

Committee/Council: Social and Humanitarian  
Issue: Young refugees and the right to education in hosting countries  
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## Introduction

Over the last years conflicts have increased at an unprecedented rate, forcing even more people to leave their home country with the hope that they will find a secure place, across borders. The majority of refugees tend to find shelter in neighboring countries that are often poor and struggle to cover the basic needs like food and shelter. Education, which is a basic human right playing a constructive role in restoring dignity to these peoples' lives, is usually seen as a luxury.

Young refugees, one of the most vulnerable groups, are the most needy. Education is key to a better future and a productive life. However, receiving it is a dream that might never come true. Even if hosting countries are providing young refugees with this right the chances of it being of a good quality are very little.

Building the foundation for the right to education to young refugees is one of the greatest challenges the international community is nowadays facing. Despite the efforts made, a durable solution is very difficult to be found. The only thing for sure is that young refugees should have the opportunity to develop themselves and to dream a better life.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Refugee

*According to the 1951 Refugee Convention a refugee is someone who:*

*"owing to a 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 to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."*

### Hosting Country

*According to the Business Dictionary a hosting country is:*

*"Nation in which individuals or organizations from other countries or states are visiting due to government invitation or meeting."*

### Border

*According to the Oxford Dictionary border is:*

*"line separating two countries, administrative divisions, or other areas."*

## Asylum

According to the Oxford Dictionary asylum is:

*“the protection granted by a state to someone who has left their home country”*

The three following terms can be easily confused with the term of the refugee, so it is important to define them:

## Asylum-seeker

According to UNHCR an asylum seeker is someone who:

*“says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.”*

## Internally Displaced Persons:

*“Persons who have been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or made-man disasters; and who are within the territory of their own country”*

## Economic Migrant

According to the Collins Dictionary economic migrant is:

*“a person who moves from one region, place, or country to another in order to improve his or her standard of living”*

## **Background Information**

### Refugees

The situation in many countries is aggravating and the lives of thousands of civilians, including children and young people are put at stake every single day. To be more specific, currently there are around 43 million victims of conflict and persecution worldwide.

Refugees, effects of a brutal war, are people who have been the center of attention of the international community for many years and in urgent humanitarian need, most of the times lacking the basic recourses of food, water and shelter.

The main sources of law for refugees can be found in a Treaty the so called “1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees”, which has been the legal document defining refugees as well as protecting them and their rights.

Fleeing from their homes and leaving their homelands, not knowing if they will ever be able to return, severely disrupts their family and community life, putting them in an even more vulnerable position. They are highly depended on humanitarian assistance, mostly provided both by international organizations relevant to refugees such as the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and the governments they refugee in.

The difficult path refugees are going through does not come to an end after leaving their home countries. There are many obstacles they need to overcome whether they are living in a refugee camp or in an urban area of their hosting country. But refugees are not the only ones facing ordeals. The continuation and the escalation of conflicts and poverty mostly occurring in many African as well as Asian countries increases their numbers, making it more difficult for the hosting countries to provide them with the bare necessities, housing, work, education and to improve their living standards.

### The rights of refugees

According to the 1951 Convention, the treatment of the refugees from the hosting countries has to be equivalent to the local population. The Contracting States should give them aid and the right to choose their place of residence as well as the freedom of movement and exercise of their religious beliefs. Moreover, refugees should have access to schooling, health care and employment. However, they are severely restricted, their rights are highly constrained and their opportunities of having a healthy and happy life are very limited. Most hosting countries are neglecting their refugees and do not give them the rights, they fairly deserve.

### Refugee population and destination

Prior to 1970 the global refugee population was estimated at 3 million but currently it has increased to 15.4 million people, spread across 75 countries. 80 per cent of refugee population is to be found in developing countries. The first continent refugees reside from is Asia, followed by Africa hosting 22% of the world's refugees. Europe is the third continent with the biggest influx of refugees (14 %), while America has the smallest share of them.

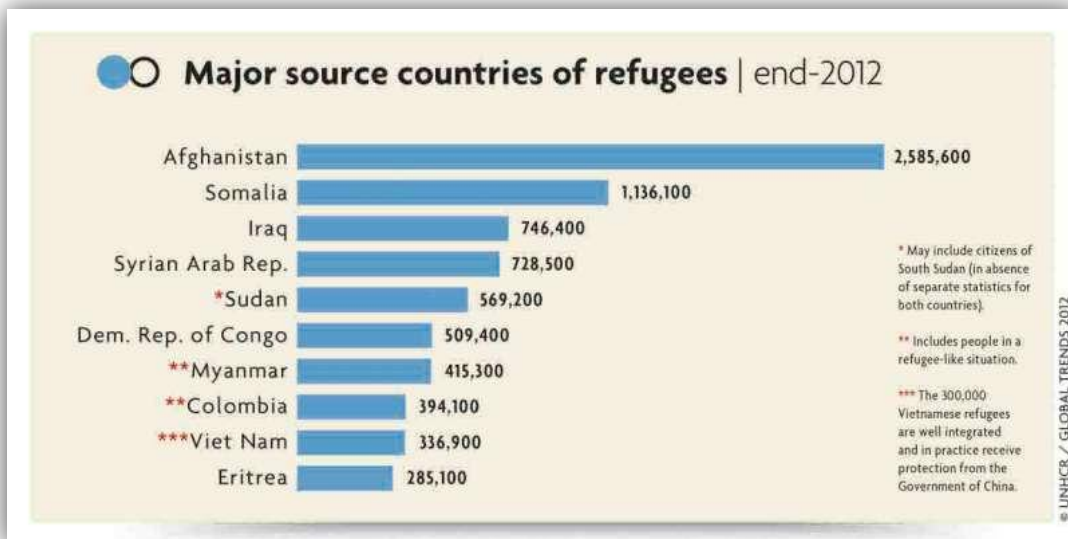
Concerning the hosting countries Pakistan is ranked first with 1.6 million refugees. The second and third top countries are Iran and Germany, which provide asylum to approximately 1.5 million refugees. The following table depicts UNHCR data from 2012 showing the leading 10 hosting countries with the largest numbers of refugees.

Table 1:



55% of the world’s refugees come from the five most war affected countries namely Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan. Afghanistan is the leading source country, with 2.6 million followed by Somalia with 1.3 million, while approximately 700 thousand refugees come from Iraq. The following table shows the top 10 countries of origin for refugees:

Table 2:



### Young Refugees

According to the UNHCR statistics, 46 % of the world’s refugee population are children and minors under 18 years of age and 48% are women and girls. The most shocking information is that around 21.000 accompanied children were recorded during 2012.

Table 3:

**TABLE 6 Demographic characteristics of refugees**  
| 2003-2012 (% of total population)

Year	Women	<18 years	18-59	>60 years
2003	48%	49%	46%	5%
2004	48%	50%	45%	5%
2005	48%	46%	49%	5%
2006	47%	47%	49%	4%
2007	47%	46%	49%	5%
2008	48%	44%	51%	5%
2009	47%	41%	54%	5%
2010	47%	44%	51%	5%
2011	48%	46%	49%	5%
2012	48%	46%	49%	5%

The percentages are based on available data and exclude countries where no demographic information is available. This is in particular the case for industrialized countries.

Young refugees are the most vulnerable group and are in desperate need of humanitarian support. They have been exposed to intense violence and traumatized by it, have lost everything they had and sometimes have even been separated from their families. This situation jeopardizes their psychological stability; it increases their psychological needs and makes it more difficult for them to feel secure. However, young refugees represent the future of their nations and so they have to be properly supported.

### Education

“when we put Education First, we can reduce poverty and hunger, end wasted potential – and look forward to stronger and better societies for all.” Ban Ki-Moon

The right to education was not officially recognized until 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established. Since then, various international Conventions have taken place some of the most important are the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on Education for all.

Education is a fundamental human right, necessary for the exercise of the other human rights. People that have access to education, become aware of their rights, responsibilities, have the opportunity to develop their personalities and increase to a large extent their potentials on having a decent work and a healthy life. Education however, does not only benefit individuals. Access and the right to education means that governments and the international community can operate better. When people develop themselves then the community will automatically do the same.

All people are entitled to free education, however this right is denied to millions worldwide. Unfortunately, nowadays about 75 million children do not have access to basic education and another 150 million will drop out from school before completing primary education. All these children lack the ability to develop a particular skill and have access to information.

The United Nations also places a lot of emphasis on the right to education by putting it as one of its Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and having the aim to assist millions of people all around the world that devoid this right.

Education is a powerful and effective tool in enhancing self-reliance and self-esteem to young refugees. It empowers them, addresses their psychological needs and contributes to their psychological well-being. All the above mentioned advantages reduce the opportunities of young refugees to be negatively exploited and abused. Most young refugees have experienced the bad repercussions and the handicaps of a conflict. The right to education will bring them a sense of safety, normality and a feeling that they belong somewhere, namely to the school community.

Education prepares adolescence and children for their future. It informs them about sanitation the importance of gender equality, of how not to become victims of HIV/AIDS and other life threatening diseases and how to act in case of an emergency. But most importantly educated persons will emerge, able to lift themselves out of poverty, build the foundations of peace and justice and after the conflict in their home countries has come to an end, help in the reconstruction of the economy and the rebuilding of the society.

### Challenges to Refugee Education

Some major challenges regarding the provision and quality of refugee education are:

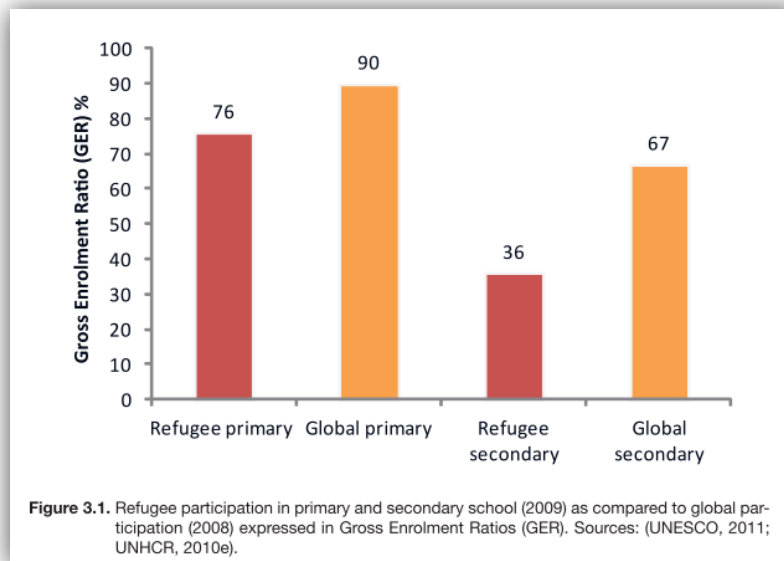
- ✓ Only 30% of young refugees have attended school
- ✓ Lack of learning materials and infrastructure
- ✓ Because of gender discrimination and early marriage, only 30% of refugee students in secondary school are girls
- ✓ Only two thirds of teachers are qualified
- ✓ The support for secondary education is insufficient
- ✓ Failure of hosting countries to record the quality and safety of the education
- ✓ Hosting communities are not engaged with refugee education programs
- ✓ The situation of young refugees living in urban areas is not accurately monitored

Education is not something young refugees are used to, with no more than 30% of refugee children receiving it. This happens because many hosting countries are not able to provide even their own citizens with the basic education. When hundreds of people are

crossing their borders every day, their priority is to provide this desperate population with the basic resources.

Most conflicts at the current moment are occurring in developing regions. Refugees look for the quickest and easiest escape which most of the times happens to be their neighboring countries. Taking into consideration that hosting countries have sometimes their own internal problems and struggle to provide their own people with the bare necessities, assisting young refugees is not part of their plans. Both the hosting countries and young refugees are not focusing on mental health and development, but on survival. So, providing them with primary universal education and meeting their psychological needs comes to a second fate. But even if countries endeavor to educate children, the shortages of qualified teachers, basic school material, the inadequate infrastructure and the gaps of their educational strategies, make it more difficult and sometimes impossible for them to provide an effective and one of a good quality education.

Table 4:



## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

This organization was established in 1950 by the UN General Assembly with the aim to “safeguard the rights and the well-being of the refugees “. UNHCR assists more than 125 hosting countries by offering protection to millions of hopeless refugees and by setting up refugee camps, leading to a huge number of refugees being fully depended on its assistance.



Moreover, UNHCR plays a vital role in ensuring the right to education for all young refugees, stressing the importance of receiving quality education. In order to burden the knowledge and the skills of young refugees, UNHCR has established many education strategies. Having the support and the assistance, given by other organizations such as UNESCO, national and international NGO's and by the hosting countries, UNHCR's efforts are more likely to be sufficient and effective.

### Countries Involved

Here are some example countries that are facing difficulties to provide the right to education to their young refugees:

#### **Pakistan**

Pakistan's refugee population consists of 1.74 million Afghanistan people. It was one of the first countries ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child something which represents its commitment to ensure the right of education among its refugees. However, Pakistan due to its fragile security situation, the instability in some of its territories and the insufficient allocation of money to education, has one of the largest refugee populations out of school. It has made some efforts in providing some kind of primary education, while secondary education is not even thinkable. More specifically, 31 per cent of Afghan girls have received no more than 2 years education and only 5 per cent have completed primary education.

UNHCR and UNESCO together with some local and international NGO's such as the German NGO, "Basic Education for Afghan Refugees (BEAR)" are supporting and enhancing the school infrastructure, training teachers and generally working to restore education in the vicinity.

#### **Iran**

Iran has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, also having a large Afghan refugee population. Its refugees are considered to be the most vulnerable group of the country, the majority of which are living in urban areas. Iran is facing big financial problems and so paying little attention to the young refugees' education. Most refugee children are denied access to public school and do not get the basic education.

#### **Jordan**

Jordan is also hosting a large number of refugees mainly coming from Syria and Palestine. It is estimated that 60 per cent of its refugee population is not receiving education, while children are forced to work in order to supplement their family income. The Jordanian Government is in desperate need of international assistance and that is why the European Commission donated 4.6 million Euros to UNICEF with the aim to improve Jordan's educational programs as well as providing learning materials to children.

## **Thailand**

Thailand is not a member of the 1951 Refugee Convention, with no refugee law. It has 86 thousand legitimate refugees mostly coming from the neighboring Myanmar. Refugees are very restricted and the provision of the right to education to young refugees is one of the most challenging tasks. Although many efforts have been made it does not seem that in the years to come the situation will improve.

## **Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events**

### **1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol**

The 1951 Convention followed by its Protocol was entered into force in 1954. The parties of the Treaty are 144, while of the Protocol 145. It defines who a refugee is, its rights and the obligations of the hosting country. It also underlines the importance for refugees to have the right to education as it is stated in its 22nd Article:

*“Article 22. - Public education*

*1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.*

*2. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.”*

For finding more details you can check the following link, showing the Treaty:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/v1crs.htm>

### **Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC)**

This Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and entered into force in 1990 after the ratification of 20 Member States. It is a binding instrument and the only one which addresses all basic human rights that a child has or should have everywhere. In its 28th Article it is stated that education should be available and accessible to all and 29th Article places a lot of emphasis on the primary purposes education should have.

The following link shows all 54 Articles of the Convention:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

United States and Somalia are the only countries that have only signed but not ratified the Convention, while South Sudan has neither signed nor ratified it.

### World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)

Supported by UNESCO the "Education for All" was adopted in 1990. Together with the Millennium Development Goals, this Declaration is the most important instrument in achieving Education for All around the globe. All children regardless of their status have to receive equal education. This Declaration had a tremendous impact on the international community, resulting in more children to be accepted in schools and having many countries finally act towards educating illiterate children.

### Timeline of events

Date	Event
1951	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted, where in its 22<sup>nd</sup> Article the right to primary education for refugees is outlined</li> </ul>
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of Understanding between UNESCO and UNHCR</li> <li>The Protocol relating to the Convention on the Status of refugees was adopted</li> </ul>
1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1<sup>st</sup> guidelines for refugee education were published by UNHCR, so called "Organizing Primary Education for Refugee Children in Emergency Situations"</li> </ul>
1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</li> </ul>
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)</li> </ul>
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 2<sup>nd</sup> guideline for refugee education were published by UNHCR, known as "Guidelines for Educational Assistance to Refugees"</li> <li>DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarships for higher education was established</li> </ul>
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of Understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF</li> </ul>
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The World Education Forum recognized the role of education in development and the promotion of peace, especially for refugees during their displacement.</li> </ul>
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was formed, playing a vital role in the information sharing in emergency education</li> </ul>
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasizing the importance of "education as a tool for protection", the Executive Committee approved the "2002 UNHCR Agenda for Protection and subsequent Action Plan"</li> </ul>
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>INEE issued the "Minimum Standards" for Education in Emergencies, Long lasting crises and Early Reconstruction</li> </ul>

2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 1<sup>st</sup> UNHCR Education Strategy took place, focusing on issues of access, quality, and protection of education</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revised version of the Minimum Standards for Education were issued by the INEE</li> <li>• The 2<sup>nd</sup> UNHCR Education Strategy took place for three years, focusing on the access, quality, and protection of education</li> <li>• Education is one of the Global Strategic Priorities for UNHCR between 2012-2011</li> </ul>
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education is one of the Global Strategic Priorities for UNHCR between 2012-2013</li> </ul>

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

So far many attempts have been made to address the education challenges of young refugees. Hosting countries bear large responsibility in promoting the right to education for refugee children and they are achieving this, by organizing education activities after ensuring that refugees' basic needs such as shelter and food are available to them. However most of their efforts have many gaps and this is when international organizations step in. One of the most involved international organizations is the UNHCR. It has launched several projects and strategies the most recent of which is the 2012-2016 education Strategy aiming at expanding secondary education, increasing the number of refugee children having access to education and the use of technology, ensuring the quality of lessons and that the school environment remains safe. The UNHCR has signed a Letter of Understanding with UNESCO so as to tackle the educational problems and to ensure that Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan will return as educated as possible to their homelands. Another agency, known as UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) also helps around 4.8 million registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. To resolve the complex educational problem occurring in most countries of the world UNHCR had also a close and fruitful cooperation with UNICEF and local Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's). UNHCR focuses on specific countries too, emanating strategies according to the countries needs and education shortages.



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