



**15% BY
2030** REFUGEE
HIGHER
EDUCATION

15by30 Roadmap

Expanding Higher Education,
Skills and Self-Reliance for Refugees

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & NOTE ON DRAFTING METHODOLOGY

The Global Report on the 15by30 Roadmap for Refugee Higher Education and Self-Reliance was produced by the Education Section in the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The drafting process was led by Alanna Heyer, with the support of Arash Bordbar, Anila Fischer, Francis Randle, Tom Odhiambo Joseph-Christensen, and Manal Stulgaitis.

The nature of the task to extend opportunities for higher education and skills development to more refugee and host community youth requires the deep and sustained commitment of a range of stakeholders. This includes partners in government, academia, civil society, the donor community, and students from both refugee and host communities. Therefore, UNHCR led a highly consultative drafting approach involving over 40 individuals and organisations who are experts in their respective work enabling and expanding higher education access for refugees. This diversity of perspectives and expertise is reflected in the language and presentation of the report. The resulting roadmap is a testament to our collective effort and commitment, not only throughout the drafting process, but also in envisioning how to achieve and exceed 15 per cent enrolment of refugees in higher education by 2030.

UNHCR would like to express sincere gratitude to all the individuals and organisations who contributed their valuable time, insights and expertise to drafting this report.

We extend our appreciation to the following individuals for their expert guidance and feedback: Adhieu Achuil Dhieu, Adrian Little, Aki Takada, Álvaro Zúñiga Ayala, Amanda Kelleher, Amelie Daas, Anders Andreasen, Andie Reynolds, Andonis Marden, Annick Suzor-Weiner, Armağan Erdoğan, Armando Borja, Asma Rabi, Catherine Gladwell, Christine Hofmann, Chrystina Russell, Clara Graulich, Dora Cacai, Duncan Ross, Ella Ininahazwe, Gavin Brockett, Georgia Cole, Hala Haj Taleb, Jean-Benoît Falisse, Jeanne Muhimundu, Jennifer Dwyer, Jimale Kassim, Joyce Hope, Kerry Bystrom, Lara Kuhnle, Laura Wagner, Lina Choueiri, Maha Haidar, Martha Akello, Matthew Costello, Merja Färm, Michael Paller, Michelle Manks, Monika Schmidt, Mulondo Apollo, Nicholas Sabato, Oshish Ungras, Patricia Musiime, Philomen Misoy, Pia Schauerte, Rahildaris Marchena, Raymon Burton, Rebecca Granato, Rebecca Murray, Rudi Osman, Sabine Klasen, Sadiki Bamperineza, Samah Shda, Sari Turunen, Sasha Ramani, Shalom Ishimwe, Stephen Pech Gai, and Wesley Milner. Thank you also to those who contributed case studies and photos. Photos are credited as subject's own.

We also acknowledge the contributions of the following organisations and institutions: Agence University de le Francophonie, Addis Ababa University, American University of Beirut, Arizona State University, Bard College, Bard College – Berlin, Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, Education Above All, Finn Church Aid, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), GIZ, Global Task Force on Complementary Education Pathways, Global Refugee Youth Network, International Labour Organisation, Jesuit Worldwide Learning, Kepler, Luminus Life Plus, Northeastern University, One Refugee, Open Society University Network, Oxford's Refugee-Led Research Hub, President's Alliance, Refugee Education UK, the Refugee Law Project, Tertiary Refugee Student Network, Times Higher Education, University of Edinburgh, University of Sheffield, Wilfred Laurier University, Windle, World University Service of Canada, and the World Bank.

Lastly, we would like to thank all those who attended meetings, provided additional comment and review to support the development of this report. This unique collaboration was pivotal in ensuring the quality and comprehensiveness of this document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & NOTE ON DRAFTING METHODOLOGY	2
GLOSSARY	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	6
THE CONTEXT: ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE 15BY30 GOAL	7
GLOBAL DATA SNAPSHOT	7
STATE OF PLAY: Why 15 Per Cent?	8
THE 15BY30 ROADMAP	12
NATIONAL ENROLMENT	12
DAFI SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME	18
COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS	22
CONNECTED HIGHER EDUCATION	30
TECHNICAL & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION & TRAINING	36
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES	42
EVIDENCE & DATA	42
BRIDGING & TRANSITION PROGRAMMES	46
STUDENT MOBILISATION	48
PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS	52

GLOSSARY

CHE	Connected Higher Education
CLCC	Connected Learning In Crisis Consortium
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OER	Open Educational Resources
ProGres	UNHCR case management software application
RLO	Refugee-led Organisation
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TRSN	Tertiary Refugee Student Network
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019 UNHCR and partners set the goal to achieve 15 per cent enrolment of refugee youth in higher education by 2030 – the 15by30 target. At that time, the estimated global refugee enrolment in higher education stood at 1 per cent.¹ Today, that figure has risen to 7 per cent,² approaching the halfway point towards achieving 15by30.

UNHCR attributes this progress to several factors: improved communication regarding the importance of higher education access for refugees (including for the communities that host them), greater recognition of the costs of not providing education opportunities and solutions for refugee youth, enhanced coordination across the higher education ecosystem, and improvements in data collection that have allowed UNHCR to track progress since setting the 15 per cent objective. However, as global displacement continues to climb,³ with disproportionate increases in the last year causing the total number of displaced youth to reach approximately four million,⁴ the greatest push towards 15by30 has only begun.

Post-secondary education is the essential pathway to developing skills, building livelihoods, and transitioning to self-reliance. Research indicates that knowledge of higher education opportunities is one of the most significant motivating factors for refugees to complete their secondary education.⁵ Therefore, expanding inclusive higher education for refugees, to enable access on the same conditions as nationals, is key to unlocking the economic, social, and political benefits of higher education for refugee and host community youth.

This Roadmap report delineates specific actions stakeholders can take to achieve and surpass the 15by30 target across five distinct higher education pathways: enrolment in higher education institutions in hosting countries (national enrolment), refugee scholarship programmes (such as the UNHCR DAFI programme), complementary education pathways, connected higher education (CHE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Across each pathway, the crucial role of strong multi-stakeholder partnerships, eliminating policy barriers across the pipeline to, through and beyond higher education, strengthening capacity and infrastructure, securing multi-year financing, and increasing opportunities for refugees to access higher education are essential to achieving 15by30.

Each chapter of this report details the potential of the individual pathway to contribute to the 15by30 target, identifies concrete actions for stakeholders to effect measurable change, and includes case studies illustrating how stakeholders can invest in and implement recommended actions. Finally, the report highlights key cross-cutting themes that underscore the importance of investing in targeted research and evidence generation, enabling refugee youth to take ownership across the higher education ecosystem, building bridging and transition programmes that fortify the higher education pipeline, and engaging the private sector.

The importance of cross-sector partnerships in achieving the 15by30 target is further reflected in the methodology of the roadmap report. UNHCR thanks the multitude of partners who contributed to the highly participatory and consultative drafting process for this report. Contributors included over 40 individuals and organisations who are experts in their respective work enabling and expanding higher education access for refugees. This diversity of perspectives, experience and expertise are reflected in the richness, language and relevance of this report.

¹ [UNHCR 2019](#).

² [UNHCR 2022a](#).

³ As of mid-way through 2023, UNHCR reports the total number of persons displaced worldwide has surpassed 110 million, 36.4 million of whom are refugees ([UNHCR 2023a](#)).

⁴ (Ages 18-24) UNHCR data 2023.

⁵ [UNHCR 2022b](#).

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, the number of forcibly displaced persons is on the rise, as is the likelihood of protracted displacement.⁶ Enabling access to education for refugee children and youth remains a critical challenge, particularly in higher education. There are approximately 3.8 million refugee youth of relevant age for higher education globally. The often protracted nature of forced displacement creates a situation where many refugee youth complete their basic education outside of their country of origin and require access to further skills development, training, and higher education to continue their education journey. According to data from UNHCR, in 2023, 35 per cent of refugee children were not attending primary schools and 59 per cent of young refugees had no access to secondary education.⁷ While data on refugee access to higher education remains incomplete, it is estimated that just 7 per cent of refugee youth worldwide were accessing higher education as of 2023,⁸ compared to a global average of 42 per cent.⁹

Higher education is not merely a next step in the education cycle. The chance to develop post-secondary skills and qualifications is the essential bridge between learning and earning, between dependence and self-reliance. Higher education is increasingly recognized as an indispensable goal for sustainable development¹⁰ and is a critical component of the 2030 Agenda. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 aims to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all, at all levels.¹¹ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) asserts that the provision of full cycle educational opportunities is essential to humanitarian responses aligned with development goals and approaches. Recognising that access to higher education can serve as an effective incentive for more refugee children and youth to complete basic education and progress towards greater self-reliance,¹² UNHCR set the target that by 2030, 15 per cent of young refugees should be enrolled in higher education – the 15by30 target. Preceded by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR, 2018), this goal is rooted in the GCR commitment that,

“In line with national education laws, policies and planning, and in support of host countries, States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education.”

(UN General Assembly, 2018: 26)

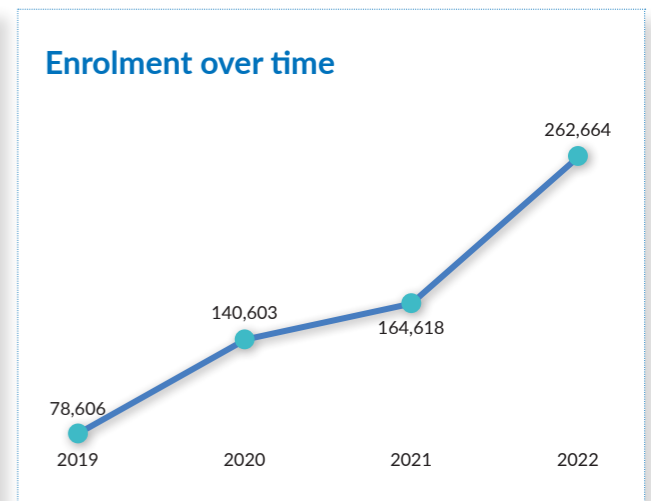
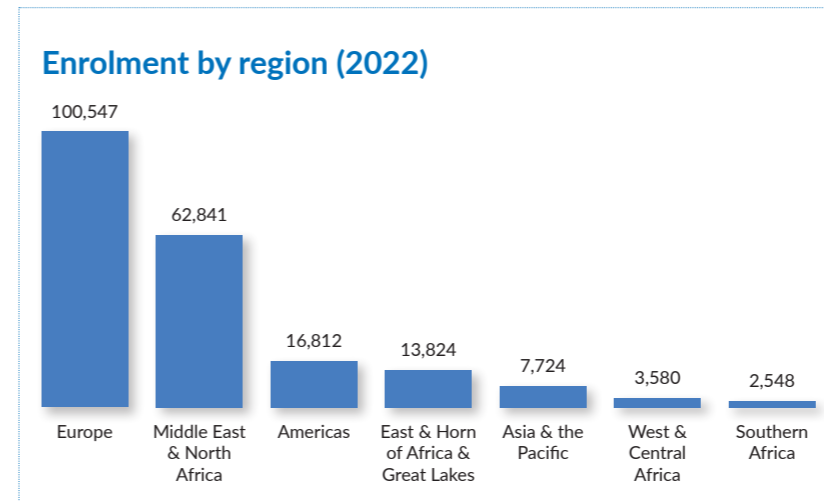
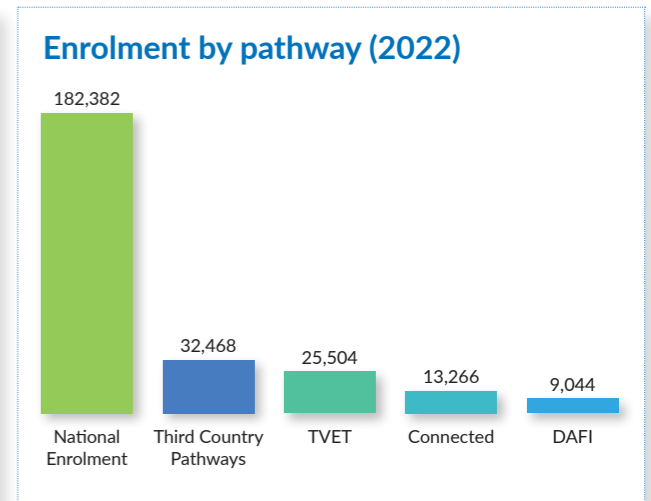
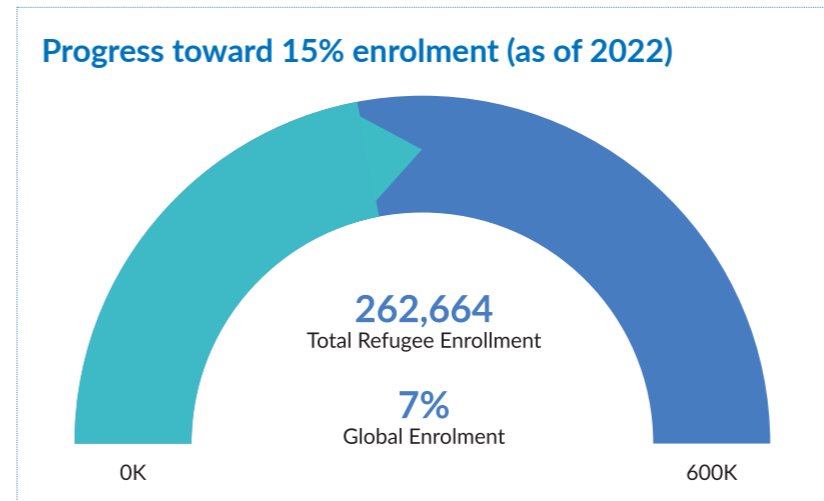
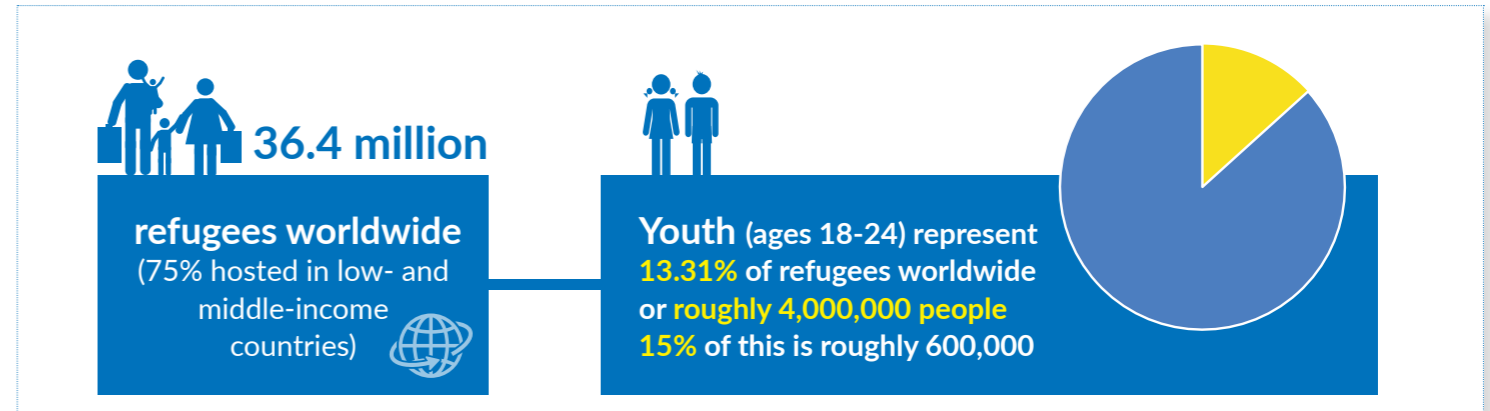
Since setting the 15 per cent objective on the eve of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019, UNHCR and partners have been working to tackle the barriers that prevent refugees from transitioning to higher education, expand and scale existing higher education programmes for refugees, devise means to support partnerships with higher education systems, institutions and governments in host countries, strengthen data collection and evidence availability, enhance the ability of refugee youth to participate in and lead the 15by30 objective, and develop a strategy to achieve 15 per cent enrolment by 2030.

The objective of this report is to provide concrete guidance and strategic actions to pursue and achieve the 15by30 target. This roadmap is the first in-depth review of the state of play, key cross-cutting themes and promising practices across each pathway for refugees to access higher education, namely, direct enrolment in national universities, refugee scholarship programmes (specifically, the DAFI programme), complementary education pathways in third countries, connected higher education (CHE), and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Furthermore, the roadmap addresses critical supporting areas that are critical to achieve 15by30, namely, data and evidence, youth mobilisation, bridging and transition programmes, and engagement with the private sector.

⁶ Protracted refugee situations are defined as those where more than 25,000 refugees from the same country of origin have been in exile in a given low- or middle-income host country for at least five consecutive years. Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate are excluded from this analysis (UNHCR 2021).
⁷ UNHCR 2023b.
⁸ This estimate includes data on national university enrolment, UNHCR tertiary education scholarships (DAFI), TVET, connected higher education programmes, and complementary pathways for admission to third countries (UNHCR 2022a).
⁹ World Bank 2023.
¹⁰ World Bank 2021a.
¹¹ United Nations 2016.
¹² UNHCR 2022b.

THE CONTEXT: ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE 15BY30 GOAL

GLOBAL DATA SNAPSHOT¹³



¹³ Population data on forced displacement can change rapidly. The total number of refugee youth worldwide, as well as the number of refugee youth known to be enrolled in higher education, and related ratios are presented as accurately as possible. Global figures on refugees and refugee youth worldwide are sourced from UNHCR's 2023 Mid-Year trends report (UNHCR 2023a) and figures reflecting progress toward the 15by30 target as well as enrolment by pathway, region and over time were gathered in UNHCR's annual data collection exercise (2022).

STATE OF PLAY: Why 15 Per Cent?

The GCR placed predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing at the centre of the international refugee protection agenda, highlighting the importance of resources and support that result in benefits to both refugees and members of host communities. In the context of higher education, full commitment to the inclusion agenda¹⁴ should enable more refugee and host community students to participate in quality higher education.

67 per cent of refugees live in protracted displacement situations¹⁵ and 75 per cent live in upper-middle income, lower-middle income and low income countries,¹⁶ many of which are already under pressure to deliver sufficient quality education to their own citizens. Given this challenging socio-economic context, higher education is out of reach for many young people who have not been affected by forced displacement, but nonetheless face some of the same challenges that refugee youth face. This includes a lack of financial means, living long distances from higher education institutions, social pressure to work or raise a family at the expense of study, lack of connectivity, risk of attending university due to disability or fear of discrimination based on a protected characteristic, and lack of access to information about opportunities for higher education.

While challenges related to cost, quality, and access may affect refugee and host community youth alike, certain or amplified challenges apply only to refugees. These barriers include host country context and environmental factors that may reduce students' safety, freedom of movement, and scholarship opportunities; administrative and bureaucratic restrictions on access to higher education and the right to work; missing or challenges validating prior learning credentials and qualifications; gaps in information about available higher education opportunities; the often prohibitive cost of higher education; language barriers; psychosocial factors linked to the experience of displacement; and physical and connectivity barriers that include difficulty accessing campuses or connecting to remote learning.¹⁷

Such challenges necessitate a robust engagement with higher education in humanitarian- development contexts and need to be addressed through targeted actions. For example, by equalising fees charged to refugee students, recognising prior learning where documentation is missing, permitting refugee students to access national education finance programmes, or eliminating movement restrictions.¹⁸

Many of the potential benefits of inclusive higher education for refugees and their host communities relate directly to the connection between higher education and labour force participation. Post-secondary education is critical to the transition to self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods. Enabling conditions for access to and completion of secondary education create a pipeline of candidates for higher education, whereas conditions for access to work following graduation create incentives to complete higher education.

The first step to harnessing the skills of refugee graduates after higher education is to ensure that more refugees have the right to work. Approximately 70 per cent of refugees live in countries with restricted access to the labour market. This means lost talent, lost opportunity, and often, resort to precarious work or dangerous onward movement.¹⁹ Workforce development planning involves assessing the current and future needs of a country, identifying skill gaps and training needs, and developing strategies and programmes to meet future labour market demands. While it may be impossible to factor large scale displacement into national workforce development planning, early assessment of skills, education levels, and professional qualifications should be prioritised to inform a country's long-term response to displacement, maximise early access to employment pathways, and capitalise on existing capabilities within the refugee population.

Today, 7 per cent of refugee youth are enrolled in some form of higher education.²⁰ For refugees, higher education is the crucible for leaders, thinkers, and makers – those who will rebuild their countries if they are able to safely return home, and those who will contribute to the futures of their host communities and countries. However, there is a critical tension between the nature of humanitarian response and refugees' pursuit of higher education. Refugee camps are established as temporary spaces often far from urban centres where most higher education institutions are located, frequently lack adequate facilities and infrastructure for education, and, more specifically, do not focus on anticipating long term higher education needs, much less, deliberate integration into the labour force.

In recent years, however, the nature of humanitarian response has changed, enabling higher education to play an instrumental role in humanitarian action and underscoring the humanitarian-development nexus (see feature: "Inter-agency steering group on higher education in humanitarian and development contexts").²¹ To ensure that more refugees have the opportunity to accrue the social, economic and cultural benefits available through higher education, and to promote the ability of refugees to participate in and contribute fully to the communities and countries they live in, in 2019 UNHCR and partners set the specific 15 per cent target, placing higher education squarely on the inclusive education agenda.

Linked to the sustainable development agenda, higher education enables personal development and promotes economic, technological and social change. It promotes the exchange of knowledge, research and innovation and equips students with the skills they need to meet ever changing labour markets. For students in vulnerable circumstances, it is a passport to economic security and a stable future.²² Without access to higher education, options to improve one's economic stability, personal development, political and social engagement are limited, exacerbating cycles of poverty and marginalisation. Lack of education generally and higher education specifically can also weaken integration in the host country, which can fuel social isolation and reduce social cohesion. The World Bank reports,

"Economic research unequivocally illustrates high private and social rates of return for investments in tertiary education, including research. The benefits include higher employment and earnings, productivity growth and innovation, greater social stability, more effective public sector bureaucracies, increased civic engagement, and better health outcomes. The consequences of underinvestment in tertiary education include talent loss, limited access to applied research capacity for local problem solving, hindered economic growth due to low levels of skills in the workforce, low-quality teaching and learning at every level of education, and, perhaps most glaringly, expanded wealth inequality both within countries and among nations, with those investing proportionately more experiencing more innovation and attraction of investment."²³

The urgency to ensure that more refugees, often considered among the most vulnerable populations, have access to higher education is further underscored by international commitments affirmed in the GCR's objectives to ease the pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. Without equal opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, build social networks and capital to be able to participate in civic life, and earn qualifications for work, refugees will remain largely dependent on the countries hosting them, unprepared to return as productive members to their country of origin and unable to partake in the opportunities of an increasingly interconnected world.

Refugee students are in some cases perceived as competing with host community students for university slots. However investing in education infrastructure benefits refugees and host communities alike. Securing sustainable, long-term funding to the education system is essential, regardless of the origin of the learners. The cost of not educating refugees can result in a significant economic burden for the host community in the long run.

¹⁴ The inclusion agenda aims to ensure refugee education is fully embedded in a host or third country education system, with the same cost drivers and constraints that determine quality and efficiency ([UNHCR 2022c](#)).

¹⁵ [UNHCR 2022d](#).

¹⁶ [UNHCR 2022e](#).

¹⁷ [UNESCO 2022](#).

¹⁸ [UNESCO 2022](#).

¹⁹ [Refugees International 2022](#).

²⁰ [UNHCR 2022a](#).

²¹ [UNHCR 2018](#).

²² [UNESCO 2023a](#).

²³ [World Bank 2022](#).

Given the multitude of associated benefits, why is the target 15 per cent, and not 100 per cent? The latest global average enrolment figure for higher education stands at 42 per cent, with variations between countries at both the high and low ends of the spectrum. Parity with the average national global higher education enrolment figure is not considered a realistic goal at this time. This is largely a reflection of the fact that most of the world's refugees are hosted in countries that have a lower average national enrolment rate,²⁴ high economic barriers to access and high demand for already over-stretched higher education systems. 15 per cent enrolment is considered an ambitious but achievable goal, grounded in the principle that refugee enrolment should increase aligned to national standards, and to the benefit of refugee and host community students.

Based on current population data, achieving 15 per cent enrolment in 2030 will mean that over half a million refugee youth will be participating in and enriching academic life across the pathways to higher education. That is a dramatic contrast with the just over 260,000 refugee learners known to be participating in higher education worldwide today.

Expanding higher education access among refugees, and host community youth, requires the coordinated, committed and sustained engagement of a range of partners committing expertise, resources and partnerships. Support for higher education systems and higher education institutions in primary hosting countries is of particular importance.

FEATURE: Inter-agency steering group on higher education in humanitarian and development contexts

Higher education institutions have long been essential partners in humanitarian response, providing pro-bono legal assistance, conducting research on forced migration issues and providing safe spaces for scholars at risk or those in need of physical shelter. Many higher education institutions and stakeholders are eager to respond to the needs of students in emergency situations, offering scholarships, . There is, however, a more comprehensive role for higher education to play in humanitarian response, from the point of emergency onset through to inclusion, integration and development.²⁵

To capitalise on the willingness and strengths of higher education education stakeholders to act in humanitarian contexts, more is needed to ensure timely coordination and communication, availability of financial resources to activate higher education services and mitigate loss of learning, deliver safe and quality higher education during and post-emergency response, prepare higher education institutions and stakeholders to efficiently admit and effectively integrate refugee learners, and improve preparedness and risk reduction of higher education systems. Thus far, a framework to engage and coordinate the higher education ecosystem in humanitarian response has been lacking.

> THE WAY FORWARD

To address this gap, UNHCR convened the first planning meeting to establish a global Interagency Steering Group for Higher Education in Humanitarian-Development Contexts on 30 May 2023 at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable Development Congress hosted the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology²⁶ in Saudi Arabia. Participants in the first steering group meeting collectively affirmed the need for a higher education in emergencies coordination mechanism and underscored the importance of positioning higher education institutions and systems to be responsive in emergency contexts. To do so, they must have access to information about the needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, understand the various roles that higher education actors can play in evolving situations and be able to communicate and coordinate collectively.

Building on the foundational work of partners and leaders in higher education and emergencies, such as the Global Platform for Syrian Students and the Institute of International Education (IIE), the structure of a global steering group on higher education in humanitarian and development contexts will continue to evolve. This will be led by a core group of higher education partners, with the aim to establish a predictable and sustainable higher education in emergencies response structure in 2024.

 For more information on the interagency steering group, please contact: stulgait@unhcr.org

²⁴ [World Bank 2023](#).

²⁵ The Global Platform for Syrian Students convened an important [conference on Higher Education in Emergencies](#) in 2014, and remains an active actor in this space ([Nexus 3.0](#)).

²⁶ Official Communique from the THE Sustainable Development Congress: [THE 2023](#).

THE 15BY30 ROADMAP



NATIONAL ENROLMENT

> WHAT IS NATIONAL ENROLMENT?

National enrolment refers to enrolment of refugee youth in higher education institutions (HEIs) in their host country. Taking into account limited opportunities for education mobility, desire to remain close to family and financial limitations, the majority of refugee youth need access to higher education opportunities in the countries where they have sought asylum. The significance of national enrolment in meeting the 15by30 target is further evidenced by global data collection: as of 2022, national enrolment accounted for nearly 70 per cent of recorded refugee higher education enrolment.

> HOW DOES NATIONAL ENROLMENT CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

Expanding opportunities for refugees to enrol in higher education institutions directly aligns with the inclusion agenda outlined in UNHCR's Refugee Education 2030 strategy. To demonstrate and embed the benefits of inclusion for refugees and the countries that host them, it is urgent that more viable education opportunities are created to allow refugee youth to become contributors in their host communities.

> STAGES OF INCLUSION IN NATIONAL ENROLMENT



Completion and post-graduate opportunities

Refugee graduates do not have the right to work; internship opportunities are highly limited.

Refugees have the right to work in policy but in practice, may face some challenges in accessing formal employment. Refugees may find internships on their own, but do not necessarily receive dedicated post-graduate counselling services.

HEIs partner with employers to create internship opportunities and pathways to employment. Refugee students receive market-informed academic counselling to help them select high-demand fields that align with their academic ambitions.

> SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Summary of recommended actions that key stakeholders, including national government, higher education councils, national development actors, universities and higher education networks, student groups and networks, refugee parents, secondary education teachers, guidance and admissions counsellors and financial aid providers can take to contribute to the 15by30 target by expanding and enhancing refugee enrolment in higher education opportunities in hosting countries.

Eliminate policy barriers

- Permit refugees freedom of movement in the country of asylum.
- Ensure refugee students can participate in secondary school leaving exams and access certificates to facilitate admission to higher education and training.
- Allow refugees to access education financing opportunities, loans and bank accounts.
- Ensure qualifications recognition systems anticipate the conditions that affect refugees.

Increase access

- Recruit higher education candidates in refugee hosting areas, and ensure sufficient information and resources are available to support the transition to higher education.
- Deliver bridging and transition programmes tailored to address barriers specific to refugee students.
- Recognise the role of higher education institutions in responding to humanitarian crises from the earliest stage of emergency.

Create a pipeline

- Invest in secondary education needs in refugee hosting areas.
- Raise awareness of the economic and social benefits of continuing education.
- Raise awareness of the individual benefits of higher education for community health, development and well-being, especially for girls and women.
- Make higher education success stories visible to encourage more young people to complete higher education.

Capitalise on completion

- Identify labour market gaps and provide information to learners to inform choice of field of study.
- Tie technical and professional training programmes to on-the-job training and placement in high demand fields.
- Permit refugees to access the formal labour market, in policy and practice.
- Permit refugees to start, register and own businesses.
- Demonstrate the economic potential and contribution of educated refugees for national development through targeted research and evaluation.



> CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

In the context of national enrolment it is helpful to consider at least two kinds of refugee learners. On the one hand, those who have been through the education system in the host country and possess proof of education from that country, and on the other, those whose education was disrupted by conflict and may not possess or are unable to obtain proof of prior learning. Each category faces varying but related challenges when pursuing higher education.

Refugee students who completed secondary school in their country of origin but do not have certificates of completion may have been out of school for a number of years and their memory of material learned in school may deteriorate. This can result in challenges when they need to submit to placement or equivalency tests to re-enter school. Furthermore, difficulty in communication between authorities, or the collapse of education or higher education systems, in countries of origin and countries of asylum can complicate the process of obtaining prior education certification. Where documentation of prior learning is simply not available, there may be a need for a specialised procedure to assess and 'rebuild' qualification documentation.

Refugee youth who completed secondary school in their host country may have undertaken their studies in a parallel system, informal setting or in the language of their home country, which may not align with higher education admission criteria leaving students unprepared to enter the national higher education system. Lengthy asylum processes, missing identity documentation or lack of awareness by secondary education institutions may result in students being denied opportunities to apply or enrol, participation in final exams or issuance of secondary leaving certification.

Refugee youth who are able to pursue higher education may face additional system-wide challenges. Refugees are often not eligible for national education finance programmes or even private loans and may be unable to overcome the barriers of high tuition and associated costs of studying, particularly if they are prohibited from working in the host country. Discrimination, disproportionate pressure to contribute to their family's income, disinformation about the right of refugees to attend university and lack of familiarity with the types of documentation refugee applicants are able to provide compound the challenge to access and benefit from higher education.

> THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Most refugees who enrol in higher education institutions in their host countries do so through the traditional route. In other words, high achieving secondary school graduates independently secure admission to university or technical school. This is possible where proof of identity and evidence of prior learning are available, where refugees are not charged inordinately high international student tuition rates and where students can also cover their cost of living by borrowing, working, family contributions or with the support of higher education institutions or scholarship programmes. Enabling policy and regulation serve as a foundation for each of these factors.

Unlike the basic education environment, however, the higher education space is characterised by decentralisation and often autonomous institutions of higher education. In this context, National government, Ministries, TVET regulatory agencies, financial aid agencies and individual institutions each have a role to play in making access to higher education possible for refugee youth. Ministries of labour, workforce development, public employment services, private sector employers and others may also have influence in processes to expand access. The tables below present a non-exhaustive list of actions that specific stakeholder groups can take.

Eliminate policy barriers

National governments	National higher education council, ministry
Change or adopt policy to enshrine access to higher education for refugees on the same terms as nationals, including fee structures and access to education finance.	Ensure universities are informed of equal access policies.

Increase access

Higher education institutions	National development actors
<p>Waive enrolment fees among refugee students or permit refugee students to pay national student rates. For example, in Burundi, a public university adjusted policy to allow refugees to pay tuition fees on par with nationals for the academic year 2022-2023; HEC Tchad University (Chad) committed to offering a 50 per cent fee waiver to refugees; and in Jordan, UNHCR and Al Yarmouk University established a memorandum of understanding to reduce fees, eliminating the international fee structure for refugees.</p> <p>Provide equivalency or entrance exams in lieu of missing academic records and provide alternative identity verification processes.</p> <p>Recruit candidates in refugee-hosting areas and conduct in-person outreach to ensure refugee youth receive sufficient information (mentoring, application processes, scholarship opportunities) to successfully transition into university.</p>	<p>Improve the quality of higher education by supporting the development of local institutions and investing in academic staff and facilities.</p>

Create a pipeline

National governments
<p>Refugee children and youth have access to formal secondary education, can participate in secondary school leaving exams and can be issued certificates of completion.</p> <p>Work with development partners and banks to ensure that higher education systems strengthening projects include refugees and/or target refugee hosting areas in design and implementation.</p>

Capitalise on completion

Higher education institutions
<p>Provide market-informed academic counselling to refugee students to help them choose high demand fields that align with their academic ambitions.</p> <p>Strengthen partnerships with industry, employers and the private sector to strengthen pathways to postgraduate employment.</p>

> Afghanistan – The challenge to sustain gains in gender parity in higher education

In some countries, immense progress to advance investment in and access to higher education have been rolled back. In Afghanistan, decades of conflict severely affected the country's tertiary education system. The impact is particularly stark in terms of women's participation rate, with only three percent of women enrolled in higher education in 2013. At that time, the government recognized the critical need to promote gender equity, both within the tertiary education system and in society at large. With support from the World Bank's Higher Education Development Project, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) undertook a range of measures to promote female enrolment including providing buses to transport female students and faculty to all 25 major public universities, piloting the establishment of child care and counselling centres at a few select universities, constructing new dormitories to accommodate female students, rolling out a new female student orientation programme, establishing a scholarship programme for female students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and for those with physical disabilities and reserving seats for female students in priority disciplines at the national university entrance examination. Prior to the takeover by the de facto authorities in 2021, UNHCR established a scholarship programme for former refugee returnees to Afghanistan as a means to promote sustainable voluntary repatriation. The programme successfully enrolled equal numbers of women and men. The prohibition on girls and women accessing higher education, however, has eviscerated gains and even resulted in new displacement as women, girls and families seek safe haven and access to rights, including the right to education, elsewhere.

> European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP) - Addressing qualification documentation barriers to higher education

Due to the circumstances of displacement, many refugees do not have documentation of prior learning or credentials, or host countries may require additional documentation that is difficult to obtain from the country of origin. To address these challenges, the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) was launched in 2017. Partners from Greece, Norway, Italy, the United Kingdom and UNHCR developed a specific instrument to assess qualifications to enable refugees to continue their studies or find relevant employment. The legal basis of the EQPR is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), which is the main legal agreement on credential evaluation in Europe. The Convention contains a specific provision on the recognition of refugees' qualifications (Article VII) as well as a recommendation on refugee qualifications in which the EQPR is highlighted as a way for countries to fulfil their obligations under the convention. The EQPR was endorsed by all countries of the European Higher Education Area²⁷ through the Rome Communiqué (2020), and the EQPR has been referenced with respect to specific applications e.g., Ukrainian refugees arriving in the EU.²⁸ As of November 2023, 22 countries are part of the EQPR: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia and the United Kingdom. To date, 943 EQPR have been issued to candidates based in Armenia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, many of whom have obtained a job or place of study on the basis of the EQPR. The very first recipient was a Syrian physiotherapist who obtained the EQPR in Greece and is now working in a related field in Norway.

The EQPR has since been adapted by UNESCO to form the basis of the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants (UQP). The UQP is a universal tool that aims to enable refugees to access tertiary and higher education when there is a lack of sufficient documentation for standard equivalency validation. To support the implementation of the programme, ensure relevancy within national recognition mechanisms and address inclusion and integration, UNESCO coordinates closely with national authorities and higher education institutions to promote relevant policies in admission, financing and to anchor the UQP recognition mechanisms within national systems. The UQP project began as a pilot initiative in 2019 and in 2023, UQP is in use or under development in five countries – Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Iraq. For example, in Zambia, UQP has been adopted into the national university admission guidelines and efforts are underway to allow UQP holders to access national public higher education financing from the government. Finally, St. Eugene University in Zambia is offering 245 scholarships that can be accessed by UQP holders. Looking ahead, capacity-building sessions and conversations about how to further scale UQP are underway, with an aim to ensure that the UQP can be made available as a fit-for-purpose solution in relevant contexts.

²⁷ Council of Europe n.d.

²⁸ European Commission 2022.



> WHAT IS THE DAFI PROGRAMME?

Since its inception in 1992, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme has supported over 24,500 students worldwide. It is one of the most renowned and long-standing higher education scholarship programmes designed specifically for refugees. The programme, funded primarily by the German government with additional support from the Danish government and other private partners and foundations, is active in 58 countries spanning all regions.

Managed at UNHCR headquarters, UNHCR country operations work closely with local NGOs and academic partners to plan and implement the context-specific programme, adapting selection, support services, partnerships with Ministries of Education and higher education institutions to local needs and conditions. The six strategic objectives of the DAFI programme are:

1. Promote self-reliance and pathways to solutions resulting from the completion of undergraduate qualification.
2. Empower young women and men equally to contribute knowledge, skills and leadership to their communities, and to participate fully in peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and the development of the communities where they live.
3. Strengthen the protective impact of education by encouraging lifelong learning for refugees.
4. Provide role models for refugee children and youth, by demonstrating the positive impact of education on individuals, communities and societies.
5. Contribute to post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction in the event that refugees return to their home countries.
6. Promote social, economic and gender equality.

> HOW DOES THE DAFI PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

In the context of the inclusion agenda and the focus on access to higher education on par with nationals, scholarship programmes designed specifically for refugees may seem contradictory. However, the DAFI programme is included in this roadmap as a specific pathway to 15by30 for several reasons. The DAFI programme, and other scholarship programmes like it, exist specifically to bridge the gap between exclusion and inclusion. Scholarship programmes that specifically support refugees are vital, even in those hosting countries that include refugees in their national education system. Nearly three quarters of countries where DAFI operates permit refugees to access higher education, under many of the same conditions as nationals. However, even where refugees may attend university, they are rarely eligible for government-issued loans or other financial aid, and in many countries they are not permitted to work, creating an often insurmountable financial barrier. These systemic and practical hurdles make participation in higher education particularly challenging for refugees, resulting in a stark disparity between refugee and non-refugee enrolment levels and opportunities.

Over time, refugee scholarship programmes have begun to demonstrate the long-term benefits of including refugees in national education systems at all levels. Namely, where refugee children and youth are able to participate in the full cycle of education, learn the language of instruction, develop social networks and capital, earn qualifications and progressively participate in the economy, they can and do become contributing members of the communities and countries where they live. Knowledge of tertiary education opportunities and scholarships have been shown to incentivise refugee youth to complete secondary education and scholarship programmes for refugees to access higher education serve as a powerful deterrent to unsafe onward movement (see case “Testimony from DAFI Ecuador”). Finally, scholarship programmes have helped create the pipeline and conditions for refugees to take advantage of new and emerging post-graduate opportunities, including further study and complementary education and labour mobility pathways. Often the stated intention of refugee-specific higher education programmes has been to ensure that displaced youth and students are educated and therefore prepared to contribute to or lead reconstruction of their home

country once they are able to safely and voluntarily return. In places like Iran, Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda and Kenya, this is taking place. In other places, refugee specific scholarship programmes serve as part of the pipeline into third country education opportunities, particularly for Masters and PhD studies, and labour mobility pathways. In most contexts, however, refugee graduates need to be able to exercise their skills and use their knowledge where they are. In order to further capitalise on investments in refugee higher education, more research and evidence is needed on the long term outcomes of refugee scholarship graduates in supporting protection outcomes, strengthening higher education institutions, contributing to local economies and advancing social cohesion.



CASE STUDY

HIGHER EDUCATION AS A DETERRENT TO UNSAFE ONWARD MOVEMENT

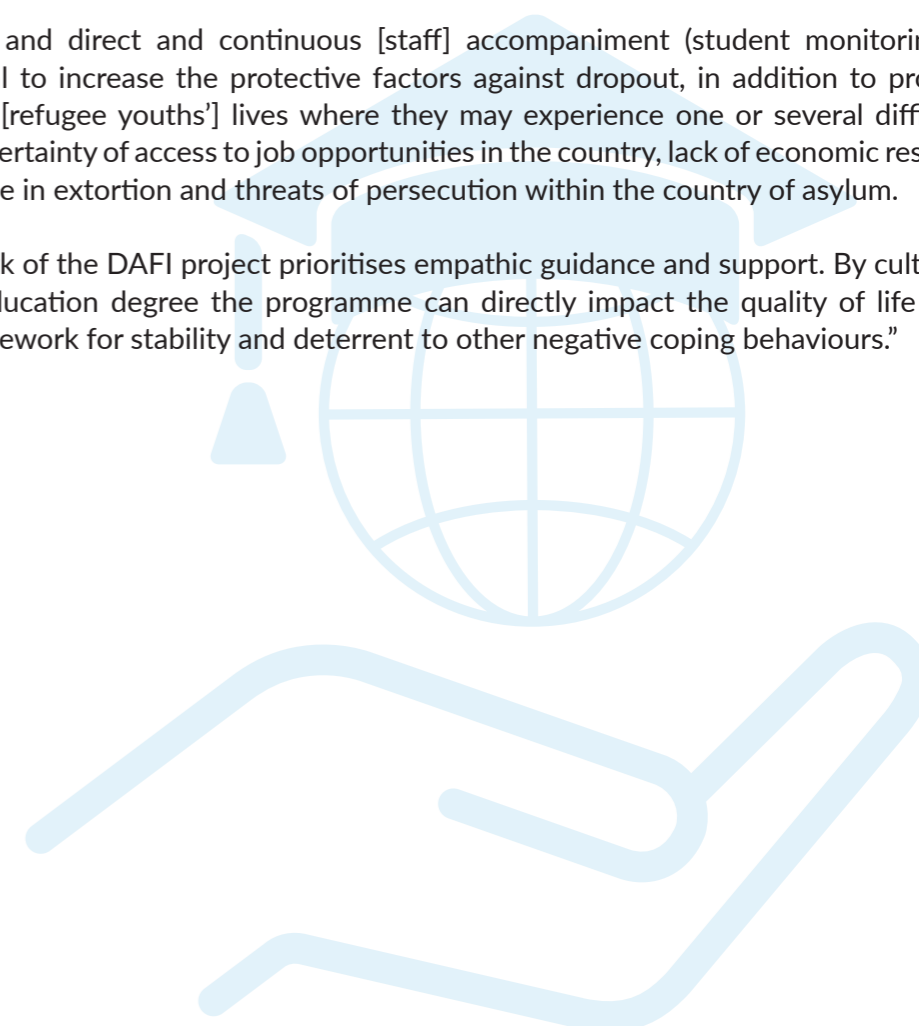
Testimony of social workers at HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the organisation implementing DAFI in Ecuador. They include Jonathan Andres Puruncajas Alvear (Ibarra), Maryury Ortega (Quito Norte) and Benny Leon (Guayaquil).

“Among the greatest difficulties faced by young refugees in the city is the perception of insecurity resulting from generalised violence, increased robberies, kidnappings and murders, the fight for territory between criminal gangs and the inefficient response of security agencies to safeguard citizens. This adverse social situation negatively impacts their lives because it triggers psychosocial effects that may be linked to previous experiences related to the reason for leaving their countries of origin.

A second difficulty experienced by the refugees who are part of the DAFI programme is related to not having the presence of nuclear family or close relatives, resulting in feelings of loneliness, detachment, sadness, distrust, less sense of support and emotional well-being.

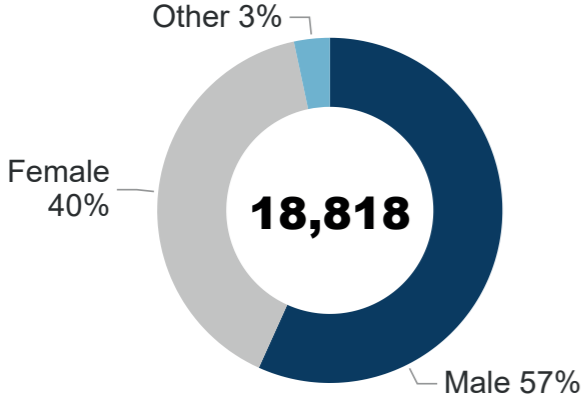
The link with higher education and direct and continuous [staff] accompaniment (student monitoring and psychosocial support) is essential to increase the protective factors against dropout, in addition to providing guidance in other areas of their [refugee youths'] lives where they may experience one or several difficulties simultaneously, including: the uncertainty of access to job opportunities in the country, lack of economic resources to meet their basic needs, increase in extortion and threats of persecution within the country of asylum.

The role of HIAS in the framework of the DAFI project prioritises empathic guidance and support. By cultivating interest in studying a tertiary education degree the programme can directly impact the quality of life of the refugee student, providing a framework for stability and deterrent to other negative coping behaviours.”

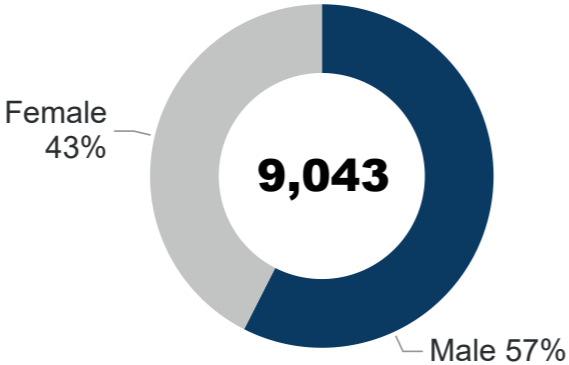


DAFI - 2022 DATA SNAPSHOT

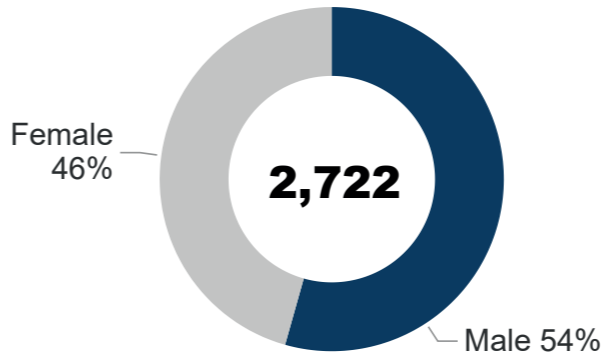
APPLICATIONS



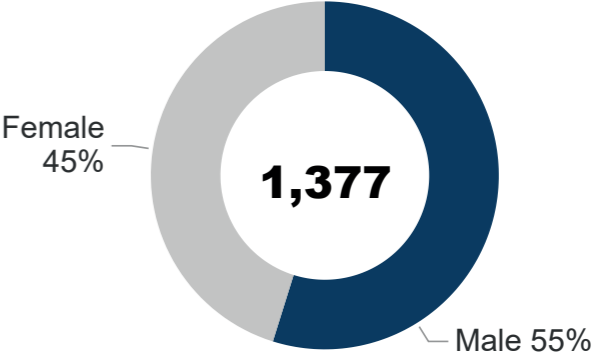
TOTAL DAFI STUDENTS



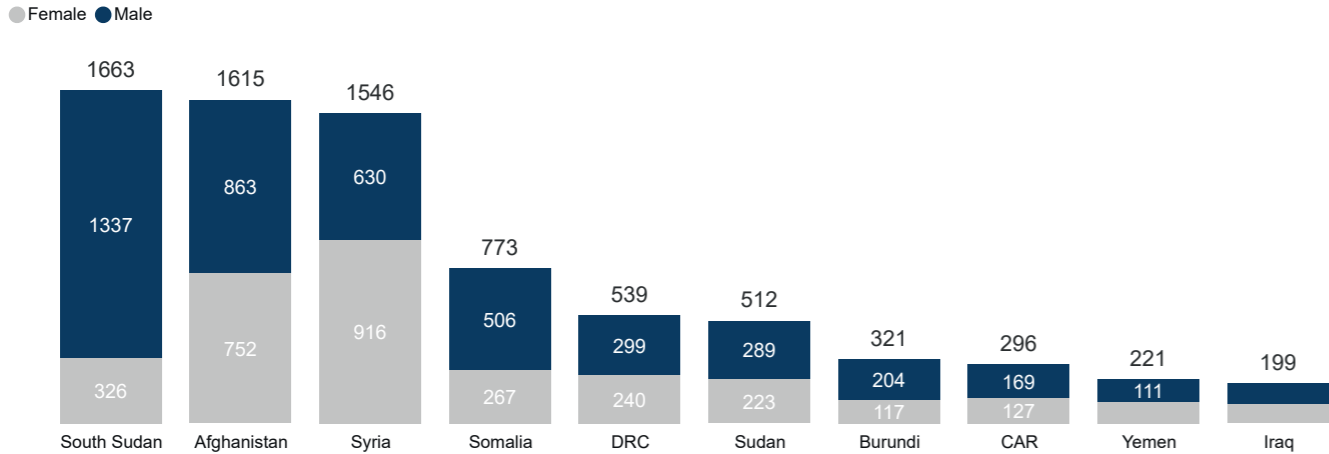
NEW SCHOLARSHIPS



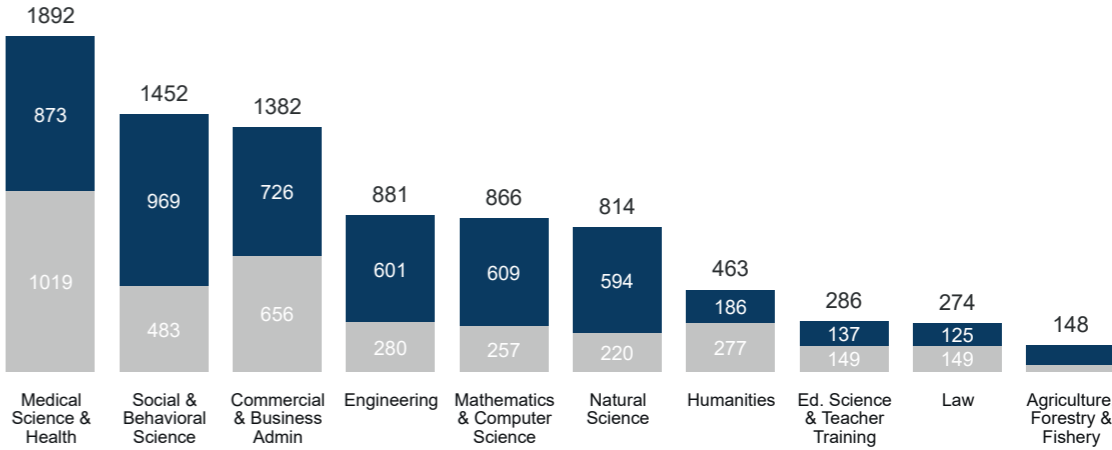
GRADUATES



TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



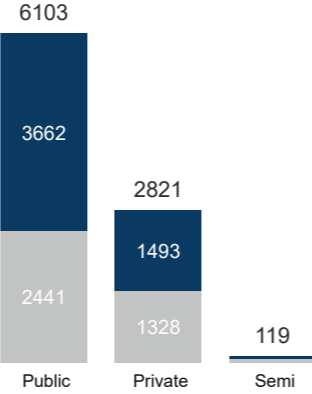
TOP FIELDS OF STUDY



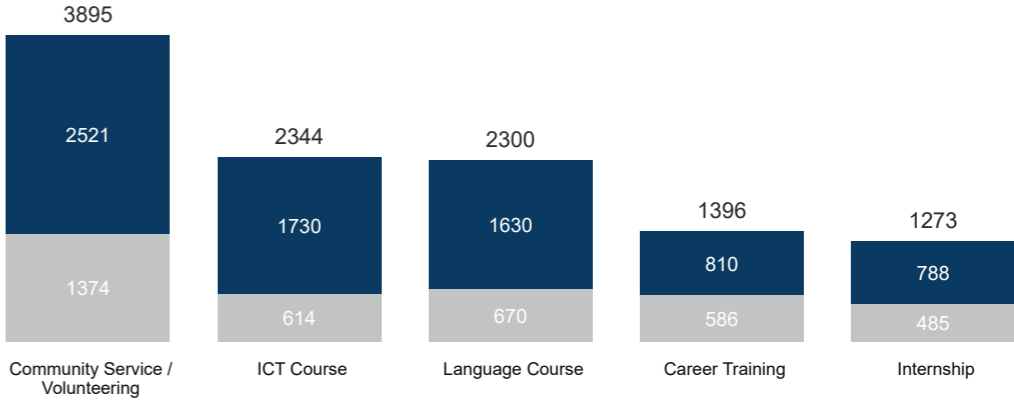
STUDENT LOCATION



INSTITUTION TYPE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CAREER READINESS ACTIVITIES



COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS

> WHAT ARE COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS?

Complementary education pathways are safe and regulated admission avenues by which refugees can move to a third country to study where their international protection needs are met.

> HOW DO COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

Complementary education pathways to third countries have emerged as an innovative opportunity to increase education access for refugee students and expand options for lasting solutions. Beyond directly contributing to the 15by30 target, these particular higher education opportunities make important contributions towards achieving the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), namely, to expand resettlement and complementary pathways to third countries. Complementary pathways are multifaceted and require collaboration across a range of stakeholders, spanning from actors in first countries of asylum, to third countries offering educational opportunities and encompassing the private sector and multilateral organisations that transcend borders.

> STAGES OF INCLUSION IN COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS



> SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Summary of recommended actions that key stakeholders, including governments, post-secondary institutions and associated communities, lending institutions, the private sector, philanthropists, development actors, civil society organisations and refugee-led organisations, can take to contribute to increase refugees' access to and inclusion in higher education, via complementary education pathways.

Collaborate, pool and innovate to tap into new and existing funding resources

- Support refugee students' living expenses and other incidentals
- Fund support infrastructure from application to integration
- Pool individual donor contributions and hold individual donor campaigns
- Collaborate with states to include education pathways in existing funding mechanisms
- Expand innovative financing options e.g., loans, grants, crowdfunding campaigns

Advance and advocate for policies that account for refugees

- Simplify application procedures and expedite visa issuance for refugee study, including waiving procedural elements (interviews, biometric collection) where embassy access is not possible
- Waive or reduce exit and/or overstay fees for individuals departing on complementary education pathways and expedite exit permit processing
- Design and launch programmes for refugee students in addition to international student route that would be specifically tailored to refugee needs
- Ensure refugee students are protected from refoulement at all stages of their study or subsequent integration

Promote academic and community inclusion

- Coordinate efforts and communications between overseas and domestic actors
- Connect refugee students with the tools and resources needed to meet their academic and social-emotional well being
- Engage current and former refugee students as the leaders and experts in their own academic and community integration
- Coordinate with partners to ensure a smooth pre- to post-arrival transition for students

Strengthen overseas infrastructure

- Identify barriers to refugees in readily accessing documentation, e.g., proof of learning
- Develop bilateral partnerships to ensure students' safe passage through transit countries
- Establishing data sharing agreements to facilitate the flow of information
- Invest in language instruction for refugees and develop partnerships with actors delivering internationally recognized testing
- Strengthen language and skills certification services to enable more refugees to qualify for academic opportunities abroad
- Create opportunities specifically for women, girls and people of diverse gender identities
- Support local organisations and partners with training, capacity building and strategy development on complementary education pathways activities and relevant skills
- Include Civil Society and Refugee Led Organizations in discussions with Government on refugee and migration policy as well as creating more welcoming communities

> BENEFITS TO STAKEHOLDER OF INVESTING IN COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Complementary education pathways are unique and powerful opportunities for refugees to pursue higher education and to bolster lasting solutions. Establishment of effective pathways necessitates collaboration across a range of stakeholders. Investing in complementary education pathways can be deeply rewarding, resulting in a range of benefits for key stakeholder groups. The expansion of complementary education pathways emerges not solely as a pragmatic initiative but as a dynamic force with transformative potential for individuals, institutions, and nations alike.

Higher Education Institutions and Organisations/Networks: Education pathways provide an opportunity for non-traditional humanitarian actors, such as post-secondary institutions in a receiving country²⁹, to play a key role in the global response to forced migration. Specifically, they have the opportunity to share responsibility with those in first countries of asylum that are often at the forefront of refugee protection and education. In return, participating campuses reap a tapestry of benefits, including the enrichment of classroom discussions and campus life through a more diverse and international student body. This infusion of diversity enriches discussions on campus, drives innovation and has the potential to transform institutions, rendering them more inclusive for displaced and conflict-affected students. These advantages are in line with the missions of most higher education institutions, and often align with the values of staff, faculty and students. Furthermore, as many post-secondary institutions are influential within their communities, the act of welcoming refugees serves to cultivate community awareness and support for refugee integration. Simultaneously, it creates a platform for the campus to further develop linkages with the community and expose local populations to global and forced migration issues, enhancing interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

Civil Society & National Governments and Ministries: The expansion of complementary education pathways bolsters receiving countries with an influx of young learners, a particularly notable advantage for countries experiencing declining birth rates and ageing populations. This demographic boost can serve as an impetus for addressing labour market shortages and augmenting economic productivity while contributing to long term self-reliance of refugees. Governments, both those of first countries of asylum and in third countries, can capitalise on complementary education pathways by creating enabling policy frameworks and environments that allow for and encourage the pursuit of complementary education pathways tied to economic development aims. By investing in the education and training of displaced populations, governments can build a more skilled workforce that subsequently drives economic growth. This, in turn, can alleviate some of the pressures encountered by first countries of asylum in hosting refugees, aligning with the principles elucidated in the GCR.

Development Actors: Complementary education pathways act as powerful incentives for displaced individuals to complete secondary education and continue their studies, aligning with the goals of development actors who aim to improve outcomes at secondary and other education levels. Pathways should promote gender equality, aligning with global endeavours to ensure equitable access to education and training. Beyond the impact on education, the interplay between development actors and complementary education pathways extends to broader socio-economic implications. Educated and skilled refugee populations catalyse economic growth, amplify the labour supply, reduce potential drivers of conflict and promote stability.

Private Sector Actors: The expansion of complementary education pathways brings forth a pool of nationally trained graduates, resulting in a diverse and skilled talent pool that benefits the private sector. This resourceful workforce can enhance overall business growth and competitiveness. Moreover, growing private sector engagement in education pathways aligns with corporate social responsibility, yielding economic and tax benefits while contributing to socially meaningful causes. This synergy between profit motives and social impact serves

as a catalyst for active involvement. Exposure to diverse cultures and contexts equips companies with a global perspective, and facilitates cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. By investing in complementary education pathways, private sector actors can help to reshape narratives and attitudes surrounding newcomers and refugee workers.

> THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

To increase enrolment via complementary education pathways, there are critical steps all stakeholders can take to move the needle, expand access and advance inclusion. These next steps account for the primary factors that determine and affect how complementary education pathways can contribute to 15by30 and include: **funding resources, policy, academic and community inclusion and overseas infrastructure.**

Funding resources

Governments	Post-secondary institutions and communities	Lending institutions	Private sector and philanthropists
Waive visa fee and costs associated with obtaining a visa	Provide fee waivers for refugee students (including admission, application)	Address the barriers that currently prevent refugees from accessing student loans	Waive language testing fees for refugees
Enable postsecondary communities to welcome refugee students under community sponsorship programmes	Develop scholarships for refugee students		Offer part-time and/or summer employment to refugee students
	Support or develop student, staff and faculty levy models		Develop study-work hybrid programmes with employers that cover student expenses
	Support refugee student employment on campus or with partners in their community		Offset the cost of student travel by developing miles programmes or offer fare waivers
	Allow refugee students to access domestic tuition fees		

Policy and advocacy

Governments	Post-secondary institutions and communities
Participate in national and international forums that discuss education pathways and ensure participation of all relevant stakeholders	Include student bodies and communities in policy and awareness discussions with governments to encourage flexible models whereby academic communities can engage with education pathways
Review the legal infrastructure to identify entry routes, visas and necessary adjustments to existing visa processes to allow refugees entry for study	
Waive visa requirements that prevent refugees from accessing foreign study programmes, including application fees, income requirements and the need to prove their return to country of asylum or origin	
Issue machine-readable temporary, one-way or convention travel documents	
Accept documentation, including travel documentation issued by a country of asylum	
Extend travel documents at embassies and consulates on the receiving end rather than requiring students to renew permits from outside of the country	
Issue multiple entry travel documents for an extended period of at least five years	Advocate to waive barriers for refugee students related to documentation, at an internal and national level

²⁹ Receiving country refers to a country that receives a refugee who has been resettled, arrived via a complementary, labour mobility, or community sponsorship programme. The receiving country is also referred to as a third country, other than the country of origin or the country of asylum (UNHCR).

Academic and community inclusion

Post-secondary institutions and communities	Civil society organisations
<p>Include refugee students in relevant orientation programming e.g., for international and first generation students</p> <p>Offer training to select or designated HEI staff about how to support refugee students on campus</p> <p>Pursue cross-campus and community based efforts to build awareness and education about how to support refugee students</p> <p>Form a cross-departmental, community committee or taskforce to ensure holistic support for refugee students</p> <p>Ensure refugee students have an academic advisor and/or peer mentor to support integration and facilitate network building between refugee students</p> <p>Use innovative means of language credentialing, including in-person interviews and use of the Duolingo English test</p> <p>Facilitate access to qualification confirmation</p> <p>Accept alternative forms of identity confirmation beyond national passports and/or support acquisition/certification of alternative documentation to confirm credentials and prior learning</p> <p>Accept alternative forms of qualification, confirmation and certification beyond traditional diplomas and transcripts e.g., the UNESCO Qualifications Passport and European Qualification Passport</p>	<p>Support refugee students to understand their rights and services, which they can self-advocate for</p> <p>Coordinate with partners to ensure a smooth pre- to post-arrival transition for students</p>

Overseas infrastructure

Governments	Development actors, CSOs, RLOs	Post-secondary institutions and communities
<p>Ensure refugee learners can receive official and accredited documentation for completing their studies (either from accessing exams proctored by an official from their home country or country of asylum's ministry of education)</p> <p>Invest in strengthening national education systems to better include refugee learners</p> <p>Relevant ministry in country of asylum develops operational guidance to ensure the timely processing of exit visas for refugees pursuing studies in third countries</p> <p>Waive or reduce exit and/or overstay fees for individuals departing on complementary education pathways, and expedite exit permit processing</p> <p>Country of asylum offers possibility of re-entry visa to students who study abroad</p> <p>Develop operational guidance and adaptations that allow for distance processing of study and other visas</p> <p>Train consular officers to ensure sensitivity and understanding of refugee situations to facilitate access to visa issuance</p> <p>Ensure access to consular services of the first country of asylum upon arrival in the third country to allow for extension of travel and other residency documents, ensuring continuous documentation and access</p> <p>Develop and implement self-service tools for refugees to enter their credentials</p> <p>Collect relevant refugee data in their countries of first asylum (including information on education, skills, certification, language capacity, aspirations for future study, etc.)</p> <p>Include refugees in programmes and partnerships on local development, such as access to secondary and tertiary education as well as training opportunities</p>	<p>Develop partnerships with banks or financial institutions to allow refugees to access bank accounts</p> <p>Link scholarship recipients with opportunities for continued study</p> <p>Ensure training on soft skills and admission interviews through education organisations and partners on the ground</p> <p>Develop cultural orientation and university fairs to prepare refugee students for success</p> <p>Expand the scope of relevant education and protection partners to work with potential beneficiaries to prepare and support them with administrative procedures (application, interview, departure)</p>	<p>Develop and/or deliver bridging programmes that can help refugee learners access and succeed in third country opportunities</p> <p>Use remote teaching partnerships and frameworks to enhance relevant skills and credentials, including language</p>

The UNIV'R programme

Insights from interview with Cécilia Brassier-Rodrigues, Policy Officer for University Integration of Refugees and Internationalisation at University Clermont Auvergne, summarised by Stephen Pech Gai (member of UNHCR's Journalism Mentorship Programme)

The UNIV'R programme, or the University Corridor project, was launched in France in 2021. It is run by UNHCR and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), with the support of the Migrants in Higher Education (MEnS) network. This project aims to develop a harmonised and sustainable pathway for refugees to pursue their master's degrees in France. 13 HEI's currently participate in the UNIV'R programme.

University Clermont Auvergne (UCA) plays a key role in the programme by identifying eligible master's courses, selecting students and providing academic support. UCA partners closely with Forum Réfugiés, which supports selected students upon their arrival with administration and integration procedures. Forum Réfugiés specifically targets students from three countries of first asylum, namely Niger, Chad and Cameroon. UCA has welcomed ten students over three years (2021 - 2023). Next, UCA plans to offer new master's courses in Clermont-Ferrand as well as other campuses and will identify partners to support the social integration of UNIV'R students. The university plans to continue the project each year, ensuring it remains an integral part of its commitment to supporting refugee students.

Programme Eligibility & Components

Applicants must hold refugee status in their first country of asylum and have a bachelor's degree equivalent to French standards (three years of higher education study after completion of secondary studies).

UCA works closely with local partners to implement UNIV'R, which as a whole encourages and invites universities to work with multiple actors and communities. For example, Forum Réfugiés supports reception and day-to-day administration procedures, such as helping students open bank accounts, navigate transportation services, etc. Furthermore, Forum Réfugiés and UCA help students search for internships and apply for jobs. Other local organisations provide psychological services, support securing housing and stipends for basic needs. Finally, UCA provides academic support in the form of tutoring, English language courses and refresher courses to ease students' transition.

Student Status & Challenges

Refugee students who arrive in France under the UNIV'R programme are classified as international students. They are granted a one-year study visa (VLS-TS), which is equivalent to a residence permit. After one year, like other foreign students, they must apply for visa renewal to continue their two-year Master's degree programme. Upon graduation, they can apply for a residence permit if they find work or wish to do so.

With a one-year study visa (VLS-TS) in hand, UNIV'R students are able to travel freely throughout Schengen area countries, may supplement their resources with work (20 hours per week), receive housing support and may extend their stay. Furthermore, they are considered members of the international student community and may benefit from all university services offered to international students.

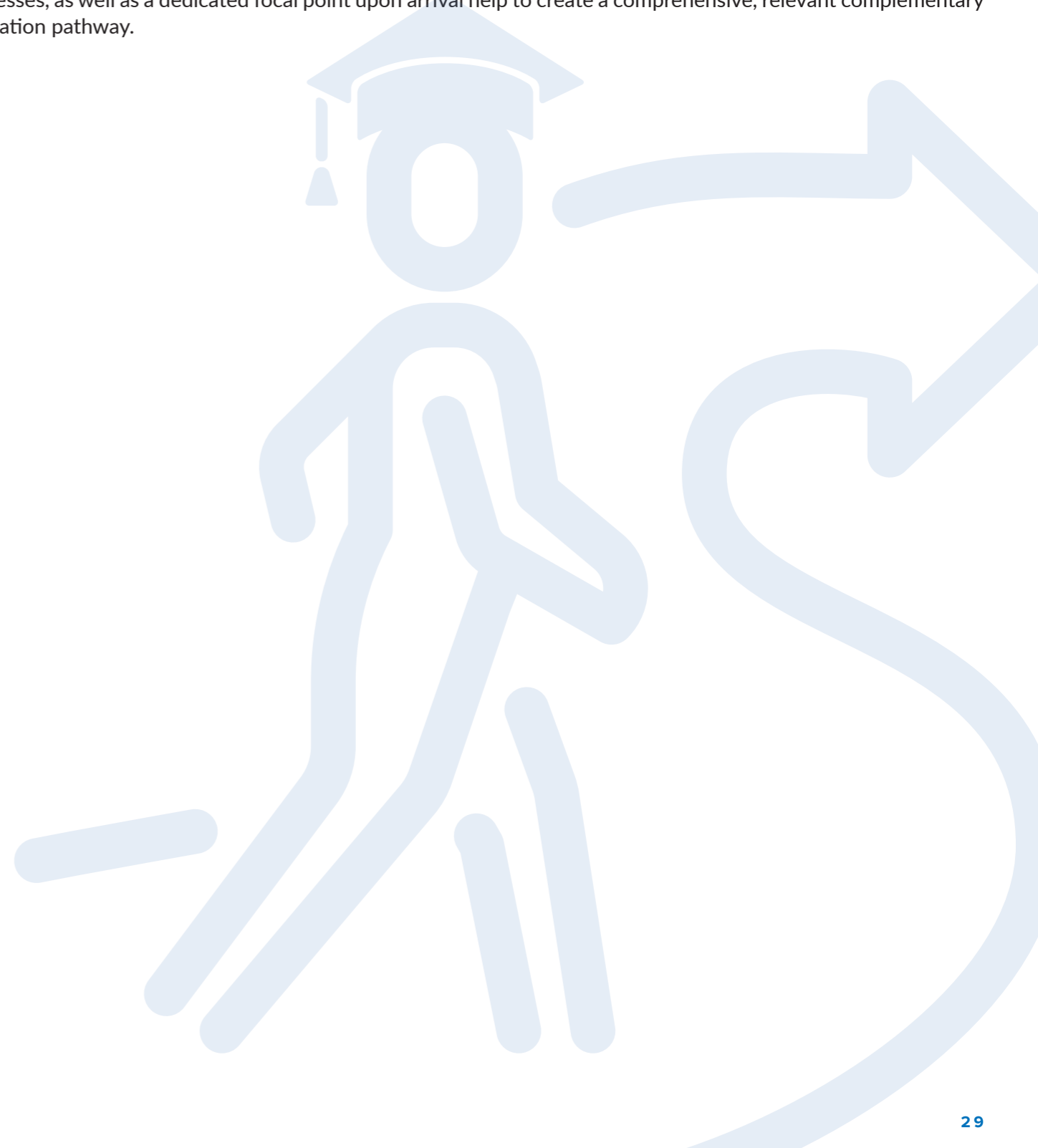
Students on this type of visa may not bring their families with them to France. Furthermore, while doors are opened to them as international students, this visa does not necessarily meet their specific needs as refugees. Therefore, UCA's partner Forum Réfugiés helps ensure students receive relevant support on arrival and throughout their studies.

Best Practices

UNIV'R at UCA highlights a few best practices in establishing complementary education pathways programmes. First and foremost, UCA relies heavily on its primary implementation partner – Forum Réfugiés – and other local partners to ensure students receive all the support they need to succeed in their studies and adjust to life in France. As Cécilia emphasises,

"A university corridor project must be multi-actor. A motivated university is not enough, otherwise it will run out after the first edition of the project. The project will only work if we identify partners who get involved and take charge of different aspects. I think that the university corridor can and must be a project carried out in conjunction with the actors of the territory."

Holistic services that go beyond academic support empower students to succeed. Tailored selection and integration processes, as well as a dedicated focal point upon arrival help to create a comprehensive, relevant complementary education pathway.





CONNECTED HIGHER EDUCATION

> WHAT IS CONNECTED HIGHER EDUCATION?

Connected higher education (CHE) refers to relevant, flexible, accredited and sustainable higher education programmes that link student interests to academic or vocational pathways through the use of technology, including low tech. CHE includes higher education opportunities delivered:

- Through technology and outside the university campus, either in a satellite campus or in a learning centre in a refugee-hosting community
- Fully online, enabling students to access the course from any location
- Partially on the campus of the host university, with a blended component

> HOW DOES CHE CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

CHE offers enormous opportunities for refugees to enrol in high quality university courses at scale. As a mode of delivery it has distinct advantages in bringing higher education directly into refugee-hosting communities, thereby improving access among some of the hardest-to-reach populations. It also has the potential to scale and reach even larger numbers of refugee students. Furthermore, CHE provides options for greater flexibility and pace of learning in the context of displacement, which helps to mitigate some of the barriers refugees face in accessing and participating in education.

> STAGES OF INCLUSION IN CONNECTED HIGHER EDUCATION



> SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Summary of recommended actions that key stakeholders, including HEIs (in countries of first asylum and in the global north), university associations, private sector education providers, accreditation providers, connectivity providers, employers, global labour platforms, foundations and private funders, multi- and bi-lateral donors, development banks, NGOs and student groups can take to contribute to the 15by30 target via CHE.

Engage the ecosystem – partnerships and stakeholders

- Map the full range of formal and informal online spaces for learners.
- Design CHE programmes to avoid duplication and fill gaps, with consideration for the numerous formal and informal points of contact for refugee learners e.g., higher education and community institutions, social media, NGO-led initiatives and others.
- Engage, incentivise and leverage points of connection and stakeholders e.g., the local education group, governmental agencies, national universities and ministries of education.

Support students into and through CHE

- Develop and provide bridging and upskilling programmes to help students upgrade their digital, academic and language skills and support their transition into higher education.
- Consider the mental health, social and emotional wellbeing of students and integrate trauma-informed teaching and provision of mental health services into CHE.
- Design and implement flexible admissions processes, particularly regarding the recognition of credit from other universities and alternative documents.
- Encourage more universities to develop CHE courses, especially those in countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees, to increase opportunities.
- Connect CHE with relevant employment outcomes via local partnerships, career guidance and counselling, internships, workplace experience and technical training aligned with the digital and remote labour market.
- Ensure course content and accreditations are relevant to the labour market and linked to job opportunities, both locally and internationally as well as remote work options.

Build for scale and sustainability

- To combat the tension between higher education quality and scale, implementers may consider investing in students and partners to take on additional responsibilities while not incurring additional costs.
- Establish cost-sharing and incoming sharing agreements with students.
- Conduct fundraising via institutional approaches, which involve students and alumni.
- Conduct training for NGO and UN field staff to facilitate their thorough understanding of CHE, to support the implementation and growth of CHE programmes.
- Increase investments in connectivity, electricity and internet-enabled devices.

Local relevance

- Engage with local authorities and universities to ensure use of local expertise in programming and to properly secure accreditation, particularly among CHE providers that deliver across borders.
- Understand and apply context-specific digital learning policies and programmes.
- Incorporate local, localised and global content, in relevant languages of instruction.
- Involve refugee youth in the co-design of CHE opportunities and initiatives.



> CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

While there are notable benefits that can materialise through connected learning, there are also a number of challenges. Although delivering higher education in conflict and crisis contexts is increasingly acknowledged as a global priority, there is a lack of research-informed evidence about the effective use of educational technology in such contexts.³⁰ Clear benefits surfaced as the world turned to digitally supported education to provide continuous learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the vast majority of forcibly displaced learners, and their host community peers, were left out and the digital divide widened. Importantly, it is becoming more apparent that these disadvantages are not limited to refugee populations.

UNHCR estimates that 78 per cent of refugee learners had limited or no access to learning during COVID-19 school closures.³¹ This was the result of limited investments prior to the pandemic, which meant communities lacked the infrastructure, technology, digital literacy and overall capacity to transition to and access national radio, television and digital learning platforms. For refugees to enrol and study at university remotely, they almost always need internet enabled devices and an internet connection. Refugees have lower rates of access to digital tools: compared to global standards, refugee households are approximately 50 per cent less likely to have an internet-enabled phone and two and a half times more likely to be living without a phone.³² Furthermore, approximately 94 per cent of refugees in camps have very limited access to reliable, clean and sustainable electricity.³³

Where technology that allows refugees to access CHE programmes is available, other concerns remain. These include whether logistical and technical resources are adapted to the living and learning environment of the camp or other location, the alignment of course content to learners' contexts, the lack of physical presence or interaction with the learning environment or other learners, the complex power dynamics of universities based in the Global North delivering education in refugee-hosting communities and a lack of or insufficient accreditation.³⁴ As a refugee student in a CHE programme explained:

"We call on universities to provide more opportunities for refugees, including in the locations where they are based. Digital learning is an option in this regard, and it allowed us to earn our degrees, but it also has its challenges. We all live in areas where there is limited access to computers, stable internet or even electricity. We have to travel long distances to reach community centres, where the internet might not even be working when we arrive. Universities need to ensure that they have planned for these challenges before they start delivering courses."³⁵

Furthermore, there are challenges implementing inclusive CHE. Many of the massive open online course (MOOC) platforms and content are developed by and for constituencies outside of refugee hosting areas, as are the platforms which universities use most often to deliver courses. Open Educational Resources (OER) are also largely produced in high-income countries, and may not be fit-for-purpose in refugee hosting regions. The question remains as to whether the abundance of these types of OER may exacerbate inequalities in global education.

Finally, cutting across all of this is a growing digital gender divide which affects women and girls worldwide, placing them at a disadvantage in accessing mobile devices, using the internet, and developing digital skills.³⁶

Digital Transformation Strategy

The growing use of digital channels and associated technology offer a wide range of opportunities for forcibly displaced and stateless people, but also bring new risks. [UNHCR's Digital Transformation Strategy](#) was developed to provide a unified vision and approach to realising the rights of refugees to digital inclusion and protection. Digital technology has the potential to create opportunities for refugees in education, employment, building human connections, engaging in online services and receiving critical protection information.

However, there are also risks of the increasing prevalence of digital technologies leading to heightened protection challenges and risks for refugees. These include, but are not limited to, threats to the fundamental right to privacy, increased processing of personal data in digital systems, the online targeting and exploitation of people on the move and the digital risks faced by host communities e.g., fraud. Toxic online narratives and hate speech are both a root cause of forced displacement and a protection threat to the stateless and the displaced.

> THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

There is growing discourse around the increasing need to expand CHE, and a sense that more online learning is inevitable. This is linked with global agendas such as the [World Bank's STEER](#) initiative, which sees digital technology as essential to building resilient higher education systems.³⁷ The regulatory environment has also become more favourable to online learning. In regions which were previously resistant to recognition of online learning, there is now a growing movement to recognise credits earned online.

Through its flexibility and adaptability, CHE has the opportunity to meet anticipated opportunities which may arise in labour mobility and remote work. To achieve this, CHE will need to establish greater relevance to labour market outcomes. CHE programmes will need to deliver courses which capitalise on opportunities as they arise. With opportunities in remote work continuing to expand, there is a growing need for wider recognition of international accreditation and prior learning. This also includes opportunities for private providers to offer accreditation for short, technical courses.

To tap into these opportunities and the potential of CHE, recommended actions for each stakeholder group are detailed below. Each has a part to play, independently and even more so in partnership with one another, to achieve 15by30. There is great willingness among universities in the Global North to respond to refugee crises. However, this is typically in the form of scholarships on campus or solidarity initiatives, rather than via CHE. These universities have a critical opportunity to leverage their global partnerships and engage with UNHCR and NGOs to design relevant, accredited CHE courses for delivery in refugee communities. Furthermore, Global North universities may look to tap into international partnerships and satellite campuses to enrol refugees through trans-national education schemes.

³⁰ [UNESCO 2023b.](#)

³¹ [UNHCR 2022f.](#)

³² [UNHCR 2022f.](#)

³³ [UNITAR 2022.](#)

³⁴ [Carron et al 2023.](#)

³⁵ [Dusenge, Byiringiro & Ayuen 2023.](#)

³⁶ [UNHCR 2023c.](#)

³⁷ [World Bank 2021b.](#)



Engage the ecosystem – partnerships and stakeholders

University associations	Universities in countries of first asylum	Universities in the Global North	NGOs	Employers (local, international)	Global labour platforms
Share information on how to develop CHE opportunities with members	Work with UNHCR and the CLCC to understand refugees' needs Partner with and advise international universities and education providers who deliver to refugee populations in countries of first asylum	Identify partner universities based in major countries of first asylum for refugees to collaborate with and co-develop a CHE course	Partner with universities to provide essential support services to refugee students studying in higher education to ensure their psychological and social wellbeing	Work with CHE providers to develop internships and pathways to employment for CHE graduates	Share information with CHE providers on remote work opportunities to create linkages to employment

Support students into and through CHE

Universities in countries of first asylum	Private sector education providers	Accreditation providers	Connectivity providers	Employers (local, international)
Develop and deliver accredited courses at learning centres for refugee populations	Ensure delivery of education programmes for refugees which cater to the full needs of the learners, including their mental health and social and emotional needs, but also the requirements for students to get a job after graduating	Provide accreditation for CHE courses which can be linked to work opportunities and/or further study	Ensure internet is available at centres where refugees are studying higher education courses and provide access to zero rated data for refugees studying online	Identify CHE content, skills and knowledge that would support employment, including third country pathways

Build for scale and sustainability

Universities in the Global North	Foundations and private funders	NGOs	Multi / Bi-lateral donors and development banks
Analyze options for development and delivery of CHE courses financially, including through cost sharing, alumni support, fundraising or fee waivers Ensure that where foundations are covering the fees of refugee students they are not paying international fees, but rather national fees or fee waivers Partner with UNHCR to explore the role that alumni networks of the university can play in the fundraising process Enrol refugees in satellite campuses or similar arrangements under trans-national education	Partner with UNHCR and CLCC members on cost sharing initiatives to maximize and amplify the impact of investments	Provide spaces in refugee settlements where CHE can take place, such as connected learning centres and community hubs	Conduct 'macro' level research on investments in CHE

Local relevance & Design with Communities

University associations	Private sector education providers	Connectivity providers	Multi / Bi-lateral donors and development banks	Student groups (refugee and host communities)
Work with the CLCC to run webinars and courses on CHE for members, which focus on best practices and lesson learned from implementation Work with refugee groups experienced in studying and developing connected higher education opportunities to design courses, such as the CLCC Student Engagement Task Force	Partner with UNHCR and the CLCC to understand the needs of refugees in the country of programme delivery	Develop community-based approaches to connectivity and zero rated data for sustainable access in refugee communities	Include refugee hosting communities in connectivity initiatives	Advocate for CHE from the student perspective Provide advice to course providers on establishing programmes





TECHNICAL & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION & TRAINING

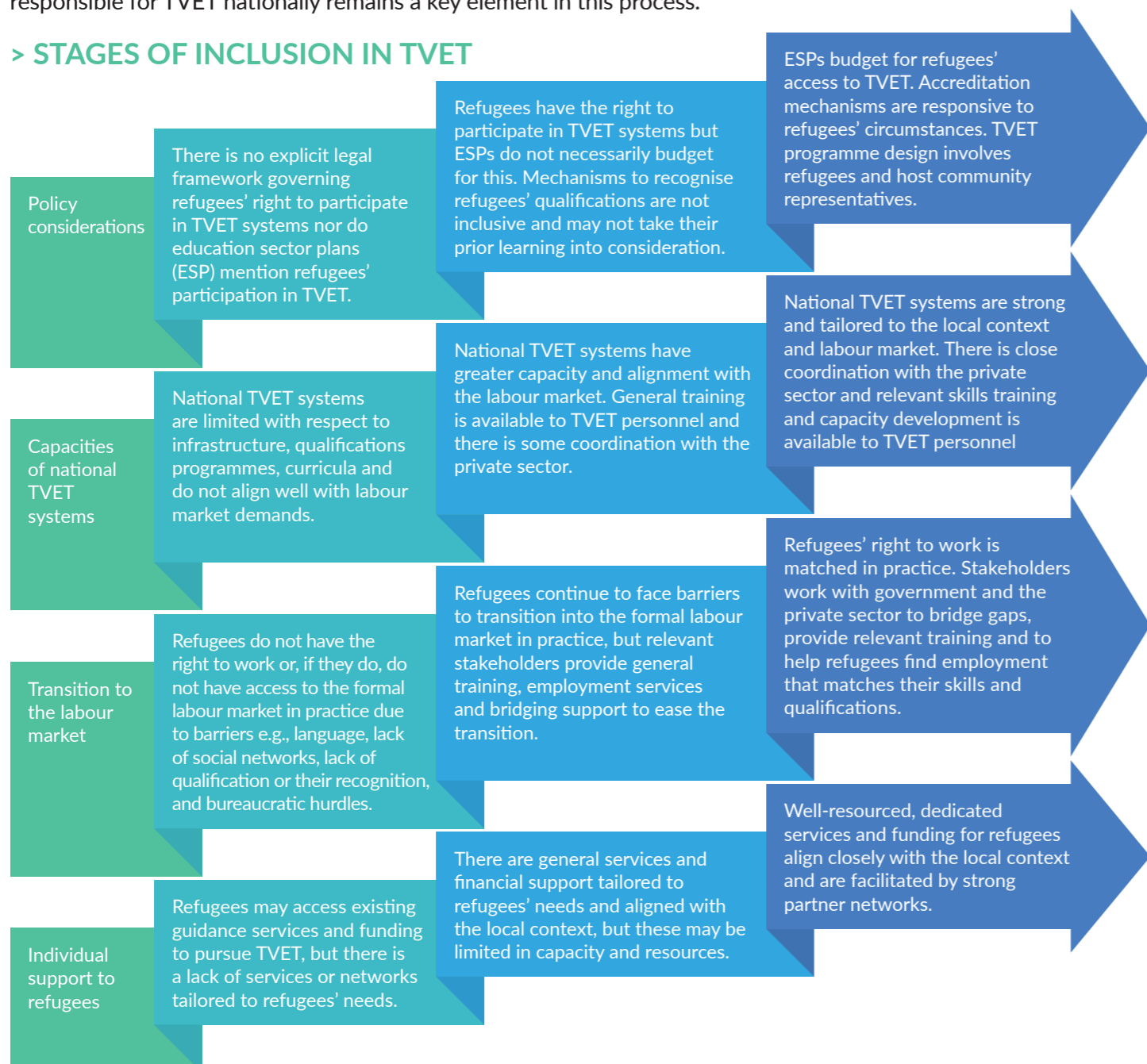
> WHAT IS TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) comprises education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. As part of lifelong learning, TVET can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels and includes work-based learning as well as continuing training and professional development, which may lead to qualifications. TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities attuned to national and local contexts. The development of core skills, learning skills, literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills and citizenship skills can be integral components of TVET.³⁸

> HOW DOES TVET CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

Access to TVET promotes employability and livelihood prospects for refugees in their host or third country, as well as in their home country upon return, should they be able to repatriate. It is important to support both displaced persons and their host communities through a holistic and integrative TVET approach that can enhance their access to job opportunities in any location. The aim of quality TVET programming is to provide demand-led, practice-oriented and competence-based training in cooperation with the local private sector. The qualification of TVET personnel also plays a decisive role in achieving this. In addition to transitional solutions in acute crises and displacement situations, it is critical to strengthen local structures and secure government-led coordination to include refugees in national education systems. Alignment across humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding actors, and ministries responsible for TVET nationally remains a key element in this process.

> STAGES OF INCLUSION IN TVET



³⁸ UNESCO n.d.

> SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Summary of recommended actions that key stakeholders, including host country governments, labour market actors, education and training providers and humanitarian and development actors can take to contribute to the 15by30 target via TVET.

Align policies with the inclusion agenda

- Clearly establish the right of refugees to participate in TVET and to work, on par with host country nationals
- Reflect and budget for refugees' right to work in education sector plans (national, regional, provincial) to implement the right to work in practice
- Align accreditation, certification and recognition of qualifications with relevant national occupational standards
- Ensure that recognition of prior learning (RPL) frameworks are implemented and accessible to refugees

Strengthen national TVET system capacity

- Strengthen national TVET capacity by improving infrastructure, enhancing technical equipment, refining qualifications programmes, enhancing curricula development and expanding course offerings, all tailored to the local context
- Improve skills development and training of TVET personnel, who are critical service deliverers, role models, and help to promote social cohesion
- Establish a dialogue and close cooperation with private sector stakeholders
- Enhance inclusion and integrate learners with diverse needs and abilities, via capacity building

Enable the transition to the labour market

- Hold policy dialogues focused on building inclusive TVET and supporting the transition to the labour market, also in collaboration with trusted enterprises
- Mitigate barriers to accessing and transitioning into the formal labour market by providing language courses, ensuring recognition of prior learning, career guidance and support to apply for work permits and navigate the job market
- Provide refugees with training and work experience aligned with labour market demand, and incentivise employers to provide work-based learning programmes
- Utilise or conduct market research to identify high-demand skills and occupations as well as job opportunities most relevant for refugees, and design training programmes accordingly
- Provide relevant employment services and coaching to assist refugees in developing their careers and finding job opportunities that match their skills and qualifications

Improve individual support and resources

- Support refugees with access to RPL mechanisms to match their current skills with further opportunities for skills development
- Introduce career guidance and counselling services to help TVET learners make informed decisions regarding training courses and their career paths
- Establish referral networks consisting of local authorities, healthcare services, NGOs and voluntary organisations, to ensure safety and wellbeing of learners
- Provide psychosocial support and counselling
- Design mechanisms for peer-to-peer learning and establish peer groups that connect trainees with mentors, internships, and help them find jobs
- Provide financial support, e.g. scholarships, transport allowances and other stipends
- Support refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and initiatives to provide individual support services in their communities, as relevant

> KEY STAKEHOLDERS – BENEFITS OF BUILDING INCLUSION VIA TVET

Access to TVET promotes employability and life prospects for individuals in their host country, a third country or upon return to the country of origin. Furthermore, a multitude of stakeholders benefit from increased inclusion of refugees in higher education, specifically through TVET. These stakeholders include host country governments, labour market actors, education and training providers, and humanitarian and development actors.

Host country governments: Access to education and training is an essential entry point to the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and displaced persons. Host country governments – including Ministries responsible for TVET, education, labour, migration, and displacement – can include displaced populations alongside host communities in education and training settings as a means to support social cohesion and help to mitigate tension between groups. In addition, providing skill development opportunities in contexts where refugees have access to labour markets leads to economic opportunities, including access decent work and possibilities in entrepreneurship. This promotes self-reliance of refugees and forcibly displaced persons, which in turn reduces the burden on host communities and governments, brings increased tax revenues and shifts discourse around displacement towards benefits and potential stemming from the skills, creativity and motivation of incoming populations.

Labour market actors (employers, employers’ organisations, employment services, workers’ organisations): Refugees and displaced persons who gain skills relevant for local labour markets are attractive to employers, can increase productivity and innovation and help fill labour and skills shortages. This hinges, naturally, on refugees having rights to access the labour market. Focus on skill development opportunities for refugees can improve the competitiveness of in-country enterprises as well as the broader economy of the host country. When TVET graduates have access to entrepreneurial opportunities, their businesses can produce in-demand goods and services and increase diversification, growth and prosperity. Furthermore, refugee-founded enterprises can create job opportunities for locals as well as for other refugees.

Education and training actors (TVET institutions, NGOs, TVET agencies, public and private providers, including labour market bridging programmes): TVET agencies and institutions, whether public, private or NGO-led, benefit from policies that promote the inclusion of refugees and displaced people in TVET because the number of potential trainees and future skilled workers increases. With additional resource support and a focus on inclusive training, these providers can extend quality, labour-market oriented services to more participants. Furthermore, skilled refugees can also work as trainers, thereby strengthening the pool of qualified teaching personnel. Moreover, inclusive TVET provision promotes social cohesion and stability at the local level. TVET institutions and enterprises offering work-based learning can serve as hubs to increase interaction and collaboration between refugees and host communities, creating conditions for familiarity, trust and coexistence.

Humanitarian and development actors (states, UN institutions, civil society, private sector): Humanitarian and development actors strive for sustainable solutions for refugees and displaced people. In addition to the positive effects on socio-economic inclusion, local economic development and social cohesion, the impact of inclusive access to TVET and decent work extends beyond displacement. Promoting economic activity and decent work during and after displacement is key for the success of voluntary repatriation. Skills gained and maintained through training and employment during displacement can be an asset for countries of origin receiving returnees, as well as third countries in case of resettlement or labour mobility. Ultimately, the inclusion of refugees in education and TVET systems reduces reliance on external aid.

> THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

The following section defines and elaborates on different areas that contribute to inclusion via TVET, namely, policy considerations, capacities of national systems, transition to the labour market and individual support to refugees. Each stakeholder group has a different, essential role to play in each of these areas.

Align policies with the inclusion agenda, to the benefit of refugees and host communities

Host country policies provide the legal framework for refugees to access national TVET systems. First and foremost, this includes laws that speak to and inform the right of refugees and migrants to participate in accredited (or in some cases non-formal) TVET systems or courses, and to have the right to work. This should also be mirrored in education sector plans at the national, regional and provincial level. Legal access to education and training for refugees needs to be budgeted for in education sector plans to overcome the common gap between *de jure* and *de facto* access to education. Moreover, there needs to be accreditation, certification, and recognition of prior learning and qualifications of refugees based on relevant occupational standards. TVET programmes should be designed in a way that supports the development of platforms for local stakeholders, including TVET institutions, local governments, the private sector, refugees and representatives of the host communities, to create mutual benefits through collaboration and exchange.

Strengthen national TVET system capacity

In many host countries, national TVET systems are structurally weak and not closely linked to the labour market. To enhance the integration of refugees and displaced persons into national education and training systems, it is crucial to invest in the capacities of national TVET systems. This involves improvements in infrastructure, investment in technical equipment, refining qualification programmes, enhancing curricula development in TVET institutions and expanding course offerings that are employment-oriented and geared to the needs of the labour market. Especially in fragile situations, teachers and trainers serve as important role models. Additional focus and investment is needed to provide high quality skills development for TVET personnel, including school teachers, trainers and management staff. Dialogue with social partners and close cooperation with the private sector are also essential. Throughout, all strategies and measures must be tailored to and align with the local context.

For example, the project “Qualifications and employment prospects for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the host population in Ethiopia (QEP)”³⁹ focuses on the following areas:

- Improving vocational training by adapting existing qualification programmes to the needs of the labour market and offering training courses for vocational teachers to improve their professional and social skills.
- Transforming public vocational schools into inclusive vocational schools where refugees and Ethiopians learn together. Strengthening capacities of inclusive vocational schools helps to foster the potential of social cohesion between refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities.
- Facilitating the transition to self- and wage employment by supporting incubation centres at vocational schools and strengthening partnerships between companies and vocational schools.
- Supporting the implementation of national refugee legislation by working with the Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Technical Skills as well as the Ethiopian Refugees and Returnees Service. The aim is to strengthen the capacities of relevant stakeholders to implement the national policies.

Through the QEP project, to date, over 8,000 refugees and Ethiopians received qualifications and over 5,700 refugees and Ethiopians gained employment.

³⁹ QEP is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ. The first phase was co-funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) ([GIZ 2023](#)).

Enable transition to the labour market

Access to labour markets and decent work is an essential component of sustainable response strategies. This enables refugees and displaced persons to participate in and contribute to the economies and societies of host countries and communities by utilising their skills and knowledge.

In practice, a range of factors influence refugees' and displaced persons' capacity to access the labour market and find decent work. This includes the right to work as well as the socio-economic conditions of the host country, legislation and policies around the protection of refugees and displaced persons, and other practical issues, such as lack of RPL, language, and administrative barriers. As a result, refugee workers are often concentrated in low-skilled, informal employment or under-regulated sectors where they are susceptible to poor working conditions, discrimination and exploitation. Supporting the transition of refugees and displaced persons into the labour market and into decent work is an essential aspect of successful integration and self-sufficiency of TVET graduates. There are four key considerations to facilitate this process.

For refugees and displaced persons, **access to the formal labour market** is a vital prerequisite for socio-economic inclusion, reducing vulnerability, enhancing resilience, promoting social cohesion and securing dignity. Even if *de jure* access is established, many refugees and displaced persons face significant barriers to accessing the labour market in practice, such as language barriers, weak social networks, lack of recognized qualifications and bureaucratic hurdles to obtain work permits. Labour market actors and humanitarian and development entities can work with the government and other stakeholders to support refugees and displaced persons in overcoming these barriers, through systematic availability of language courses, recognition of prior learning, career guidance, and support to apply for work permits and navigate the job market. This can also foster transitions from informal to formal employment.

Employers' and workers' organisations are key allies to realise the right to work as well as access to decent work for refugees and displaced people. These organisations need to be involved in policy and social partner dialogue around inclusive TVET and transitions to the labour market. Furthermore, such organisations should increase and diversify their membership base to ensure inclusive, quality services for all. TVET institutions can partner with private sector employers to provide refugees and displaced persons with training and work experience aligned with labour market demand. This can be achieved through apprenticeships, traineeships or job shadowing that allow refugees and displaced persons to acquire practical skills and experience. Governments can incentivise private sector employers to participate in such programmes through tax credits, subsidies or other support measures.

Governments, social partners and TVET institutions should **conduct market research** to identify the skills and occupations that are in demand in the local labour market as well as the job opportunities that are relevant to refugees' and displaced persons' skill sets. This information can be used to design training programmes, in partnership with employers and industry associations, that are tailored to labour market demand.

Finally, **employment services are critical** to assist refugees and displaced persons in finding employment opportunities that match their skills and qualifications and in helping them develop their careers. Labour market measures that focus on recognition of prior learning, reskilling, wage or entrepreneurship support can help refugees and displaced persons meet the demands of the host country's labour market. Business coaching, including training in business planning, marketing, budget management and support to access finance, can assist more refugees and displaced people to start and run their own businesses.

Improve individual support and resources

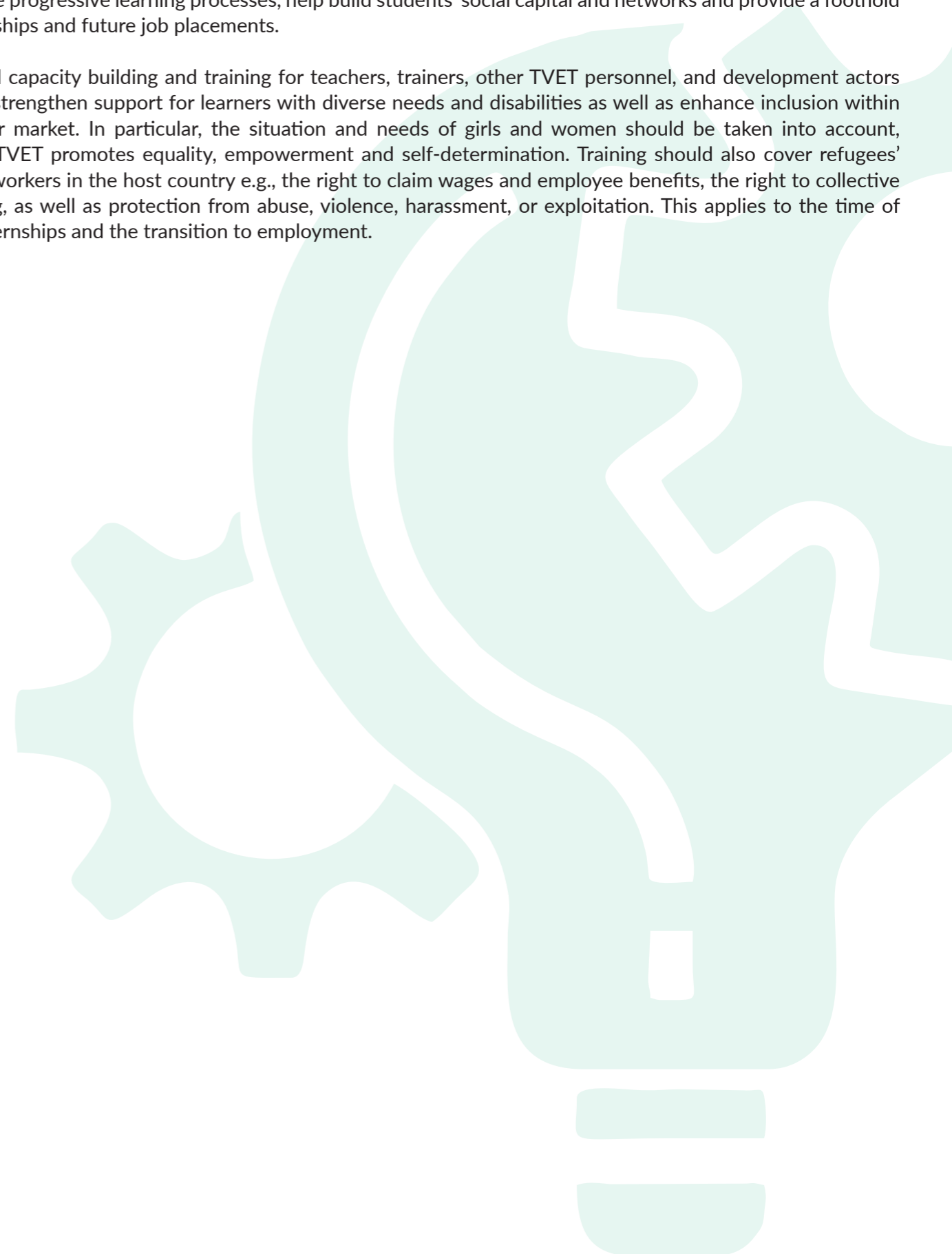
To enable refugees to excel on the road to and following TVET, individual support and resources must align with participants' needs and context. This approach can benefit host community participants as well. Considerations must include the language of instruction, diverse learning styles, student and family participation, core skills training, relevant career guidance and financial support.

Specifically, TVET providers should introduce and incorporate career guidance and counselling services to help students improve make informed decisions about their career pathways, including the transition to future education or employment. Counselling services should also include psychological support to help participants navigate the challenges associated with displacement.

Development actors and TVET providers can help establish and strengthen referral networks that consist of local authorities, healthcare services, NGOs and voluntary organisations to better support the safety and well-being of students and create communication channels between schools and relevant local resources.

TVET providers and development actors can set up collectives that connect trainees with mentors in academia, NGOs or the private sector as well as design mechanisms to facilitate peer-to-peer learning. These approaches can enable progressive learning processes, help build students' social capital and networks and provide a foothold for internships and future job placements.

Dedicated capacity building and training for teachers, trainers, other TVET personnel, and development actors can help strengthen support for learners with diverse needs and disabilities as well as enhance inclusion within the labour market. In particular, the situation and needs of girls and women should be taken into account, whereby TVET promotes equality, empowerment and self-determination. Training should also cover refugees' rights as workers in the host country e.g., the right to claim wages and employee benefits, the right to collective bargaining, as well as protection from abuse, violence, harassment, or exploitation. This applies to the time of study, internships and the transition to employment.



EVIDENCE & DATA

> STATE OF PLAY

UNHCR began reporting on refugee enrolment in higher education in 2019, and estimated an enrolment rate of 1 per cent world wide. The figure drew from discrete sources, including limited country-level enrolment data, UNHCR's tertiary education scholarship programme and other refugee-specific scholarship programme enrolment.

Today, baseline data on refugee enrolment in tertiary education remains limited to a handful of sources and primary hosting countries. Whereas primary and secondary education enrolment data are often collected and reported in a centralised manner at national level, tertiary enrolment data is not. Furthermore, UNHCR and partners do not operate refugee-specific higher education institutions. While tertiary enrolment data is collected and recorded on national level in some countries,⁴⁰ it is rarely disaggregated by migration status.

In 2020, UNHCR collected country-level refugee tertiary education enrolment data in a pilot survey initiative across 94 countries. 41 countries provided gender-disaggregated enrolment data collected from higher education institutions, implementing partners and a range of other sources. Among these, UNHCR's DAFI scholarship programme provides the most consistent and comprehensive data on refugee tertiary education enrolment. The exercise confirmed the unevenness of access to data across refugee hosting countries, but also suggests that various combinations of data are available. In subsequent years, UNHCR continues to collect and report on multi-country data but there remains a clear need for a standardised methodology to collect tertiary enrolment data, which is also responsive to context. At present, the lack of substantive, standard enrolment data makes it impossible to properly quantify the need, cost the global target or form strategic policy positions.

Building a predictable, reliable refugee tertiary education enrolment data collection methodology is therefore essential to achieving and demonstrating progress toward the 15 per cent target and, more importantly, to elaborating a research agenda and developing the evidence base on the outcomes of access to higher education for refugees, for both refugee and host communities.

> EXISTING DATA SOURCES

Existing, relevant data sources include the following:

- Household survey data and databases held by partner organisations or UNHCR, which include questions on education and level of attainment
- Private disaggregated enrolment and administrative data
- Student records held by higher education institutions
- Public education financing programmes and cash grants issued to students and families
- Connected education enrolment and student level data held by members of the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC)

Supplementary aggregated data include: Enrolment in refugee-specific scholarship programmes, public disaggregated education enrolment data held by ministries, ProGres data held by UNHCR.

Examples of refugee higher education data collection:

COLOMBIA	OECD: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS
Colombia permits refugees to enrol in its national higher education and TVET institutions. While enrolment rates for Venezuelans generally remain below their Colombia peers due to prohibitively high costs in private higher education institutions, challenges navigating application systems, lack of documentation to prove prior learning levels or identification documentation, Colombia is able to disaggregate enrolment by migration (country of origin) status.	A biannual study of visa entries across OECD countries also uses country of origin to estimate the number of refugee students accessing higher education via complementary education pathways. The first report focused on permits, including student visas, issued between 2010 and 2017 by OECD countries to individuals from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria). In total, this accounted for more than half of the world's refugees under UNHCR's mandate during each year under review. Each country has a high rate of refugee status recognition upon applying for asylum in OECD countries. This reporting has contributed significantly to understanding the rate at which and destinations of students enrolling in higher education abroad who are likely refugees.

The critical next step is to evaluate existing data and data collection methodologies and subsequently develop a standardised annual data collection method that best balances the practical limitations on refugee enrolment data and capitalises on previously unused means to collect data. It is essential to guard against under-reporting and double counting of enrolment across diverse data sources, and also to account for protection considerations.

> ONLY A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE - UNDER REPORTING

Several factors suggest that actual refugee enrolment in higher education is significantly under-reported. First, in countries where UNHCR's DAFI scholarship programme operates, the number of applications submitted is consistently and significantly higher than the number of awarded scholarships. For example, in 2021 UNHCR received 15,860 applications from around the world for only 2,860 new scholarship places. In 2022, there were only 2,722 new scholarships available against the 18,818 applications submitted. Other refugee scholarship programmes similarly report disproportionate numbers of applicants compared to scholarships offered. It is reasonable to assume that at least some of the refugee students who are unsuccessful in obtaining scholarship placements secure another pathway to higher education. Anecdotally, UNHCR and partner colleagues report that students seek other ways to finance their studies independently or consider less costly options. In response to the high demand for tertiary education, some UNHCR offices create independent education support programmes that provide partial stipends.

Second, some host countries and higher education institutions adopt policies to permit refugee students to access higher education on the same conditions as national students, or create their own fee waiver or discount plans for refugee students. This suggests that some host countries are aware that refugees are accessing or seeking to access tertiary education in significant enough numbers to warrant a systematic response.

Third, comprehensive tracing of refugee enrollment at TVET institutions or through CHE degree programmes has not been undertaken. TVET is an important pillar of access for refugee students and is expected to become increasingly relevant in the coming years. In some countries, such as Uganda and Ethiopia, where large TVET programmes for refugees exist, obtaining refugee enrolment data may be feasible by combining direct enrolment in national institutions with enrolment via refugee-specific programmes provided by partner organisations. Including TVET programmes in the mapping of higher education opportunities will strengthen the collective understanding of how refugee participation in TVET affects employment, business ownership and access to the labour market in refugee hosting areas. The same observations can be made for CHE, specifically in terms of assessing the suitability of online degree programmes to position graduates to transition to work in specific fields and even to remote work.

⁴⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) n.d.

Despite the challenge of gathering data on independent enrolment of refugees in higher education institutions across refugee hosting countries as well as UNHCR's uneven access to this data, existing efforts suggests that a global mapping of scholarship opportunities has the potential to close the higher education information gap facing refugees⁴¹ and to improve awareness of higher education access points around the world – thereby strengthening the foundation for and development of more comprehensive data collection methodology.

> THE WAY FORWARD

In 2024, two strategic projects will be underway. First, an opportunity mapping exercise to build the most accurate picture to date of existing higher education opportunities for refugees around the world. This will be captured in a public repository hosted on UNHCR's Opportunities website⁴², which will, in parallel, inform a strategy to expand and sustain the website with relevant, timely and geographically representative scholarship opportunities which can be periodically updated. The mapping exercise will be led by a multi-functional group of committed partners, including refugee-researchers.⁴³ This exercise will inform and monitor progress towards and beyond the 15by30 target.

Second, the opportunity mapping project lays the groundwork to develop an evidence-based global refugee higher education enrolment data collection methodology. This will highlight which countries gather data on the protection status of tertiary education students and which do not, and whether this information is centralised and shared publicly. Expanding awareness of higher education opportunities, scholarships, institutions and partners as well as identifying the incentives for higher education institutions to enrol and report on refugee enrolment figures will be key to informing an effective enrolment data collection strategy.

Finally, much more investment is needed to understand the implications of refugee higher education participation on economic and social development in refugee hosting countries, as well as on the long-term objectives for peace and security, including by addressing the root causes of conflict. In short, robust generation and ensuing research on the return on investing in higher education specifically for refugees will be critical to communicate incentives to relevant stakeholders, counter resistance and spur investment in inclusive higher education.

CASE STUDY

Refugee-Led Research

Summary of interview with Academic Manager Ruth Nyabuto, conducted by Jeanne Muhimundu (member of UNHCR's Journalism Mentorship Programme)

The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford. The RLRH was founded in Nairobi in October 2022 with the objective of creating a space to enable those with a displacement background to become leaders in the fields of forced migration, humanitarianism and border justice. A majority of RLRH staff have lived experiences of forced displacement. RLRH achieves its mission by:

- Delivering academic programming to a global cohort of learners who have been affected by displacement
- Supporting access to graduate degrees
- Conducting primary and secondary research led by individuals with displacement backgrounds – from start to finish
- Creating professional development opportunities

RLRH advances its mission via its academic and research pillars. Academic support and training include RSC Pathways – a three-month online course in Forced Migration Studies – as well as Graduate Horizons – a global application support and mentorship programme for students affected by forced displacement. RSC Pathways has supported nearly 400 learners from over 50 countries across six continents. Through its research focus, RLRH enables researchers with displacement backgrounds to lead primary and secondary research studies in the field of forced migration from start to finish. This is done through professional placements, research mentorship and graduate-level research training. RLRH also collaborates on research projects with partners committed to promoting refugee leadership in forced migration research works with other organisations to provide research support, advice and training.

RLRH researchers and affiliates have conducted and led robust research, which includes country-specific reports on RLOs in East Africa, refugees' access to citizenship and permanent residence in Kenya and refugees' access to work permits and business licences in Kenya.

To further its own work and collaborative efforts with partners, RLRH plans to expand graduate access, placement and training activities for refugee researchers and continue to lead on independent and diverse ownership of research outputs.

⁴¹ Strengthening not only the knowledge base contained on the UNHCR Opportunities website, but also the resources available to and shared via the Peer-to-Peer Solutions Advisor Network.

⁴² <https://services.unhcr.org/opportunities/>

⁴³ The proposed global mapping exercise will be the first of this scale. However, various partners and research networks have previously completed local opportunity mapping exercises to gather information that aligns with the UNHCR Opportunities platform. Among various examples, this includes Mosaik Education's work to identify and regularly update a repository of relevant higher education opportunities for refugees across Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The Refugee Education Special Interest Group (RESIG) regularly gathers, updates and publishes a repository of scholarships at universities in Australia dedicated to refugees and asylum seekers. The Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, with support from the Open Society University Network (OSUN), plans to conduct a mapping of higher education opportunities in West Africa. Furthermore, the Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN), the Peer-to-Peer Solutions Advisor Network and organisations at the forefront of refugee-led and participatory research (including the Global Evidence for Refugee Education (GERE) initiative and Oxford's Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH)) are exceedingly well positioned to lead methodology development and data collection efforts.

BRIDGING & TRANSITION PROGRAMMES

> WHAT ARE BRIDGING & TRANSITION PROGRAMMES?

Bridging and Transition (B&T) programmes have emerged as a crucial component of the strategy to achieve the 15by30 target. These programmes bridge the gap between secondary and higher education, thus equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in rigorous academic environments. By addressing the challenges faced by students with less-prepared teachers or limited resources, B&T programmes are designed to enhance academic readiness, thus increasing their chances of admission. Ultimately, B&T programmes aim to facilitate the smooth integration of students into learning opportunities alongside host communities.

> HOW DO BRIDGING & TRANSITION PROGRAMMES CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

B&T programmes ensure refugee youth are well prepared to gain admission, integrate into and succeed in host country national education systems. B&T programmes bridge access to opportunities that participants might not be able to access otherwise. Furthermore, B&T programmes fill a need across high-, low- and middle-income countries for both refugee and host community youth. Missing elements of preparation for higher education affect all learners around the world.

> RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

For B&T programmes to be effective and contribute to both the 15by30 target and the inclusion agenda more broadly, they need to account for the following core areas:

- **Admission pathways:** B&T programmes are often resource intensive and are not the solution to enable all refugee youth to access higher education. However, B&T programmes that focus on supporting only a narrow group of refugees, who are already part of a support system, risk supporting a more privileged few. Providers should consider advertising to both refugees and host community youth to better direct limited resources to benefit diverse candidates.
- **Partnerships & key stakeholders:** Establishing partnerships with institutions that specialise in all components of B&T programmes (curriculum, infrastructure, legal considerations, psychosocial support, IT, etc.) helps deliver high quality, sustainable, well-integrated programmes instead of operating in silos.
- **Policy & advocacy:** Active engagement with government and non-government actors on policy and advocacy efforts are essential to help sustain B&T programmes in the long run, with respect to funding, resources and legal changes.
- **Financing:** Donor-funded B&T programmes are not sustainable in the long run. B&T programmes should explore self-funding models as well as stable, recurrent funding from governments.

> KEY STAKEHOLDERS – BENEFITS OF BUILDING INCLUSION VIA BRIDGING AND TRANSITION

B&T programmes range from short programmes focused on building one skill (e.g. English language, IT, etc.) to year-long programmes that address a multitude of skills needed to prepare students for degrees, certificates or transition to livelihoods. Well-executed B&T programmes play a key role in strengthening the post-secondary education pipeline, including pathways to third countries, increasing diversity and social cohesion, and enhancing the skills of those voluntarily returning to post-conflict areas.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Refugees who enter higher education through B&T programmes bring well-honed skills and readiness alongside their diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to the academic setting. B&T programmes like Iteme, launched by Kepler in Rwanda and Ethiopia, have not only supported institutions in East and West Africa but have also expanded the pool of qualified applicants from marginalised communities. Consequently, these programmes contribute to creating a more inclusive and diverse higher education landscape.

Transitional support structures, often required for students transitioning from secondary education to higher education, can be costly for universities. B&T programmes can alleviate this burden by providing scholarship funding. As a result, universities can admit more students without having to raise additional funds. By reducing expenses and creating more opportunities for students, B&T programmes enable universities to foster inclusive environments that benefit both individual learners and academic institutions.

National government and development actors

B&T programmes for refugees to pursue higher education go beyond academic enrichment; they equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for economic success, self-reliance and social integration. Specialised B&T programmes can also help prepare refugees to take advantage of complementary education pathways opportunities in third countries as well as local opportunities in their first country of asylum.

Private sector

Many benefits of B&T programmes align closely with the goals of private sector actors. These programmes are specifically designed to prepare learners with critical thinking, analysis, digital literacy and other soft skills that are essential for entering the job market, whether they pursue a formal degree or not. Refugees with these skills can also serve as uniquely knowledgeable ambassadors in transnational markets. Furthermore, B&T programmes help to prepare a more resilient workforce that can better adapt to changing market conditions.

CASE STUDY

Kepler's Refugee College Guidance Counsellors, RCGC

Summary of interview with Ella Ininahazwe, conducted by Jeanne Muhimundu (member of UNHCR's Journalism Mentorship Programme)

Kepler offers two main bridging programmes: Iteme for high school students and an additional programme for bachelor's degree students. Refugee College Guidance Counsellors (RCGC) support the successful implementation of these programmes, which provide skills training, support for specific initiatives and assistance with employment after graduation.

The RCGC programme is a pioneering initiative conceptualised by the U.S. College Board and provides meaningful guidance to refugees aspiring to pursue college and university education. Operating in all camps in Rwanda, with an expanding presence in Ethiopia, the programme aspires to overcome the unique challenges refugees face in accessing tertiary education in their first countries of asylum and globally.

Best Practices: In response to context-specific challenges that are often more pronounced for refugees, RCGC focuses on providing context-relevant information as well as reducing information gaps and barriers by working closely with students as well as relevant stakeholders and partners.

- **Contextualization:** RCGC tailors its support to the specific challenges of each local camp, and this was associated with an increase in refugee women's participation in bachelor's degree scholarships on Kepler's Kigali campus

from 6 to 40 percent of the programme.

- **Documentation and Immigration Processes:** Refugee students often struggle with documentation and understanding immigration processes. RCGC supports both students and institutions in navigating these complexities, providing resources and guidance to facilitate the process.
- **Information Gap:** RCGC, who have navigated similar processes, mentor refugee students by providing essential information and guidance about educational opportunities.

Furthermore, Kepler partners with UNHCR, schools, universities, immigration departments and refugee student-led initiatives to provide comprehensive support to refugee students. The lessons learned and best practices applied by RCGC can be leveraged by key stakeholder groups in the following ways:

- **Universities:** Universities should be more flexible in their documentation and admissions requirements, better understand the unique barriers faced by refugee students and consistently offer opportunities.
- **Governments:** Governments should facilitate the processing of travel documents for refugee students, improve secondary education and address mobility challenges.
- **Non-Governmental Organisations:** NGOs should implement programmes that lead to actual jobs or educational opportunities, offer certificates that matter and develop contextualised, refugee-informed programmes.

STUDENT MOBILISATION

> WHAT IS STUDENT MOBILISATION?

Student engagement refers to the set of practices, activities and initiatives where students are active participants or leaders. These practices are generally established and led by higher-education providers or humanitarian organisations to engage students in pre-established programmes. In this case, students are engaged 'by' those mentioned providers, having influence rather than authority over their programmes and decision-making process.

On the other hand, under partnership or ownership models, students mobilise themselves by creating and leading educational programmes that aim to support their own communities. In this case, students have partial or complete authority over the decision-making process, as well as over the programmes' outcomes.

> HOW DOES STUDENT MOBILISATION CONTRIBUTE TO 15BY30?

Refugee and host community students play a central role in actively providing solutions to their own challenges, either through informal networks and initiatives, institutionalised projects and associations or partnerships with local organisations, international actors and UN agencies. By integrating local, context-based and experiential knowledge, these initiatives have the potential to provide high-level results that respond to community concerns and available resources.⁴⁴ This section features core models of student mobilisation and engagement, which highlight students' central role in achieving 15by30.

> MODELS: FROM STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO MOBILISATION

According to the GCR, 'responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist.' Aware of this, students have been leading their own initiatives, and, in parallel, some higher education providers started to engage them in alumni groups, general assemblies, councils and committees. These approaches, however, can be differentiated according to the 'level' of authority⁴⁵ or influence that students have over decision-making.⁴⁶

In practice, this 'level' of authority or influence depends on the context, the nature of the work and the relationship established between the actors involved. The following graphic showcases the overarching approaches – student engagement and student mobilisation – and their associated models: consultation, participation, partnership and ownership.

	Student Engagement		Student Mobilisation	
	Consultation	Participation	Partnership	Ownership
Student role	Students share their ideas or perspectives on a specific project or dimension, mainly during the evaluation stage.	Students contribute to a programme in a limited role. Spaces of participation include General Assemblies, Students' Committees and Councils.	Students are equal partners in all stages of programmes and projects.	Students are leaders and owners of the projects and programmes, and are responsible for all dimensions and stages of them.
Collection of student perspectives	Students' opinions are generally translated (through surveys or reports) and can be considered during the decision-making.	Students' opinions are prioritised during decision-making, more often when there are no larger financial, partnership or programmatic constraints.	Students are present in all spaces of decision-making, and have authority to veto high-level decisions on strategies, programmes, projects, partnerships and financial matters.	
Student authority	Students do not have a direct influence over decisions.	Students can have a direct influence over some decisions, although this is generally limited.	Students have significant authority over decision-making, having capacity to engage with the process and the outcome.	Students have full authority over decision-making, having control over the process and outcomes.

For example, the Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN) is a global refugee student-led organisation established in 2019 to support the student advocacy element of SDG 4 and the 15by30 target. TRSN is a clear example of student ownership. The network's four global leaders co-founded the network in 2019 and proceeded to recruit 14 regional chapter leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), West Africa, East Africa, Europe, Latin and Central America and Asia and the Pacific. The network also launched a peer to peer advisory model for refugee students transitioning to higher education – the Global Peer to Peer Solutions Advisor Network.

⁴⁵ By authority, we mean real power to decide during all stages of an implemented project (initiation, planning, implementation, evaluation), which differentiates from 'tokenism' and non-meaningful practices of participation and engagement (UNODC 2019; Brown & Donini 2014).

⁴⁶ ALNAP 2000; Brown & Donini 2014; Harley & Hobbs 2020.

Global Peer to Peer Solutions Advisor Network

One of the most pronounced barriers refugee students themselves identify in the transition to tertiary education is a lack of reliable information about the higher education and livelihood opportunities available to them and associated application processes. Peer support provided by skilled, experienced refugee advisors has proven an effective way to bridge this gap.

Building on the best aspects of several small-scale refugee university and employment guidance models, the Global Peer to Peer Solutions Advisor Network positions refugee advisors at the centre of the decisions and processes that affect them and their peers. Peer advisors can provide relevant, timely, context specific guidance to some of the hardest to reach displaced youth and link them to opportunities available to them. This innovative approach capitalises on the strengths, knowledge and capacity of refugee youth leaders to connect refugee students with the solutions that fit their needs.

With two advisors based in each country, refugee peer advisors will be trained and given continuous professional support to provide information about available education and employment programmes, to guide individual application processes and ultimately to increase the number of youth successfully transitioning into education and work solutions.

The UNHCR-led Global Youth Leadership Training initiative is an example of student partnership. Launched in 2021, in its first year the programme supported 80 DAFI students, alumni and other refugee youth to build foundational leadership, advocacy and entrepreneurial skills. Refugee youth are partners in the programme design, projects and subject matter covered. However, the programme itself is led by UNHCR.

> THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ACTIONS

Existing student engagement initiatives and student-led organisations should consider and implement the following to move towards an 'ownership' model:

- A leadership structure with transparent, ethical elections
- A constitution and strategic goals (co-designed by an elected leadership committee)
- Clear roles and responsibilities, captured in an organisational chart
- Bylaws and legal framework, or clear steps for registration as a legal entity
- Strategic partnerships with INGOs and UN agencies to secure representation on global platforms

To enable student groups and initiatives to move towards an 'ownership' model, stakeholders, including HEIs, funders, INGOs and other development actors, have an opportunity to establish and implement refugee-led and student-led funding schemes that allow student-led networks to access funding with greater flexibility, with consideration of location and legal status. For example, the Refugee-Led Innovation Fund supports Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs) with a 45,000 USD grant that can be transferred through a number of modalities to networks that are yet to secure legal registration. This flexibility allows student groups and networks to establish their activities and presence as they work towards registration and additional funding.

CASE STUDY

The Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN)

A conversation with Sadiki Bamperineza (TRSN leader), facilitated by Shalom Ishimwe (member of UNHCR's Journalism Mentorship Programme)

"By investing in the potential of refugee students and amplifying their voices, we contribute to a more equitable and prosperous future for all." – Sadiki

In pursuit of 15by30, the engagement of refugee students emerges as a critical catalyst for change. In an illuminating interview with Sadiki Bamperineza, a remarkable leader at the helm of TRSN, he shares profound insights into the formidable challenges refugee students face and highlights actionable strategies for stakeholders to expand access to higher education for refugees.

Among the many challenges refugees confront in their quest for higher education, Sadiki underscores the dearth of resources, language barriers and the struggle to foster student communities in the context of online learning. These challenges, compounded by the unique circumstances of forced displacement, necessitate tailored approaches to support and empower refugee students.

The Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN) lies at the heart of the movement to empower refugee students. This global network provides a platform for refugee students to connect, collaborate and support one another. TRSN's comprehensive approach focuses on promoting peer-to-peer learning, mentorship and access to resources, all of which are vital in overcoming the barriers refugee students face on their educational journey.

TRSN has a pivotal role to play in advancing 15by30, particularly through its newly formed peer-to-peer programme. This programme, first launched in Uganda, exemplifies the network's commitment to providing support and mentorship to refugee students. Sadiki explains, "We're starting with refugees supporting fellow refugees to learn about opportunities, mentor them, guide them through scholarship searches and equip them with the skills necessary to navigate the higher education process."

To further enhance higher education opportunities for refugee students, Sadiki advocates for stakeholders such as NGOs, universities, the private sector and government to embrace a partnership mindset and involve refugee-students in the decision-making process, stating "Inviting refugee students to the table for discussions and sharing ideas on supporting their communities is crucial. Their experiences can provide clear perspectives on how refugees need to be supported." Moreover, Sadiki stresses the critical importance of financial and structural support for RLOs. He states, "RLOs need support in terms of funding and structuring. Registering these organisations legitimises their operation and expands their impact."

Looking ahead, Sadiki envisions expanding the peer-to-peer programme as a key stepping stone to achieving 15by30. He explains, "The programme will involve refugee leaders supporting fellow refugees, providing mentorship, and guiding them through scholarship searches and the higher education process." TRSN aspires to extend its reach beyond Africa and Europe, particularly to regions such as Asia and the Pacific and South America, where support for refugee students is currently more limited.

Finally, Sadiki emphasises the creation of tailored learning materials and resources to support mentorship and scholarship searches. He believes that these resources will be invaluable in empowering refugee students, stating, "Equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills will address the barriers they face in accessing higher education and propel them towards their aspirations."

> WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN ACHIEVING 15BY30?

As UNHCR and partners worldwide continue to push towards the 15by30 target, it is evident that multi-stakeholder collaboration, specifically including an essential role for the private sector, can dramatically influence outcomes. The private sector, with its resources, networks, expertise and innovative capabilities, has the potential to be a game-changer in enabling refugees to not only access higher education but to thrive post-graduation.

Private sector engagement in refugee higher education extends beyond philanthropic pursuits. The sector, by virtue of its global reach and impact, has the capability to directly influence policies, market dynamics and opportunities that can facilitate better educational access and outcomes for refugees. Moreover, investing in refugee education – education for all – aligns with broader corporate social responsibility goals, and can result in tangible returns in terms of talent acquisition, positive branding, and market expansion.

> PRIVATE SECTOR STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS

As we inch closer to 2030, the combined efforts of the public, private and non-profit sectors will determine the trajectory of refugee higher education. With the private sector taking an active role in partnerships, investments, and advocacy, higher education can become an accessible reality for more refugees.

Direct Funding for Scholarships: One of the most immediate ways the private sector can contribute is by providing direct funding, including for higher education scholarships. By financing the academic pursuits of refugee students, companies and foundations not only empower individuals but also create a ripple effect in communities – infusing new resources, skills, motivations and inspiration. This direct financial contribution paves the way for a new generation of educated, skilled and motivated refugees who are ready to contribute positively to their societies and the global economy.

Internships and Training: Offering internships and training opportunities is a win-win proposition. For refugee students, internships can provide valuable on-the-job experience, professional network expansion and skill enhancement, which are crucial for a smooth transition from education into the workforce. Companies extending such opportunities gain the unique chance to tap into a diverse talent pool, rich with resilience, multicultural perspectives and unique skills. These individuals can bring fresh perspectives, innovation and ambition to the workplace as well as increase the pool of candidates who are prepared to support and are uniquely knowledgeable about a company's goals.

Commitment to Hiring Graduates: Many refugee graduates encounter significant challenges when trying to make the leap from obtaining a degree to securing meaningful employment. By committing to hire refugees who have graduated from universities or vocational training, corporations can play a direct role in ensuring the sustainability and efficacy of refugee education. This commitment can manifest in hiring practices in countries where refugees currently reside as well as through complementary migration pathways that facilitate labour mobility or by leveraging the digital economy or offering remote roles. The latter approaches are especially important in countries where refugees do not have the right to work or experience significant barriers accessing the formal labour market. By opening doors for qualified refugee graduates, businesses can reinforce the value of education, enhance their own diversity and inclusivity credentials and strengthen their organisational outcomes in the process.

UNHCR partners with IKEA Foundation on Journalism Mentorship Programme

UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation teamed up to create the Refugee Voices Initiative/ Journalism Mentorship Programme (JMP), a practical example of a private sector partnership making a tangible difference. The programme offers refugees, the internally displaced and stateless individuals the opportunity to learn about tools and techniques to share their stories, whether personal experiences or tales from their communities. Participants receive hands-on training and mentoring in public speaking, journalism and content creation.

By shifting the public narrative surrounding refugees, the JMP seeks to create a more inclusive and aware public understanding of issues surrounding forced displacement. This can inform potential policy changes in host countries and counteract some of the negative stereotypes tied to displaced communities. The IKEA Foundation's financial support via the Refugee Voices Initiative has been vital to the programme's success. The initiative underscores the importance of giving displaced individuals a voice, ensuring they can advocate for their communities and also find personal economic opportunities.

Beyond storytelling, the fellowship aligns with a broader goal: promoting the economic inclusion of refugees. During the programme, which spans three years, participants undergo a three to six month training phase. Participants produce online content, engage in blogging, create social media content and have opportunities to speak at major events. The steady support from the IKEA Foundation guarantees continuity, ensuring participants receive quality training, are compensated for their contributions and have opportunities to participate in significant events.

Talent Beyond Boundaries forges pathways to employment

Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) offers a compelling example of how non-profit organisations can partner with private sector companies to make a difference. TBB links skilled refugees with companies across the globe in search of their expertise. This simple yet impactful approach is grounded in the knowledge that refugees possess a vast, untapped pool of skills and talents that can greatly benefit industries worldwide.

TBB's innovative model places refugees' profiles on an online platform, where companies can list job openings specifically designed for them. This facilitates not just employment but creates pathways to meaningful, long-term careers. Through this approach, TBB is transforming the way both refugees and industries see potential employment opportunities.

The impact of their work is evident. TBB's online Talent Catalog has registered around 65,000 skilled workers, ranging from software developers to healthcare professionals. This platform has led to over 450 candidates securing international jobs, with more than 500 individuals moving on to countries like Australia, Canada, Germany and the UK as a result.

Strengthening employment pathways aligns seamlessly with the goals of 15by30, ensuring that refugees with tertiary education are not just equipped with knowledge, but also with tangible opportunities to apply their education in global industries. TBB's work underscores the indispensable role of the private sector in strengthening refugees' pathways from higher education to employment.



15by30 MPS pledge statement

In 2019 UNHCR and partners set the goal to achieve 15 per cent enrolment of refugee youth in higher education by 2030 – the 15by30 target.

At that time, the estimated global refugee enrolment in higher education stood at 1 per cent. Today, that figure has risen to 7 per cent. As global displacement continues to climb causing the total number of displaced youth to reach approximately four million, the greatest push towards 15by30 has only begun.

Post-secondary education is the essential pathway to developing skills, building livelihoods, earning higher education qualifications and being able to transition to self-reliance. We cannot overlook the potential, motivation and rights of refugee youth around the world to benefit from higher education and to contribute to strong communities and to local, national, regional and global sustainable development goals.

On behalf of refugee students at all levels of education, refugee student leaders around the globe, universities and partners who stand beside us, we appeal to you to join us in ensure that higher education is ingrained as an essential component of humanitarian response, facilitating strong, bright futures for all refugee youth.



15% BY
2030 REFUGEE
HIGHER
EDUCATION

15by30 Roadmap

Expanding Higher Education, Skills and Self-Reliance for Refugees