



Students at Nyumanzi Integrated Primary School for Ugandan nationals and refugees from South Sudan © UNHCR

# THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

A joint agency briefing & call to action on education for refugees

## INTRODUCTION

More than half of all refugee children in the world – 3.5 million – are not in school. People who were refugees at the end of 2015 have been in exile for an average duration of 10.3 years, meaning millions of children miss out on some – if not all – of their education.<sup>1</sup> These children often face discrimination and exclusion as they seek to rebuild their futures far from home. As a result, refugee children are five times less likely to attend school than other children in the countries in which they are displaced. Only 61 per cent attend primary school, 22 per cent have access to secondary school and just one per cent join university. Girls are out of school at higher rates than boys.<sup>2</sup>

A child's right to an education does not end in times of emergency and the world will not meet Sustainable Development Goal 4, unless efforts are made to reach those furthest behind – including refugees. Providing refugees with an opportunity to learn is the building block from humanitarian response to recovery, resilience and long-term development. During displacement the need for safe, quality and inclusive education – for hope for the future – is critical. Refugee children and their families put a premium on education and ask for it to be prioritised.

86 per cent of the world's refugees live in low – and middle – income countries whose education systems already struggle to meet the needs of the most marginalised. These countries need international support to scale up provision of local services and to provide alternative educational opportunities for refugees – sharing the global responsibility of large movements of refugees.

In the New York Declaration, all Member States committed to '*ensure all children are receiving education within a few months of arrival, and we will prioritise budgetary provision to facilitate this, including support for host countries as required*'. States promised to provide quality early childhood, primary and secondary education, as well as accelerated learning, tertiary and vocational education. While some elements of the first draft of the Programme of Action provide an important starting point, we strongly urge UN Member States to seize this unique opportunity to agree on action that facilitates cooperation to deliver specific results, as committed to in the New York Declaration.

Building on the first draft, this document sets out our recommendations for meaningful measures which would form the basis of a Programme of Action to close the refugee education gap.

# THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The current draft of the Programme of Action includes the following on refugee education:

*In line with national education policies and planning, as well as the 2030 Agenda, and in support of host countries, other States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to expand national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children and youth. More direct financial support and special efforts will be mobilized to minimize the time refugee boys and girls spend out of school, ideally a maximum of three months.*

*More specifically, this will include resources and expertise to:*

- support the expansion of educational facilities and capacity (e.g. infrastructure (including for early childhood development); teaching staff; and including refugee data in education management information systems);
- meet the specific needs of refugee children and youth, especially girls, (e.g. through accelerated education and other flexible learning programmes, "safe schools", as well as adapted approaches to cope with psychosocial trauma or specific needs) and overcome obstacles to their enrolment and attendance (e.g. those associated with the need for safe transport; health; accreditation and documentation; and language and literacy support);

- expand access to secondary and tertiary education, including through scholarships (see also section 3.3 below) and connected learning, with a particular focus on women and girls; and

- support refugees and members of host communities who are or could be engaged as teachers.

We welcome the commitment for host countries to include refugee children and youth in national education systems within three months of displacement. We also welcome the recognition that refugee children and youth, and particularly girls, face obstacles to educational access and learning. To make these commitments an actionable plan, and in a spirit of strengthening the principle of responsibility-sharing, we recommend that the list of specific actions is expanded and strengthened.

**We have developed a three-point plan that covers the following areas:**

- 1. Inclusion of refugees in national education systems**
- 2. Financing education for refugees**
- 3. Ensuring refugee children are learning**



Alia, 6 came from Syria to Zaatari Refugee Camp two years ago. She attends a kindergarten in the camp.

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# A GLOBAL AGENDA FOR CHANGE

## 1. INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Inclusive policies and practices are vital so that children can access and thrive in the formal system where possible, and enter and succeed in accredited non-formal education when not. This is the most practical and sustainable way to enable displaced children to access accredited and certified learning opportunities that can be monitored for quality and can lead to future opportunities. Despite political and operational challenges to inclusion, refugee hosting governments must be supported to enact policy changes and increase investment to ensure all refugees are included in national education systems. Of the 25 UNHCR priority countries only 16 (64%) allow refugees full access to their education systems at primary and secondary level, the rest placing limits on access.<sup>3</sup>

### We recommend:

- Host governments, and potential host governments develop national education sector plans which include provisions for refugees. These plans should be supported via joint technical and financial assistance from donors, UNHCR, the Global Partnership for Education and the Education Cannot Wait Fund.
- Host countries remove policy barriers which prevent refugee children from accessing the formal education system, for example, by having an inclusive and flexible registration and documentation system that allows students to enrol in school, including in the absence of documentation. This also includes removing gender-based barriers and limits on time spent out of education.
- Host governments enact policies that provide access to accredited, quality, innovative non-formal or informal learning opportunities for children for whom the formal system is inaccessible – with clear pathways into the formal system so that children can transition when ready. NGOs and CBOs can help provide these learning opportunities to fill the gap in public provision.
- Donors, host governments and NGOs increase cash transfers to unaccompanied children and families with marginalised children, including pregnant girls and child mothers, and demilitarized boys and girls, to ensure children attend school instead of taking on household chores or participating in child labour outside of the home.
- Host governments with support from donors, NGOs, CBOs and the private sector build refugee and national teacher capacity through professional development, appropriate support and remuneration so that new and existing teachers can support the learning and wellbeing of all their students.
- Regional institutions and host governments develop regional and national policies for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees and returnees, including teachers and learners to enable integration into national education systems.



Teacher Lim Bol from South Sudan teaches a class in Ethiopia.  
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## 2. FINANCING EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES

Education systems around the world, especially in low and middle-income countries are underfunded and not meeting the needs of children, especially the most marginalised. The Education Commission estimates that in low and middle-income countries spending on education needs to increase from \$1.2 trillion annually today to \$3 trillion by 2030. The education systems in the top ten countries of origin for refugees are weak and receive relatively little support from the international community. Education received more than two per cent of humanitarian financing in only two of these countries in 2016.

This mirrors the humanitarian sector in general where only 2.7 per cent is directed to education. In the Incheon Framework for Action, UNESCO indicates that national governments should spend 4-6 per cent of GDP or 15-20 per cent of their budgets on education.<sup>4</sup> Given the protracted nature of refugee crises UNHCR should be spending similar proportions on education.

In 2016, UNHCR's overall budget was set at \$7.5 billion; however, it only managed to raise \$4.4 billion.<sup>5</sup> This meant that UNHCR missed all its 2016 education targets. At the primary level, UNHCR was aiming to enrol 1.4 million children, but enrolled only 980,000, and at the lower secondary level the target was 149,000 and they only enrolled 66,000.<sup>6</sup>

Meeting UNHCR's funding targets should be a minimum achievement for the international community and arguably UNHCR should be more ambitious over the size of its overall budget.

### We recommend:

- Donors commit to provide predictable, long-term, multi-year funding to support hosting countries to deliver safe, quality learning opportunities to refugees and host communities.
- UN agencies, multilateral institutions, States, NGOs and private sector actors develop a global costed plan for financing refugee education, based on national costing estimates in refugee hosting countries using common costing benchmarks. This would demonstrate how much it costs to deliver quality education and achieve outcomes for refugee and host community children aged 3-18 years. This information should be used to make decisions about resource allocation towards reaching the greatest number of children at the lowest costs with the greatest impact.

### 3. ENSURING REFUGEE CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

For education to have an effective impact, it must be of sufficient quality - enables genuine learning outcomes, supports student wellbeing and is of relevance to the lives of the students. The education needs of refugee students are complex; many have experienced distress or severe trauma, may have missed years of schooling and may be unfamiliar with the local curriculum and the language of instruction.

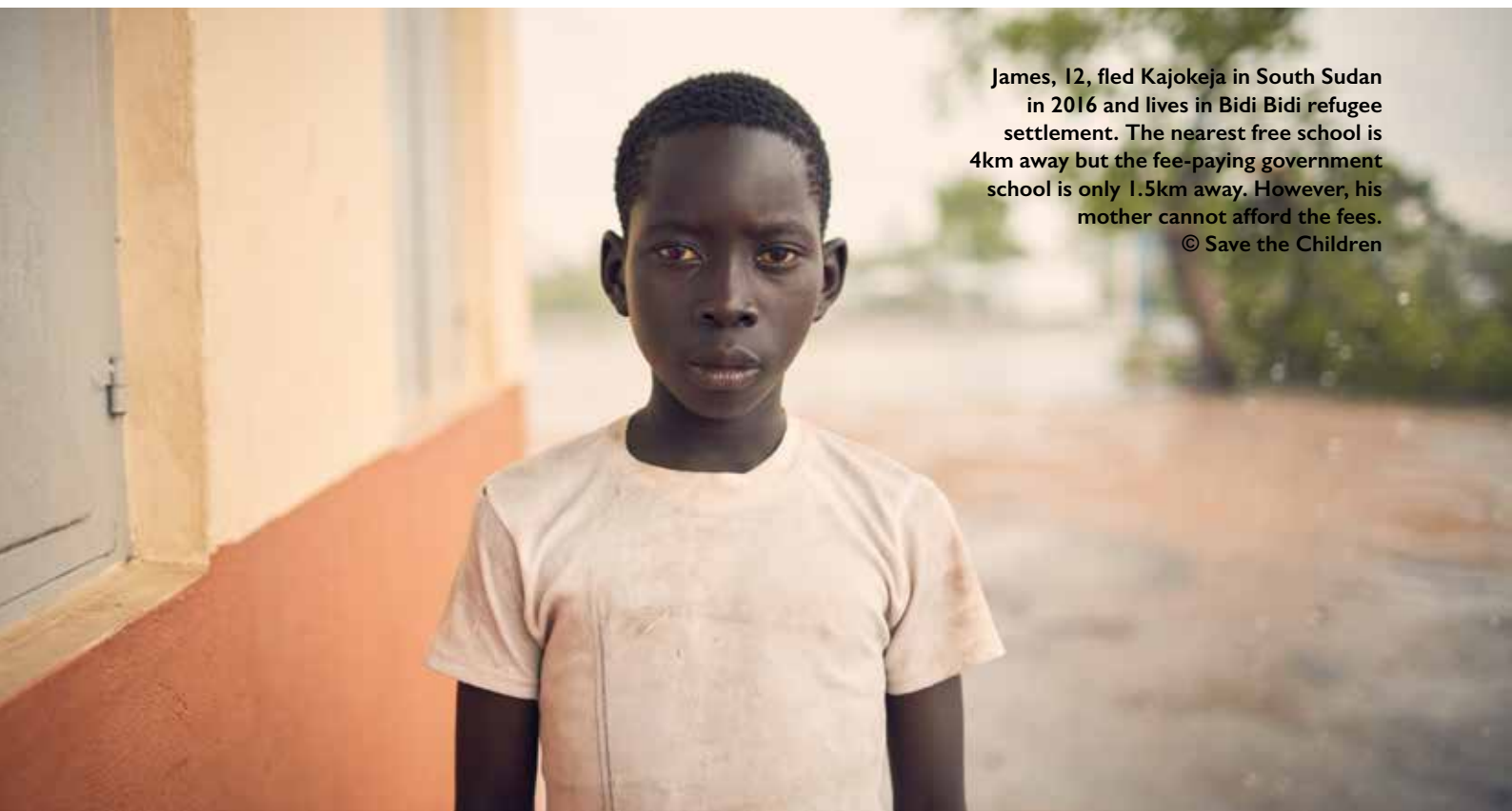
At present the quality of education available to refugee children, whether in camp or non-camp settings, is invariably poor. This is putting their development, learning and well-being at risk while also leading to high dropout rates. Educational quality in refugee settings is rarely measured by learning outcomes (which is itself problematic), but where learning assessments have been done, the results are worrying.

Many displaced children require socio-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities and psychosocial support (PSS) to help them deal with the stress and trauma they have experienced and to build resilience to help them adapt to their new surroundings. Access to education for children with special needs, including those with mental and physical disabilities, must be prioritised.

Globally, early care and development in emergencies is recognised as providing critical life-saving and life-sustaining support for refugee children. Early care and development and parent education offer vital tools to remedy and offset the negative effects of displacement.

Girls are disproportionately affected by crises. Girls – particularly adolescent girls - are two and a half times more likely to be out of school and face a heightened risk of trafficking, child and forced marriage, early pregnancy, and sexual and gender-based violence. Refugee girls face challenges in accessing learning opportunities such as opportunity costs of attending school, toxic stress from gender-based violence and a lack of sanitation facilities in school, including access to menstrual hygiene management supplies.

A lack of data on refugee education specifically has been identified as a key barrier to effective planning, provision, and decision-making. Data is crucial for multi-stakeholders to better plan the education needs of refugee children – it allows service providers to map population movements, demographic details, and service provision, while allowing for more effective needs analysis, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and budget projection.



James, 12, fled Kajokeja in South Sudan in 2016 and lives in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement. The nearest free school is 4km away but the fee-paying government school is only 1.5km away. However, his mother cannot afford the fees.  
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## On ensuring refugees are learning we recommend:

### Learning:

- Ministries of Education in refugee hosting countries, donor governments, multilateral institutions and NGOs should define learning outcomes for refugee students to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy in the early grades, helping to lay the foundation for future learning, prevent drop out and reduce grade repetition.
- Multi-stakeholders support holistic learner assessments in refugee contexts (literacy, numeracy, social emotional skills and wellbeing) to identify the needs and gains of individual learners as well as providing an overview of current learning skills and equity gaps for refugee populations from among some of the key crises on which the humanitarian community currently focuses.
- Hosting States to create Learning Task Teams composed of UNHCR staff, operational partner staff, Ministry of Education officials, and other relevant stakeholders charged with analysing and communicating learning achievement data and making recommendations for continuous improvement of education planning and programming, both for refugee and host community learners.
- Donors, academics, NGOs and private sector to undertake rigorous research to build evidence on how best to support learning in refugee contexts, particularly during the initial stages of displacement – including research which seeks to understand the relationship between learning and wellbeing, and the implications for programming including answering questions of what works, how, for whom, under what conditions and at what cost.

### Psychosocial Support & Social Emotional Learning:

- Donors, hosting States, multilateral institutions, academics, private sector and NGOs need to prioritise Psychosocial Support & Social Emotional Learning (PSS/SEL), dedicating more staff and financial resources to programming, policy and research in refugee contexts. These efforts should include developing replicable approaches, providing technical assistance to implementers, supporting Ministries of Education in host countries to develop and adopt policies on PSS/SEL provision, training teachers, conducting research into the benefits of PSS/SEL and disseminating good practice.

### Early care and education:

- Donors, hosting States, multilateral institutions, academics, private sector and NGOs to recognise that education and development start at birth and therefore early learning should become standard practice in refugee responses.

- The development and implementation of nurturing care frameworks for refugee contexts.

### Refugee girls:

- Strengthening PSS/SEL for girls who have experienced gender-based violence to build their resilience and prepare to re-enter education. Special measures should be taken to reintegrate girls who have been excluded from school such as married girls and child mothers.
- Ensuring all learning services have gender segregated adequate sanitation facilities and access to menstrual hygiene products.
- Mainstreaming protection elements into all policies and initiatives related to education, as protection concerns either in transit to and from educational facilities, or in the educational facilities themselves, exacerbate barriers to girls' access to education.

### Teachers:

- Strengthening regional frameworks to promote the inclusion of refugee teachers, and their professional development and certification, in national education systems and support of equivalency. This could include:
  - Facilitation of teacher accreditation and certification across borders, including methods to fast-track training and certification;
  - Progressively align pay and conditions of service across host community and refugee teachers related to experience and qualifications;
  - Support continuous pre-service and in-service professional development of refugee and host community teachers, and increase gender parity and equalise career progression opportunities among teachers;

### Data:

- Refugee hosting states, with support from donors and the private sector, roll out OpenEMIS and collect refugee education data to inform policy making, budgeting, implementation of educational services and to assist with accountability. Data must be at a minimum disaggregated by gender, age and disability.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group, 2016. How Many Years Have Refugees Been in Exile? <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/549261472764700982/pdf/WPS7810.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Malala Fund (2016). Yes All Girls: Education and the Global Response. P.4.


<sup>3</sup> Nicolai, S., & Hine, S. (2015) Investment for education in emergencies: A review of evidence, ODI

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (2016) Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, UNESCO

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2017) 'Financials' available at <http://reporting.unhcr.org/financial#tabs-financial-budget> accessed 3rd September 2017

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR (2017) 'Themes', available at <http://reporting.unhcr.org/thematic> - accessed 3rd September 2017





Ayesha, 8 years-old. Her family fled Myanmar when their village was attacked and are now living in a makeshift camp in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh. "I used to go to school with my friends in Myanmar. If I can go to school I'll make new friends and we can play together. In the future I want to study and become a teacher or doctor."

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Karenni refugee children attend Kindergarten at the Ban Mai Nai Soi camp in Northern Thailand. © UNHCR

These recommendations have been developed by international organisations working to support education for refugees.



The recommendations have also been endorsed by the [Initiative on Child Rights in the Global Compacts](#). The initiative is a multi-stakeholder partnership bringing together **30 UN, civil society and philanthropic organisations** around a shared agenda: to ensure that children's rights are at the heart of the two global compacts on migration and on refugees and to create a continuum of care, protection and support for migrant and refugee children.