

Post-Primary Education for Refugees

Policy brief

Good quality, inclusive post-primary education for refugees can transform individual and community futures, building skills, agency and confidence. Yet evidence from a longitudinal study called *Voices of Refugee Youth* tracking 1,126 refugee students over 2 years shows that significant systemic and socio economic factors limit both educational progression and access to post-study employment for young refugees.

Why this matters

The benefits of education for refugee youth are well documented: education protects, builds resilience and creates opportunities for a better future, whether in a protracted crisis, in a host country or on return to a country of origin. Significant progress in access to primary education for refugee children has been made in recent years, but a huge gap remains in secondary education with only 37% of refugee adolescents enrolled compared to 84% of their peers globally¹ and only 6% of refugees accessing tertiary education, compared to 40% of youth globally². Refugees are up to six times more likely to be unemployed than non-refugees³: the potential gains - both for individuals and the global community - of post-primary education for refugees remain only partially realised.

¹ [UNESCO UIS. \(2022\)](#). School enrollment, secondary (% gross).

² [UNHCR. \(2022\)](#). All inclusive: the campaign for refugee education.

³ [British Council. \(2018\)](#). Inclusion of Refugees in Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Key findings

- ▶ **Post-primary education was perceived to have had a positive impact** for almost all of the refugees in the cohort (94%), building knowledge, skills, agency, social capital, confidence and the ability to contribute to refugee and host communities.
- ▶ At secondary level, **improving teaching quality was identified as one of the most important ways to improve education for refugees**, along with addressing a lack of educational and technological resources, and providing more holistic trauma-informed support.
- ▶ **Higher education in particular enhances the agency of refugee youth**, with almost double the reported rate of self-determination of circumstances across the cohort.
- ▶ **Systemic factors including prohibitive fees and administrative hurdles significantly limit refugees' progression** to higher levels of education.
- ▶ Despite positive correlation between university completion and employment (with one of the university cohorts achieving a 63% employment rate), **legal barriers to work, employer prejudice and a challenging job market limit pathways to employment** for young refugee graduates.

Key policy recommendations

To ensure education for refugees has the impact it can and must, global education stakeholders should implement the following key actions to enhance quality, enable progression and equip refugees for work.

Enhancing quality

- 1 Education policymakers should continue efforts to centralise transferable skills, including communication, confidence and critical thinking in post-primary curricula design, and ensure that refugee learners have full and equal access to these components.
- 2 The international refugee education donor community should work with host-governments to establish and boost inclusion in technology access schemes specifically tailored to the needs of refugee communities.
- 3 Governments and donors should provide specialist training and associated finance to enable education institutions to provide holistic trauma-informed support to refugee students.
- 4 Governments and donors should work together to ensure teachers from a refugee background are paid a salary aligned with that of teachers who are host country nationals, based on their qualifications and experience; and regular teacher professional development opportunities on supporting refugee learners should be provided.

Enabling progression

- 5 Host governments should take steps towards ensuring refugee students pay the same fees as host-community students and have equal access to grants and loans.
- 6 In the interim, the refugee education donor community should provide targeted funding through scholarships, grants and loans to supplement government provision and ensure parity with national students.

Equipping for work

- 7 Education institutions should prioritise the development of practical skills within national curricula to improve refugee readiness for the workplace, and add targeted content within teacher professional development programmes to ensure this is applied in the classroom.
- 8 UNHCR should continue to invest in the development of strategic partnerships with providers of workplace readiness training schemes across the private and public sectors, facilitating industry placements, apprenticeships and fairly paid internships for refugees.
- 9 Governments should explore opportunities for technical and vocational training for refugees to be better aligned with local emerging markets and context-specific employability trends.

About this document

This policy brief represents a synthesis of the key findings and recommendations from the Voices of Refugee Youth initiative. It seeks to inform policy-making in refugee education on the basis of rigorous evidence with refugee youth at its centre.

For more detailed findings and recommendations, including country specific actions, see the Voices of Refugee Youth research report, youth advocacy reports from Rwanda and Pakistan, and executive summary. All outputs from the initiative can be found on the Voices of Refugee Youth [website](#).

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VOICES OF REFUGEE YOUTH

“Voices of refugee youth: impact of post-primary refugee education” is a research initiative conducted in partnership between Jigsaw, Refugee Education UK and UNHCR. Read more [here](#).

JIGSAW

Jigsaw is a social enterprise that exists to build evidence for education in low-income countries. Read more [here](#).

Refugee Education UK

Refugee Education UK (REUK) is a charity which equips young refugees to build positive futures by thriving in education. Read more [here](#).



UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. Read more [here](#).



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