

I. Current status of access to education of refugees

Although it is widely recognized that refugee children and adolescents are among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in education, data on education indicators for refugees are limited and fragmented. Education indicators for refugees are often missing from both the statistics of the refugee's country of origin and the refugees' host country.¹¹ At the global level, there is a lack of available data disaggregated by gender or level of education. As an example, data on secondary schooling is not disaggregated between lower and upper secondary school, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports secondary school enrolment data as being for the age group 12-17.¹²

What has been ascertained is that in 2017, 61% of refugee children were enrolled in primary school, compared to 92% globally.¹³ At the secondary school level, figures are even worse, with 23% of students enrolled in schools compared with 84% globally. This means that only two-thirds of refugee children transition from primary to secondary schools.¹⁴ At the tertiary education level, the figure for refugees is 1% compared to 34% globally.¹⁵

Access to education for refugees varies significantly between countries. The vast majority of school-aged refugees are hosted by low- and middle-income countries. Some of the countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees have the lowest secondary school enrolment rates. In 2016 in Pakistan, only 5% of secondary school-age refugee students attended school; in Cameroon only 6%; in Ethiopia, the figure was 9%.¹⁶

More than half the world's refugees today live in towns and cities rather than camps.¹⁷ Historically, international donor support to education of refugees was channelled through UNHCR and international NGOs, and focused on education service provision within camps. Access to education in camps was often higher than for urban refugees.¹⁸ UNHCR data showed that, in 2010, the primary school gross enrolment ratio (GER) in camp settings was 78%, whereas it was 70% in urban areas, and the secondary school GER in camps was 37% and in urban areas it was 31%.¹⁹ It is now widely acknowledged, however, that donor-supported camp schools running outside of national education systems do not provide a sustainable solution, and that refugees should be included in national education systems.

Vulnerable refugee students have their access to education limited even further. More recent UNHCR statistics show that access to education is limited for refugee girls hosted in developing countries. Data from Kenya and Ethiopia show that in 2017, there were only seven refugee girls for every ten refugee boys enrolled in primary education.²⁰ At the secondary school level, the gender gap was even greater: refugee girls at the secondary school level were only half as likely

¹¹ Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Zubairi and Rose, 2016.

¹² Zubairi and Rose, 2016.

¹³ *Ibidem*. In detail, 61% of refugee children were enrolled in primary school, compared to 92% globally.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ UNHCR, 2018 *Her Turn*.

¹⁶ Global Education Monitoring Report/UNHCR, 2016 *No more excuses*.

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2016 *Missing Out*.

¹⁸ Dryden-Peterson, 2011.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ UNHCR, 2018. *Turn the Tide*.

to be enrolled as their male peers.²¹ In 2017, in Uganda, there were five girls for every ten boys in secondary schools.²² In 2013, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that up to 10% of Syrian refugee children may be living with a disability (physical, mental or sensory). Children with disabilities face considerable barriers to accessing education, including discrimination, physical barriers and lack of appropriate services and trained staff.²³ The Education Sector Working Group found that in Jordan, less than half (46%) of Syrian children with disabilities were in school in 2013. Complexities and inconsistencies regarding the definition, identification and recording of information about disability²⁴ potentially hides greater out-of-school numbers.

Even when students can attend school, the quality of learning is a serious concern. The immense pressures that growing demand for schooling imposes on host countries, including overcrowding and shorter school hours where a double shift system is implemented, have significant implications for the quality of education for refugees. Even if teaching and learning materials are financed and distributed, the ability of schools to transform these inputs into learning appears mixed, in part due to challenges surrounding language of instruction, lack of qualified teachers and overcrowded classes. Monitoring of refugee children's learning to date has been limited, with no currently available analysis of learning outcomes. Gains in access risk being undermined by losses due to inadequate quality, which is one of the drivers of high dropout rates among refugee students. Education should be seen as a continuum, where lags and gaps in learning and student trajectories in previous educational stages impair subsequent stages and thus opportunities for the realization of the right to education. Education systems must then provide maximum opportunities at the school level and take special structural policy measures for the inclusion of at-risk populations in quality education from early childhood that enables them to continue their student trajectories to tertiary education and beyond.

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ Education Sector Working Group, 2015.

²⁴ Riggall and Croft, 2016.

II. The barriers to education faced by refugees

The barriers to education for refugee children are multifaceted, interlinked and complex. This section attempts to summarize them into three categories:

- household, related to the actual capacities of refugees and their families to afford education, how relevant they consider it to be, and how easy access to education is for them;
- systemic, related to some characteristics of the configuration of the education system that can prevent refugees from receiving a fair provision; and
- functional, related to how the system works for refugees and what differentiated outcomes refugees get from it.

1. Household barriers

At the household and school levels, obstacles to education include financial barriers (caused by the direct and indirect cost of education), distance to school, linguistic barriers, security concerns, xenophobia and intolerance. Practices and beliefs along with the contingent need caused by displacement keep boys and girls out of school, particularly at the secondary level. Even when refugees recognize the importance of education, displacement changes their priorities: food security and financial constraints reportedly become their main concerns. Early marriage and wage-earning activities feature in the research as common strategies to cope with immediate and urgent needs.²⁵

A. Cost of education

Indirect or direct schooling costs are among the main constraints in accessing education. Although primary education is officially free in most refugee host country contexts, other costs such as tuition fees, operational fees, exam fees, stationary, uniform and transport costs can make school inaccessible for refugee students.²⁶ Countries may charge fees to partially cover education costs. As an example, in the capital of Uganda, Kampala, schools may charge fees to cover operational costs, such as water and electricity.²⁷ Education costs can be even higher for secondary school, where school fees are often charged within the public system.²⁸ A recent study²⁹ demonstrates that only 2% of Syrian children were enrolled in and regularly attended secondary school in Lebanon: “Syrian refugees, who invariably fled under a variety of circumstances, are unable to afford even the nominal tuition and transportation fees without assistance. To make matters worse, only 30% of Lebanese public schools offered a waiver of school fees”.³⁰ Financial barriers may limit transition from primary to secondary schools too. In Uganda, the majority of students aged 13-18 in refugee settlements (71% of boys, 73% of girls)

²⁵ UNESCO, 2017 *Working Paper*.

²⁶ Sommers, 1999; Smith, 2007; Bonfiglio, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2016 *Growing Up Without an Education*.

²⁷ Dryden-Peterson, 2003 cited in Bonfiglio, 2010.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Shuayb, Makkouk and Tuttunji, 2014.

³⁰ *Ibidem*: 15.