



DAISMUN XI

FORUM: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

ISSUE: Strengthening Stable Long-term Access to Quality Education of Refugee Children

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POSITION: President

Introduction to Committee:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, abbreviated as UNHCR, was established January 1, 1951 by the UNGA. As the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR works to provide protection for refugees and find solutions for refugees to better assimilate into their new environment. The UNHCR works with host governments of these refugees and provides humanitarian aid. Another goal the UNHCR has is to provide education for school age refugees, as they believe education plays a key role in the thriving and survival of refugee children. The UNHCR stands in the center of the refugee response system, taking a leading role and assuming lots of responsibility to provide aid for refugees. By definition, the UNHCR aids anyone considered a refugee, from IDPs to those who are exiled. As of 2021, the UNHCR has over 16.1 million refugees under their jurisdiction, over half that number being children under the age of 18. The UNHCR also has the elected high commissioner, who is picked every 5 years by the UNGA. Currently, Filippo Grandi is the 11th UN high commissioner for refugees, and will serve his place in office until June 30, 2023.

Introduction to Topic:

Child refugee crisis have uprooted the largest number of refugees in recent history. Contemporarily, roughly half of the 17.1 million refugee population fleeing escalating violence in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Northern Africa are under the UNHCR's mandate are children and young people below the age of 18. By no doubt, the initial emergency relief initiatives concerning the refugee crisis must evolve to develop longer-term strategies promptly. Additionally, it is vital to focus on refugee youth education-a crucial yet often overlooked element in humanitarian response-while carrying out the long-term disposition.

As for millions of adolescents, these are the years they should be spending in school, acquiring sufficient knowledge on not just how to read, write and count but also how to inquire, evaluate, debate, and calculate- how to look after themselves and others and work towards attaining their goals in the future. Noting the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is clear that education is a fundamental human right. However, to a greater degree, education is a protective factor for refugee youth. 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, writers, teachers, health care workers, and public servants who will rebuild and revitalize their countries once peace is established and they can return. Concisely, these young refugees' education is crucial to the peaceful and sustainable development of the places that have welcomed them and their countries' future prosperity.

The issue that remains profound is that compared to other children and youth worldwide, the gap in opportunity for the refugee versus international expands progressively. Globally, 91 percent of children attend primary school.



DAISMUN XI

Yet, for refugees, that figure is far lower at only 61 percent – and in low-income countries, it is less than 50 percent. Even so, there is progress to report. Due to the measures taken by Syria's neighbors to enroll more refugee children in school and other educational programs, as well as increased refugee enrolment in European countries that are better able to expand capacity, the proportion of refugees in a primary school in 2016 has experienced an unprecedented increase on the previous year (from 50 percent). Unfortunately, the obstacles only increase as the refugees get older: compared to 84 percent at a global level, merely 23 percent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school. What is more concerning is that in low-income countries, which host 28 percent of the world's refugees, the number in secondary education is disturbingly low (at a mere 9 percent). As for tertiary education – the crucible in which tomorrow's leaders are forged – the picture is just as grim. Across the world, enrollment in tertiary education stands at 36 percent, up to two percentage points from the previous year. Despite significant improvements in overall numbers for refugees, the percentage remains stuck at 1 percent.

History:

Earlier on, there were measures developed to address this issue; politicians, diplomats, officials, and activists from around the world gathered to forge a path for approaching the world's refugees' dilemma. Hence this led to the creation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, signed by 193 countries, which emphasized education as a vital element of the international response. Moreover, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) endeavors to deliver "inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning."

Additionally, according to the report written by the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees policy development and evaluation service (PDES), the UNHCR currently works towards promoting high quality and protective education for refugees, in keeping with education as a durable solution and the core elements of the UNHCR's mandate. These include the following but not limited to:

- *Integration of refugees into national education systems*, particularly in urban areas where half of refugees now live, working closely with Ministries of Education and UNICEF to strengthen national systems for the benefit not only of refugees but also host communities
 - *Provision of post-primary education for all refugees up to the end of secondary school*, with emphasis on access for girls and other marginalized groups, and provision of additional opportunities for higher education, both scholarships and site-based programs that use open and distance learning
 - *Investment in teacher training that cultivates high quality skills* related to both pedagogy and content and that is sequential, leading towards a basic qualification that is recognized in home and/or host countries
 - *Development of new standards and indicators for education that measure learning outcomes*, including formative in-class assessments and summative independent sample testing, drawing on the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and on partnerships with UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), national Ministries of Education, and other bilateral partners supporting education
 - *Recognition of the connections between education and conflict in all education policy and planning*, emphasizing the use of conflict-sensitive analyses to assess the content and structures of education, including curriculum, language, and
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DAISMUN XI

relationships between actors; the importance of education for political stability and leadership in host countries and upon repatriation; and the reinstatement of peace education as a core component of refugee education

- *Support for increased and predictable human and financial resources in education*, including hiring of Regional Education Advisors, Education Officers in country offices, and Community Services and Protection Officers with educational expertise; the selection of Implementing Partners (IPs) with proven technical capacities in education; and formalized operational and field-level partnerships between UNHCR and national Ministries of Education, UNICEF, and the Education Cluster.

Despite overwhelming support for the New York Declaration, SDG4, and various others, refugees remain in a real crisis of being outdistanced in terms of their education.

Key Terms:

Refugees/Migrants- Used to describe people that have been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Child Refugee Crisis- A type of humanitarian crisis in which refugees under the legal age of 18 have been forced to leave their homes.

Refugee Education- Providing refugees sufficient education for the sake of their wellbeing.

National education systems in host countries use funding to provide the schools and teachers necessary equipment for all refugee children to have a quality education.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)- Also known as the Global Goals, are a series of goals that are adopted by all nations in order to promote prosperity and equity of rights.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR)- A historic, international human rights treaty geared towards the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants- A political will of world leaders to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility on a global scale, specifically those of refugees and migrants. Refugees, migrants, host countries, and communities will all benefit if these commitments are met.

1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child-the League of Nations (LON) adopted the Geneva Declaration, a historic document that recognised and affirmed for the first time the existence of rights specific to children and the responsibility of adults towards children

***Revised* Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees-** Emphasized UNHCR support for education systems rather than scholarships for primary and secondary levels and the concept of open access to the “ladder of educational opportunities”

Major Parties Involved:

UNESCO, Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



DAISMUN XI

From its origins in 1945, UNESCO carried the global mandate for education, including for refugees and other displaced populations. However, by the mid-1960s, it was clear that with UNESCO's focus on national-level policy, there was little capacity to act on this field-level responsibility (hence, the creation of UNHCR).

World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)- Education of All (EFA) is an international initiative first launched in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society”.

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)- A global open network of members working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure all humanitarian aid.

Department of Operational Support (DOS)- Provides operational support to all UN Secretariat entities, including advisory, operational and transactional support services.

Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM)- Provides the knowledge, guidance and tools necessary to design and deliver UNHCR programmes that demonstrate quality, technical integrity and innovation.

Division of International Protection (DIP)- A series of legal research and protection policy papers issued by the UNHCR Division of International Protection.

Timeline:

Date	Event
1900-1951	The period spanning the World Wars saw the creation of the highest number of refugees the world had ever seen, in part because the end of free movement across borders brought with it compulsory passports, visas and other travel documents. The collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires as a result of the First World War created ethnic, political and religious refugees and stateless persons. During hostilities, individuals were forced from their homes as invading armies made the land uninhabitable.
1933-1945	The coming to power of the antisemitic, anti-Communist Nazi party caused displacement from as early as 1933. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935, the Anschluss with Austria and Kristallnacht in 1938 prompted more departures of Jews and political dissidents from Germany and Austria, while the annexation of Sudetenland created significant numbers of Czech and Jewish refugees (c.90,000)
1951	Establishment of the <i>Refugee Convention</i> . World War II had created such large-scale displacement that the United Nations felt the need to create international guidelines relating to the protection and acceptance of refugees. 26 States were represented at the conference in Geneva in July 1951. While this document gave significant rights to refugees to ensure their protection, ultimately it was only a guide to national legislative policies.



DAISMUN XI

1988	The first UNHCR guidelines for refugee education were published, Organizing Primary Education for Refugee Children in Emergency Situations: Guidelines for Field Managers
1990	The EFA identified conflict as a central barrier to meeting education needs, especially for displaced populations including refugees
1992	The second UNHCR guidelines for refugee education were published, Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees
1994	Agreement signed with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to provide short-term education officers on secondment to UNHCR. Also: the genocide in Rwanda – on the heels of conflicts in Afghanistan, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, parts of the former Soviet Union, and the former Yugoslavia – led to a focus on education in crisis and emphasis on inter-agency coordination
1996	Report, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, by Graça Machel underlined the critical role for education in the protection of refugee children and the importance of peace education
2000	Thematic assessment of education in emergencies and strategy session of the World Education Forum recognized the role of education in national development and the promotion of peace, especially for refugees in all stages of displacement
2002	The 2002 UNHCR Agenda for Protection and subsequent Action Plan approved by the Executive Committee emphasized the importance of “education as a tool for protection”
2004	INEE issued the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction, the fundamental tool for quality and accountability in the field of education in emergencies
2010	UNHCR Education Unit moved from Operations, first within the Department of Operational Support (DOS) and then within the Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM), to the Division of International Protection (DIP)

Possible Solutions:

Emergency residency permits for people fleeing climate change

Urge states to create emergency residency permits to allow people fleeing droughts, floods and sea level rises to relocate to safe places.

Early-warning systems to relocate people affected by droughts

Additional, profound research on tracking droughts to develop early-warning systems so that affected populations can be relocated before they are forced to abandon their homes and lands. This is specifically set towards undeveloped countries, as they have limited access to such technological advancements.



DAISMUN XI

Educate future generations about refugees

To counter xenophobia, governments can reform their education systems to include aspects/themes in regards to refugees' rights.

International database of job opportunities for refugees

More specifically, these international database of employment opportunities for refugees are set in order to allow employers to e-scout refugees based on their qualifications and skills, hence boosting the economic inclusion of refugees,

Tax reduction for companies employing refugees

To give employers an incentive to hire refugees an adequate amount of tax break for companies employing refugees and a "global citizen" label to recognize their contribution.

Better internet access and online education platforms

By improving internet access in refugee communities and to providing education platforms with pre-recorded lectures and assignments for children facing connectivity issues, this would facilitate a learning environment for those that cannot 'physically' attend school due to other factors.

Mental health programs for refugees at schools

To improve refugees' mental wellbeing at schools, teachers can have extra training sessions and provide refugee children access to extra-curricular activities such as sports and music to counter social isolation.



DAISMUN XI

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DAISMUN XI

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