



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Topic B: Measures to help refugee girls and women overcome barriers to education and employment

Introduction:

Providing refugee girls and women with access to education and work is a key priority with major humanitarian and strategic repercussions. Targeted policies, such as accessible education programs, vocational training, and mentorship activities, address the issues that refugee populations deal with every day. These programs not only break down cultural barriers but also teach practical skills to refugees, thus promoting economic empowerment. This effort is significant not only for individual empowerment but also for creating global stability and ensuring the development of future generations within displaced communities.

The availability of safe transportation and solid infrastructure is especially important for refugees because relocation may disrupt established routes of transit. Promoting the smooth involvement of refugee girls and women in educational and labor endeavors is critical. By investing in education and employment towards this vulnerable group, we establish the groundwork for economically self-sufficient communities, which helps the overall stability of areas dealing with displacement difficulties.

Within the goals of attending refugee girls and women, reaching gender equality among displaced populations is a crucial objective. Education and job opportunities are effective means of breaking the cycle of poverty and encouraging community development. Empowered women become agents of economic prosperity and social peace, impacting not just their own lives but also the resilience and advancement of entire societies. Furthermore, given the global interconnectedness of human well-being, investing in the education and employment of refugee girls and women becomes an essential step toward fostering a more stable and peaceful world in which equitable opportunities are provided to all, regardless of their displacement status.

Concepts and definitions:

- **Actionable measures:** in this context, quality education strategies viable for refugee girls in UNCHR reports and practical steps and effective policies.
- **Education Cannot Wait (ECW):** a global fund for timely and effective education responses in humanitarian crises for refugee girls.
- **Gender disparities:** in this context, inequalities in educational programs for refugees, as reflected by the enrollment gap, unequal pay gap or any other disparities between male and female individuals in the same condition.





- **Inclusive education:** practices and policies facilitating diverse learning requirements to address vulnerable learners, providing opportunities to diverse groups and the requirements needed for all to study and thrive.
- **Psychosocial support:** assistance regarding social well-being, essential in alleviating effects of hardships experienced by refugees.
- **Refugees:** individuals or groups of people forced to flee their countries due to conflict, violence, poverty, or any other threat to their integrity and safety.
- **Systemic barriers:** perpetual institutional or structural impediments that limit the education and employment opportunities, usually created by policies and practices that result in an unfair and unequal treatment.

Current issue:

Refugee's access to education is a current and relevant issue. Today, there are 35.3 million refugees around the world, out of which an estimated 41% are children (UNHCR, 2023b). Statistics paint a sharp picture – only 61 percent of refugee children have access to primary education, compared to the international average of 91 percent. Just 23 percent of refugee adolescents attend school, a striking contrast to the global average of 84 percent (UNHCR, 2018).

Also, 51% of the 108.4 million people that were forcibly displaced in 2022 were women and girls (UNHCR, 2023a). The profound challenges faced by refugee girls and women in accessing education and employment demand a comprehensive exploration of the intricate web of systemic barriers that persist in the face of displacement. The "Her Turn" report from UNHCR serves as a revolutionary revelation, exposing the harsh reality that refugee girls at the junior high educational level are only half as likely to enroll in school as their male counterparts, despite constituting half of the school-age refugee population (UNHCR, n.d.). According to UNHCR (2023a), there are less than eight refugee girls for every ten refugee boys in primary school; at secondary school, for every ten refugee boys, there are fewer than 7 refugee girls. This unsettling matter provides us with deeper understanding of the multifaceted challenges that hinder the educational journey of refugee girls and women across the globe.

This UNHCR report unveils a disheartening reality wherein social and cultural conventions perpetuate the prioritization of boys over girls in terms of access to education. This bias is particularly pronounced as refugee girls transition to the middle school education level, facing increased marginalization and widening the gender gap. The report underscores that the likelihood of their enrollment in middle school dramatically decreases, presenting a grave injustice that denies them a fundamental human right.

The lack of appropriate facilities, such as toilet facilities and menstrual supplies, increases the difficulties faced by refugee girls, hindering their access to education. Additionally, the financial burden imposed by the cost of books, uniforms, and school





transportation further restricts the already limited opportunities for many refugee families, intensifying the struggle to secure an education for their daughters. This reality highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive and compassionate international response to dismantle these barriers and recognize the inherent injustice of depriving refugee girls and women from their right to education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a harsh spotlight on pre-existing challenges, exacerbating the hardships faced by refugee girls and women. School closures, disruptions in education, and economic hardships resulting from the pandemic have disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, particularly female refugees. The profound barriers to education and employment, compounded by the ongoing global crisis, not only create immediate challenges, but also cast a long shadow on the prospects of refugee girls, potentially leading to a 'lost generation'.

In the “Her turn” report, UNHCR delineates actionable measures and policies to ensure quality education for refugee girls and women. Recognizing the correlation between the ability of refugee adults to work and support their families and the likelihood of their children staying in school, the imperative is to create conditions for adult employment within refugee communities. Additionally, ensuring safe journeys to school is fundamental, demanding enhanced protection against harassment, sexual assault, and kidnapping during the commute.

A critical step forward involves recruiting and training more female teachers from both host and refugee communities. This strategic move aims to promote best practices and create a supportive learning environment that empowers girls. The report underscores the protective nature of quality education for refugee girls, reducing vulnerability to exploitation, violence, teenage pregnancy, and child marriage. Moreover, education emerges as a powerful tool for empowerment, fostering leadership skills, entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and resilience.

In the “Coming Together for Refugee Education” report (2020), UNHCR details ways in which schools and universities, host communities and governments, private organizations and individuals can contribute to improve the chances for all refugee children to get an education.

The broader implications of denying refugee girls and women access to education are staggering. Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, aptly calls for the international community to recognize the profound injustice and unite in a collective call to action: "It's her turn." Thus, compelling for an international effort to address all the challenges and hardships. Grandi's warning resonates deeply: "If we continue to neglect refugee girls' education, it is evident that the consequences will be felt for generations." It is time for the international community to prioritize refugee girls' education, recognizing the far-reaching consequences that extend across communities and generations.





International initiatives:

The **UNHCR's Education Strategy** is a comprehensive framework designed to enhance educational opportunities for refugees globally. It emphasizes the importance of providing quality education to all refugees, with a specific focus on marginalized groups, including girls and women. The strategy aims to increase enrollment, retention, and completion rates for girls in primary and secondary education. It also underscores the significance of creating safe and gender-sensitive learning environments. Also, **UNHCR programs for self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihood** have resulted in transformative changes for refugee women. They contribute to improve their employment rate and empowerment.

The **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** is a collaborative effort that brings together governments, donors, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen education systems in developing countries. GPE recognizes the specific challenges faced by girls in accessing education and promotes gender equality in education policies and programs. It supports initiatives that address gender-based violence, early marriage, and cultural barriers, contributing to an inclusive education system.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is a global fund dedicated to ensuring that children and youth affected by crisis have access to quality education. For refugee girls and women, ECW provides targeted support to overcome the unique challenges they face in emergencies. This includes efforts to establish safe learning spaces, provide psychosocial support, and the promotion of gender-sensitive education programs. ECW collaborates with various partners to deliver timely and effective education responses in humanitarian crises.

The **Girls' Education Challenge**, initiated by the government of the United Kingdom, is committed in addressing the multifaceted barriers preventing marginalized girls, including refugees, from accessing education. They fund and support projects that target specific challenges such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural norms. By focusing on evidence-based interventions, they aim to bring about systemic change and improve educational outcomes for girls, including those displaced by conflict or crisis.

The **Malala Fund**, founded by Malala Yousafzai, advocates for girls' education globally. The fund supports initiatives that provide every girl and woman 12 years of free, safe, and quality education. The Malala Fund works towards breaking down barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing education.

The **World Bank's Global Program on Forced Displacement** addresses the development challenges associated with forced displacement. Within this program, a key focus is on education and skills training for refugees. The World Bank provides financial support to countries hosting large refugee populations, assisting in creating sustainable solutions for education and employment. By fostering partnerships and leveraging resources, the program aims to enhance opportunities for refugees to build a better future.

UNESCO's Global Education Coalition is a multi-stakeholder partnership that addresses the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to education. The coalition





recognizes the importance of inclusive and equitable education. It works to support countries in implementing distance learning solutions, reopening schools safely, and ensuring that vulnerable populations, including refugees, have access to quality education during and after the pandemic.

Several countries and regions have also implemented initiatives to address the barriers faced on refugee girls and women in accessing education and employment. These initiatives vary in scope and approach but share the common goal of creating inclusive opportunities for the educational and economic empowerment. Some examples include:

- Germany's Girl on Track initiative to support refugee girls in their education and career aspirations. The program focuses on skill development and integration, providing courses tailored to the specific needs of refugees.
- Sweden and Norway emphasize refugee integration through education by offering special programs that address the unique needs of refugee students, including language support, counseling services, and mentorship programs to ease the transition into the education systems.
- In North America, there have been programs that emphasize the importance of gender equality and address the unique challenges faced by refugee women. These programs include targeted support for education and skills training. By providing comprehensive services, they aim to facilitate the integration of refugee women into the education system and the workforce.
- In South America, inclusive education policies and economic empowerment initiatives have been taking part in providing opportunities for skills development and entrepreneurship. These initiatives contribute to the economic self-sufficiency and integration of refugee women.
- Jordan and Lebanon have launched women's empowerment initiatives that include vocational training and education programs for refugee women. These initiatives recognize the importance of empowering women economically and socially. They help to address financial barriers faced by refugee families, enabling them to send their children to school.
- Countries in Africa have collaborated on regional integration programs aimed at providing education and employment opportunities for refugee girls. These initiatives focus on inclusive policies that facilitate the integration of refugees into national education systems and labor markets.
- Australia has implemented programs to enhance the workforce participation of refugee women. These initiatives include targeted employment services, skill development programs, and mentorship opportunities. By recognizing the potential of refugee women to contribute to the workforce, Australia aims to create pathways for economic independence and social integration.

These country-specific initiatives demonstrate a commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by refugee girls and women. By tailoring programs to the





specific needs of this vulnerable demographic, countries aim to create an environment where education and employment opportunities are accessible, contributing to the empowerment and integration of refugee women and girls into their new communities.

Guiding questions:

- How do integration programs support refugee girls and women in terms of education and job opportunities?
- What are the advantages of local solutions that can address specific needs related to refugee girls and women in each country/region?
- What are the advantages of globally applicable initiatives to help refugee girls and women overcome barriers to education and employment?
- To what extent are cultural practices responsible for the biased access to education based on sex and gender, and what can be done about it? Provide insight from your delegation.
- How has financial aid in your region/continent helped refugee girls to overcome education barriers, and what can be done towards more sustainable financial assistance?
- In terms of responding to the unique requirements of refugee girls and women, how effective is the UNHCR's Education Strategy or the Global Partnership for Education in your region?
- How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the access to education and employment of refugee women and girls in your delegation? What innovative strategies can be applied to mitigate these effects?
- What role does psychological support play in the academic life of refugee girls? What role does it play in the work life of refugee women?

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