

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Why does UNHCR need strong partnerships with higher education institutions?

To achieve the #15by30 target for refugee higher education, UNHCR relies on the partnership and unwavering support of higher education institutions (HEI) in first countries of asylum as well as in safe third countries. In all countries where refugees seek safety, HEIs are invaluable partners, opening their doors, mitigating barriers to access, and training qualified, skilled refugee graduates who are equipped to tackle 21st century challenges and meaningfully contribute to the communities they live in.

UNHCR has, in many contexts, partnered with HEIs to deliver legal assistance to refugees. Today, those partnerships are expanding with the recognition that HEIs play a central role in ensuring refugee students can fulfil their academic and professional ambitions through higher education. Higher education institutions often work hand in hand with national government and may be involved in systems level planning and decision-making processes relevant to national development planning. These strong relationships can support the institutionalisation of inclusive higher education systems that are responsive to the barriers refugees face in accessing higher education and recognise that refugee students are contributors to the communities, campuses and countries they live in.

As centres of research and knowledge production, transfer, and exchange, HEI are key links to new discoveries and developments while also supplying evidence and analysis for strategic planning. HEI play a significant role in achieving progress across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and continuous strengthening of partnerships with HEI is a strategic step in increasing refugee youth enrolment in higher education and in meeting the #15by30 target.

What Can Individual Institutions Do?

UNHCR country operations can consult with academic partners and university leadership to identify the best ways to build or strengthen partnerships across legal aid, admissions, integration and research. At its simplest, each Institution can take meaningful steps to ensure their campuses are accessible to refugee candidates: advertise and conduct outreach in refugee hosting areas; adopt same-fee structures to ensure that refugee youth are charged the same tuition as national students – not international student fees; put in place systems to process foreign-earned, partial or missing academic qualifications; ensure refugee students have access to campus services they may need such as orientation, academic counselling, language support, and soft skills development.

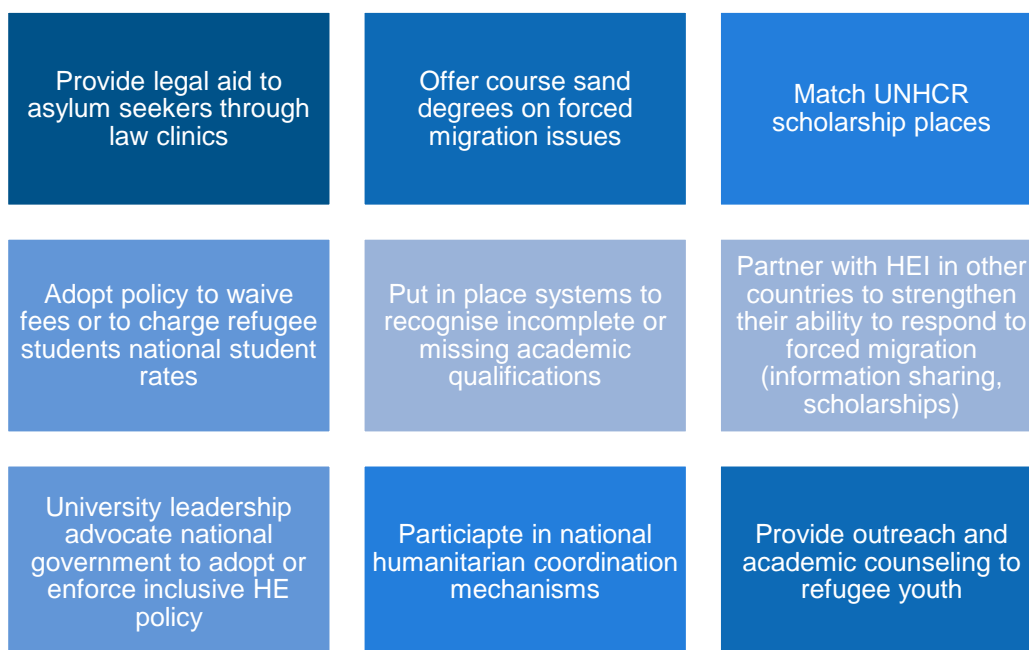
The Power of University Networks

While individual higher education institutions are the backbone of a globally inclusive higher education movement, networks of universities are well-positioned to exponentially expand access to higher education for refugees. By mobilising their members, university networks can create change in multiple countries, across types of Institutions, applicable to a range of humanitarian and displacement contexts.

AUF - The Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) is a network of more than 1,000 universities, colleges, university networks and scientific research centres in 119 countries. Its mission is to promote solidarity between higher education and research establishments which implement projects that concretely transform the university system. Under the auspices of a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), UNHCR and AUF implement a range of actions including: access to online learning at AUF *campus numeriques*; cost-sharing to expand scholarships through the UNHCR DAFI scholarship programme; financial support to HEI supporting students in exile through AUF's AIMEs programme (Reception and Integration of Migrants in Higher Education). AUF's work with refugees is visible in West Africa, Lebanon, Burundi and France with intention to expand in other refugee hosting regions.

OSUN - The Open Society University Network (OSUN) is a global network of over 40 HEI committed to promoting civic engagement on behalf of open societies and expanding access to higher education to disenfranchised and minority populations, including refugees. OSUN's Threatened Scholars Integration Initiative (TSI) offers fellowships in OSUN institutions for scholars who have lost their academic positions or cannot remain in their home countries forced displacement. OSUN partners also provide bridging programmes and scholarships for refugee students in Kenya, Bangladesh, throughout Europe and beyond.

Areas of engagement with HEI



UNHCR country operations or universities and university networks can initiate discussions to identify the best way for local HEI to engage with refugee education and higher education. These are just some of the actions that can be the starting point for a relationship between UNHCR and national HEI.

Regional Approaches to Eliminate Access Barriers

Regional higher education networks or consortia can support inclusive higher education by addressing access barriers or by creating access initiatives. Examples include:

- adopting agreements in accreditation and credits transfer system between a university in the refugees' country of origin and the host country institution
- promoting information sharing between HEI in refugee-hosting countries
- developing region-wide refugee access programmes or scholarships
- conducting research on forced migration issues in higher education
- raising awareness about region-specific barriers or issues in higher education for refugees

Advocacy and policy making

HEI are well placed to lead national-level advocacy to raise awareness about refugee higher education among higher education partners, particularly in fora where UNHCR is not present. This includes sectoral planning contexts such as in local education, development coordination or higher education sector planning groups, labour force and economic development partners meetings and TVET coordination groups.

Research on Forced Migration Issues

There is ample opportunity for HEI to contribute to the forced migration knowledge base by utilising their pool of talented university personnel, PhD students and other research consortia. The UNHCR Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (GAIN), formed as part of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), leads coordination between UNHCR and HEI or individuals committed to developing research and evidence to strengthen and inform humanitarian response. Reliable, accurate, relevant, and timely data is needed to develop and implement education strategies and inclusion policies, inform advocacy, cost refugee inclusion, mobilize resources, report on activities, measure impact, and identify research gaps. HEI are valuable partner in delivering local information and research needs.

Higher Education Institutions as Social Actors

When higher education is inclusive of refugees, all students can benefit from, amongst other things, a richer academic environment, and improved social cohesion. As such, UNHCR can partner with HEI to either collaborate on existing projects or suggest new projects that target the population under the agency's mandate.

Example: *Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Juba, UNHCR and the university plan to establish a Centre of Excellence of Forced Displacement and Peacebuilding as the foundation for collaboration on various projects relevant to the South Sudan context.*

Engagement modalities

The modality of engagement with HEI will depend highly on the relationship between the two parties and the level of commitment. Existing relationships with university law departments or legal aid clinics, for example, can provide a strong starting point for conversations about other areas for collaboration.

Depending on the level of formality desired, UNHCR and a university partner may wish to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which is a type of agreement between two or more parties to express a convergence of will between the parties, indicating an intended common line of action. There are no expectations of financial transaction in an MoU. In most cases, this is the preferred modality as it outlines all the possible engagement levels and is agreed upon at the highest level. To effectively interpret the MoU for implementation, it is advised that an operationalization note accompanies the agreement. Less formal alternatives, which may suit an evolving relationship, are a Letter of Understanding (LoU), a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), or similar. The tertiary team at headquarters and the legal affairs service (LAS) in UNHCR can support the drafting and adoption of such agreements.

There are multiple ways for HEI to participate in UNHCR's work to expand refugee access to higher education. Please contact UNHCR to join any of the below entities:

Global Refugee Tertiary Education Task Team	stulgait@unhcr.org
Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network	gain-secretariat@essex.ac.uk
Global Task Force on Complementary Education Pathways	edpathwaystf@opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org

What can UNHCR Offer Our University Partners?

Ultimately, UNHCR is asking university partners in many refugee hosting contexts to be even more generous and open their doors wider to include refugees, despite already high demand from national students. Recognising the immense generosity of HEI, UNHCR aims to promote and provide visibility to the contributions of HEI. UNHCR is committed to ensuring the participation of national HEI in global policy discussions, with the ultimate aim to ensure that efforts to expand refugee access to higher education also benefits national students and higher education systems. UNHCR is similarly committed to convening events to promote information sharing, twinning, replication of good practices, and recognition of individual or collective efforts.

Student Engagement as role models and advertisers

Students themselves play an important supporting role in ensuring that young people complete secondary school and can transition to and thrive beyond higher education. The talent, energy, and potential of young refugees are vital resources in increasing access to higher education opportunities. In many contexts, non-refugee and refugee students and alumni are creating synergies and supporting each other to develop their communities and to take up roles that are life-changing including pursuing higher education.

DAFI Clubs are comprised of the current and former scholarship recipients in the UNHCR tertiary refugee scholarship programme. Bringing together students of different educational levels to exchange experiences and share knowledge, DAFI clubs aim to create a community of refugee students and alumni who can jointly deliver activities, advocate and share information across their network.

The **Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN)** is a community of over 200 committed refugee students and graduates in more than 23 countries who are dedicated to increasing the number of refugee youth with access to higher education, as well as advocating for more and better opportunities for refugee youth to participate, lead and represent refugee interests and rights. TRSN members conduct liaison and advocacy with local authorities and universities; deliver IT, entrepreneurship, and language training to refugee youth; engage with the private sector; provide academic advising workshops; participate in global forums and conferences; conduct outreach to secondary students, among other activities.

