

**Forum:** Advisory Panel Question on Refugees (APQ)

**Issue:** Improving Access to Education for Refugees

**Chair:** Laura Hwa, President & Dylan Chang, Deputy President

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## Introduction

65 million people around the globe are forced out of their homes, and most of these people come from conflict affected countries. Of these refugees, 21 million crossed national borders in search of safety and the majority live in urban areas. Most international organizations that provide aid for refugees send their resources to refugee camps, leaving urban refugees at a disadvantage.

Most urban refugees have self-settled into their area of residence, but remain marginalized. Many of them are undocumented and wish to remain “invisible” so they avoid harassment, detention, and forced returns. These are all apparent threats to those living in urban areas, since refugees are marginalized. Therefore, it is imperative that the international community recognize the need to address the discrimination, exploitation, and violence urban refugees face on a daily basis.

A key way to lessen the hardships urban refugees face is by helping them receive an education. Education is what allows them to exit the vicious cycle of poverty and enables refugees to live a life that makes fleeing their homes worth it. However in many nations, there is massive overcrowding in government schools, unqualified teachers, and insufficient space. When education opportunities are already subpar for people in the community that urban refugees are residing in, they are relegated to the lowest priority. There are insufficient national policies in place to help refugees and not enough oversight to see that existing policies are implemented.

Member nations should work to increase transparency within their own governments and increase awareness to families of urban refugees about the education opportunities available. Acquiring skills and gaining knowledge are the tools that urban refugees need to build a better future for themselves.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Urban Refugees

Urban refugees are refugees who have settled in urban areas, instead of a refugee camp. Some of the biggest barriers they face are language gaps, a need for documentation, histories of trauma, discrimination, and they need to support their families. Urban refugees live in precarious conditions, where humanitarian aid hardly reaches them.<sup>1</sup> Many cities with an influx of urban refugees resent the difficulties that they have brought to the nation and populist sentiment has risen. With refugees flowing in from countries like in the Middle East, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, many nations have set barriers in place to prevent refugees from being accepted.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, for instance, the refugee admissions ceiling has been halved from 2017 to 2019 by President Trump. In Europe, governments have reduced funding for refugees and have deported many refugees when they arrive at their nation's border. Moreover, in Durban and Johannesburg, Somali refugees have been killed, as local politicians and police forces target them.

### Education

Education is the process of learning, which means that people can be educated even outside of the classroom environment. Education happens as a result of social interactions where one gains a better understanding on how to judge situations they face and take an informed course of action. Curriculums kickstart the learning process because they consist of lesson plans with clear objectives and there is more control in the learning structure. When educating students, striking a balance between informal and formal education is crucial yielding the best result.<sup>3</sup> With education, it is crucial that students remain hopeful that they can improve and what makes students want to set expectations for themselves in the first place.

### Refugee Status

Refugees are defined under international law as “a person who ‘owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling

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<sup>1</sup> “Raising the Voice of the Invisible.” *Urban Refugees*, [www.urban-refugees.org/](http://www.urban-refugees.org/).

<sup>2</sup> Co-founder, Robert Muggah, et al. “The Urban Refugee Crisis Is Also an Opportunity.” *CityLab*, 2 Oct. 2018, [www.citylab.com/perspective/2018/10/global-refugee-crisis-role-of-cities/571876/](http://www.citylab.com/perspective/2018/10/global-refugee-crisis-role-of-cities/571876/).

<sup>3</sup> “What Is Education? A Definition and Discussion.” *Infedorg*, [infed.org/mobi/what-is-education-a-definition-and-discussion/](http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-education-a-definition-and-discussion/).

to avail himself of the protection of that country.”<sup>4</sup> Having refugee status enables one to receive humanitarian aid and other forms of assistance.

## **Xenophobia**

Xenophobia is the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners.<sup>5</sup> Many people may feel fear or hatred towards what they do not understand, and this is largely the case with xenophobia. When migrants flood into a nation, citizens often resent the difficulties and strife that results from dealing with the needs of foreigners. Many want the nation's decision making power to rest with them and dislike that governments are directing resources towards humanitarian aid. As a result, individuals can become driven to act violently and harmfully to migrants because their actions are fueled by their xenophobic sentiment. Moreover, when a big population of a nation is xenophobic, their fear for foreigners affects government policies, which results in governments rescinding aid to migrants.

## **Discrimination**

Prejudiced treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction towards, based on the group, class, or category to which they are perceived to belong.

## **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

Internally displaced person is a person who fled to their home but still remains within the country's borders; however they do not fall within the legal definitions of a refugee so can not be referred as refugees.

## **Asylum Seeker**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated”. In many instances when there is a mass movement of refugees, people fleeing from that source of trouble are declared refugees by default (prima facie) and do not have to be individually interviewed.<sup>6</sup> Being an asylum seeker is a precarious position, as they still face national asylum systems. Many nations have called for more restrictive asylum policies to prevent people who are not in desperation of aid from using

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<sup>4</sup> Members' Research Service. “Refugee Status under International Law.” *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog*, 27 Oct. 2015, ephthinktank.eu/2015/10/27/refugee-status-under-international-law/.

<sup>5</sup> "Xenophobia." Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 05, 2019.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia>.

<sup>6</sup> Members' Research Service. “Refugee Status under International Law.” *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog*, 27 Oct. 2015, ephthinktank.eu/2015/10/27/refugee-status-under-international-law/.

the host country's resources. Instead of making national asylum systems more effective, nations have clamped down on refugee intake, which goes against each nation's obligation to protect refugees.<sup>7</sup>

## Background Information

### Urban Refugees' Lives

Though living in urban areas allows refugees to have less restrictions, unlike life in camps, these people are faced with other challenges that the international community does not pay as much attention to, since the challenges urban refugees face mainly resulted from the effects of greater social problems. Some issues urban refugees must grapple with include being vulnerable to exploitation, competing with the poorest local workers for low paying jobs, overcoming language barriers and discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

### Refugees' Position in Education Current Systems

The UNHCR released a report stating that more than half of the 6 million school-aged children refugees have no school to go to. Due to the hardships refugees experience, they are much more likely to not have education opportunities available, compared to the global average. Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees believes that refugee education is unrighteously neglected, as education transforms the futures of forcibly displaced people.

Often times, the international community does not think much further than the survival of refugees in camps, further explaining why urban refugees face tremendous difficulty. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4, refugee education has been discussed at various forums and summits, which increases the likelihood that organizations in the private-sector, governments, and humanitarian agencies pool resources to promote education.<sup>9</sup> Refugees often end up settling in regions where governments already face difficulties educating their own citizens, so classrooms are often overcrowded and teachers are insufficiently trained. Moreover, language barriers stand in the way of refugees being able to fully understand instructions and make up for their lost years of education due to their circumstances.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/4565a6bb2.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations. "Urban Refugees." *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/urban-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/urban-refugees.html).

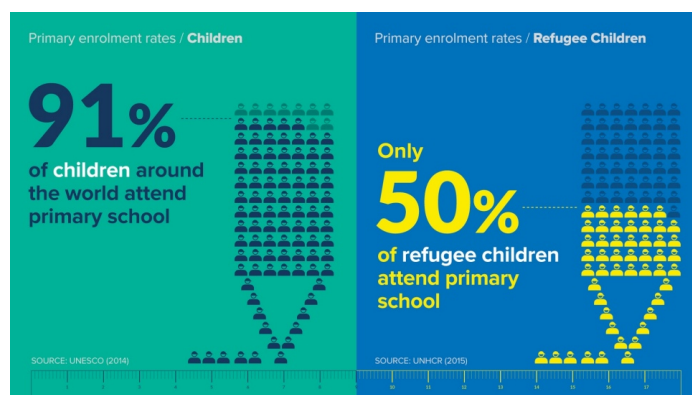
<sup>9</sup> United Nations. "UNHCR Reports Crisis in Refugee Education." *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/9/57d7d6f34/unhcr-reports-crisis-refugee-education.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/9/57d7d6f34/unhcr-reports-crisis-refugee-education.html).

## ***Educating Syrian Refugees***

Jordan and Lebanon accept a substantial number of Syrian refugees, and host governments have implemented a “double shift” system at schools to help Syrian refugee children get the education needed. In February 2016, a conference on supporting people from the Syrian Region was held in London and donors pledged almost \$2 million for this cause. Such planning and publicity, as seen with mitigating the effects of the Syrian crisis, shows member nations that a joint vision and effort results in positive change.

## ***Educating South Sudanese Refugees***

The Kakuma camp in Kenya predominantly hosts refugees displaced due to the civil war in South Sudan and only 3% of the children in this camp is enrolled in school. However, some individuals have caught up on multiple years of education and can make it to higher education. Still, overcrowding and underfunding are problems in these regions, making it so governments have more difficulty prioritizing effective inclusion of refugee children in multi-year, national education systems. Continuous funding and forward planning are crucial components in improving access to education.<sup>10</sup>



***Caption #1: UNHCR reports crisis in refugee education***

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **UNHCR**

The UNHCR currently operates in an environment characterized by a decreasing number of refugees, more internal displacement, more complex and irregular mixed migration movements, and a need for international humanitarian response to be reformed. The UNHCR outlined a strategy for

<sup>10</sup> United Nations. “UNHCR Reports Crisis in Refugee Education.” *UNHCR*, [www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/9/57d7d6f34/unhcr-reports-crisis-refugee-education.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/9/57d7d6f34/unhcr-reports-crisis-refugee-education.html).

improving refugee education which includes Secondary Youth Education Program. Pilots for this program have been run in various African nations and Pakistan since 2017 and has proved to improve the enrollment of education in different areas. Even though the enrollment in secondary school is lower than primary; however, with the help of UNHCR, the chance of refugees on receiving a higher education has increased by a significant amount over the past several years. In order to further extend the enrollment of those secondary education, UNHCR will focus more on the investment in teachers and schools, and facilitating community plans to boost the enrollment and attract economic support for refugee families.<sup>11</sup>

The UNHCR also coordinates a global consultation program of action which will form part of the Global Compact of Refugees. This compact is made up of commitments by various parties to pool their resources and expertise to increase the accessibility of education for refugees, through strengthening the quality of national education systems. The UNHCR hopes that member states realize that investing in refugee education is worthwhile, as refugees can become productive members of society, and urges collaboration in various avenues to bridge the educational opportunity gap between local citizens and refugees.

## UNICEF

UNICEF has been addressing the education for the Rohingya refugees for the past several years. UNICEF has been making solid progress in addressing the shortage of professional teachers and set professional development progress. UNICEF has also continued to improve on the placement of students based on different levels of abilities. UNICEF aims to help all children to develop skills, as seen through UNICEF's assistance to Venezuelans crossing borders for more opportunities. UNICEF has partnered with the Colombian government to provide migrant children with meeting their fundamental needs and gaining education opportunities.

With the help of UNICEF, Colombia is able to offer free education to migrant children from Venezuela. Even if many students have to commute long distances to get an education, there has been a tremendously positive response to this learning opportunity, suggesting to other nations and organizations that their investment in education is needed. UNICEF helps refugees have a better chance at getting substantial financial support through their advocacy and establishment as a renowned international organization. The crises that displaced school-aged children are incredibly complex, but

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<sup>11</sup> Grandi, Filippo, et al. "The Number of Refugees in Secondary Education Is Staggeringly Low. Here's How We Can Change That." *World Economic Forum*, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/closing-the-refugee-education-gap](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/closing-the-refugee-education-gap).

helping increased education opportunities is a sure way to combat the effects of crisis from exacerbating.

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## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1951	1951 Refugee Convention (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees) Signed by 145 countries in July 28, 1951 and put into effect in April 22, 1954, this convention defines the “refugee”, outlines the rights of the displaced and legal obligations of States to protect them, and affirms its core principle of non-refoulement.
September 11, 2001	2001 September 11 attacks In the 2001 September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda hijacked and crashed four commercial airplanes, destroying the World Trade Center and one side of the Pentagon, killing 2996 people, and wounding 6000. It shaped United States (US) foreign policy of the 21st century to combat terrorism and increased Islamophobia and right-wing populism.
December 2007- June 2009	2008 Great Recession Due to the Great Recession, every European country had to raise taxes and cut benefit payments. Rising unemployment and plummeting purchasing power resulted. Far-right parties gained massive support since they blamed the over acceptance of refugees for contributing to the financial crisis.
March 2011	Syrian Refugee Crisis The Syrian conflict resulted in one of the most severe displacements of people in modern day. The crisis began as a part of the Arab Spring and when the government cracked down, armed groups began fighting. There are ethnic and religious undertones to the politics of the conflict and contribute to the crisis’ severity. Over half the country’s population before the wars began were killed or have fled their homes. Some Syrians fled to neighboring countries while others

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<sup>12</sup> “For Many Venezuelan Children, Hope Begins around Dawn Each Day.” *UNICEF*, [www.unicef.org/stories/many-venezuelan-children-hope-begins-around-dawn-each-day](http://www.unicef.org/stories/many-venezuelan-children-hope-begins-around-dawn-each-day).

journeyed to Europe in search of a better life. Syrian refugees need a lot of support in the countries they relocate to, and the UN estimates that in 2019, \$3.29 billion was required to meet the most urgent needs of vulnerable Syrians.

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November 13 - 14,  
2015

November 2015 Paris attacks

The attack included mass shooting, suicide bombing, and hostage taking, killing 138 and 413 victims. In response, the French government issued a three-month state of emergency, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to make it more difficult for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the US. In the 2015 french regional elections, Marine Le Pen, President of the National Rally political party, gained massive support through pushing for hardline security measures and anti-immigrant policies.

January 27, 2017

US President Trump signed Executive Order 13769 (Muslim Ban)

The Executive Order 13769 lowered the number of refugees to the US, suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for 120 days and entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely, detained more than 700 travelers, and provisionally revoked more than 60,000 visas. The signing sparked a lot of controversy with many protests and the federal court ruled against Trump because the bill discriminated against Muslims. The federal court stated that "No person shall receive any preference or priority or be discriminated against in the issuance of an immigrant visa because of the person's race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence."

December 18, 2019      Global Refugee Forum

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

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<sup>13</sup> "Quick Facts: What You Need to Know about the Syria Crisis." *Mercy Corps*, 30 Dec. 2019, [www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis](http://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis).



- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW)
- Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers (ECLSMW)

## Possible Solutions

**Invest in teacher training improving existing education systems in regions with higher densities of refugees.** In many places where refugees resettle, teachers are already struggling to cope with teaching existing curriculums to local students, which is why teacher training is imperative in improving the status quo. The given nation's Ministry of Education should reach out to other internationally trained education specialists to help establish a framework of forward planning for the host country's curricula. In the Kakuma Refugee camp in Kenya, a program called "Teachers 4 Teachers" was launched. This program proved to be incredibly beneficial, as teachers were working alongside others of the same profession and can get an informed second opinion on how best to serve the education needs of their students.

**Implement refugees' educational needs in existing local curriculums.** The host nation's Ministry of Education should create policies that help bridge the education gap many refugees have. With the joint funds from the nation's government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugees could get access to online programs where someone who speaks their language teaches the language of their host country. If this were to be an infeasible solution, the school-aged refugees of a particular community should gather for after-school classes to learn the local language together. This means that teachers will have to commit extra work hours, but new, refugee-conscious government education policies should adequately fund these teachers. Collaborating with companies in the private sector that work in education may also help create additional classroom space and materials.

**Establish better systems for identifying and determining signs that one is a refugee.** The UNHCR aims to work with nations to ensure the best protection method for refugees, without affecting the interests of the nation. Nations can work alongside the UNHCR to improve the law-enforcement capacity for refugees and train border guards to have better judgement of who is a refugee. Discussions on the criteria of distinguishing one subject to international protection and one migrating for economic benefits should take place to help officials improve their grasp on the matter. Giving nations the assurance that incoming migrants are not exploiting the nation's resources is the first step in improving the life of refugees in their host nation, which improves their chances to receive an education. However, working to decrease misinformation on refugees among local citizens will help decrease the stigma and

hostility around this already marginalized group, which will promote support for government policies that cater to the needs of refugees.<sup>14</sup>

**Improve record keeping for refugees' learning achievements.** Often times, refugees only receive fragmented formal education opportunities, vocational training, and miscellaneous work experience, meaning that their accomplishments are not recorded. NGOs and governments should work towards making data systematic and help refugees with their literacy, especially when it comes to forming a resume. This will help working-aged refugees get higher paying jobs, creating more disposable income for them to support their children's education and have a better chance at exiting the cycle of poverty. Moreover, it is also valuable to consider the education opportunities for adults, since learning skills and the language of the host country is important. However, creating a database may also cause privacy concerns for refugees and potentially make them more susceptible to harm.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [www.unhcr.org/4565a6bb2.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/4565a6bb2.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, Allison, and Jessica Brandt. "Innovations for Improving Access to and Quality of Education for Urban Refugees." *Brookings*, Brookings, 14 May 2018, [www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/).

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