



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

LEFT BEHIND REFUGEE EDUCATION IN CRISIS



About this report

This report tells the stories of some of the world's 6.4 million refugee children and adolescents under UNHCR's mandate who are of primary and secondary school-going age, between 5 and 17. In addition, it looks at the educational aspirations of refugee youth eager to continue learning after secondary education, and examines the conditions under which those who teach refugees carry out their work.

Education data on refugee enrolments and population numbers is drawn from UNHCR's population database, reporting tools and education surveys and refers to 2016. The report also references global enrolment data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics referring to 2015.



Contents

Introduction by Filippo Grandi	4
The global picture	8
Education in emergencies	12
Investing in inclusion	22
Champion teachers	34
“We must close the gap” by Alek Wek	48
Malala’s message	52
Call to action	53



South Sudanese refugee children at Yangani Progressive Primary School in Yumbe District, northern Uganda, a school with more than 5,000 pupils, the majority South Sudanese.

© UNHCR/ISAAC KASAMANI



INTRODUCTION

BY FILIPPO GRANDI, UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visits refugee children from Aleppo, Idlib and Homs at Taalabay school in Bekaa Valley. © UNHCR/ DIEGO IBARRA SANCHEZ

The world's growing refugee crisis is not only about numbers. It is also about time. The fact that there are now 17.2 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate – half of them under the age of 18 – is dismaying. Perhaps less immediately shocking, but hardly less distressing, is the statistic telling us that 11.6 million refugees were living in protracted displacement¹ at the end of 2016; of this number, 4.1 million had been in exile for 20 years or more. For millions of young people, these are the years they should be spending in school, learning not just how to read, write and count but also how to inquire, assess, debate and calculate, how to look after themselves and others, how to stand on their own two feet. Yet these millions are being robbed of that precious time.

The case for education is clear. Education gives refugee children, adolescents and youth a place of safety amid the tumult of displacement. It amounts to an investment in the future, creating and nurturing the scientists, philosophers, architects, poets, teachers, health care workers and public servants who will rebuild and revitalize their countries once peace is established and they are able to return. The education of these young refugees is crucial to the peaceful and sustainable development of the places that have welcomed them, and to the future prosperity of their own countries.

¹ UNHCR defines 'protracted refugee situations' as those where at least 25,000 people have been forcibly displaced for more than five years.



Yet as this report reveals, compared to other children and youth around the world, the gap in opportunity for the 6.4 million school-age refugees under UNHCR's mandate is growing ever wider.

Globally, 91 per cent of children attend primary school. For refugees, that figure is far lower at only 61 per cent – and in low-income countries it is less than 50 per cent. Even so, there is progress to report. The proportion of refugees in primary school in 2016 was up sharply on the previous year (from 50 per cent), thanks largely to measures taken by Syria's neighbours to enrol more refugee children in school and other educational programmes, as well as increased refugee enrolment in European countries that are better able to expand capacity.

As refugee children get older, however, the obstacles only increase: just 23 per cent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school, compared to 84 per cent globally. In low-income countries, which host 28 per cent of the world's refugees, the number in secondary education is disturbingly low, at a mere 9 per cent.

As for tertiary education – the crucible in which tomorrow's leaders are forged – the picture is just as grim. Across the world, enrolment in tertiary education stands at 36 per cent, up 2 percentage points from the previous year. For refugees, despite big improvements in overall numbers thanks to investment in scholarships and other programmes, the percentage remains stuck at 1 per cent.

A year ago, politicians, diplomats, officials and activists from around the world gathered to forge a path for addressing the plight of the world's refugees. The result was the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, signed by 193 countries, which emphasized education as a critical element of the international response. Furthermore, the ambition of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) – one of the 17 global goals aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and promoting prosperity for all – is to deliver “inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning”.

Despite the overwhelming support for the New York Declaration and SDG4, refugees remain in real danger of being left behind in terms of their education. In this report, we at UNHCR urge the international community to match their words with action.

- We declare that **education must be an integral part of the emergency response to a refugee crisis**. It can provide a protective and stable environment for a young person when all around them seems to have descended into chaos. It imparts life-saving skills, promotes resilience and self-reliance, and helps to meet the psychological and social needs of children affected by conflict. Education is not a luxury, it is a basic need.
- At the same time, education is a social service that requires long-term planning and investment. A child's schooling must not be curtailed the instant a new emergency arises elsewhere and the emergency response moves on. **UNHCR calls for sustained, predictable investment and a holistic approach to supporting education systems in refugee hosting countries**. This needs to benefit both refugees and their host communities – most of which are located in low- and middle-income countries that may struggle with inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of capacity.
- In order to square this circle of emergency response and long-term need, **we must ensure that refugee children and youth are included in national education systems**. Refugees, like all young people around the world, deserve an education of value – **to follow a curriculum that is accredited, and to take exams that lead to the next phase of their schooling**. UNHCR has learned from decades in the field that parallel systems are poor substitutes – indeed, they are counter-productive, resulting in unaccredited learning that stops children from progressing. Some countries have embraced this principle of

refugee inclusion despite their limited resources; others have yet to do so, perhaps because they need more support. This is a shared endeavour with shared responsibility.

- Finally, we must not forget those who take the lead in often overcrowded, under-resourced classrooms. Perhaps you had a teacher who really made a difference to your school days, even your life. Perhaps they opened your eyes to something for the first time, or said a word of encouragement at the right moment, or uttered some harsh truths when they were most needed. The teachers featured in this report walk into the toughest classrooms in the world day after day to help refugees build their own futures. **Teachers deserve our wholehearted support – suitable pay, the right materials in sufficient quantities, and expert assistance.**

Read the case studies in this report, and you will be left in no doubt of refugees' desire to learn and thus to determine their own futures. You will also see how the obstacles to an education pile up as a child grows older and tries to retain a place in the classroom. The gap between refugees and their non-refugee peers is vast, and it is growing.

The education of refugees is a shared responsibility. Committing ourselves to its investment and support will reap plentiful rewards. Last year, with the New York Declaration, no fewer than 193 countries made a promise to the world's refugees. Now is the time to live up to those promises.

EDUCATION IS A RIGHT

The words of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights remain as relevant as ever: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

EDUCATION PROTECTS

This is especially important for refugee children who find sanctuary, friendship and routine in a classroom. Classrooms can protect them from forced recruitment into armed groups, child labour, sexual exploitation and child marriage. Education also strengthens communities’ resilience and helps refugees better protect themselves by imparting vital healthcare knowledge and awareness of risk.

EDUCATION EMPOWERS

It gives refugees the knowledge and skills to live productive, fulfilling and independent lives. The economic argument is clear: in Uganda, for every extra year a refugee child spends in school, their income increases by 3 per cent. The longer refugees spend in quality education, the more they will know their rights, be able to stand up for themselves and rely on their own endeavours.

EDUCATION ENLIGHTENS

As with children and youth everywhere, the classroom is a place for refugees to learn about themselves and the world around them. In this report, story after story shows the unquenchable thirst refugees have for learning and the sheer desire of those who have lost everything to go out and rebuild their lives and communities.

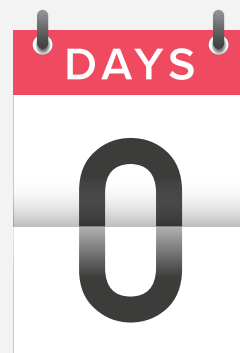
THE GLOBAL PICTURE

There are 6.4 million refugees of school-age amongst the 17.2 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate. In 2016, only 2.9 million were enrolled in primary or secondary education. More than half of them – 3.5 million – did not go to school.

For many refugees, education remains out of reach



School-age children are supposed to get **200 days of school** per year

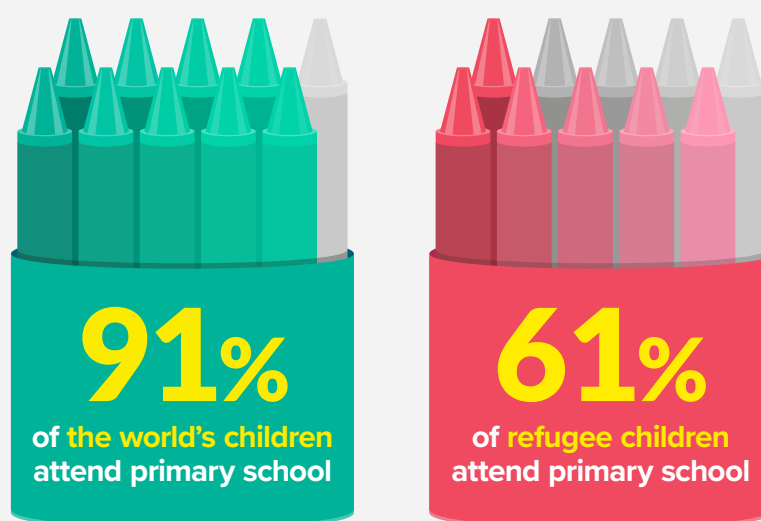


3.5 million school-age refugees* had **0 days of school** in 2016

* Under UNHCR's mandate

Source: UNHCR 2016

Primary enrolment rates



Source: UNESCO (2015), UNHCR (2016)

Among them, some 1.5 million refugee children were not in primary school and 2 million refugee adolescents were not in secondary school. The 2.3 million refugee children enrolled in primary school and the 600,000 refugee adolescents enrolled in secondary education were in need of increased support to help them stay and succeed in school.

Refugees remain five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers. While there has been great progress in enrolling refugees – and many host governments have been working with UNHCR and its partners to ensure their access to accredited education in national systems – the struggle is one of sheer numbers.

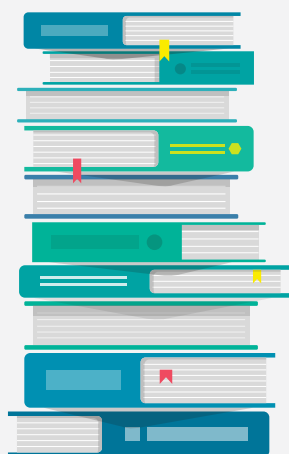
While the global school-age refugee population group was relatively stable at 3.5 million over the first ten years of the 21st century and there was gradual progress on enrolment rates, it has grown by 600,000 children and adolescents annually on average since 2011. At this pace, this means at least 12,000 additional classrooms and 20,000 additional teachers are needed each year.

Global refugee enrolment figures tell only part of the story, of course. The increase in primary enrolment for refugees from 50 per cent in 2015 to 61 per cent in 2016 is in large part a reflection of improvements for Syrian refugee children thanks to increased international efforts and measures taken by host governments. While this is proof that such combined efforts bear fruit, enrolment rates for other groups of refugee children have not been rising at the same levels. Fewer than half of refugee children hosted by low-income countries access primary education, and only 9 per cent of refugee adolescents access secondary education in these countries.

Refugee girls remain particularly disadvantaged. For every ten refugee boys in primary school, there are fewer than eight refugee girls. At secondary school the figure is worse, with fewer than seven refugee girls for every ten refugee boys.

Secondary enrolment rates

84% of the world's adolescents attend secondary school



23% of refugee adolescents attend secondary school



Source: UNESCO (2015), UNHCR (2016)

Higher education enrolment rates



Source: UNESCO (2015), UNHCR (2016)



“I couldn’t read, and my parents couldn’t teach me because they are illiterate too. Now I can teach my parents and all my little sisters and brothers. My parents are so proud of me, I’m so happy that I can read. Now I can finally dream of my future.”

Khadija, 12, Sudanese refugee in Doro refugee camp, Maban, South Sudan.



CHAPTER 1

EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Sala, 6, Nigerian refugee in Niger attends school together with local children. © UNHCR/HELENE CAUX

Away from the chaos, safe spaces for refugee children

For children who were forced to flee their homes, education provides stability and security when everything else in their lives seems to have fallen apart. As signatories to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants declared, “access to quality education, including for host communities, gives fundamental protection to children and youth in displacement contexts, particularly in situations of conflict and crisis.”

For many refugee children, a classroom can be the first peaceful and reliable environment they encounter, providing them with a reassuring routine. While their parents are trying to cope with the reality of displacement – seeking food and shelter, making contact with aid agencies and the relevant government organizations – children can find a place of safety in school, meet their peers and start or resume structured learning.

Equally important are the life-saving skills and information they gain – such as how to avoid danger, how to prevent disease, and where to find help. Furthermore, schools with trained teachers and support staff are able to help address the psychological and social needs of young children and adolescents recovering from the trauma of conflict. As such, education is a core part of UNHCR’s emergency response to a humanitarian crisis.

Education in an emergency situation does not mean “emergency education” – that is, temporary measures that accidentally turn into long-term responses to children’s educational needs. As we show in the following chapter, decades of experience have taught us that it is crucial to work

Making up for lost time

A refugee classroom is like no other. Including refugee children in national education systems demands creative thinking. With the population of school-age refugees growing by an average of 600,000 per year since 2011, many host countries need additional support to meet the educational needs of both locals and new arrivals. Refugee children may have missed out on months or years of education before fleeing their countries – as personal stories illustrate, from the Afghan medical student who was once a farm boy, to the teenagers who are so terrorized by street gangs that they are too scared to make the journey to school.

“A refugee classroom is like no other.”

with local partners and national host governments from day one of refugee emergencies. Ensuring that refugees receive the necessary support also benefits local children, who often live in the deprived and remote regions that host refugees.

Children and adolescents have the right to an education that will ensure they meet their potential; a system with no recognized examinations or certification, with inadequate materials and poor infrastructure, taught by under-trained and under-qualified teachers, will in no way provide this. Consequently, education needs to be woven into planning and funding for refugee emergencies, at national and international levels, and systematically included in national development and education sector planning and budgeting.

To help refugees bridge the gap of many missed years of schooling, more flexible forms of education are essential such as accelerated education, catch-up and bridging programmes. Accelerated education comprises a condensed curriculum so that students can complete it in half the number of years normally required for that level, or even less. Students sit for accredited examinations which allow them to be integrated into mainstream education (in the right class for their age), transfer to the next level or move on to skills-based technical and vocational education. Catch-up and bridging programmes either help students learn content they missed or give them the knowledge and skills (such as the acquisition of a new language) they need to adapt to a different system.

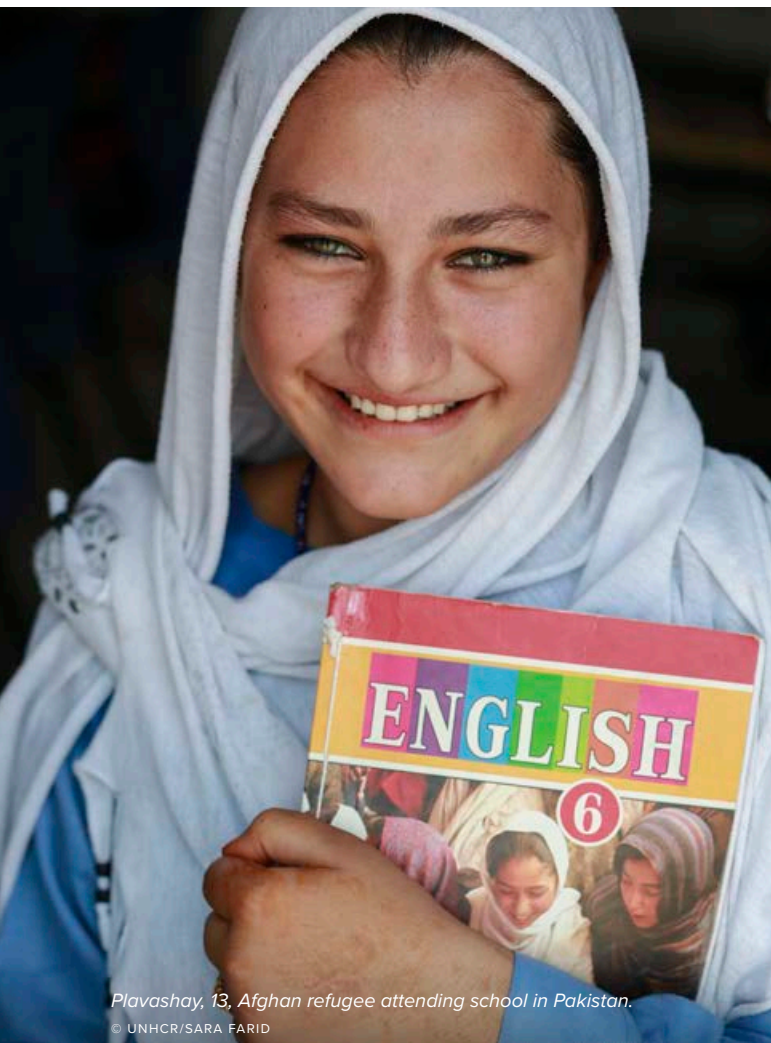
In this report there are numerous examples of successful implementation of education in emergencies: finding ways to make school resources go further, devising bridging programmes to bring children up to speed in line with their levels of previous learning, intensive language classes, or cross-border agreements on recognition of student and teacher certification. They are adaptable strategies that can be used in a variety of emergency situations. And their effect, apart from learning and protection, is to promote the social and emotional well-being of refugee children and youth.

A response to emergencies that needs sustained support

Signatories to the New York Declaration undertook “to provide quality primary and secondary education in safe learning environments for all refugee children, and to do so within a few months of the initial displacement.” These last few words are crucial, recognizing as they do the protective benefits of education, especially in the early phases of an emergency, and a commitment to every child’s right to education.

Education cannot be allowed to fall victim to the ebb and flow of funding when new conflicts blow up and fresh emergencies need addressing. It is deeply unfair to provide schooling for a child for one year only to take it away the next because they are no longer considered “part of an emergency.” The goal of an inclusive education requires a long-term commitment from the international community. It also requires contingency planning and preparedness by host governments, development actors and humanitarian agencies.

Refugee children deserve an education of quality that will last them a lifetime. Education must be an integral part of our response to emergencies, not an afterthought that falls gradually into neglect.



Plavashay, 13, Afghan refugee attending school in Pakistan.
© UNHCR/SARA FARID

“I can see a bright future for myself once I am done with my studies. I will go back to South Sudan and I will help my people, through whichever means, except guns. I don’t know how I will contribute yet but I will. I must.”

*Samuel Mabil Deng, 26,
Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya.*

CASE STUDY

NYAHOK'S QUEST

Nyahok Reath was a star student at her primary school and had her heart set on becoming a pilot. But secondary education remains out of reach - and while that remains the case, her life's ambition is beyond her grasp.

Before she and her family fled their home in Nasser, in South Sudan's Upper Nile State, Nyahok would watch, enthralled, as United Nations aircraft carrying aid supplies flew in and out of the nearby airport. "My dream has always been to be a pilot," she says. "When I was young, I saw a lot of planes flying around Nasser. I saw the pilots when they got out of the planes and their fancy uniforms. I want to see every country."

Hopes flicker of a place at secondary school

Now a resident of Kule refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia, Nyahok, 16, knows that moving through secondary school is the only way of turning her dream into reality. But there is only limited provision for the first year of secondary school in the region; after that, hardly any refugee adolescents have a classroom to go to. The region is one of the least developed and remote states in Ethiopia – and more refugees are arriving all the time.

For Nyahok, hope briefly appeared in the form of her uncle, who lives in Kenya and who offered to pay her secondary school fees. With her parents' full support, she left the camp and set off to Nairobi to pursue her studies. After only six months, however, her uncle ran out of money. "It soon became hard for him and he couldn't pay the school fees anymore," she says, staring at her feet as she sits on her bed, chatting with her father, Reath Kun.

The South Sudan crisis has created the fastest-growing refugee population in the world. Of the more than 2 million people who have fled South Sudan, 62 per cent are under the age of 18. There are now almost 340,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, classified as one of the world's least developed countries and therefore already struggling to educate its own people.

The Ethiopian government has stated its intent to improve educational access at all levels for refugees and for its own people, but the obstacles are significant. Only 9 per cent of secondary school-age refugee children in Ethiopia have a place in a classroom, well below the 23 per cent rate for refugees globally and light years away from the 84 per cent figure for their non-refugee peers.

'I would leave again if I had to'

That means that youngsters such as Nyahok simply run out of opportunities, no matter how much they have committed themselves at primary school. "I did not have the chance to go to school," says her father. "I lived in a remote area in Nasser and there were no schools in the area. Nyahok, I want her to go to school. I am very proud of her, for her achievements in school and for her drive."

Berhanu Geneti, a UNHCR education officer in Gambella, says refugee children and adolescents are "eager to learn and make something of their lives". But funding constraints, he adds, mean a shortage of classrooms, text books and teachers.

Because Nyahok was unable to finish the past school year, she will now start grade 8. But despite her setback, she still has her eyes on the skies. "It would make me very sad if my dream of becoming a pilot could not come true." That, she says, is how she can explore the world and take care of her family at the same time. And she also wants to beat a trail for South Sudanese girls like herself. "I want to be an advocate and a role model for them."

Right now, she says, "all I can think of is my education, finishing school. I would leave again if I had to, to get my education."

CASE STUDY

DIGITAL HISTORY



Qusai, 27, Syrian refugee living in Azraq refugee camp, Jordan. © UNHCR/MOHAMMAD HAWARI

War brought an abrupt end to Qusai's efforts to become a lawyer. He had been in the first year of a law degree at university in Dara'a, the city in southern Syria that was at the centre of the fighting when violence first swept through the country. In 2013, he and his family fled to Jordan, ending up in the remote refugee camp of Azraq. There, Qusai's hopes of continuing his education seemed to evaporate.

Desperate to keep learning, he signed up for every informal class he could find – English, computing, even mobile phone repair. But, unable to afford local university fees or secure a visa to study in a third country, the idea of finishing his degree remained out of reach.

That was when he heard about an initiative called InZone, backed by the University of Geneva and offering a degree-level history course devised by Princeton University. “I hadn’t thought about studying history before but there were prestigious institutions involved and I really wanted to take it,” said Qusai.

Only one in every 100 refugee students makes it to tertiary education

Even as enrolment in tertiary education rises across the world – 36 per cent in 2016, up from 34 per cent a year earlier – for 99 per cent of refugees access to university and other forms of tertiary education is out of reach. The demand is demonstrably there: in 2016, more than 4,300 refugees received DAFI scholarships, the UNHCR higher education programme that is supported by Germany, to undertake tertiary education in 37 host countries, an increase of almost 90 per cent compared to 2015. But for tens of thousands more, fees, distance and the difficulty of completing secondary education conspired to shut them out.

InZone shows how higher education might come to those who could not normally access it. First established in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp in 2010, the initiative arrived in Azraq in September 2016 with the Princeton history course. Now an engineering course delivered by Purdue University is also on offer. Classroom sessions are held in a computer lab funded by UNHCR and run

by the non-governmental organization CARE International.

James Casey, a doctoral candidate in modern Syrian history at Princeton, was one of the online tutors for the Azraq course. He says that unlike normal online or correspondence courses, where retention rates are often low, the InZone approach is to foster regular engagement between tutors and students, whether online, face-to-face or via social media. That is how to keep them “engaged and on track,” he says.

Labs, tablets and real-life teachers

Course tutors and professors try to visit students in the camp at the start and end of term, in the first case to hold selection exams and introduce those chosen to the course, and latterly to oversee an end-of-course workshop and final exams.

Apart from the computer lab, students use mobile devices to study and can access material on USB keys for when the internet is down. Tutor groups are also set up on WhatsApp to enable communication between students and teachers even when connectivity is limited.

As well as credit towards a degree, the course kept Qusai intellectually stimulated and gave him hope. “Studying with top universities and being connected to the outside world of academia makes you feel part of something bigger – not just a number in a refugee camp,” he says.

But it also brought fresh perspectives on the future. “We learned about how the countries of Europe rebuilt after World War Two. And that gave me hope that we can do the same in Syria.”

ON THE GROUND
**GOING TO
SCHOOL IN
A WAR ZONE**



Josef, 10, Ethiopian refugee living in Sana'a, Yemen. © UNHCR/SHABIA MANTOO



Shabia Mantoo, a UNHCR spokesperson in Yemen, describes the determination of refugee children to keep studying despite the destruction around them.

Josef is cheerful, unfailingly polite and looks for all the world like a cherub in a painting by a Renaissance master. When he chats away, he gives no indication of the violence, loss and hardship that has marred his short life.

Born to Ethiopian parents who were forced to flee their homes several years ago, 10-year-old Josef is one of more than 280,000 refugees in Yemen – people who escaped conflict and persecution in one country only to face it again in another. For Yemen is a scene of disease and destruction.

Since the latest round of conflict erupted in 2015, Josef's father has passed away, his school has shut down, and he himself narrowly escaped with his own life when a shell landed close by. It is impossible to know how much pain there must be below that sunny exterior. But he keeps his head high, his shoulders back and his smile on.

Josef is now back at a new school, enrolled through support from a UNHCR and partner-run community centre in the Yemeni capital. Other than the opportunity to keep learning – and a wish that the bombs would stop raining down – he makes no demands on anyone else. “When I hear the explosions I get scared but when I'm in the classroom I feel safe. I just want to finish my schooling so I can become an engineer,” he told me, with his characteristic beam.

For years Yemen has been one of the world's most generous refugee-hosting countries, something for which it has rarely been given credit. As the only country in the Arabian Peninsula that is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has historically been a place of sanctuary for those fleeing violence in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Refugees arriving here have been given access to essential state-run services, including education, but with conflict spreading unabated across the country it means that refugee and local children alike face a multitude of barriers as they seek to continue their schooling.

Basic services and institutions, including the public education system, are buckling because of war. Many refugee households wrestle with poverty and disease, unable to find work and lacking the social networks, protection and safety nets that the locals can fall back on, even in these desperate times. Dozens of people are killed or injured every day, while civilian infrastructure, including schools, have been targeted and

children have been killed on their way to school – or even while they are there. Those who have to journey for miles just to get to the classroom are particularly exposed.

One of the results of all this is that teachers in Yemen have had to learn subjects and strategies way beyond the usual demands placed on members of the profession. Samy al-Yamani, a school resource manager who I met at a school in Sana'a, sees the effects of the violence on her students every day. “Some children are so traumatized by the conflict that during classes they pass out, some scream, some start shouting and some hide under the table,” she says. “I'd say up to 50 per cent of the students at school exhibit symptoms of trauma because of exposure to the conflict.”

On another visit to a school in the Basateen district of Aden, in a residential area host to a large community of refugees and internally displaced persons living side by side with Yemenis, I saw what looked like the shell of a school bus that had taken a direct hit. The houses around were pockmarked with bullet holes. Under the hot summer sun, school students, having finished for the day, passed by, books in their hand, backpacks in tow and smiles on their faces, seemingly unfazed by their apocalyptic surroundings. The image of the bus is one I find hard to forget.

Yet these young refugees, and those who work at their schools and other education centres, hold on – still wanting to teach, still wanting to learn. They hold on to dreams of becoming doctors and engineers (Josef's profession of choice) – the sorts of jobs that any war-torn country will need if it is to rebuild when the fighting stops. Education is their lifeline to the future.



CHAPTER 2

INVESTING IN INCLUSION

Mahmoud, 9, Syrian refugee in Sweden (left) was resettled from Egypt after a traumatic attempt to reach Europe by boat. © UNHCR/JOHAN BÄVMAN

The day a refugee child starts school in their host country marks a turning point – a move away from the chaos of fleeing home and towards the normality of life as they used to know it. Yet the reality for too many refugees is exclusion from the sanctuary and opportunities that school affords. In 2016, there were 6.4 million school-aged refugee children under UNHCR’s mandate, all of whom required approximately 200 days a year of school. Some 3.5 million didn’t get a single day.

“There is no short-term fix for the education of refugees.”

There is no short-term fix for the education of refugees. For millions, their exile has lasted decades. In 2016, only 552,200 refugees returned to their countries of origin, and only 189,300 were resettled. Education for refugees condemned to years of forced displacement is arguably the best means available to change the fortunes of the people of these conflict-stricken countries. Experience has shown that the most sustainable path to this end is to ensure that refugees are systematically included in national development planning, as well as education sector plans, budgets and monitoring systems.

Ensuring inclusive education for refugees is already a clear responsibility for UN member states under international treaties – commitments that were renewed under Sustainable Development Goal 4 and its promise to “ensure inclusive, equitable quality education for all”, as well as in the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. But governments and the international community must also grasp another crucial point. Humanitarian organizations have to prioritize new emergencies as they arise; education for refugees, on the other hand, is a social service that requires long-term planning, technical support and funding.

Developing countries bear the brunt of the global refugee crisis: more than 84 per cent of the world’s refugees are hosted in developing regions, and 28 per cent are in the least developed countries – that is 4.9 million people. As a result, refugees often find themselves in places where resources are already stretched. Even where the national policy is to include refugees in education systems, funding and support from the international community is falling short.

When refugees and the children of the host community learn side by side, investment in a shared system will create long-lasting improvements for the community and ease tensions over the extra strain on local resources. Building new schools and training more teachers improves the quality of a country’s education system for future generations of students – be they refugees or citizens of the host country. By contrast, admissions policies that discriminate against refugees – either because of their refugee status, or because of their gender, or because of disability – are unacceptable, not to mention counter-productive. Neither should it be forgotten that education is a lifelong endeavour. Ensuring that adults have access to education of all levels – whether it is their first time in the classroom or whether they seek to learn new skills – is another way of enhancing their independence, self-sufficiency and dignity.

These ambitions entail responsibilities and costs, and the international community must share them. Working together, UNHCR, governments and partner organizations have already made considerable progress towards inclusion. In Chad, for instance, refugee children have access to the national education system and the government is committed to educating refugees and local children together. In 2016, the education ministry received \$6.95 million in emergency support from the Global Partnership for Education, a multi-agency advocacy and funding platform, in response to the Nigerian refugee situation around Lake Chad. The money was spent on training more than 800 teachers, which in turn benefited more than 8,500 children.



Lebanese and Syrian children attend FAID, a school for the deaf in Baabda, Mount Lebanon. © UNHCR/HAIDAR DARWISH

Other examples abound. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR has worked with the education ministry to ensure local schools are supported so that they can include refugees from Burundi, as well as other displaced children. In Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, governments have in different ways promoted the inclusion of refugee students in their national education system. Bridging programmes, including intensive language learning so that refugee children understand the language of the classroom in their host countries, have proven highly effective as vehicles of inclusion.

In Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, 95 per cent of the Somali refugees who arrived in 2011 had never had access to education before. Thanks to investment from private donors and development organizations, secondary education services for both refugees and host community children have improved.

Education for refugees needs to take place within accountable systems that provide certification to ensure valuable learning. A recognized exam certificate can make the difference between

access to further education or seeing the door closed. Extra efforts need to be made, therefore, to overcome the challenges refugees face to stay in school – challenges that are particularly acute as refugees reach adolescence and face pressures to start working, get married and devote themselves to domestic duties. Enrolment levels for refugees drop starkly as they transition from primary to secondary education, often because secondary schools simply do not exist, are too costly or are too difficult or dangerous to reach. It is unsurprising, therefore, that a mere one per cent of refugee youths make it to tertiary education.

An effective response to the challenges of educating refugees cannot be based on unpredictable annual funding and short-term planning. Funding needs to be substantial and long-term to enable governments around the world to build more schools and train more teachers, thus making a lasting contribution to the development of the host country. Treating education for refugees as an investment in sustainable development means everyone can win.

“They want to know about us and we want to know about them. There’s so much to tell and explain. Sometimes I translate for the others into Arabic or German.”

Kamala, 10, Syrian refugee in Golzow, Germany.



CASE STUDY

EQUAL TREATMENT



Maryam Rahimi, Afghan refugee in Iran who is in her last year of schooling, hoping to enter university in 2018.*

ORIGINAL PHOTO © UNHCR/REZA SAYAH, ILLUSTRATION © UNHCR/BEATRIZ HEREDIA

Maryam Rahimi's* parents were children when they fled Afghanistan just after the Soviet Union invaded in 1979. They found refuge in Iran, where they met as adults, got married and had two daughters. Neither of them had finished school.

“My parents were illiterate. My father worked as a labourer,” Maryam says. “It was important for both of them to see me get an education.”

Today Maryam is 17 and one of the top students in her class. She has her sights set on university.

‘Study so that you can control your destiny’

With its progressive refugee policies and efforts to foster tolerance and social inclusion, Iran has enabled Afghan refugees like Maryam to learn side by side with Iranian students at every level of school. Its commitment to giving refugees access to state education is longstanding.

Because Iran has recognized the importance of school to potentially vulnerable refugee children, today there are more than 420,000 foreign students studying in Iranian schools. This is an achievement in a world where less than a quarter of refugees of secondary-school age receive an education, compared to a global level of 84 per cent.

“The government here is doing a great service. I’m very thankful,” Maryam says.

She was not always top of her class. There was a time when she found it hard to concentrate and her grades were poor. But her parents kept encouraging her, and a kindly teacher told her to focus on her strengths.

“My father would always say, ‘Study so you can control your destiny and stand on your own two feet. Don’t become a labourer like me.’”

Perseverance reaps its rewards

By her teenage years, this encouragement was paying off. Her grades began to improve – and her teachers noticed. She remembers how her vice-principal helped secure her a place when she wanted to enrol in a social science class but there seemed to be no more room.

“That was another moment when my motivation to study increased,” she says.

She also built strong relationships in school with her Iranian peers. “I didn’t get along with everyone, but there were five of us who liked one another a lot,” Maryam says. “We always studied together. We did everything together.”

Her classmates were a crucial source of love and support when she grieved over the loss of her father two years ago. “I no longer consider them my best friends. They are now my sisters. That’s how much we care about one another,” she said. “With us, where we come from doesn’t matter. It’s how we treat one another that’s important.”

Today Maryam and her classmates are busy studying for next year’s university entrance exams. Although refugees wishing to undertake tertiary level education do have to pay foreign student fees, Maryam is determined to find a way to study law.

“From fifth grade, I kept telling everyone: human rights, human rights,” she says. “My goal is to be a lawyer so I can help people understand their rights....[I want to] get accepted to a good university so I can work and support my mother.”

In confident tones, she adds: “I see a good future for myself.”

*Name has been changed for protection reasons.

CASE STUDY

NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN



Sudanese refugee, Hosna Idris, 37, sits in English class with her daughter Khadija, 15, in Goz Beida, Chad. © UNHCR/OUALID KHELIFI

The life of Hosna Idris Abdallah, 37, has been marred by violence, hunger and poverty. But she has never given up on herself or her children, and has never lost her desire to keep learning.

At home in the Darfur region of Sudan, Hosna's family were farmers and herders. Like every other young woman she knew, she got married and started a family. Then war broke out and gunmen raided her village. They killed five men from her family, including her husband.

That same day, Hosna gathered her children and her belongings and left home. After arriving in Chad in 2003, she remarried and had two more children. But years later her second husband divorced her and she was left to raise them on her own.

Taking the kids to school – and joining them

The family now lives in a refugee camp near the Chadian town of Goz Beida. Initially they struggled to find food, clothing and shelter but as aid arrived and their lives stabilized, Hosna began to look to the future. “I realized it was important for my children to get an education,” she says. “They have no father. The only thing they have for their future is education.”

And the thought struck her that she wanted to be a part of it. “Back home in Darfur no one ever thought about taking me to school. I decided to go because I had never had the opportunity.”

Fitting in an education as well as providing for her children has been tough. Hosna gets her children up early and all of them go to look for firewood, which they can sell for food.

“I have to take them to school after work,” says Hosna. “I have only a few hours to make sure I make enough money to feed all of them.” She also looks for odd jobs in the market but says that as a single mother she often gets paid less than she should.

Ignoring the naysayers and persevering

Life in the classroom has also been tough. Hosna is by far the oldest – indeed, she started in kindergarten along with her youngest children. “The first time I went to school, even my own children were laughing at me.” It took several attempts to pass her first exams and a long time to get to the end of primary school. But she made it into secondary school, which she now attends with her daughter, Khadija, 15. They are in the same classes and help each other with their homework.



Sudanese refugee, Hosna Idris, studies with her sons, Awad and Salah. © UNHCR/OUALID KHELIFI

“People find it strange that I go to school with my children. Some say, ‘your life is already hard enough without doing this to yourself – better to give up and stay at home and look after your children.’ But I will never give up.”

CASE STUDY

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Two years ago, Lydiella Hakizimana knew no more than a few words of English. Now it is her favourite subject. As the bell rings out to herald the start of the day at Paysannat L School, just outside Mahama refugee camp, she is at her desk, ready to begin.



Lydiella Hakizimana, 13, Burundian refugee attending class at Mahama refugee camp, Rwanda. © UNHCR/ANTHONY KARUMBA

In 2015, as civil unrest in Burundi arose over disputed elections, Lydiella, her mother and her three sisters joined the stream of refugees into neighbouring Rwanda. Today there are more than 50,000 refugees in Mahama, a camp close to the Burundian border.

Keen to regain some semblance of stability in her life, Lydiella, aged 13, looked forward to resuming her education. But there was a problem: in Rwanda classes are taught in English, not French as in Burundi.

UNHCR and the Rwandan government devised a solution. Together, they set up a system that enables refugee children to plug into Rwanda's national curriculum: a comprehensive, six-month bridging course, locally known as the orientation project, that includes English lessons. It is one of many such initiatives UNHCR supports around the world to boost refugees' education and help them move into a formal learning environment.

Refugees who largely missed out on an education at home go through the entire course. Others are enrolled in state schools at a suitable level as soon as they are ready. At the 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, Rwanda pledged to help include Burundian refugees in the national education system. It is striving to live up to that promise.

New horizons, and new friends

The bridging course introduced Lydiella to more than another language. It educates students in other subjects, too. "It was the first time I had heard about the sciences and social studies," she says. "Orientation is a way of getting used to what other students study here, especially if you are a newcomer."

"We realized we needed to integrate refugee students into the national system as they faced serious barriers to coping and adapting," says Charles Munyaneza, UNHCR's associate education officer based in Kigali.

The bridging project started at Mahama with 2,500 students in June 2015. Since then, more than 19,000 children have passed through it. "It is a really crucial step towards including refugees in the national education system," says Munyaneza.

Paysannat L is one of several schools in the area with the Paysannat name – with a total student population of almost 20,000 – but it is the only one where refugees and local students learn side by side. Jean-Claude Muhyemama, the deputy head, says that having a common language has played a big role in integrating the two communities and fostering good relations. "This project has really helped the Burundian students get to the same level as Rwandan students," he says. "At the beginning they knew very little or no English but now they can express themselves well."

Having adapted to the Rwandan curriculum and reached the last year of primary school, Lydiella enjoys her studies hugely. She hopes one day to spread her love of English to her fellow Burundians. "If one day I return to Burundi, I will teach others English because it is important," she says. "It is spoken around the whole world and so I think if people learn it, it will help them in their life."

Jean Harindwa, Lydiella's English teacher, has been working at the school since it opened its doors in 2015. Himself a Burundian, he says teaching English has helped him with his own mastery of the language. "It was a good thing to start this project," he says.

"Most of these students fled their country and they didn't think they would ever learn again."

ON THE GROUND

NEW HORIZONS

*I miss myself, my friends, times of reading novels
or writing poems, birds and tea in the morning.*

*My room, my books, myself,
and everything that was making me smile.*

*Oh, oh, I had so many dreams
that were about to be realized...*



This short poem was sent to me a couple of years ago by a remarkable young man

named Hani al-Moliya. We first met when he was still a teenager living in a Syrian refugee settlement in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. At the time, I asked him what he had taken with him when he fled his home.

Hani looked up at me, smiled and said: "I took my high school diploma. I took it because my life depends on it. Without education, I am nothing."

Hani had already proved his determination to get an education. To get to school in Homs, his home city in Syria, he had to dodge soldiers and snipers. Sometimes his classroom would reverberate to the

sound of bombs and shells landing. Such a desire to keep going to school terrified his mother, who implored him every day to give it a miss. He kept going, saying that his determination to finish school outweighed his fear.

In the end, however, the family had to flee. Hani's aunt, uncle and cousin were murdered in their homes for refusing to leave their house. Their throats had been slit.

In Lebanon, Hani and his family found respite from the war, but they also found gruelling hardship and monotony – no jobs, no education, and dwindling hope. Not that you would ever describe Hani as someone lacking in hope, given the maturity and self-assurance he radiates. Despite an incurable eye condition that means he is legally blind, he has never given up. His response to this affliction was to take photographs, and lots of them; in Lebanon,



Hani al-Moliya, 19, Syrian refugee, pictured outside his shelter in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. © UNHCR/ANDREW MCCONNELL

he would record daily life among his fellow refugees incessantly. The camera lens became his eyes – it is how he sees the world. More than that, though, he turned out to have a real talent for photography.

Before too long, fortune smiled upon the family and they were granted asylum in Regina, Canada, where they have now settled down. Hani is now majoring in computer engineering at Ryerson University in Toronto. He says it was hard getting back to his studies after a break of four years, but he has thrived on being back in a “school community” and making new friends. And he is still writing poetry.

When people ask why the world’s refugee problem is our collective problem, I often think of Hani – a boy so determined to learn that he risked his life to go to school, who reached for his


high-school diploma when he had to leave almost all his other possessions in Homs. As he said in the poem, with his books, his friends and his home life, Hani had so many dreams. To realize those dreams, he doesn’t want charity and handouts – just the chance to live a normal life and to have the educational opportunities that will let him stand on his own two feet.

This is why we need for more universities to offer scholarships to refugees, to help counter the terrible statistic that says only one refugee in 100 has access to a place in tertiary education. This way, we invest in young people as brave, resourceful and determined as Hani al-Moliya. This way, we invest both in the richness of our own societies and in the future prosperity of the countries they once called home.

Melissa Fleming is the Chief Spokesperson at UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

CHAPTER 3

CHAMPION TEACHERS

A smiling man in a grey shirt stands in the foreground, looking towards the camera. Behind him, a group of people, including women and children, are seated in a classroom-like setting. The background shows a corrugated metal structure, likely part of a camp or school building.

“If you teach the mother, she will teach her daughter how not to suffer how she has suffered.”

Mohammed, Somali refugee living in Melkadida camp, Ethiopia, teaches refugee women how to read and write Somali and English. © UNHCR/DIANA DIAZ

Children all over the world need great teachers, but refugees need them all the more. Behind the students featured in this report are teachers – academic tutors but also mentors, motivators, protectors and champions, often working in exceptionally difficult circumstances with poor facilities, inadequate supplies of educational materials and overcrowded classrooms.

Without the dedication and perseverance of those teachers, there would be no schools to go to. Investment in a teacher of refugees is therefore an investment in the futures of hundreds, if not thousands, of children.

Teachers must be properly supported and motivated

Teachers involved in the education of refugees need adequate and regular pay. But other measures to help them feel like respected professionals – participation in decision making, improvements in working conditions and support for substantial professional development and certification – also contribute to the motivation, quality and attitude of teachers with some of the world’s most challenging jobs. Without this, the chronic teacher shortages that hamper the education of refugees and their host communities will persist.

The case study in this report of Yangani Primary School, in the Bidibidi refugee settlement in northern Uganda, reveals a student-to-teacher ratio of 130:1 – a situation that would be deemed unacceptable, if not downright impossible, in most countries. The sort of ratio inevitably leads to dozens of children sharing desks, textbooks and other materials. Investment in building new schools and expanding the capacity of existing ones is sorely needed, as is the provision of adequate supplies of learning materials and equipment.

In the world’s toughest classrooms, the teachers must be qualified.

Like all other children, refugees deserve qualified teachers who are knowledgeable in how they teach and what they teach. These teachers, if they are to develop and progress in their profession, require access to continual training opportunities to help them develop, add new skills and find solutions to problems they encounter in the classroom.

Some organizations have shown great flair and imagination when it comes to the provision of ongoing training and support. As we see in the case study in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, a training and mentoring programme is giving the teachers there support and engagement from both international and local coaches to overcome the many challenges they face. The more such efforts are replicated, the more refugee children will have well qualified teachers standing before them.

Digital innovation can enhance classroom learning but cannot replace it.

UNHCR strives to offer refugees connected learning programmes with accredited courses through partnerships with academic institutions, using a mix of onsite and online interactions with instructors, tutors and their peers. Connected learning engages students in ways that allow them to link different dimensions of their learning environments: personal interests, peer relationships and opportunities. Connected learning has been particularly successful in remote places where resources are low, and is invaluable where it is hard for refugees to physically attend university.

Yet teachers remain central to the success of such programmes. Massive open online courses are sometimes perceived as an acceptable substitute for refugees, yet they have extremely high dropout rates. Unlike connected learning programmes, they lack personal and onsite support. Learners find the material short on relevance or are put off by the impersonal nature of sitting in front of a computer and watching a video lecture. Only 1 per cent of refugee youth are in tertiary education; this statistic will not be improved by asking refugees to learn exclusively online.

Teachers and students need access to quality materials.

Children learn best with a variety of tools and experiences which are appropriate to their age and are culturally, linguistically and socially relevant. However, all too often, refugee teachers and the children in their classrooms do not have access to adequate materials. To get some idea of the scale of the problem, in Ethiopia, 15 refugee learners have to share the same book.

What do teachers say?

Unsurprisingly, the response of teachers depends on the circumstances they face and the level of support they receive. Some speak of being “overwhelmed”, of using “shortcuts” to get through lessons; others say that students can spot teachers who are supported and motivated, and that makes them “more determined to succeed”. In Yemen, where children and adolescents from both refugee and host communities are going to school in the middle of a war, teachers speak of having to counsel highly traumatized children who have witnessed appalling violence and who may have lost close relatives, including one or both parents. Yet they keep turning up to work despite the omnipresent danger, delayed or unpaid salaries and the bomb-damaged classrooms.

Leaving teachers without support networks and opportunities to develop would be unthinkable in any well-developed educational system; there is no justification to do so with those entrusted with the futures of refugee children.



“These children shall be empowered in such a way that they can stand on their own. This school is a place where every child matters, no matter what religion, background or culture.

Our aim is make positive changes in their lives.
Every person here needs a lifeline, a fresh chance in life.”

Zannah Bukar Mustapha, founder of the Future Prowess Islamic Foundation. The Future Prowess School supports children whose lives have been ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. It has also accepted the children and orphans of Boko Haram fighters with the aspiration of promoting peaceful coexistence.

CASE STUDY

CLASS ACTS



Yel Luka, 32, South Sudanese refugee teacher at Mogadicio primary school, Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. © UNHCR/ANTHONY KARUMBA

With more than 3,400 students, Unity Primary School would be a big job for any head teacher. When Yel Luka arrived a few weeks ago, however, he was equal to the role.

“Things have really changed here since Mr Luka joined us,” says Dario, a maths teacher. “The students come to school on time and they pay more attention during assembly and in class.”

Unity is one of the largest schools in Kakuma refugee camp, in northern Kenya, and the scale of the task facing its teachers is difficult to comprehend. Classes of 90 or 100 are common; classes of 200 are not unusual. In such circumstances, engaging and inspiring the students is a daunting challenge. Staying motivated as a teacher can be just as hard.

In Kakuma, help has arrived from long distance. More than 70 per cent of the teachers there have participated in a project called Teachers for Teachers, a training, coaching and mentoring system devised by Columbia University in the United States.

Innovative support from teachers across the globe

Training begins face to face. Groups of 25-30 teachers – many of whom have little or no experience – learn techniques and methods appropriate to challenging environments such as those in Kakuma’s classrooms from international and local instructors. After that, the programme continues with more coaching, plus support from “global mentors” – volunteers from around the world with teaching experience – who provide regular, real-time support via mobile apps such as WhatsApp.

Participants follow two “tracks” concurrently, a shorter programme and an extended, more in-depth course. Both contain modules on the role of the teacher, child protection and inclusion, pedagogy, and curriculum and planning. Those who complete these programmes can choose to become coaches themselves.

For Luka, this was the most interesting part of the whole system. As a peer coach, he has become a

reliable source of support for 50 of his colleagues across the refugee camp. “Coaching has really helped me become a better leader,” he says.

Across the road from Unity is Mogadishu primary – another school given a shot in the arm by Teachers for Teachers. Like Luka, Salome Perpetua, 32, a science teacher, is also a peer coach and mentors 40 colleagues in five schools. “This training has really changed my life,” she says. “It has empowered me to share my skills with my colleagues because not all of them were able to be trained.”

She especially enjoys the mobile mentoring sessions. “I can discuss challenges online with the mentors and get a solution very quickly.”

Improved motivation spreads to the students

Mary Mendenhall, an assistant professor of practice at Teachers College, the graduate education school within Columbia that devised the programme, started it up with funding from Open IDEO, an innovation platform. UNHCR supported her and her team to pilot the project in Kakuma in 2015. Since then, 130 teachers have gone through the programme.

“These teachers are really on the front line every day and they can speak to the issues and help one another think through how they can overcome some of the challenges,” says Mendenhall.

Luka has been inspired to enrol for a degree in education. “The training has changed how things work around here,” he says.

“Our students are more determined to succeed because they can see that their teachers are so motivated to support them achieve their goals.”

CASE STUDY

MEDICAL MIRACLE

Mojtaba Tavakoli, 22, former Afghan refugee, at the Medical University of Vienna where he is embarking on his PhD. © UNHCR/GORDON WELTERS

Ten years ago, Mojtaba Tavakoli was a 13-year-old Afghan refugee who had barely survived the journey overland to Turkey and then across the sea. Eventually he wound up in Austria, alone, penniless and frightened. His brother had not survived the voyage.

This year, Mojtaba graduated from the Medical University of Vienna with a BSc in molecular biology and is about to embark on a PhD on neurodegenerative disorders. “We must dream big,” he told his fellow Afghan students at a graduation ceremony in Vienna – and Mojtaba has certainly lived up to his own maxim.

Tragedy strikes on the journey to a new life

As a boy, he spent much of time helping his parents on their farm in rural Ghazni province, in eastern Afghanistan. Mojtaba received a basic education but, as he puts it, “there was no science in my childhood.”

The farm was surrounded by members of the Taliban, and Mojtaba’s family were at particular risk as they came from the persecuted Hazara ethnic minority. “Sooner or later, we were going to be attacked. Europe was our only hope of safety.”

The family sent him and his brother Morteza, 18, ahead to see if they could find a base to establish new lives in Europe. On the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece, Morteza drowned. Mojtaba was left to continue the journey alone.

After making it to Austria, he was taken in and in effect adopted by an Austrian couple. Marion Weigl, a healthcare specialist, and Bernhard Wimmer, an environmental scientist, welcomed the Afghan teenager into their home and, once he had a place in school, introduced him to the wonders of science.

The extended family unites

After being granted asylum in Austria, Mojtaba was able to bring his Afghan family to join him. At the prize-giving ceremony, Mojtaba had both his Afghan and Austrian parents looking on. His father, Joma Ali, was swollen with pride. “This is a good evening,” he said.

The rest of his family was there, too – three sisters and one brother. The youngest ones are still in school but the oldest girl, Sohela, 21, was present to receive a school prize before she heads to university to study physics.

A slight, bespectacled figure, Mojtaba pulled no punches in his speech when it came to the difficulties for refugees trying to integrate themselves into Austrian society. He called on fellow Afghans to take an interest in politics and get involved in shaping the future of their new homeland. Not content with the remarkable transformation of his own fortunes, he helped to found the Association of Afghan Pupils and Students in Austria, whose members he exhorted to press on with their achievements.

“I have a dream,” he told them, speaking in fluent German, “that one day an Austrian government minister will have Afghan roots, and that someone from our community will win a Nobel prize.”

CASE STUDY

HOMESCHOOL CLUB

Schoolchildren are not known for their love of homework. For Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, there are additional reasons not to get it done.

For one thing, there is a language issue: in Lebanon, for instance, the curriculum is taught in French and English, while students in Syria learn in Arabic.

For another, many Syrian refugee families live in overcrowded and often basic conditions. In Lebanon, more than a million Syrian refugees are scattered throughout more than 2,100 urban and rural communities, many living in substandard shelters. For a young person trying to concentrate on their homework, peace and quiet are scarce commodities.

For those lucky enough to encounter volunteers like Noor Ismail, however, it has become less of an ordeal.

Noor Ismail, Lebanese student supporting Syrian refugee children with homework in Saida, Lebanon. © UNHCR/DIEGO IBARRA SÁNCHEZ

UNHCR and partners support community response

Homework support groups were introduced by UNHCR and several of its partner organizations as a community solution to help refugee students keep up in school and encouraging them to attend regularly. At present there are 325 active homework support groups in Lebanon – in tents, shelters, community centres, living rooms and even outdoors.

Along with the UN Refugee Agency, Save the Children, Caritas, Terre des Hommes and the International Rescue Committee are all involved in running activities in venues that children can access. The unpaid volunteers, most of whom have backgrounds in education, are predominantly from the refugee community, but locals such as Noor have got involved, too.

A 22-year-old Lebanese university student majoring in political science, Noor heard about the homework support sessions for refugees from a friend who was already volunteering. She first started helping out at a support group run by Caritas in the town of Saida, in southern Lebanon, in October 2016. “I’ve been a facilitator ever since,” she says.

Twice a week, she works with groups of children aged between 10 and 15, not just to help them with homework but to talk through any problems they may be having in class.

She loves her responsibilities and feels strongly about her new charges, aware of the pressures refugee children are under to support their families financially – particularly girls. “I consider them as my siblings and want them to thrive.”



© UNHCR/DIEGO IBARRA SÁNCHEZ

Extra sessions enable students to move ahead in school

More than 2,500 children were involved in homework support programmes in Lebanon in the 2016-17 academic year. About three-quarters of the groups kept going throughout the summer even after school was over – the volunteers and students went over what was covered in lessons to make sure the children were ready to move on to the next grade.

One of Noor’s students is Maria, aged 10, who found the transition from the Syrian education system to her local Lebanese school difficult because of the language barrier. “When I was in Syria our curriculum was all in Arabic, but here it is mostly in English. When I came here, I didn’t know a word of English but Noor taught me everything. I love these sessions.”

For Noor, though, the sessions are about more than school work. “I give them moral support. I talk to them about their future and the importance of education,” she says. “Education is their only weapon”.



ON THE GROUND

BURSTING AT THE SEAMS



Catherine Wachiaya, a UNHCR writer in Kenya, visits a school in northern Uganda where 38 dedicated teachers take on the Herculean task of overseeing the education of 5,000 eager students.

At the crack of dawn, Patrick Abale walks out of his tent, nestled amongst several others on the edge of Yangani Primary School, in the Bidibidi refugee settlement in northern Uganda. He strides across the vast compound towards the administration block, drops off his books in the office he shares with the school principal, and turns to look at the first trickle of arriving students.

“When I joined here there were more than 6,000 pupils in this school,” he says, as the sound of feet stamping and shuffling their way to school gradually fills the chilly morning air. I look on as the trickle turns into a torrent – by now students are

pouring into the partially fenced compound from all directions. Today, a few months after the school opened, there are still around 5,000 – which, as Patrick notes drily, is “a very big number.”

Patrick, himself a Ugandan, is a deputy principal in charge of academic studies and administration at Yangani. This is a Ugandan state school, and although the children are mostly refugees there are some locals here, too. Despite the massive student numbers, the school has a staff of only 38. Patrick’s ten years of teaching have seen him work in some difficult environments, but Yangani is on a different scale.



Refugee children who escaped the conflict in South Sudan attend Yangani Progressive Primary School in Yumbe District, northern Uganda

© UNHCR/ISAAC KASAMANI

Spread across roughly two acres, the school is a panorama of tattered plastic tents, many with big holes in the sides, flapping in the wind. A gently sloping valley separates the administration area and upper primary classes on the one side from the lower primary classes on the other. Inside the classrooms the temperature soon rises and children on the dusty floors squirm in discomfort.

“Things are really tough here because there just isn’t enough space for all the students,” he says, gesturing into one of the classrooms. We look in on a crowded scene: children occupy every available space, with as many as five sharing a desk. Some sit on the floor, with others standing at the back and in the aisles, clutching their books to their chests. “Sometimes because of the congestion, they stand next to the teacher at the front of the class.”

Yangani school opened in February this year to cater to the rapidly growing numbers of South Sudanese refugees. Uganda has been among the most generous countries in the world in its response to this influx, welcoming refugees, giving them plots of land and opening up public services, including education.

Now host to over a million people who have fled South Sudan – 60 per cent of them children – Uganda is struggling to keep up.

According to the Ministry of Education, the standard teacher-to-student ratio should be 1 to 45. There should be three children to a desk, and 14 to every lavatory. Yangani breaches these rules, and then some. As an administrator, Patrick tries to see to it that learning materials are shared equally across the classes. “We now have 279 textbooks for all students, so you can imagine

how tough it is to share,” he says. I try out some mental arithmetic of my own. That’s one textbook to every 18 children.

UNHCR, the Ugandan education ministry and various partner organizations are looking for ways to increase capacity, setting up more schools and working with national and local officials to identify existing ones that can expand. In this way, they hope to get more refugee children into the national education system at the same time as raising standards for both refugees and local communities. But Uganda cannot do this on its own. “The government is already doing its level best so we are calling for more donor support to fill the gaps,” says Julius Okello, a UNHCR field officer in Bidibidi.

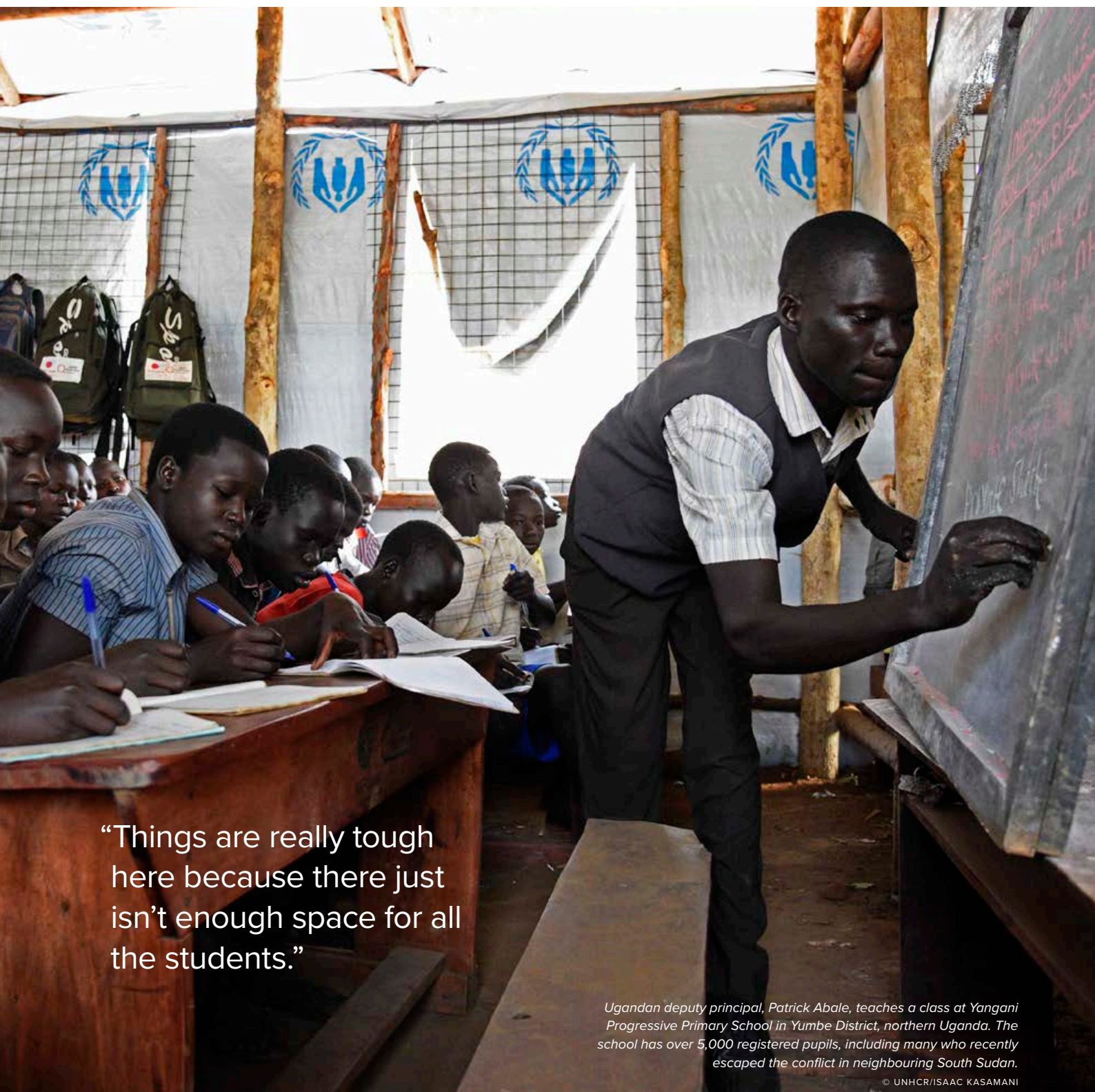
I am introduced to Bashir, a 17-year-old who fled his home in South Sudan last November. Now he lives in Bidibidi as an unaccompanied minor – his parents stayed behind but he has no idea what has happened to them. He had to wait for months before Yangani opened and he could enrol, as there were no other schools nearby. Bashir is in his last year of primary school. He tells me he is doing his best to keep studying diligently but admits it can be hard. “We don’t have enough books. If you get a little money, you can buy some, but most students can’t afford them,” he says. “Some of us who don’t have parents here struggle.”

Seeing the full-to-the-brim classrooms at first hand, you are left in little doubt that there is plenty of demand for education. Most refugees are settled in areas a long way from existing state-run schools. Setting up new ones not only gets refugee children into the national education system, it also raises capacity and standards for local communities. “Schools like Yangani are filling a crucial gap,” Okello says.

But he adds that it is hard for the children to learn under these constrained circumstances. “There are no boundaries to separate the classes. Two different classes take place next to each other, so whatever is being taught in one class is heard in the next one.”

Patrick surveys the massed ranks of children before heading off to teach another class. “Imagine only 38 teachers for all these students,” he remarks as he sets off. “You can get overwhelmed.”





“Things are really tough here because there just isn’t enough space for all the students.”

Ugandan deputy principal, Patrick Abale, teaches a class at Yangani Progressive Primary School in Yumbe District, northern Uganda. The school has over 5,000 registered pupils, including many who recently escaped the conflict in neighbouring South Sudan.

© UNHCR/ISAAC KASAMANI

WE MUST CLOSE THE GAP

by **Alek Wek,**
UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador

I was 14 when I became a refugee. As civil war tore through my village, I lost friends and neighbours. I could no longer go to school. Eventually, I couldn't even leave the house. And when the danger became too great my family and I had to flee, leaving our home, almost all our possessions and our entire way of life.

Never again would I roam the village with my schoolmates after lessons, snacking on mangoes, wandering out to check on my mother's cows or running up the big hill nearby to gaze at the airplanes passing overhead. Never again would my mother's main worry in life be whether or not I would be back in time for supper. Never again would my family, all 11 of us, be together under one roof. That period of my life is scarred by deep, life-changing loss.

In the face of this upheaval, I held fast to something my father had told me. "You can lose almost everything," he said, "but you can never lose your education." If, as a refugee, education was the one thing that could not be taken away from me, then I was going to immerse myself in learning. And that is exactly what I did.

The moment came when my mother saw the chance to send me and one of my sisters to London. I had mixed feelings about this – I was devastated to be separated from her, but I was relieved to finally reach safety. I had endured a great deal, I was still having nightmares and sudden noises terrified me, even the sudden slamming of a door.

Education became my refuge. It gave me stability and security when everything else seemed to have collapsed. I had always loved school but now, having missed several years, I saw it through new eyes – something not to be treated lightly, and certainly not to be taken for granted. Now it was not just about learning for the love of learning; now it was essential to finding my own way forward, and with confidence.

I remember well my first day of school in London. I was intimidated and afraid – I looked different from my fellow students, I couldn't speak English and I got called a whole host of names. But I was grateful to be there, even so, and with my father's words driving me on I gave it everything I had.

Education was empowering. My confidence and self-esteem rose and at long last I could see a small light at the end of what had been a long and very dark tunnel. Education gave me not just the skills I needed to navigate what ended up being a very demanding career in fashion, but it also gave me hope and optimism. It gave me the space to explore how to be the best person I could be.

Every child deserves such an opportunity to be empowered – indeed, it is every child's right. For millions of refugee children and adolescents, however, it does not exist. Overall, less than half of school-age refugee children attend school; those hoping for a secondary or tertiary education see their chances shrink with each passing year. The older a refugee gets, the more likely it is that access to the classroom will be denied.

There is a clear gap in opportunity for refugee and non-refugee children, and we must do everything in our power to close it. This means investing in classrooms and teachers for refugees. It means giving them access to appropriate material. It also means supporting girls so that they have the same opportunities as boys. For the world has much to lose if it allows whole generations of refugees to grow up uneducated and alienated.

As a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, I have met many young refugees who yearned to get an education, just as I did. I have met children who walk three hours just to get to school. I know what learning means to them because I know what it meant to me.

It is the same yearning you can see in Nyahok – a South Sudanese girl, like me, whose story you will find in the pages of this report. She has the drive and desire that in any country with an adequate education system would see her achieving her ambition of being a pilot. Yet with no secondary school to go to, she faces a barrier that for the time being she cannot cross.

This report has many more such stories. Hosna, a mother who sees its power to help her children find a better future; Mojtaba, who lost his brother on the journey to Europe but is now set for a brilliant career; Maryam, who wants to dedicate herself to the fight for human rights.

Today, my father's voice, still ringing in my ears, inspires me to advocate for access to education on behalf of all those who are left behind. It is my hope that we unite as a global community and prioritize education, that we see an increase in funding and access to national systems, that we see all refugee children enjoying their right to education and thereby finding dignity, passion and the bright futures they deserve.





Alek Wek, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, during a visit to Juba, South Sudan in 2012.

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MALALA'S MESSAGE



Malala Yousafzai visits a school at Hasansham camp in northern Iraq. © UNHCR/CENGIZ YAR

More children than ever before spend their school years as refugees. Some miss their entire education after their lives have been upended by conflict.

We should not ask a child forced to flee her home to also give up her education and her dreams for the future. And we must recognize that among today's refugee children are tomorrow's leaders, on whom we will all depend for peace.

The key to their future, rebuilding their home countries and greater stability around the world, is education. A full 12 years of school for every refugee child gives countries and regions a better chance for peace, economic growth and improved public health.

In refugee camps around the world, I have met thousands of displaced people — and UNHCR is there with them, providing shelter, safety and schools to children in need. They understand that the best way to aid refugees is to help them stand on their own.

I urge world leaders to give serious consideration to long-term consequences of neglecting education for refugee children. Sustainable peace, prosperity and stability cannot be built without them.

- Malala Yousafzai,
student, activist, Malala Fund founder

CALL TO ACTION

INDIVIDUALS

- What can you do locally? Find out if there are refugees in your community and how you can make them feel welcome
- Invest in refugee education here: donate.unhcr.org/education
- Show that you stand #WithRefugees by signing the petition: WithRefugees.org

HOST COUNTRIES

- Effectively include refugees in national systems and multi-year education sector plans

DONOR GOVERNMENTS

- Commit to multi-year predictable funding levels from the emergency phase onwards so no refugee is excluded from schooling due to lack of funds
- Establish clear links between humanitarian and development funding and programming

John Luis, 13, South Sudanese refugee at Ofonze Primary School in Bidibidi refugee settlement in northern Uganda.

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unhcr.org/left-behind



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