow a discussion due to lack of knowledge. Lastly, unemployment is one of the greatest problems governments have to face, nowadays, and by ignoring the proper access to education this problem will raise even furtherly and will cause even more problems.

### **Education for Refugee Girls**

Access to education for refugee girls is critical for their development and the prosperity of their families and communities.

Unfortunately, refugee girls do not always have the same opportunities as refugee boys. In



**Figure 3:** Refugee children from Mali compete to catch their teacher's attention in one of the six primary schools in Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania

Uganda, progress nine refugee girls in ten refugee boys are enrolled in primary school. However, in Kenya and Ethiopia, only seven refugee girls in ten refugee boys have access to primary education. According to UNESCO, local children in these areas do not face such discrimination, suggesting that the obstacle is neither local culture or ideology. As we move to secondary education, refugee girls are half as likely to enrol as boys are.

With regard to other potential obstacles, cost is an obvious choice. Whilst it applies to both girls and boys, girls tend to have a role in the family that covers some expenses, such as collecting water and taking care of younger siblings. Thus, attending school, could lead to a loss of income. According to UNHCR community-based protection staff, boys are usually prioritized because they are conceived as having bigger future income potential.

School itself can also be troublemaking for refugee girls, as they often have to face social and cultural stereotypes.. School is yet more hostile when proper sanitation, access to water and toilets are not available. The World Bank has stated that: 'menstruation leads girls in sub-Saharan Africa to miss four days of school every four weeks, adding up to a loss of 10-20% of school time', which means that without proper access to hygiene, school can often be a nightmare for girls.

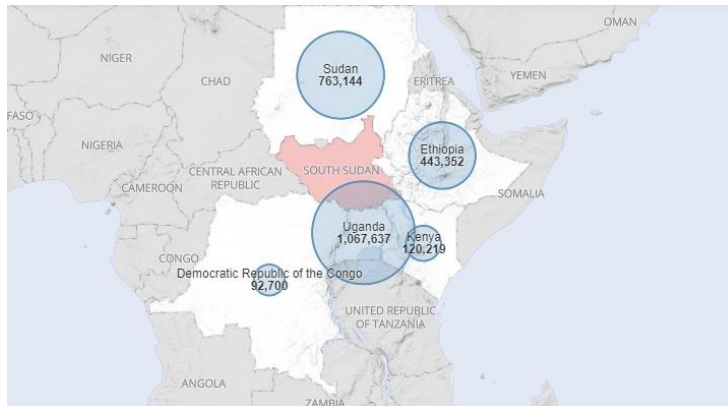
In conclusion, ensuring access to education for equally boys and girls would be a contributing factor in a lot of other on-going issues. As statistics suggest, if all girls finished primary school, child marriage would fall by 14% and if they completed secondary education as well, it would drop by 64%.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Africa**

#### **Republic of South Sudan**

Since December 2013, South Sudan has experienced a brutal conflict, which forced a lot of people to flee their homes, and sometimes, cross the borders



**Figure 4:** Refugees and asylum-seekers from South Sudan

migrating to neighbouring countries. Due to UNHCR's statistics report, more than 4 million people abandoned their home and more than half of them (2.5 million people) crossed the country's

borders, with major destination the Republic of Uganda (more than 1 million refugees). The majority of those leaving the country are women and children, who most of the times have experienced sexual assault and violence, whereas it has been highly reported that children often have to travel alone.

Thanks to "Nature Africa", a program funded by an Irish founded local organisation and the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation, South Sudanese refugee children will receive free education up to tertiary educational level. The organisations, in accordance to UNHCR's legal, financial and social service aid, have provided help to vulnerable children and elementary education in the Imvepi Refugee Camp, the Palabek settlement and the reception centre in Lamwo district.

## **Middle East**

### **Syrian Arab Republic**

After the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 many people living in the centre of this war, decided to exit their country in order to preserve safety for themselves and their families. Those refugee flows headed mainly to Europe, and especially Greece and Turkey, two of the closest countries to the Syrian Republic. Since then, more than 5.4 million people have fled Syria as refugees



and 6.1 million people are displaced within the country. Within Syria itself, there are no refugee camps apart from some shelter aid for IDPs, which are coordinated by the Global Shelter Cluster<sup>7</sup>.

## **Republic of Iraq**

Historically, there has been a growing number of refugees leaving Iraq and settling around the world. Iraq, over the last 30 years, has coped with many conflicts including the Kurdish rebellions during the Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988), Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait (1990) and the Gulf War (1991), which have forced over 4 million Iraqi refugees to flee over the globe. Iraqi refugees have mainly gone to urban centres across the region, rather than in refugee camps. Furtherly, there are less than 2 million Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries of Iraq as the 95% of them is still in the Middle East.

## **Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

Jordan has been a host-country for Syrian refugees from the very start of the Syrian Civil War. This led the country into great problems, as the chronical period refugees started to flow in the country seeking for help; the Jordanian government was suffering from the financial and environmental crisis as well as aridity. With the establishment of the Syrian refugees in the country, the need for water and sanitation supplies increased once again leading to tensions between Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees. However, the Jordanian government might cope with environmental and prosperity issue however it has invested in education in refugee camps with the great example of Za’atari camp.

## **Asia**

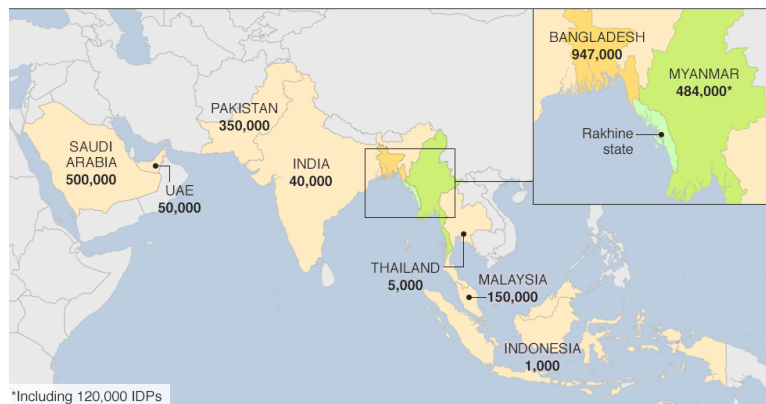
### **Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelter\\_Cluster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelter_Cluster)

During the latest exodus, on August 2017, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MFS) has reported that at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed, from whom more than 730 were children. This followed Human Right Watch report, saying that “most damage occurred in Maungdaw Township, between 25 August and 25 September 2017 - with

many villages destroyed after 5 September, when Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, said security force operations had ended.”



Fortunately, a lot of the Rohingya refugee children have the opportunity to attend

**Figure 5:** Spread of Rohingya inside and outside Myanmar

school after the tremendous hardship they have been through. For example, in Bangladesh, the major host-country for Rohingya refugees, Children On The Edge together with Mukti, handed over 45 original schools in the Kutupalong area to UNICEF, while they started to construct 75 Learning Centres in the refugee camps. This program will give employment to both Bangladeshi and Rohingya staff, as it will also provide apart from basic education healthcare, nutritional support and various opportunities to 7,500 vulnerable children.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date              | Description of Event   |
|-------------------|--|
| 28 July 1951      | The Convention relating to the status of refugees was signed in Geneva   |
| 20 March 2003     | The United States invasion in Iraq   |
| April 2011        | The Syrian Refugee Crisis begins   |
| 29 July 2012      | UNHCR opens Za'atari camp in Jordan  |
| December 2013     | Civil war erupts in South Sudan as President Salva Kiir accuses his former vice-president, Riek Machar, of plotting to overthrow him |
| 19 August 2015    | The start of the Venezuela – Colombia migrant crisis   |
| 15 September 2015 | Hungary decides to close its borders with Serbia   |
| October 2015      | The start of the Rohingya refugee crisis   |
| 1 January 2016    | The adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)  |
| 4 January 2016    | Border checks in Sweden and Denmark to stem refugee inward flows   |
| August 2017       | According to the UN, the number of refugees fleeing from South Sudan to Uganda passes the one million mark.                          |

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

## **Sustainable Development Goals – Goal 4<sup>8</sup>**

On September 25th 2015, UN Member States published a set of goals aiming at the elimination of humanitarian problems, such as poverty, environmental and prosperity issues. The 4th Goal - “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”, aims to ameliorate the educational systems of Member States, as well as reducing any disparities between people in them. In one of its clause, it is highly mentioned that by 2030, countries all around the world should eliminate any gender, ethnicity or disabilities discrimination in education. Furtherly, it also urges governments to provide their people with free and qualitative education and upgrade their education facilities in order to be able to facilitate people, such as refugees and disabled people. Lastly, it highlights the importance of people acquiring technical, vocational and tertiary education, thus integrating them into our society and helping them find a job so as to profit themselves and the relevant government.

## **The 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>9</sup>**

The 1951 Refugee Convention is the main instrument of international refugee law. The Convention actually determines what a refugee is, as well as the important measures the signatory countries must follow concerning the legal, humanitarian and social aid that must be provided to those people. On the other hand, the Convention mentions the obligations a refugee has towards a host government, as it also excludes specific categories of people, such as war criminals, who do not fall under the category of a refugee. Last but not least, although the Convention was firstly signed to protect European refugees after the World War II, it was later amended by the 1967 Protocol which included the protection of all the refugees around the world.

## **UNHCR – UNESCO - UNICEF**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137.

<http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>

Generally, the United Nations has always played a vital role in various topics concerning refugees and crises management. Especially in education, UN has addressed many of its organisations (UNHCR, UNESCO and UNICEF) to take initiative and tackle the great problem of uneducated people. Concerning refugees' access to education, UNHCR plays an active role in reporting and funding many programs in order to eliminate the issue. For instance, *Missing Out and Left Behind* were two of the greatest reports UNHCR has published, as it actually informed the world about the issue nowadays and furtherly urged people



Figure 6: UNHCR's logo

to donate with any way, to help the project. UNHCR moreover, with the support of UNESCO, has provided funds to host countries in order to facilitate education in and out the refugee camps. Lastly, although UNICEF mostly provides help with the form of healthcare and social integration, it has also cooperated with the two aforementioned organisations and many NGOs so as to improve the educational system of refugees. What is of critical importance, however, is that although these organisations try to do their best so as to ameliorate the situation, they are in great need of governments' support that, in the present time, is absent.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

Although there have been a lot of efforts to tackle this problem, none of them was good enough. Firstly, the European Union has contributed a lot to the neutralisation of the Syrian refugee crisis with a lot of measures. One of its biggest efforts is the educational fund programmes, such as Erasmus+, which is financing refugees and schools in order to preserve a position in education for

as many refugee children as possible. What is more, one of the most famous institutions of the EU is the peer learning events. After the refugee crisis, these events were also for exchanging ideas and methods of educating refugees and discussing possible solutions to the problem.

Moving on, the World Bank has also donated a lot of money in order to ensure elementary education in places of crisis and refugee camps. For example, in December 2017, the World Bank has provided an amount of 200 million US\$ which helped to improve education for Jordanian and Syrian refugee students. Furthermore, the program benefits approximately 700,000 Jordanian and Syria refugee children whereas it also provides adequate training to more than 30,000 teachers.

Last but certainly not least, the organisations that help the refugees in various ways and eventually provide them education also play a vital role in these crises. Those NGOs, with the important help of some countries, try to ease the situation for refugees but sometimes it's not enough.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Ensuring access to education for refugee children is a quite complex situation that has to be eradicated through several methods. First of all, raising public awareness should be number one in the spectre of solutions. People all around the globe should acknowledge the situation, in order to find a way to tackle it.

Secondly, the establishment of an organisation which will guide, check and report the efficiency of any refugee educational program seems crucial in these circumstances. Although many ongoing organisations, such as UNHCR, could run this program, it is safer to construct a new body which will be specialised in this topic. Something that also has to be solved is the bias many citizens show against the refugees. Every Member State should ensure that the accommodated refugees face no violence, in any form, by citizens or even other refugees.

Thirdly, the situation of uneducated refugee girls is something that also has to be resolved. Governments and NGOs, have to ensure that schools are properly equipped with the needed, as well as ensuring necessary privacy for them. Moreover, it must be ensured that young girls are well protected by any form of verbal violence that will influence them and make the school abhorrent to them.

Last but not least, it must be highlighted that education must be accessible in the refugee camps and not out of them. This is very important, as many parents or the children themselves, taking into account what they have been through, are afraid of being alone or being away from their parents. Those measures might be important and with a great prospect, but what matters the most is the proper cooperation between Member States.

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**Figure 1: <http://www.unhcr.org/left-behind/>**

**Figure 2: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/26/china-host-syrian-islam-refugee-crisis-migrant/>**

**Figure 3: <http://www.unhcr.org/heturn/>**

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Figure 6: <http://www.unhcr.org/>