



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

COMING TOGETHER

FOR REFUGEE
EDUCATION

Contents

Introduction by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees	4
Refugee enrolment - what the data tells us	8
Family	11
Community	21
Government	32
Violence against schools	39
Final word by Mo Salah	42
Call to action	44



“As a refugee living in Greece, I faced a lot of difficulties. Whatever happened, I never lost hope, I was always telling myself: it’s not the end. There will be a new start. And I was right. At the moment the whole world is suffering from this pandemic and especially refugees. We should educate children. We should listen to music. We should learn that all human beings are equal. The situation that refugees are in is temporary and will pass. We should always have hope. There is always brightness after the darkness.”

Jamil, 20, an Afghan refugee artist living in Greece, received a special mention for this painting which was submitted to UNHCR’s inaugural 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest.



© UNHCR/JAMIL KHAN

© UNHCR/JAMIL KHAN



INTRODUCTION

COMING TOGETHER FOR REFUGEE EDUCATION

BY FILIPPO GRANDI,
UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Anyone looking for inspirational examples of dedication, perseverance, resilience and strength of character should look no further than the students and teachers featured in this year's report on refugees and education.

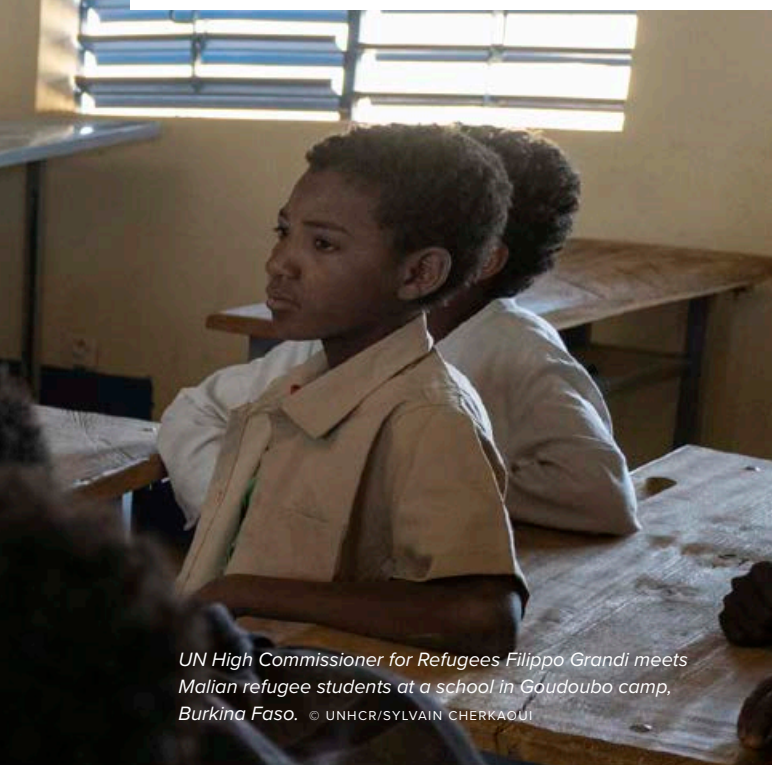
From Ecuador to Jordan, from Iran to Ethiopia, these young refugees and the adults who support them realize how much living a life in dignity and preparing for solutions depend on access to full and formal quality education.

The gap between refugees and their peers is still wide, especially at the higher levels of education. Given the continued rise in the overall number of the world's forcibly displaced, keeping education enrolment rates steady is no small feat.

The direction of travel is clear: over the past few years there have been gains which, while modest in percentage terms, nonetheless represent tens of thousands of refugee children and youth finding places in classrooms, learning centres and lecture halls around the world.

A grave threat now looms over those advances. The coronavirus could destroy the dreams and ambitions of these young refugees. It threatens to cause a 'pandemic of poverty' in the world's most

The coronavirus could destroy the dreams and ambitions of these young refugees. It threatens to cause a ‘pandemic of poverty’ in the world’s most vulnerable communities, and the steady and hard-won increases in school, university, technical and vocational education enrolment could be reversed – in some cases permanently.



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi meets Malian refugee students at a school in Goudoubo camp, Burkina Faso. © UNHCR/SYLVAIN CHERKAOUJ

vulnerable communities, and the steady and hard-won increases in school, university, technical and vocational education enrolment could be reversed – in some cases permanently.

As we strive towards [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) – to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all – COVID-19 could put that goal beyond reach.

This is not only about school closures, devastating though these have been. It is about the ability of refugee families on low incomes and in precarious livelihoods, in urban settings and in camps, to afford fees, uniforms, textbooks, travel, mobile data and devices, on top of food and shelter.

Children in every country are struggling with the impact of COVID-19. An entire generation has had its education disrupted, from nurseries and pre-primaries to universities and apprenticeships.

But if you were a refugee child before the pandemic, you were already at a grave disadvantage – twice as likely to be out of school as a non-refugee child.

For girls, meanwhile, access to education remains as challenging as ever. Our data indicates that girls continue to have less access to education than boys, being half as likely as boys to be enrolled at secondary level. A [2018 World Bank study](#) shows why this matters both now and for the future, finding that on average, women with secondary school education earn almost twice as much as those with no education at all. In addition there are enormous beneficial effects: social capital and independence, reduced early marriage and pregnancy, and general health and well-being.

The post-lockdown forecast for refugee girls is particularly grim. [By analysing UNHCR data on school enrolment](#), the Malala Fund has estimated that half of all refugee girls in school will not return when classrooms reopen in September. For countries where refugee girls’ gross secondary

enrolment was already less than 10 per cent, all girls are at risk of dropping out for good. That is a chilling prediction, which would have an impact for generations to come.

The risks to refugee education do not stop there. On September 9, the world will mark the first [International Day to Protect Education From Attack](#). While I welcome this new campaign, it is a tragedy that it should be necessary. Yet as our partners have warned – and as we highlight in the pages of this report in a dispatch from Burkina Faso – attacks on schools are a grim reality. They must stop immediately.

Yet this report gives me hope, too. Refugees and host communities, teachers, private sector partners, national and local authorities, innovators and humanitarian agencies have found numerous ways to keep education going in the face of the pandemic. This has taken resourcefulness and ingenuity. It has been a hi-tech and low-tech endeavour. And it has required partnership, generosity and creative thinking.

The pandemic has exposed gaps not just in educational provision but in connectivity, access to clean water and good sanitation, housing, transport and employment opportunities – all of which have a direct impact on a child’s ability to learn.

But there are solutions to these challenges, if we act in concert. Enabling policies and laws are crucial. Forging alliances with businesses, scientists, universities, NGOs and campaigners, the United Nations and its many partners, and individuals are equally critical.

At the end of last year, the hundreds of [pledges made by Governments and partners](#) at the Global Refugee Forum showed just how many people



and organisations – charities, NGOs, cities, states, the private sector and the refugee delegates themselves – are determined to turn things around.

COVID-19 has forced us to rethink several aspects of our lives – the structure and resilience of our societies, the precarious nature of so many things we took for granted. It has also spurred us on to innovate, from medical science to health provision



Faida, 20, from Rwanda, submitted this drawing called 'Rain of Love', for UNHCR's 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest. His drawing was one of seven selected for [animation](#). © UNHCR/FAIDA GASTON



to entertainment. This includes building momentum to implement the [Global Compact on Refugees](#), with countries including refugees in their national planning response for COVID-19 – sometimes for the first time.

If we could bring the same spirit to the field of education – developing meaningful technological solutions docked in to formal schooling, forging lasting alliances across sectors, and harnessing it

all to the passion and determination of millions of young people – it would be a huge step forward for refugee resilience, self-reliance and opportunity.

As I said at the beginning, if you are seeking inspiration, read on. The stories that follow will provide it.



**CHAPTER 1:
REFUGEE ENROLMENT**

**WHAT
THE DATA
TELLS US**

Nine-year-old Masha, who fled Ukraine with her family in 2014, designs computer games at a programming class in Minsk, Belarus. ©UNHCR/EGOR DUBROVSKY

The most recent data on school enrolment once again highlights how the educational options for refugee children dramatically fall away after primary school.

The methodology used in compiling the data in this year's education report has changed in order to improve accuracy and insights – hence the figures will look different from previous years.

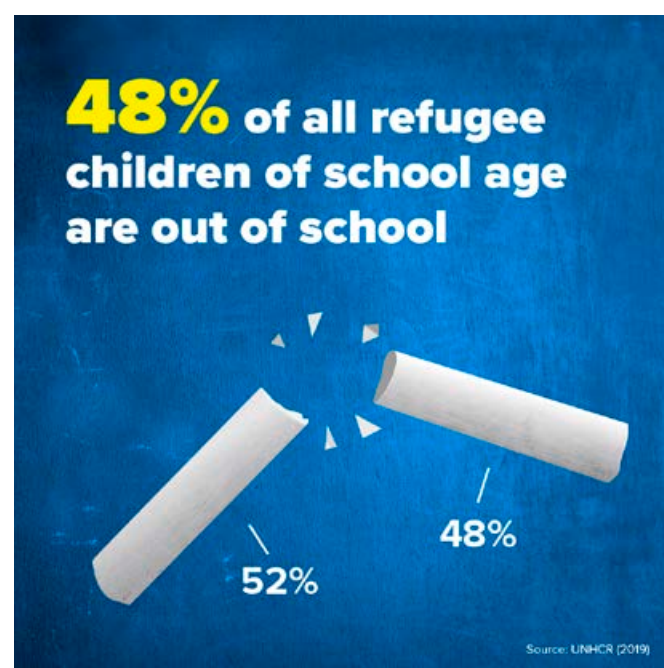
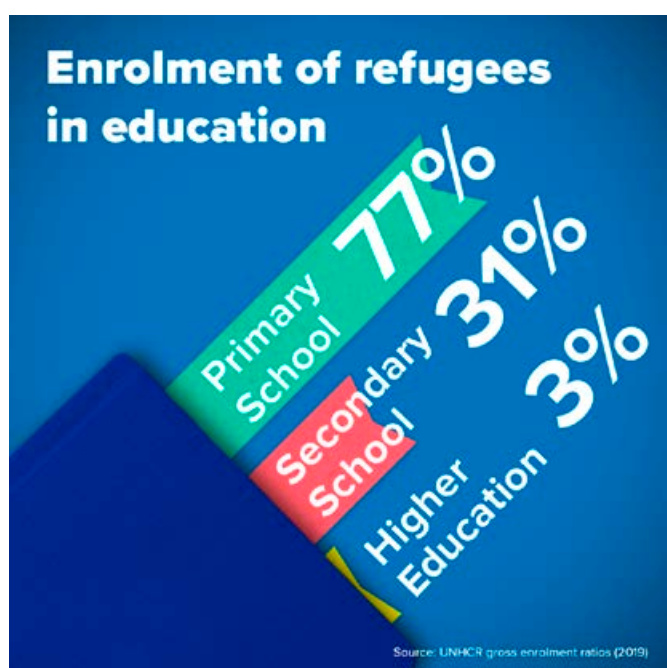
At primary level, gross enrolment of refugee children in school stands at 77 per cent, a level that has remained constant since last year.

Yet the contrast between primary and secondary level enrolment remains stark. Less than half of refugee children who start primary school make it to secondary school. Only 31 per cent of refugee children were enrolled at secondary level in 2019, although that was a rise of 2 points on the previous year, representing tens of thousands more children in school.

For girls, the picture is particularly stark. Almost all the gains made at secondary level in 2019 were in favour of boys: while 36 per cent of refugee boys were enrolled in secondary education, only 27 per cent of girls were.

At the level of higher education – including technical and vocational education and training as well as university courses – 3 per cent of refugee youth were enrolled in courses, the same percentage year after year.

According to the updated methodology, more than 1.8 million children are out of school across the 12 countries sampled – or 48 per cent of all refugee children of school age – are out of school.



This report serves not only as a reminder of the barriers young refugees face in fulfilling their dreams and ambitions; it highlights the strong partnerships that are needed to break down those barriers and open the doors to the classroom.

Data methodology

Statistics on refugee enrolment and population numbers have been drawn from UNHCR's population database, as well as education data-collecting tools (such as school administrative data, registration data, and household surveys) in 12 countries (Chad, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda). Data refers to 2019.

The total refugee population for the selected countries is 10,539,446; more than half the 20.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate.

This report uses Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) rather than net figures as in previous years. This means that we include all children enrolled in school, regardless of whether they are in the right class for their age. We have not included children in non-formal education.

Calculating how many children are in or out of school accurately requires age-specific enrolment data at all levels, which is challenging in many parts of the world. In addition, some countries include displaced children in their national education systems but do not disaggregate based on international protection status, further clouding the picture.



Since refugee populations and education systems in these 12 countries cannot be assumed to be representative of the situation of the global refugee population, we cannot infer universal conclusions from this education data. However, it helps provide indications of challenges and trends in refugee education.

Finally, the 3 per cent figure in tertiary education represents the approximate portion of refugee youth known to be enrolled in tertiary education. Because tertiary enrolment data is not centrally recorded in most countries and is rarely disaggregated to reflect refugee status, this report has to rely on a variety of self-reported, public or other easily accessible sources. The 3 per cent figure is based primarily on known scholarship data (on national higher education, national technical and vocational education and training and DAFI), connected education and third-country scholarship enrolment, as well as the limited national tertiary refugee enrolment figures available. Global enrolment is likely to be higher since much refugee tertiary enrolment data is unavailable or unreported.



CHAPTER 2:
FAMILY

Sudanese refugee Maab Yusre (right) holds her younger sister Leen while they wait to register at the UNHCR premises in Cairo. ©UNHCR/PEDRO COSTA GOMES

**THE VIEW FROM:
ECUADOR**

Star pupil battles to find her feet and shine again as the ‘new kid’ in school

Forced to flee her native Venezuela aged 13, Emily initially struggled to adapt to her new school environment. Just when she thought she was back on top, she then had to face the challenges of virtual learning.

At home in Venezuela, Emily had attended the same school since she was three. Happy and thriving among friends and teachers, she was the top student in her class.

So when her family fled the country and headed for Ecuador, her world fell apart.

“I was scared to be the ‘new kid’ for the first time,” said Emily, recalling her first day at school in a satellite town just outside Quito, Ecuador’s capital, where her family had sought safety. “It felt strange because I had gone to the same school ever since I was little.”

Emily, a Venezuelan refugee, in her new home in the Ecuadorian capital, Quito.

© UNHCR/RAMIRO AGUILAR VILLAMARÍN

Surrounded by new classmates and teachers, and faced with different expectations and ways of working, her once-stellar grades dropped precipitously. As a 13-year-old teenage girl, the family's move could not have come at a worse time – “I was at that age when your friends start to invite you out and you start hanging out in groups,” she said. “I was afraid I wasn't going to have that here.”

“We were used to seeing our friends having to leave,” Emily added, “but we never imagined we'd have to go, too.”

On top of her social anxieties, Emily found herself struggling to keep up academically as she had to grow accustomed to her new teachers and their different expectations. Even her strongest subjects – literature and physical education – were suffering. “Back in Venezuela I was always very good at those subjects and I really liked them,” she said.

More than 5 million Venezuelans have left their country to escape widespread insecurity, rampant inflation and political instability, travelling mainly to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Most of the countries now hosting them have given Venezuelan children and youth access to their formal education systems, though some still do not recognize Venezuelan certificates of learning, while others require documents for school entrance that displaced families did not bring with them.

It might not have seemed like it, but in some ways Emily – who is now 16 – was fortunate. Ecuador, which has taken in some 400,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants, has enacted legislation that guarantees all children on its territory the right to study in its state schools, regardless of nationality or immigration status. Thanks to this policy, at least 43,000 Venezuelan children are enrolled in Ecuadorian schools, according to government statistics.

As Emily learned the ropes at her new school, she turned things around. She made friends with her classmates and they started to ask her over to do homework together. By her second year in Ecuador, she had not only regained her habitual spot at the top of the class but she was elected president of the student council.

“We were used to seeing our friends having to leave – but we never imagined we'd have to go, too”

There was more disruption to come. After about two years in Ecuador, Emily's father was offered a job in the northern part of Quito and the family moved again. This time, finding school places was much tougher – everywhere was full up.

Worried that their children might fall behind again as they waited for places to become available, the family signed them up for a Venezuelan online course that covered some of the subjects they had been learning in Ecuador. Although originally intended as a temporary solution, it did mean that when the coronavirus started to spread across South America and schools were forced to close their doors, Emily and her sisters had already spent a few months getting accustomed to virtual learning.

Again, they had a stroke of good fortune: a good internet connection at their home enabled them to get on with their studies. But according to Ecuador's official statistics body, only 37 per cent of school children have internet access at home – and the rate plummets among displaced families, who already tend to be living in precarious circumstances.

While happy to be able to continue her studies during the pandemic, online learning has taken an emotional toll.

“I'm a people person, so I'd really like to go back to school,” said Emily, adding that, under lockdown, she has not had the chance to make friends in her new host city. “I don't know when this is going to be over, and I'm wondering whether I'll be able to graduate next year.”

THE VIEW FROM: JORDAN**Refugee children eager to access an online learning platform set up by the Jordanian government**

It is not unusual for siblings to argue over which channel to watch, or to plead with their parents for more mobile phone data after watching too many videos. But arguing over whose turn it is to use the family TV and a single mobile phone to keep up with schoolwork is much more unusual.

Yet in the era of the coronavirus pandemic, this is what the five children of Mustafa and Sherin, Syrian refugees in Jordan, have had to do when they need to follow lessons, complete home assignments and undertake tests and assessments.

Since schools closed in Jordan in mid-March as part of the country's lockdown measures, Nour, 15, Fadia, 14, Nadia, 12, Muhammad, 10, and Abed, 5, have been following a timetable drawn up by their parents, keen to ensure their education does not suffer, to access an online learning platform set up by the Jordanian government.

Fadia, a 14-year-old Syrian refugee, undertakes an online test at home in Amman, Jordan while e-learning during the COVID-19 lockdown.

©UNHCR/LILLY CARLISLE

Before that, the four eldest were all at state schools (while Abed went to nursery), many of which operate a double-shift system to meet demand – normally girls in the morning and boys in the afternoon.

“Every evening we look at the schedule sent by the Minister of Education for classes the next day and try and come up with a rotation between what to put on the TV and who gets to use the phone, so that every child can try and do their classes,” says Sherin. “It is very difficult. The older girls have priority, though, as they have important exams to do.”

In addition to her formal studies, Nour, who wants to be a family lawyer, has been writing stories in her spare time, taking pictures of the paper on the phone to send to her teacher for marking.

“Sometimes I talk to my teacher on the phone when we can’t get the internet to work but otherwise I have just been rereading some of my books and helping my younger siblings with their studying,” she says.

All five children share the same bedroom.

“Sometimes I just want my own space – I try and close the door but the younger ones always come and annoy me.”

“They sent us a link through WhatsApp and we had to login and answer the questions, but I couldn’t get the data to work.”

Nour and her siblings have been taking turns to access Darsak, an online distance-learning platform launched by the Jordanian government in partnership with the private sector at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis.

Darsak has been key in allowing children across Jordan, refugees and nationals alike, to keep up their education over the months of lockdown. With videos in subjects from English and Arabic to maths and science, more than a million students have accessed the platform.

Even though mobile phone companies are providing customers with free data to access the platform, things don’t always run smoothly. Mustafa has had to buy additional data because his children’s teachers send data-hungry videos via the messaging service WhatsApp. The added cost has forced the family to cut back on other expenses – and even then the data sometimes runs out.

“Yesterday, I had an online test,” says Nour. “They sent us a link through WhatsApp and we had to login and answer the questions, but I couldn’t get the data to work.”

An estimated 23 per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan have no internet access at home, while two-thirds have limited phone data packages. According to a recent needs assessment carried out by UNHCR and its partners in Jordan, 46 per cent of those surveyed said their children were not accessing the Darsak platform.

As with so many refugees, the lockdown has hit the family’s income hard. Prior to the lockdown, Mustafa used to collect discarded plastic and metal for recycling while Sherin cleaned houses in the East Amman neighbourhood. The family who fled Syria in 2013 has been relying on 150 Jordanian dinars (US\$211) a month in cash assistance from UNHCR to pay for food and rent. “We feel very lucky – some of our neighbours don’t have this support and are really struggling,” says Mustafa.

All of the children emphatically insist they preferred it when they could go to school.

“I could ask my teachers questions, and talk with my friends in the break,” says Nadia, 12. “Now I just argue with my sisters over who gets to use the phone.”

THE VIEW FROM: IRAN

Afghan girl who waited years for school refuses to let her enthusiasm wane

She was 11 before she saw the inside of a classroom, so Parisa was not about to stop learning even under lockdown.

A few months ago, mornings at Vahdat Primary School when the children arrived were full of enthusiasm and energy.

Bags bouncing on their backs as they ran through the gates of their primary school, a group of girls skidded to a halt in front of the main building, waiting for assembly. At the back of a line of sixth-graders stood Parisa, the oldest in her class at the age of 16 – her classmates were on average only 12 years old.

But Parisa was undaunted by the age gap and determined to make the most of her time at Vahdat Primary, in the old Persian city of Isfahan in Iran.

“I love school so much,” she said, clutching her books to her chest. “My favourite subject is mathematics ... I love multiplication and division – they are really easy.”

To have her education interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic since then is doubly cruel given what Parisa had to endure before she got her first taste of an education.

Afghan teenager Parisa, listens intently in her school class in Isfahan, Iran. Now 16, she had to wait until she was 11 to go to school for the first time.

©UNHCR/MOHAMMAD HOSSEIN DEHGHANIAN

A decade ago, her family fled Afghanistan after the Taliban terrorized their neighbourhood in Herat. “If you went out to the bazaar, there was no guarantee you would return,” recalled Besmellah, 67, Parisa’s father.

The extremists also threatened to kidnap any girls who dared to go to school. “Then they started planting landmines in schoolyards,” added Besmellah. “We had no choice but to come to Iran.”

Over the course of 40 years of invasions, civil war, power struggles and religious strife, approximately three million Afghans have sought refuge in Iran. Nearly one million are registered as refugees, while up to 2 million are undocumented. An additional 450,000 Afghan passport holders live in Iran either to work or complete their studies.

In Iran, Parisa and her six siblings had found safety but during her first years in exile she couldn’t go to school. The family barely had enough to live on, let alone cover school costs.

Parisa’s brother dropped out of school at age 15 and started working. With this extra money, Parisa was able to set foot in a classroom for the first time, at the age of 11. At first, she found herself in an unofficial school not registered with the government, where lessons were organized in two shifts to accommodate as many children as possible. With no qualified teachers and no proper curriculum, the students only learned the basics

“My wife and I feel disabled by our lack of education. We don’t want the same to happen to our children.”

As an undocumented refugee, at the time this was Parisa’s only option. But in 2015, Iran started allowing all Afghan children – regardless of legal status – to attend state schools. When Vahdat Primary opened with the support of the

government, UNHCR and co-funding from the European Union, Parisa got her first taste of a formal education.

Today, some 480,000 Afghan children in Iran benefit from this inclusive education policy, of whom 130,000 are undocumented Afghans like Parisa. At Vahdat Primary, 140 young Afghans rub shoulders with 160 Iranian students.

But the pandemic threatens to derail Parisa’s education once more. As Iran continues to feel the health and economic effects of the virus, both refugees and host communities are finding it harder to make ends meet. Many of those who rely largely on informal work have lost their jobs.

“I haven’t been able to work for the past three months,” said Besmellah, who is a day labourer. “Parisa is supposed to start the seventh grade this year but I cannot afford it.”

While refugees are exempt from school fees in Iran, other costs associated with education, including learning materials, are still a burden. “My landlord also raised the rent so I had to borrow money to pay the deposit for a new place.”

Parisa has lost none of her enthusiasm for her education. “My sister and I followed our lessons on the television, but we had to borrow my older sister’s smartphone to do our exams,” she said. “Sometimes our classes would clash, so one of us would have to miss a lesson. It was difficult, but I encouraged my sister to persevere. Thankfully, we both got good grades.”

“As long as I can work, I will do everything for my daughters to be able to go to school – but it is getting harder,” said Besmellah. “My wife and I feel disabled by our lack of education. We don’t want the same to happen to our children.”

THE VIEW FROM: RWANDA

Scholar, doctor and trailblazer boosts Rwanda's healthcare response to COVID-19

Congolese refugee Dr Jonas Havugimana thought he had reached the end of his education after secondary school – until he heard about the DAFI awards.

Whenever he faced the nightmare prospect of his education coming to a premature end, Jonas redoubled his efforts and made sure to be top of the class.

This determination gained him top marks in Rwanda's western province in exams to go on to secondary school. It got him a score of 95.4 per cent in his final secondary school exam. And it won him a DAFI higher education scholarship – out of 800 applicants – to study medicine.

Today, he works as a qualified doctor at Byumba District Hospital, among the first refugee graduates in medicine in the whole of Rwanda. And in only his second year as a qualified doctor, Dr Jonas has found himself helping Rwanda combat the biggest global health crisis for decades.

Congolese refugee Dr Jonas Havugimana overcame all odds to graduate with a medicine degree thanks to DAFI.

©UNHCR/ANTOINE TARDY

An extraordinary achievement for a man who was the first person from his family ever to go further than primary school. Even more so because for Jonas, now aged 30, the path to his medical career was not a straightforward one.

His family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996 when he was not yet six years old. Long-running violence in the DRC has displaced more than 900,000 Congolese, with around 76,000 living in Rwanda.

Eventually they reached Kiziba refugee camp, on a remote hilltop in the country's west, overlooking Lake Kivu. His formal education began only in 1999, with six years of primary school; in secondary school, he remembers class sizes of 80 pupils, with refugees and Rwandans learning side by side.

"Living in the camp was very difficult," he recalls. "When I was in high school I saw how other students had things I didn't – good-quality books, some even had laptops. Some of them had fathers with high-ranking positions. I came from a large, uneducated refugee family."

"But I said to myself, 'if they study for two hours, then I'm going to study for four'."

Having aced the secondary school entrance exam, Jonas continued his studies in Kiziba camp for three more years until he won a scholarship to a state school to study maths, chemistry and biology.

Although he got stellar marks in his final exams in 2010, for a time Jonas believed he had reached the end of the road and that studying for a degree would remain an unrealized ambition. He went back to school, this time as a volunteer teacher.

"I didn't want to live my whole life in the camp – I had to make something change, even if it was hard."

At the end of 2011, he saw a poster on the wall of the ICT room in Kiziba camp calling for applications for DAFI scholarships – UNHCR's higher education scholarship programme, funded by the German government and private partners.

"I knew I had the marks," he says. "I applied immediately."

The news Jonas had been desperate to hear came from his old headmaster, who called him on the morning he was due to sit another exam, this time to get a better-paid teaching job in a state school. He had won a DAFI scholarship to study at the University of Rwanda.

"I got on a motorbike and came straight back to Kiziba. I cannot express the emotion of that day." He graduated in 2018 and spent a year as an intern at Byumba hospital before qualifying.

So far, Byumba hospital, in the north of Rwanda, has not had to deal with any severely ill COVID-19 patients, though Jonas says several people suffering from the virus have been treated there.

Despite all his achievements, Jonas has another dream – to further his medical career and specialise as a neurosurgeon. In the meantime, he is financially supporting his younger siblings so that they can pursue their school careers. He also continues to be a role model for other refugee youth.

"Being a refugee, education has made me strong," he says. "I didn't want to live my whole life in the camp – I had to make something change, even if it was hard."

Factbox

1992

the year in which the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) programme was opened

8,347 young refugee women and men studied on DAFI scholarships in 2019 at

925 higher education institutions in

54 countries

40% were female

Top 5 fields of study in 2019

1. Medical Science & Health Related
2. Commercial & Business Administration
3. Social & Behavioural Science
4. Engineering
5. Mathematics & Computer Science



CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY

“After completing my secondary school I had no chance of continuing to university so I started saving money gradually by doing jobs in the camp with different NGOs. Finally I bought a second hand laptop. I could watch graphic design tutorials on YouTube everyday. After some weeks people started hiring me to design posters and logos. I now have a small graphic design company called Jemo Graphics and Screenplays.”

Kuena, 23, a South Sudanese refugee and self-taught graphic designer, has illustrated (above) all the COVID-19 prevention activities taking place in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Uganda, his home. He is a regional winner of UNHCR’s 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest.

THE VIEW FROM: ETHIOPIA
South Sudanese teacher sets sights on university for his children

A primary school vice-principal has high educational ambitions for his compatriots, but is all too aware that the odds are stacked against them.

A framed photograph of James Tut, in cap and gown and receiving his Bachelor’s degree, takes pride of place at his home in Ethiopia’s western Gambella region. It captures one of the proudest moments of the 42-year-old’s life.

“I was very happy,” says the South Sudanese refugee. Given half a chance, he added, he would go on and study a Masters.

For every student, graduating from university is a cause for celebration – but for refugees it is a real triumph over the odds.

Only 3 per cent of refugees are enrolled in any form of tertiary education, compared to 37 per cent of their non-refugee counterparts globally. For those who have fled conflict in South Sudan, the proportion is smaller still.



James had hoped that with a degree in Community Development and Leadership from the University of Addis Ababa, he might find employment with the government of South Sudan. But by the time he finished his undergraduate studies in 2014, war had intervened and he had become a refugee in Ethiopia.

Later, his family managed to flee South Sudan and make it to the Gambella region, where they were all reunited.

James Tut, a 42-year-old father of five, is vice-principal at one of four primary schools in Jewi camp, Ethiopia. He exudes a calm authority, but wishes classes were not so overcrowded. ©UNHCR/EDUARDO SOTERAS JALIL

Even though he has been unable to return home, a university education has stood James in good stead. For the past few years, he has been vice-principal of one of four primary schools in Gambella's Jewi refugee camp.

Smartly dressed and softly spoken, he exudes a calm authority amid the din of boisterous children as he walks from one classroom to another, carrying a box of chalk and his lesson plan.

"Our country is the world's youngest nation, yet 80 per cent of the population are illiterate – imagine. If you have more illiterate people with each passing generation, you have a problem," he says.

Years of violence in South Sudan have been a disaster for the nation's children and youth. Two-thirds of all South Sudanese refugees are under the age of 18. Only 67 per cent of them are in primary school in Ethiopia, compared to an international average of 91 per cent.

It gets worse as they progress to the next academic level, with only 13 per cent enrolled in secondary education, compared to 84 per cent globally.

As a degree holder, James is living proof of what refugees can achieve if given the chance. But every day he goes to work, he is all too aware of the problems his pupils encounter daily.

He wishes there was more training available for his teachers, and more funds to pay them better. Many quit, saying that the 805 birr (US\$27) they receive monthly as an incentive to teach is not enough to live on.

"Our country is the world's youngest nation, yet 80 per cent of the population are illiterate – imagine."

He would also like to see less overcrowding in the classrooms – students are regularly forced to stand or sit on the floor because there are not

enough chairs and desks. And with the health protocols required for school reopening during the pandemic, overcrowding may also lead to students being forced to drop out.

James also worries that girls are more likely to miss out on an education than boys. "Fewer girls go to school here because of early marriage in the camp," he says. "Sometimes a family's situation also forces girls to stay at home to do business, [such as] prepare food to sell in the market or run tea stalls."

Schools in Jewi do their best to keep girls in the classroom in spite of these pressures. "If we see girls dropping out of school, we organize PTA [parent-teacher association] teams to go into the community to persuade parents, especially mothers, to send their children to school."

Without an education, generations of children risk growing up without the skills they need to rebuild their lives, their countries and their communities.

James is determined that his own children – three boys and two girls, aged from 18 months to 14 – will avoid this fate. He has pledged to do everything in his power to ensure that they will enjoy the same level of education as he has had, no matter what the odds. His wife is currently studying at a teacher training college to get her qualifications.

"I have been able to transfer the benefits of university to my family and my children. I want the same for my children. I plan for my children to reach where I have reached whether we are still refugees or we return back home to South Sudan," he says.

"You educate your children for them to make their lives better ... Children are the future of our country. When we return to South Sudan, they will build our country."



Koat Reath helps children learn with lively and fun classes at a primary school class at Jewi refugee camp in Ethiopia.

© UNHCR/EDUARDO SOTERAS JALIL

Once noisy and vibrant, this classroom has been silenced by coronavirus

At 42, his energy levels are a match for the 5 to 15-year-olds crammed into his class – as many as 100 at a time.

Now, however, COVID-19 has taken the vigour out of Koat's classroom. In mid-March, Ethiopia ordered the closure of all schools. With teaching his life, Koat is now restless.

"I had to stop my classes but then my students kept on coming and I had to send them away," he says. "I did not like that."

But he is even more worried about his adult students. In the afternoons, Koat used to head over to a makeshift school to give private tuition to adult students for 10 birr (US\$0.34) a month each. The students clubbed together to build the school, which has straw walls and a tarpaulin roof that leaks during the rainy season.

"I am mostly working with the adult students right now," he says. "They still need to learn how to read and write... But they need more convincing."



[See video](#)



Some are elderly and find it harder to catch up on the basics, adds Koat, while they must also juggle their studies with responsibilities such as work and domestic duties.

Koat, who has five children of his own, is himself a refugee: he and his family fled to Ethiopia in 2015 after their home in Jonglei state was burned to the ground.

He understands the need for measures to stop the virus spreading, but laments the impact on his young charges, who have few other options: no internet connectivity, no extensive libraries of textbooks and educational materials, no pre-loaded tablets or mobile phones.

“I can only do what UNHCR and the doctors advise,” he says, “but this pandemic has seriously affected our work. We don’t have alternatives to gathering as a community – that’s how education works here.”

2.25 million

South Sudanese refugees

334,000

located in Ethiopia, of which more than 92% are in the Gambella cluster of camps

227,000

South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia under the age of 18

70,000

are girls aged between 5-17

25

primary schools and

5

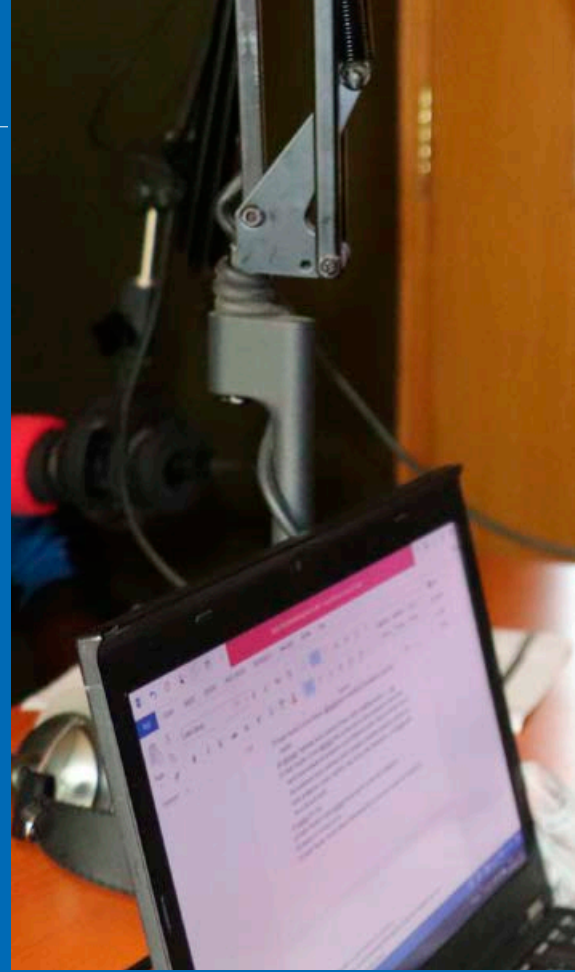
secondary schools in the Gambella refugee camps

FIVE WAYS EDUCATION KEPT GOING

The coronavirus pandemic has had dramatic effects on the lives of school age children. Schools have been closed; exams cancelled, postponed or moved online; and parents – including in forcibly displaced communities – have taken on bigger roles in their children’s learning.

But adapting to the limitations imposed by COVID-19 has been especially tough for the 85 per cent of the world’s refugees who live in developing or least developed countries. Mobile phones, tablets, laptops, good connectivity, cheap data, even radio sets are often not readily available to displaced communities.

Keeping education going in the time of a pandemic has required resourcefulness, innovation, invention and collaboration. Here are just some examples that UNHCR encountered in the first weeks and months of the COVID-19 outbreak.





[See video](#)



Somali refugee teacher, Amina Hassan, gives an English lesson to grade five pupils over the radio at Dadaab camp in Kenya. ©UNHCR/JIMALE ABDULLAHI

1

KENYA

All we need is Radio Gargaar

In normal times, Amina Hassan would stand at the front of her class of about 100 children at a school in the Dadaab refugee complex, in eastern Kenya, close to the Somali border.

These days, she has had to become a broadcaster instead – with one of the world’s more unusual phone-in radio shows.

Dadaab has more than 67,000 students attending just 22 primary and six secondary schools, where refugee children and youth, along with the host community students that share their classrooms, receive a certified Kenyan education. Amina’s school, Umoja Primary School in Dadaab’s Hagadera camp, has more than 1,200 students. After the closure of learning institutions countrywide due to COVID-19, a lot of curious minds were left without regular lessons.

Amina, who qualified as a teacher in Kenya, took to the airwaves to broadcast lessons to her Grade 5 class on a community station called Radio Gargaar, meaning “help” or “assistance” in Somali. “They sometimes call me at the studio to ask questions,” she says. “I believe they are learning even though I can’t see them.”

The school hiatus has also compelled UNHCR and other partner organisations to build on existing connected education programmes in Dadaab, including the Instant Network Schools (INS) supported by the Vodafone Foundation.

Under INS, schools and community centres are equipped with a multimedia hub together with a set of digital resources including tablets, laptops, projector and speaker system, a solar-power system for electricity, connectivity through satellite or a mobile network, and an offline collection of digital learning material. While social distancing measures have restricted interaction and device-sharing, teachers have still used them to prepare lessons and to further their professional development.



Mobile classroom brings learning and games to Venezuelan refugee kids.

© UNHCR/ WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

2

BOLIVIA

The classroom on wheels

Dancing, singing, painting – and learning how to protect yourself from coronavirus – have been on the agenda for a group of young Venezuelans in La Paz, Bolivia. But instead of having to go to school for these activities, the school has come to them.

Aula Movil (Mobile Classroom) is a project being piloted by UNHCR and partner organisations for Venezuelan refugee and migrant children who have had no access to formal educational, distance learning or recreational activities since lockdown.

The service functions as an informal classroom for the children and their families, giving them an important outlet for their energy and creativity. Even though the staff are dressed in personal protective equipment from head to foot, the youngsters soon get used to them and absorb plenty of information about the virus that has drastically changed their lives.

In addition, the class has provided psychosocial support and engagement for the Venezuelan community, visiting accommodation centres where UNHCR is providing shelter for Venezuelan families. By the end of 2019, Bolivia was host to more than 5,400 registered Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

And it has helped both to identify risks of gender-based violence within families during lockdown and to develop a mobile “day centre” for women that was piloted in parallel with the classroom.

“Quarantine has generated anxiety and stress among the population. That is why we are developing these activities,” said Ana Llanco Aguirre, a coordinator for the Munasim Kullakita Foundation, a Bolivian non-governmental organization.

3

UGANDA

Online or offline, making education work

Thanks to a partnership dating back to 2018, UNHCR and an array of partners in Uganda have been able to accelerate a connected education project giving teachers and students access to a wide variety of open resources.

Many displaced communities live in areas where internet connectivity is poor or non-existent and where getting hold of smart devices is out of the question. This makes the switch to online learning extremely challenging.

An [open source learning platform called Kolibri](#), developed by the non-profit organisation Learning Equality, is designed to get around those issues by being tailored for a variety of low-cost, off-the-shelf devices and other “legacy” hardware in places where connectivity is poor or non-existent.

Once content has been “seeded” onto a device - either at a factory or in an area that has an internet connection - that device can share it with others over an offline local network.

Thanks to the combined efforts of Learning Equality, the global fund Education Cannot Wait (ECW), Google.org (the tech giant’s charitable arm), Hewlett Packard, UNICEF and UNHCR, for the past two years teachers and refugee learners have been able to use Kolibri to access science, technology and mathematics (STEM) and life skills content aligned with the Ugandan national curriculum.

Since the onset of COVID-19, ECW has boosted this process by funding the supply of tablets pre-loaded with content aimed at secondary-level students who are preparing for national exams. UNHCR will distribute these devices to learners within the refugee and host communities.

A support programme for teachers has also proved invaluable. Throughout 2019, UNHCR and Learning Equality helped to train teachers on how to use digital learning materials in maths and science. These “champion teachers” have since been deployed to share guidance with their colleagues via WhatsApp, or even appearing on national television to instruct their fellow teachers in using the platform.

Phone and internet opens digital opportunities to refugees in isolated northern settlements.

©UNHCR/MICHELE SIBILONI



Refugee children from Moïssala in southern Chad, now living in Dilingala settlement, draw and colour on the topic of "my school".

©UNHCR/ ELOGE MBAIHONDUM

4

CHAD

Parent power keeps the homework flowing

The traditional parent-teacher association (PTA) runs fundraising events for schools, helps out with homework clubs, and provides extra hands for activities in and out of the classroom when a school finds itself a bit short staffed.

The refugee camps of eastern Chad, where more than 300,000 Sudanese have been living for more than a decade, are no exception. PTAs in these displaced communities, along with parents from

host communities, have long been active in helping to manage these national schools - from raising awareness of educational opportunities to monitoring enrolment and drop-outs, as well as finding ways to raise money for the repair and upkeep of school buildings.

During the pandemic - with schools closed and with a national distance learning programme hardly accessible in remote areas such as refugee camps - the PTAs have got even busier. Duties have included raising awareness among schoolchildren and their families of measures to keep COVID-19 at bay, as well as keeping them informed on how to keep up with homeschooling, supervising the dissemination and weekly collection of homework for teachers to mark and visiting the most vulnerable students.

This parent-teacher collaboration has ensured that about 4,000 Sudanese and Chadian secondary school pupils have been able to keep preparing for national exams. Indeed, in a part of the world where even radio coverage is lacking, it has helped keep education going for those students.

5 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Lessons in the open air

With all schools closed and social distancing measures in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jean Aimé Mozokombo has taken his classes outside.

In northern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), more than 600 refugee students from Central African Republic (CAR) have been able to continue their preparations for the national primary school final test. Jean Aimé is one of several teachers from the host community who have been striving to keep their young students busy with schoolwork.

For the past two months, he has been organizing learning sessions at Inke refugee camp, in North Ubangi Province, outside the homes of his students. His classes are limited to six students at a time to make sure physical distancing requirements are met.

“We distributed stationery to the students, but we often lack basic school furniture, such as proper chairs and whiteboards, as refugees’ homes are not equipped with such things,” he says.

Even without the usual school facilities, these outdoor classes are vital. “We are doing the best we can as the national primary education final test is essential for students to enrol in secondary school.”

Angele, 15, who fled to the DRC in 2013, is one of the students benefiting from the outdoor classes. “I feel confident about taking the test, and lucky because not everyone has been able to continue learning during the pandemic,” she says. “It is important to study if we want to become someone in society, to serve our country and our family.”

Despite this spirit of perseverance, refugees from CAR still struggle to receive an education. Only about 8,200 of the almost 18,000 children in the camps have access to primary school, and thousands of those students are forced to call a halt to their studies at secondary level because of a lack of available schools.



Angele, a 15-year-old refugee who fled violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013, arrives for a homeschooling lesson at Inke camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

©UNHCR/GHISLAINE NENTOBO



CHAPTER 4 GOVERNMENT

SOE



Refugee students' work displayed on boards at the Sorani Kurdish language school in Trikala, central Greece. ©UNHCR/ATHINA SYKIDOTI



UNHCR Chief Filippo Grandi (right) discusses refugees' needs with Egypt's Education Minister Dr Tarek Shawky in Cairo in January 2019.
© UNHCR/PEDRO COSTA GOMES

INTERVIEW

TAREK SHAWKI, EGYPTIAN EDUCATION MINISTER

Egypt's educational revolution rises to the challenges of the pandemic

Major technological changes led to Egypt's schools adjusting quickly to the new reality.

It was not the intention of Dr Tarek Shawki to design an education system that could cope with a coronavirus pandemic. It just happened that way.

As an adviser to Egypt's President and then as the country's Minister for Education, Dr Shawki has spent the past six years overhauling every facet of

the way the 22 million students in Egyptian classrooms are educated. That includes 58,500 foreign nationals, including large numbers of refugee children, who are currently in the country's state schools.

"This is a whole revolution that we started deploying across the nation in the autumn of 2018," Dr Shawki says. "Egypt is witnessing a major reimagining of its education system."

Key to turning Egypt into what he calls “a learning society” is technology. Every student in Egypt’s state-run high schools has a tablet to access digital libraries and learning management systems, and to take exams electronically. In addition, every learner has free access to the Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB), a digital learning repository of materials from 33 international publishers.

“We started experimenting with [running] state exams electronically in 2018. So when Covid-19 hit us we were on solid ground. Within a week we were able to extract from the EKB all the curricula for pre-university education, from first year of kindergarten to Grade 12, in Arabic and English.”

“In addition, we put in a learning management system in place for over 55,000 schools in less than 10 days. We ran virtual classrooms and used a streaming platform and television stations to broadcast school classes.”

But Dr Shawki sees the benefits of this shift to digital not only in terms of coping with the coronavirus crisis, but for all students, refugees and non-refugees alike, in the years to come. “The pandemic has forced us all to reflect and do things in unusual ways. Even if Covid subsides or a vaccine is found, we’re not going to go back to how we did things before.”

Using a blend of classroom and distance learning, he adds, could solve problems of overcrowding in a country where schools struggle to handle demand.

A rescheduled timetable involving less time in school buildings and more time studying at home is a model that could work in other countries where capacity is a barrier to finding refugees a place in school – provided that the connectivity exists to support it.

“The pandemic has forced us all to do things in unusual ways. Even if Covid subsides or a vaccine is found, we’re not going to go back to how we did things before.”

Overhauling the system has also required the help of a vast array of partners. “We are fortunate that through building the EKB we have established a network of partners [including] some of the greatest knowledge houses around the world,” says Dr Shawki.

“But we also have a huge group of donors,” he adds, mentioning the likes of the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, other governments, numerous UN agencies, and international organisations such as USAID – “all working with us towards the same goal.”

Part of that goal is Egypt’s commitment, made at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, “to ensuring access to education for refugee children within the national education system in line with the national education strategy for 2030”.

At present, refugees from Syria, Yemen, Sudan and South Sudan, can attend Egyptian state schools but several other nationalities do not yet have access.

But Egypt will have to deal with the economic fallout of the pandemic for vulnerable communities, including refugees. Even before the virus, vulnerability assessments conducted by UNHCR showed that eight out of ten refugees in Egypt were unable to meet their basic needs. As a result, many school-age refugees are sent to work rather than to school.

Lockdown measures have hit incomes even harder. Many refugees and asylum-seekers, who were working in the informal sector, have lost what were already humble livelihoods. That makes warnings over the post-coronavirus return of refugees to school – such as the Malala Fund’s warning that half of refugee girls at secondary level could be forced to drop out – all the more alarming.

Dr Shawki acknowledges this but stresses the response must be international as well as national. One answer could be to relax the rules that can make it harder for children who have missed a significant amount of schooling to rejoin at their former grade; another is for states to accept student refugees from overburdened countries. “I think the world will need to come up with guidelines on this.”

But the minister clearly believes that technology will be at the heart of any long-term solution. Dr Shawki envisages an Egyptian education being brought to refugees across the region – “if we are able, between the Egyptian government, UNHCR and any other donors or NGOs to put simple devices [in their hands], we can make available all our resources.”

Beyond that, he sees lessons from Egypt being shared with other classrooms across the world. “Physics is physics, chemistry is chemistry,” he says – so why not learn with students in China, Canada and Russia?

“We can work with other countries beyond Covid-19. The future is very promising in that regard.”



INTERVIEW

ANN LUCAS, LORD MAYOR OF COVENTRY

UK city plugs into the power of local networks

With around 60 per cent of the world's refugees living in urban settings, local authorities play a crucial role in supporting the forcibly displaced. In September 2015, the UK pledged to take in 20,000 Syrians who had fled the conflict. The city of Coventry, in the middle of England, has resettled 600, the second-largest intake outside London

Ann Lucas, a former head of the city's local administration and its first female leader, became Coventry's Lord Mayor this year in a virtual ceremony held during the coronavirus "lockdown". She explained why the city had chosen to welcome refugees.

Why has Coventry been so keen to welcome refugees?

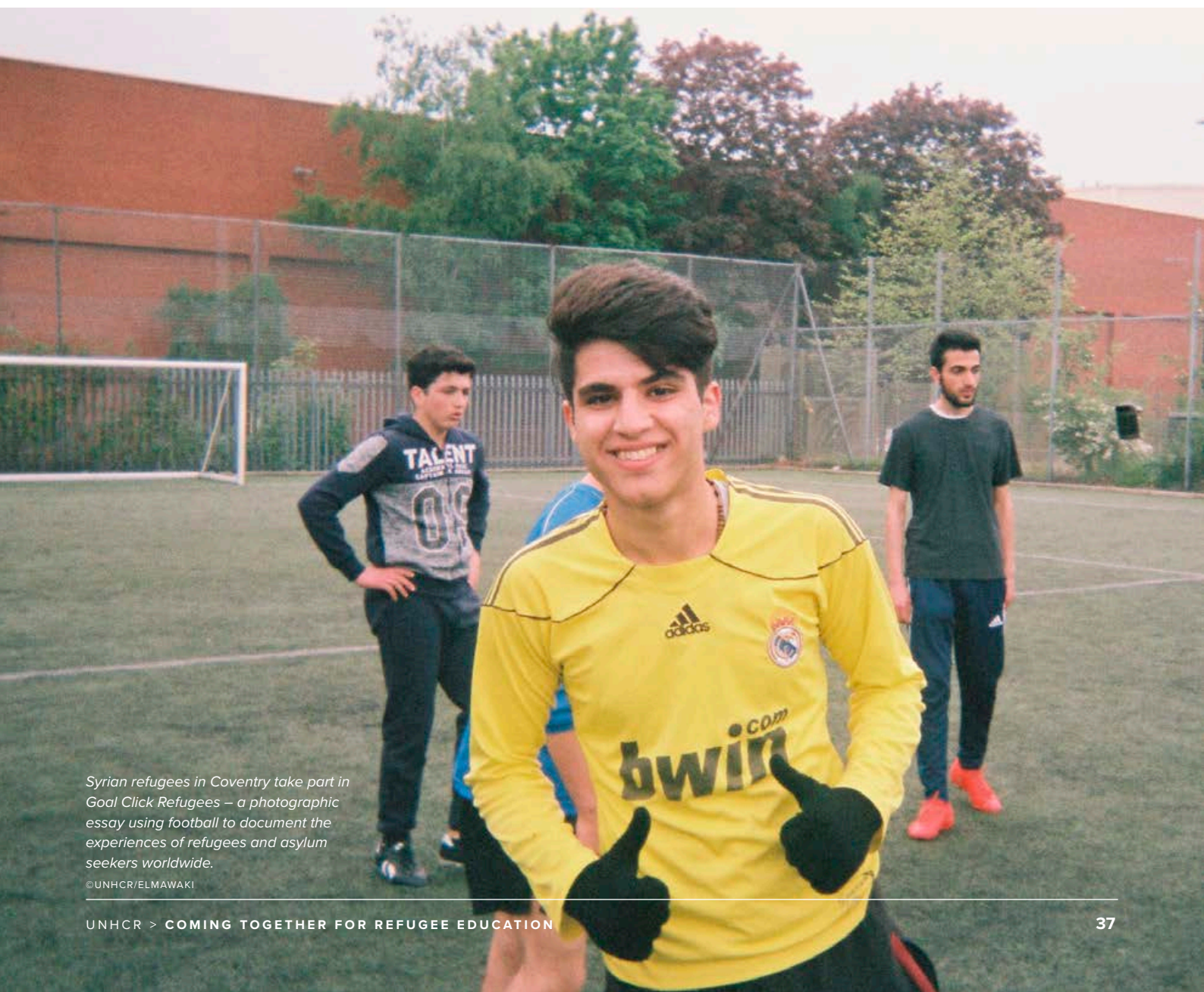
Coventry has the huge advantage of being known as a city of peace and reconciliation. We have a history of accepting and welcoming people, which started after the Second World War, when the appetite for rebuilding the city was enormous and people came to us from all over Britain and Ireland for work.

And we are the most twinned city in the world. That started with the women of Coventry supporting the city of Stalingrad [now Volgograd] in 1944, and then we twinned with Dresden and Kiel in Germany. So when the Syrian war started and UNHCR and the UK government were contacting different cities about taking in refugees, we said 'of course we will' – it was a no-brainer.

How are you able to help refugees, and in particular young refugees with their education?

It helped that Syria [before the conflict] was a country with a developed education system. The ability of the refugees I have met to not only get the basics of a new language but to master it – three months or six months in – was astounding. Their thirst for knowledge and education literally knows no bounds.

But you can't just throw kids into school and say, 'here you are, aren't you lucky' – it's about making the commitment and making it work. We have our Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS), which supports newly arrived communities in the classroom and provides school staff training where needed. EMAS works with schools to become Schools of Sanctuary – a new programme to promote understanding of what it means to seek sanctuary and dispel negative myths.



Syrian refugees in Coventry take part in Goal Click Refugees – a photographic essay using football to document the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide.

©UNHCR/ELMAWAKI

Over the past decade, we have supported more than 550 asylum-seeking school-aged children through the school admissions process, including unaccompanied children; we have also helped another 200 young people onto other schemes such as language courses or apprenticeships. We work with a huge number of organisations including the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, the Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group, the Positive Youth Foundation [a charity], the Citizens Advice Bureau, the local NHS organisation, Coventry and Warwick universities, schools, and local churches.

“You can’t just throw kids into school and say, ‘here you are, aren’t you lucky’ – it’s about making the commitment and making it work.”

What can cities do that national governments cannot?

We know the city – it’s our patch. What’s right for Coventry might be wrong for another city. We can be light on our feet – we know where to find the refugee centre, the Coventry Law Centre, the volunteer groups, the churches, the food banks – and our refugees have very quickly become involved in volunteering themselves. You cannot build that up quickly, though – it has taken us a long time.

We are used to new people, we’ve got the networks to support them. And we’ve also got communities from the Middle East who have been welcoming. They have a shared language and culture, and a sharing of religious facilities and experiences.

But – and here was the bonus – the government supported us financially and let us get on with it. When we needed support, we got it, so we didn’t lose out financially. With a politician’s hat on, you have to be able to say both that we are doing the right thing and that it has huge benefits – first, it’s not costing us anything, and secondly our reputation, nationally and internationally, has grown.

What are the main challenges?

Obviously having been displaced for a long time, the refugee children have not been getting an education. That has a longer-term impact on your ability to earn a living but also on mental health and self-esteem. And the kids have seen – and indeed suffered – the most awful things. But we work with a range of people on psychological and physical support.

Looking ahead, there is coronavirus, of course. A part of me is always thinking about the economic downturn. We will need to keep making relationships with businesses, as they can play a more active role in supporting young refugees, including offering scholarships and work placements as well as shadowing opportunities to raise their aspirations. Some have opened their doors but there is a need for more to get on board.

Coventry is the latest city to join UNHCR’s [Cities #WithRefugees movement](#).



CHAPTER 5

VIOLENCE AGAINST SCHOOLS

Pupils at Al Shuhada School in the war-ravaged town of Souran, western Syria, find a good place from which to view the recent visit of UN Refugee Chief Filippo Grandi.

© UNHCR/ANDREW MCCONNELL

**THE VIEW FROM:
BURKINA FASO**

Schools caught up in armed conflict sweeping across the Sahel

Teenage refugee in Burkina Faso has had his studies disrupted by displacement, violence and COVID-19.

At the end of the 2019 academic year, just as he was preparing to take his primary school leaving exams in northern Burkina Faso, a young Malian refugee called Oumar Ag Ousmane saw his hopes begin to fade.

With the violence that had been plaguing parts of the Sahel region for years beginning to rage in Burkina Faso, and with schools targeted and teachers threatened by armed groups, staff at Oumar's school stopped coming to work. Then they left the area altogether.

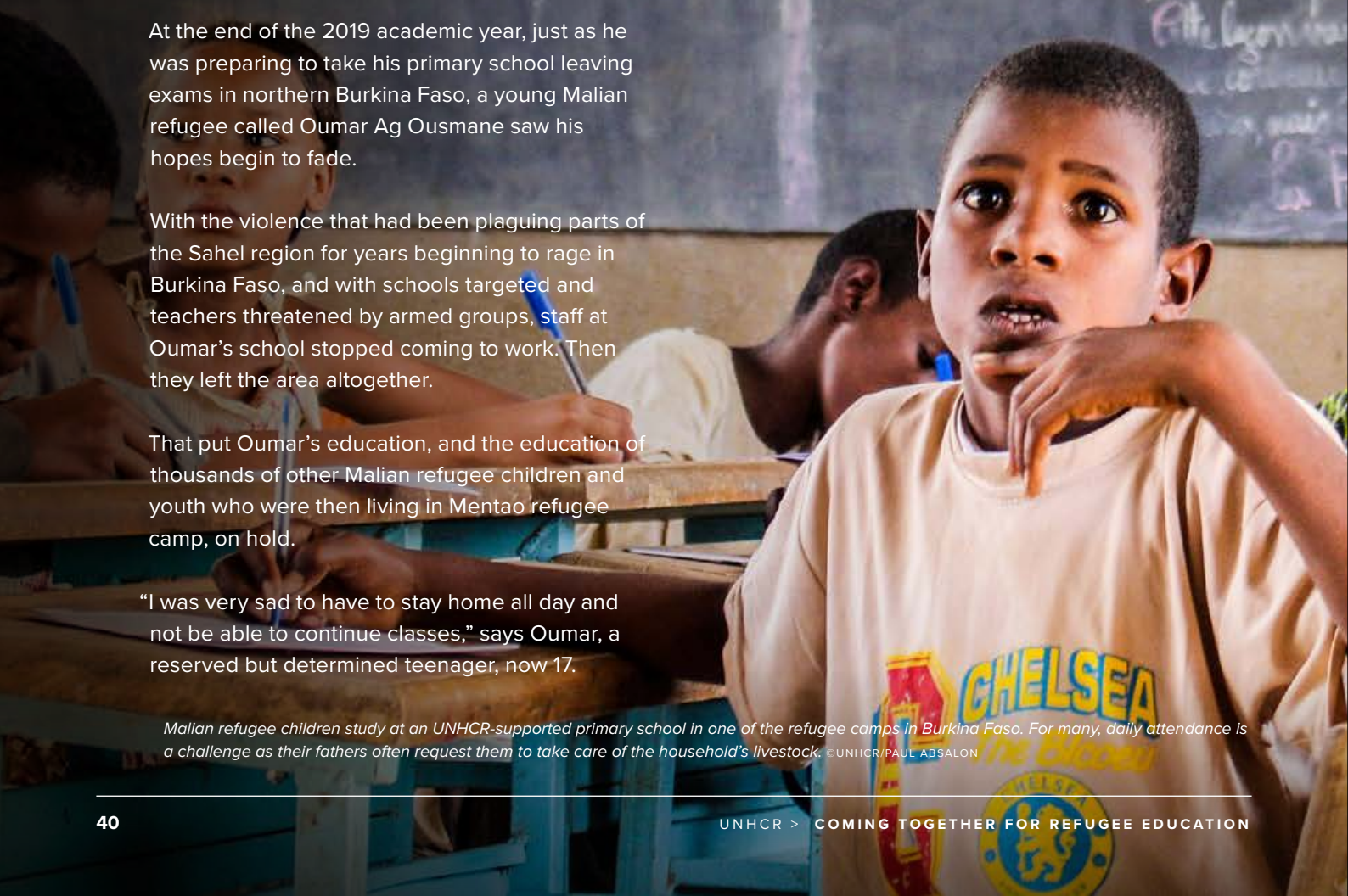
That put Oumar's education, and the education of thousands of other Malian refugee children and youth who were then living in Mentao refugee camp, on hold.

"I was very sad to have to stay home all day and not be able to continue classes," says Oumar, a reserved but determined teenager, now 17.

It was a bitter blow. Growing up, there had been no school to go to in Oumar's home town of Mopti, and after he and his family fled Mali in 2012 as violence was igniting there, life in Mentao camp had given him his first taste of an education.

To keep his schooling going, the boy's father decided to take him and his siblings to Goudoubo refugee camp, further to the east. There he was registered in a school in the nearby town of Dori, hoping this would allow him to sit the crucial exams which allow him progress to secondary level.

But more disruption lay in wait. "The following school year, as soon as the school year started, the same security issues continued in Goudoubo," he says. "I was very disappointed once again my school closed and that I was not able to finish the new school year." Oumar is over the usual age to start secondary school, something which is



Malian refugee children study at an UNHCR-supported primary school in one of the refugee camps in Burkina Faso. For many, daily attendance is a challenge as their fathers often request them to take care of the household's livestock. ©UNHCR/PAUL ABSALON

common for refugee children, particularly where education has been disrupted and there are no accelerated education programmes available.

“Once again my school closed and I was not able to finish the new school year.”

In Burkina Faso alone, over the past 12 months the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) rose five-fold, reaching 921,000 at the end of June 2020. The country is also host to nearly 20,000 refugees, many of whom have recently fled the camps - seeking safety in other parts of the country or even returning to their homeland.

Across the Sahel, millions have fled indiscriminate attacks by armed groups against both civilians and state institutions – including schools. According to UNICEF, between April 2017 and December 2019 the number of school closures due to violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger rose six-fold. By the end of last year, more than 3,300 schools were shut, affecting almost 650,000 children and more than 16,000 teachers.

In Burkina Faso alone, 2,500 schools had closed because of the violence, depriving 350,000 children of access to education – and that was before coronavirus closed the rest.

This year, Oumar thought it was third time lucky. His family moved a few miles down the road from Goudoubo camp to Dori, and he was able to start his first year of secondary school in spite of being older than most of the other students. “Everything was going smoothly,” he says.

“But classes had to stop again – this time because of the COVID-19 outbreak.”

Since June 1, the three school grades that were due to take exams this year have reopened and UNHCR is doing what it can to find places for refugee children. For the others, UNHCR, with the support of the global fund Education Cannot Wait, began buying radios for primary and secondary

On September 9th, the UN will mark the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, with the General Assembly condemning attacks on education and the military use of schools in contravention of international law.


According to the [Global Coalition for the Protection of Education from Attack \(GCPEA\)](#), violence against education includes attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel; the military use of schools and universities; recruitment of children into armed or criminal groups at school or on school journeys; and sexual violence against children and youth at, or on the way to or from, school or university.

The GCPEA has called on UN member states to sign up to and adhere by the Safe Schools declaration, an agreement that seeks to reduce the risk of attacks on educational facilities, deter military use, and minimise the impact of attacks and military use when they do occur.

The issue is by no means confined to the Sahel. Students in countries all over the world undergoing displacement emergencies – from Afghanistan and the Philippines to Syria and Yemen to Colombia – have been affected by attacks on schools and universities.

refugee students to ensure they had the same access as their Burkinabe peers to lessons being broadcast over the airwaves. UNHCR is also working with governments to enable emergency education for displaced children and youth via access to safe distance learning alternatives.

As he waits, Oumar refuses to be downhearted. “I still have the hope that the situation will improve so that I can go back and finish my education,” he says.



Egyptian football star Mo Salah calls for a team effort to ensure disadvantaged children receive a life-changing education.

© UNHCR/VODAFONE FOUNDATION/MIKE DODD

FINAL WORD

by Mo Salah

Around the world, COVID-19 has closed schools and universities. It has emptied offices and hotels, stadiums, cafes, museums, cinemas: almost everywhere we used to gather.

It has disrupted not only the education of our children and youth but also the work of those who teach them – and the livelihoods of the parents who do everything they can to pay for books, uniforms and school journeys.

For many refugee children, the vast majority of whom live in the developing world, the coronavirus has added new challenges to lives already torn apart by conflict and persecution. Many may never

ever now return to school. Hard-won gains built up slowly and patiently over decades risk being reversed indefinitely. Young lives could be ruined forever.

I became the ambassador for the [Instant Network Schools](#) programme only days before the coronavirus pandemic radically altered our everyday lives. Delivered in partnership by Vodafone Foundation and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, INS connects thousands of refugee and host-country students to a quality digital education.

Part of my new role was intended to include visiting the schools supported by the INS programme to raise awareness of the vital importance of quality education for refugee children. Like many other people's travel plans, mine will have to change.

But the INS project – like many of the initiatives highlighted in this report – shows how we can come together in new ways to make a difference to the lives of millions of young people, who more than ever need a helping hand.

Children who have been uprooted from their homes need books, schools, qualified teachers and more. But they also need the digital technology that connects them to the rest of the world.

That means better partnerships with the private sector, who are stepping up to create and deliver technology solutions – by providing software, hardware and connectivity. It is not just about technology. Every company can make a difference; transport, construction, sport, sanitation, health care and more - getting kids to school, building the classrooms they need, safeguarding their physical and mental well-being.

I also mean apprenticeships and employment opportunities that will give refugees and non-refugees alike something to aim for, and the means to support themselves and their families.

In turn, the private sector needs to build on the needs of refugees and the priorities set by their host governments. By also leveraging the capacity and harnessing the aspirations of refugees and hosting communities, along with the expertise and experience of aid agencies, charities, NGOs and others, these projects can be locally owned, and made as effective as possible.

Ensuring quality education today means less poverty and suffering tomorrow.

As we face this pandemic together, innovation will play a crucial role if the world's displaced children and youth are not to lose all hope of getting an accredited, quality education.

Not only innovation measured in silicon chips, but bold and imaginative thinking across the board to make that education a reality.

Unless everyone plays their part, generations of children – millions of them in some of the world's poorest regions – will face a bleak future.

But if we work as a team, as one, we can give them the chance they deserve to have a dignified future.

Let's not miss this opportunity.



CALL TO ACTION

Every action counts towards giving refugees the future they deserve.

Kaitlyn, 17, from the United States, received a special mention for her drawing called 'We are all in this together' which she submitted to UNHCR's 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest.

© UNHCR/KAITLYN ZHOU

To bring refugee enrolment in education at all levels up to global levels requires a combined and coordinated effort from a wide range of partners. This report has detailed several ways in which governments, schools and universities, NGOs, host communities, large and small private sector organisations and many individuals are striving to improve the chances for all refugee children to get an inclusive, quality education.

Now we need to scale up those efforts – not only to fix the damage wrought by the coronavirus on education worldwide, but also to have a real and lasting positive impact on the lives of millions of vulnerable children and youth in displaced communities around the world.

SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

- Welcome refugees into the classroom. Establish a dialogue with the families of refugee children and engage them in school life to reduce the likelihood of dropping out
- Give teachers the relevant training to integrate and educate refugee children
- Provide language courses for refugees who do not speak the language of instruction and offer catch-up programmes to those who have been out of school for months or years
- Offer scholarships and other ways for refugee students to access tertiary education, and partner with universities and technical and vocational institutions in refugee-hosting countries
- Be understanding of the realities of displacement. Avoid unnecessary or unrealistic bureaucratic obstacles
- Stand up to discrimination, xenophobia, sexual harassment and bullying in schools

STATES AND CITIES

- Ensure that refugee children and youth are included in the worldwide effort to restart education and back-to-school planning
- Ensure that refugee girls have equal access to education at all levels, and work with displaced communities to boost enrolment of refugee girls in school
- Break down barriers that refugee children and youth with disabilities face in the classroom, and ensure they get equitable access to inclusive education at all levels
- Allow refugees to enrol in schools under the same conditions as nationals, include them in national education systems, and ensure they follow national curricula
- Give refugees access to school without documentation or certification. Make sure they can sit for national exams and earn recognized qualifications
- Design policies and allocate budgets for refugee education in national plans, while ensuring that host communities also benefit
- Join UNHCR's [Cities #WithRefugees](#) movement

BUSINESSES

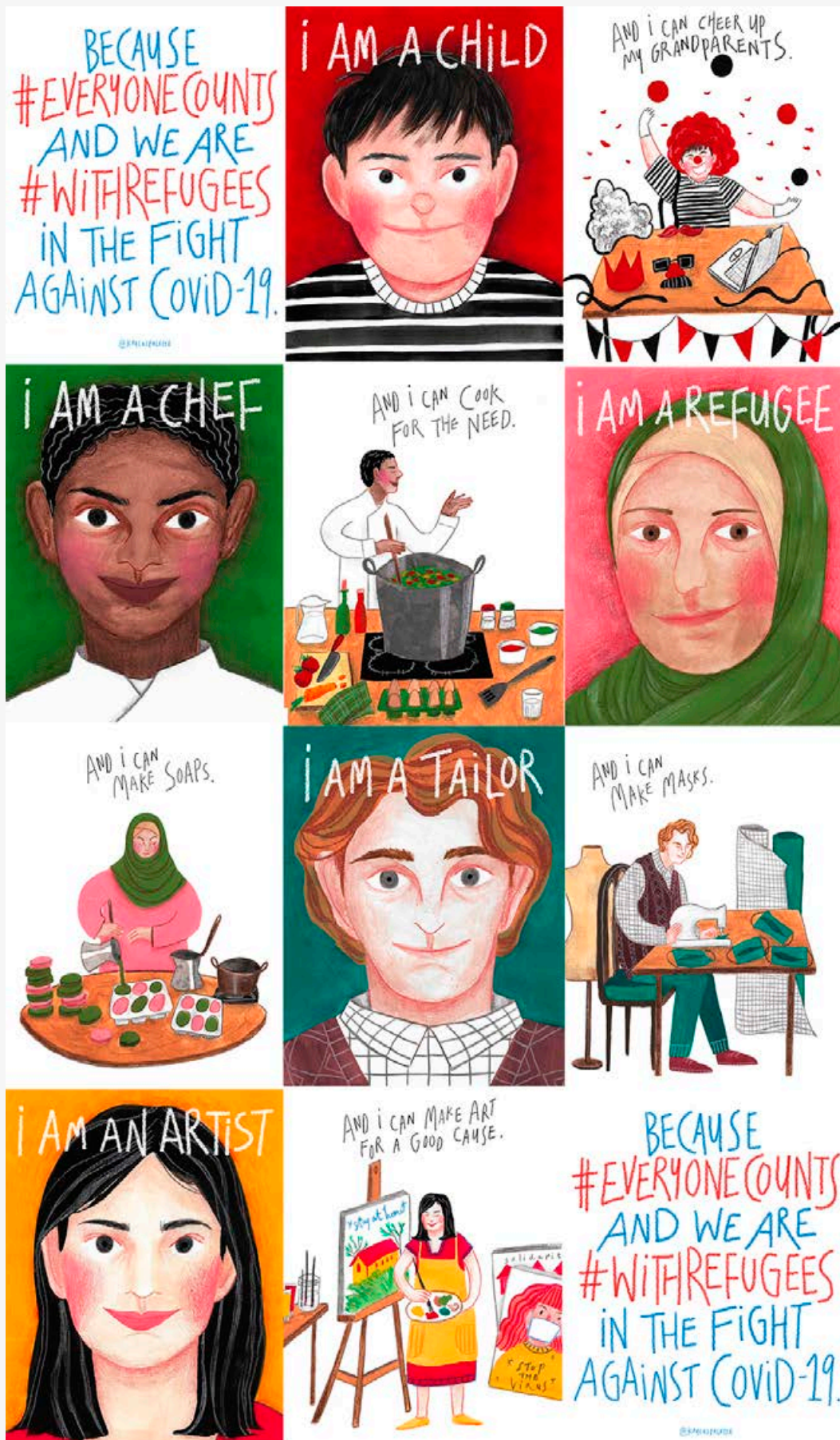
- Partner with UNHCR to boost investment in refugee education initiatives. COVID-19 has disrupted education for millions of refugee children and youth. Private sector support is critical to help refugees and their hosts continue their education and ensure everyone can benefit from connected and virtual learning opportunities
- Help us innovate and find solutions to new and longstanding problems. From classroom equipment to teacher training, connectivity to infrastructure, online resources to internships, apprenticeships, training and job opportunities – there are so many ways your business can support refugee education

EVERYBODY

- Support the work of UNHCR and its partners – through donations, advocacy, expressions of support, and volunteering
- Lobby governments to support the inclusion of refugees in national systems
- Help refugees learn new languages and skills
- Speak up on refugee issues and tackle xenophobic language and statements
- Welcome refugees into your schools, communities and lives

DONORS

- Ensure reliable multi-year funding of refugee education programmes and projects, including teacher training, school infrastructure, learning materials, innovation projects, supplies and more
- Commit to the international goals, ambitions and organisations committed to refugee education: Sustainable Development Goal 4, the Global Compact on Refugees, the UNESCO Global Education Coalition, and many others
- Fund and support partnerships with proven track records to enable them to scale up and reach greater numbers



Kayla, 23, from Indonesia, won a prize as part of UNHCR's 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest, for her illustration showing that everyone can help fight the coronavirus ©UNHCR/KAYLA ABIGAIL SALIM

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We lead international action to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

We deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place called home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

We work in over 130 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for millions.

Front cover image:

Morning assembly is a happy time at a school in Isfahan, Iran that welcomes Afghan refugees.

©UNHCR/MOHAMMAD HOSSEIN DEHGHANIAN



For more information and enquiries, please contact:

UNHCR
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

