

## Global Refugee Forum

### Empowering Futures: A Comprehensive GRF Pledge for Inclusive Secondary Education

This multistakeholder pledge will contribute to the delivery of new financial, technical, and material support for host country policies, services, and systems in relation to Secondary Education. It is aligned with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR): Objective 2, *Enhance refugee self-reliance*. Additionally, it will reinforce the achievement of GCR Objective 4, *Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity*. Specifically, in measures to prevent conflict and build peace in host countries and countries of origin.

#### Leadership

Plan International  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
Education Cannot Wait

#### Contact details

Jill Drzewiecki ([jill.drzewiecki@jrs.net](mailto:jill.drzewiecki@jrs.net))  
Hiba Salem ([hiba.salem@jrs.net](mailto:hiba.salem@jrs.net))  
Minna Peltola ([minna.peltola@plan-international.org](mailto:minna.peltola@plan-international.org))

#### Contextual Overview

The global movement to achieve universal primary education has placed increased demands on secondary education systems to accommodate more students, from a wider range of backgrounds, and to do so more inclusively and effectively. In crisis contexts, at current funding levels these demands are impossible to meet.

Refugee access to secondary education is extremely low at 41%.<sup>1</sup> Of the countries that provided gender disaggregated data, the average secondary education enrolment rates for refugee male students stood at 36% and 35% for females. Refugee girls at secondary level are only half as likely to enrol as their male peers.<sup>2</sup> Refugee adolescents and youth are two-thirds more likely to be out of secondary school, and half as likely to complete secondary education than their national counterparts.<sup>3</sup> Yet, secondary education is a critical protective factor for refugee adolescents and youth and their abilities to navigate pathways towards self-sufficiency.<sup>4</sup>

Disparities also influence the access rates of refugees compared to the national average.<sup>5</sup> The data illustrates this through three distinct examples. In upper-middle-income countries like

---

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2023), *Unlocking Potential: the Right to Education and Opportunity*, Geneva, Switzerland, pp 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (2018), *Her Turn. Why It's Time to Educate Refugee Girls*. UNHCR.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, C. Mansour, S. & Hough, W. (2023). *The missing piece: Secondary education in crisis contexts*. UNHCR.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2019), *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2023), *Unlocking Potential: the Right to Education and Opportunity*, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 8.

Türkiye, Peru, and Colombia, which have substantial forcibly displaced populations and high national averages for secondary education (exceeding 100%), the refugee access rates are significantly lower. On the other hand, in countries like Uganda and Ethiopia, where overall secondary education rates are generally low, refugees still face lower access rates. The countries with the most significant gaps are Peru, Colombia, and Bangladesh, where there is an approximately 80 percentage point difference between refugee access rates and the national average. For instance, in Bangladesh, the national gross enrolment rate for secondary education is 75%, while for refugees, it is merely 1%. Notably, refugee girls and women are disproportionately affected by these challenges. In crisis situations, they are 90% more likely to be out-of-school during adolescence compared to their counterparts in non-crisis settings. Without adequate interventions, these disruptions can result in a permanent loss of education.

Low enrolment and high dropout rates among adolescents and youth in secondary education are driven by various factors. In displacement-affected areas, inadequate funding and limited access to secondary education exclude adolescents and refugees. Additionally, refugee youth face economic and social pressures like employment and childcare, impacting their learning opportunities. The shortage of qualified secondary teachers, particularly females, further exacerbates the challenges. Research emphasises the pivotal role of teachers in supporting refugee students and making education relevant to their daily lives. While formal education pathways are crucial, there is a need for interventions at the secondary level, such as accelerated education programs, along with essential services like transportation, childcare facilities, and financial assistance. It is evident that ensuring access to national education systems for refugee adolescents is vital, but aligning these efforts with relevant services and interventions is equally important.

### **Key Outcomes**

- Member states hosting refugees in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) access appropriate financial, technical and material inputs to guarantee equitable access for refugees to national and local Secondary education.
- Adolescents and youth, irrespective of whether they belong to refugee, displaced, or host communities will be treated equally.
- Secondary education options should be flexible, relevant, certified and employ policies and strategies that combat exclusion, enhance refugee well-being, foster equitable participation in society, promote self-reliance, and contribute to the advancement of durable solutions.

### **Pledge Description**

This pledge engages relevant stakeholders including governments, bilateral and multilateral institutions, INGOs, local NGOs, civil society, and the private sector, in the provision of financial, technical, and material resources to ensure that refugee, displaced, and host

adolescents and youth in all their diversity access national and local forms of secondary education through mechanisms that support quality, holistic inclusion, retention, and protection.

### **Access**

Address barriers to access to national and local education systems at secondary levels and ensure that all adolescents and youth, in all their diversity, have equitable access to quality education systems.

1. Increase funding and **the supply of secondary education** schools and learning spaces to ensure that access to secondary education is accessible to all adolescents and youth, and within appropriate proximity to refugee settlements.
2. Increase support for **alternative models of secondary education** to enable out-of-school refugee adolescents and youth and newly arrived refugees to access multiple and flexible pathways for adolescents and youth who may not be able to immediately enter host community schools. This includes catch-up programmes, Secondary Accelerated Education Programmes (SAEPs), and other models that prioritise flexibility, equivalency, and continuity.
3. Ensure **gender-responsive programming** to reduce barriers that prevent girls and young women as well as LGBTQIA+ adolescent and youth from accessing education, including protective pathways to appropriate health and childcare facilities for girls and students who are mothers. Gender-responsive programming should also systematically include **school and community-based GBV risk mitigation measures** sufficiently costed and measured to ensure safety in and around schools.
4. Ensure that all new education infrastructure align with universal design principles that recognise the needs of **students with disabilities**.
5. Engage communities to address socio-economic barriers to secondary education, including poverty, attitudes and norms towards girls' education, and child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM).

### **Quality and Retention**

Strengthen access to quality education which enables adolescents and youth to learn in inclusive, relevant, and gender-transformative spaces that enable students to transition through secondary education and prepare for post-education trajectories.

1. Invest in programming to increase the number of qualified and trained teachers at secondary levels to strengthen the overall quality of instruction and national education systems. Invest in female teachers, particularly in refugee teachers, and particularly within STEM subjects

2. Ensure that displaced students' experiences are recognised in national classrooms, including supporting teachers to engage in appropriate learner-centred, trauma-informed, and caring pedagogical practices.
3. Integrate facilities that support the safety, wellbeing, and agency of adolescent girls and young women, through gender-responsive Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and life skills to contribute to adolescent girls' empowerment through gender-targeted MHPSS interventions considering the needs and capacities of the most disadvantaged adolescent refugee girls (such as those with multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation, i.e.: girls with disabilities, childcare for young mothers).
4. Assess additional content and services which may be added to ensure the relevance of education to young people's trajectories, including: lifeskills, career guidance, and counselling services, entrepreneurship education and livelihoods training.
5. Design and develop initiatives which support the education needs of newly displaced persons and contribute to the long-term inclusion of refugee learners in national education systems, such as making available language learning programmes and materials to facilitate rapid acquisition of the language of instruction.
6. Increase coordination between international actors, local governments, and local populations to ensure that solutions to secondary education are contextualised and relevant to the needs of adolescents and youth. Increase the participation and elevate the voices of displaced adolescents and youth to inform programming and to ensure that all responses are contextualised, relevant, and appropriate.

## **Financing**

Reduce financing gaps which exclude displaced adolescents and youth from access to education, and which place adolescents and youth at risk of repeated education loss due to financial gaps.

1. Ensure **multi-year, long-term** funding for Secondary Education through National Budgets and humanitarian funding mechanisms and Donor Contributions, and **alignment** of grants with academic year. Fund additional services and facilities which are needed to ensure that education access is protective and relevant for refugees at secondary levels.
2. **Contribute to multi-year funding of Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG):** The SEWG, led by UNHCR, is an inter-agency working group, established in 2020 with a vision to support all crisis-affected young people to have equitable access to quality, inclusive, and relevant secondary education they can complete in safety. The aim of the SEWG is to increase secondary school enrolment for crisis-affected children through a focus on access, quality, evidence and data, and advocacy through working across the humanitarian/development nexus, and help to establish new partnerships and modes of collaboration.

## **Further Reading**

### [Secondary Education | INEE](#)

Henderson, C. Mansour, S. & Hough, W. 2023. The Missing Piece. Secondary Education in Crisis Context. Teachers College, Columbia University and Secondary Education Working Group.

Salem, H., Drzewiecki, J. & Concina, G. 2023. Accelerate with Care: Towards Gender-Responsive Secondary Accelerated Education. Jesuit Refugee Service and Secondary Education Working Group.

Abdiaziz, H., Peltola, I. & Piccolo, A. 2023. *I thought my dream of getting an education had come to an end*. Youth Voices on Secondary Education in crisis contexts. Secondary Education Working Group.

All publications: [Secondary Education | INEE](#)