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Study Guide

UNHCR

Topic: Improving Access to Education for
Refugees



ISARMUN

Study Guide – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Table of Contents

1. Welcome Letter.....	2
2. Foreword.....	3
3. Improving access to education for refugees; 2020 figures.....	4
4. Education during the coronacrisis.....	6
5. Guiding questions.....	7
6. Sources for further research:.....	7
7. Bibliography.....	8

1. Welcome Letter:

Honorable Delegates,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the MUN Refugee Challenge of the UNHCR, taking place at IsarMUN. We, Larissa and Youssef, are delighted to guide you through this debate.

Larissa is a student of sociology, politics, and economics at Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen. In her spare time, she has already helped out a lot at the Tafel in Friedrichshafen, where she experienced how unequal access to food, housing, and especially education can be. There she also came into touch with many refugees and their stories.

Youssef is an Egyptian student who moved to Germany to pursue a bachelor's degree in political science and sociology at LMU. He spends the majority of his time researching international relations and attempts to highlight the inherent inequality of the world political order stemming from the world's colonial and imperial days.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was founded on 14 December 1950 by the General Assembly through the Annex of Resolution 428 and has its headquarters in Geneva. The UNHCR is the refugee agency of the United Nations and has the tasks of protecting refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons, providing humanitarian aid, and assisting with voluntary return or integration.¹

We hope the topic “Improving Access to Education for Refugees” for this committee will challenge you to use your critical thinking and reasoning in tackling global and interconnected problems. Thereby, we want to enable you to become engaged global citizens who think of people who have it harder through no fault of their own, but who just as much deserve a chance at a noble life.

It is the International Community's duty and responsibility to care about the weakest and most vulnerable in the global society. Refugees, especially children, who had to flee from their homes, are amongst those unfortunate people. Caring for them means going beyond the tight margins of basic necessities and setting them onto a path of recovery and subsequently growth. This cannot be achieved without proper education.

As a basic human right, education has remained a focal point of the UNHCR. Apart from primary education, the number of refugees enrolling in schools, be it secondary or higher education, falls

¹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (1950). Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved October 18, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c39e1/statute-office-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html>

below 30%, with just 3% pursuing higher education². With access to education being limited, and the current virus acting as an additional obstacle, we turn to you, our delegates. In collaboration with the UNHCR and UN75, this committee is tasked with finding ways to improve the access to education and perhaps a possible solution. We are confident that despite this task being a daunting one, you will be able to present a helpful outcome. We are excited to see you, hear your ideas, and watch you deliberate.

We wish you all the best, and we hope to see you on November 14th.

Yours faithfully,

Larissa Greul & Youssef Youssef

2. Foreword

By reading this paper, we assume that you are, by the very latest, now aware that you are taking part in this year's refugee challenge. The challenge was issued by the United Nations and the needed data for our topic has been compacted into a paper by them as well. We therefore ask you to refer to that file as your main study guide (it will be sent to you alongside this file). Seeing as that paper however was formulated in 2019, you can find the adjusted figures for 2020 below. For this rendition of IsarMUN, you will not be representing countries, but factions (legal, social, political, economic). Your aim, as mentioned in the welcome letter, will be to write a solution paper on the topic "improving access to education for refugees". This solution paper will be submitted to the UNHCR which then will pick the winner of this year's refugee challenge! The omission of a country matrix should encourage you to find a solution transcending borders, fitting for the international community, and either completely of your own creation or inspired by successes in other host countries. Unlike regular MUNs, your fellow delegates in this case are not adversaries, as all of your interests must meet to be able to draft a solution paper.

You will also find a brief paragraph addressing the topic at hand in light of the coronacrisis³ in addition to questions meant to help you during the debate. We understand that this new format may be challenging to some, and we are open to any questions you may have in the lead-up to the conference and stand ready to assist you.

3. Improving access to education for refugees; 2020 figures

The main problem is that refugees have lack the same access to education as non-refugees. Worldwide there are 19.9 million refugees, 7.4 million of which are of school age.⁴ In the 12

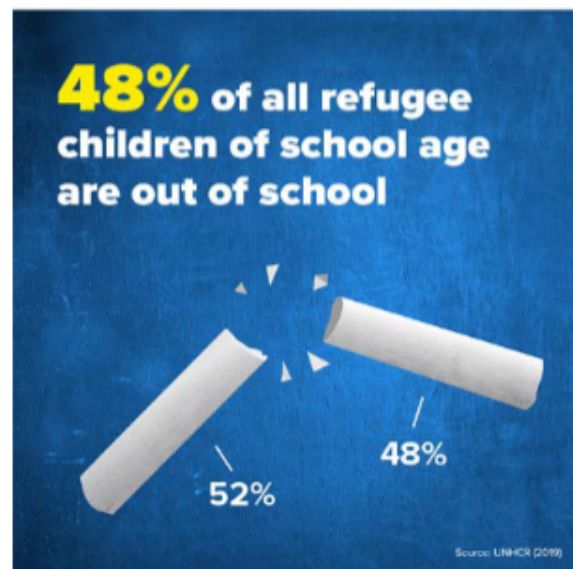
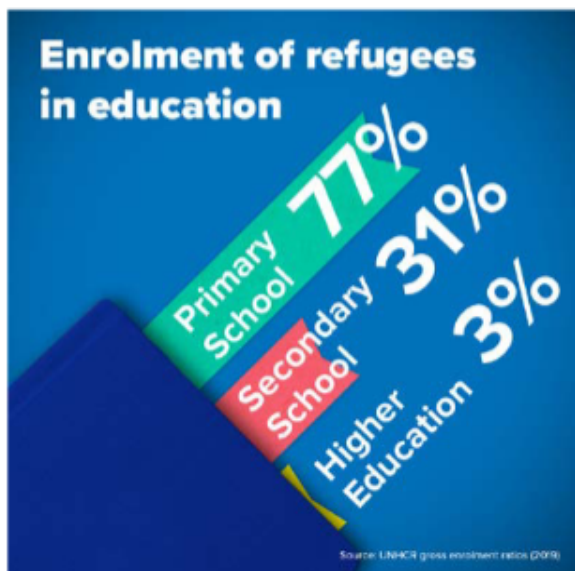
² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Education. Retrieved October 18, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/education.html>

³ Data is currently insufficient, therefore figures have been omitted

⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Education. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/education.html>

countries with the highest influx of refugees more than 1.8 million children are out of school. That means 48 percent of all refugee children of school age are not enrolled in an institute for education.⁵ The percentage of enrollment however differs largely depending on the education level.

At the primary level, the gross enrolment of refugee children in school stands at 77 percent, but less than half of refugee children who start primary school make it to secondary school. Only 31 percent of refugee children were enrolled at the secondary level in 2019. At the level of higher education, for example vocational education or training and university courses, only 3 percent of refugee youth were enrolled in programs. There is also a divide between refugee boys and refugee girls. 36 percent of refugee boys were enrolled in secondary education, while only 27 percent of girls were enrolled in such programs.⁶



The causes of this inequality are diverse and come along with the act of fleeing one's home country. Naturally “displacement disrupts children’s education because of the difficulties and dangers they face in reaching safety, accessing vital basic resources, acquiring new identity documents and helping their families in often vulnerable situations”⁷.

An important factor in the struggle for improving access to education, as well as the low enrollment numbers, is the regions they flee to. In 2018, 85 percent of refugees were located in developing

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Coming Together For Refugee Education. Education Report 2020. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2019). Stepping up. Refugee Education in Crisis. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf> p.16

countries; a third were in the least developed countries.⁸ These countries do not necessarily have enough schools and fully developed school systems capable of accommodating an influx of refugee students. Therefore there might not even be the possibility for refugee children to attend school, because of overstretched resources.

In the act of fleeing many people often flee their homes without the necessary documents that are relevant for enrollment in schools such as birth certificates, identity documents, or exam certificates. Without those documents it is increasingly difficult to enroll in schools, much less continue the school curriculum.⁹

Another factor not to be underestimated is the cost of education. Secondary education is more extensive than primary education and some subjects require advanced facilities and better materials. In parallel, the courses and contents of secondary education demand more qualified teachers. This explains the gap between primary and secondary education. Furthermore, the high costs stand in contrast to the high pressure to earn, that refugee children face. Due to the often precarious financial situation of refugee families, young refugees come under greater pressure to support their households financially. The question therefore arises whether to continue going to school and thus be a financial burden on the family, or whether to support the family by working. Girls are often even more at a disadvantage in this respect. Since tasks such as caring for younger siblings or older relatives and running the household are perceived as the responsibility of girls, their participation in the home or getting married is considered a wiser investment than their schooling. When a refugee family has limited financial resources and must choose which children can continue their education, boys are often given priority because they are believed to have the greater earning potential.¹⁰

Recently, schools have recently become increasingly terrorist targets, as some ideological groups oppose the education provided in schools. This makes it incredibly difficult for children to go to school safely. In Burkina Faso alone 2,500 schools had to be closed due to violence, depriving 350,000 children of access to education.¹¹

But why is this topic so important?

⁸United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2019). Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2019. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2019). Stepping up. Refugee Education in Crisis. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Coming Together For Refugee Education. Education Report 2020. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4>

Apart from the fact that “Education is a basic human right”, granted in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, education empowers, enlightens, and protects refugees. Education provides refugees with the ability to become independent citizens and qualified workers, gives them an awareness of the interconnections of the world and the necessary knowledge to build their own home one day, and provides them with the necessary protection against exploitation and forced labour. This is particularly important for girls, as education reduces girls' vulnerability to abuse, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and forced child marriage. Last but not least, the education of children, especially refugee children, has a high impact on the development of communities, as children are the teachers and doctors of the next generation.¹²

Lastly, the education of refugees ranks fourth as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. It reads: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.¹³

4. Education during the Coronacrisis

The already strained systems of some host countries must now deal with an unprecedented challenge to the education system. The coronavirus has forced schools to shut down and introduced digital classrooms into our world. With it came the problem of technilization and digitization of households that may not be able to afford the hardware needed. Homeschooling is feasible for some of us, but only for the ones who have the technological means for it, such as laptops, smartphones, or tablets. Refugees often do not have access to these means, regardless of their location. We must therefore ask ourselves, how can one guarantee that refugee children have access to comprehensive education during the crisis? Should governments spend money on the equipment necessary to educate refugees, knowing that they may one day return home or travel elsewhere? Would that be money well spent or should they use it for their citizens instead, such as saving a small business or financial support for struggling families? If they decide not to fund the digitalization of refugee students, does this lead to legal repercussions?

5. Guiding questions

- How can host countries provide more educational opportunities for refugee populations? How can they be helped to achieve this?

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Education. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://www.unhcr.org/education.html>

¹³ United Nations Department on Economic and Social Affairs. (2020) Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

- What is more important: teacher numbers, textbooks and other learning materials, school buildings, sports facilities, scholarships, language learning, WASH and gender-appropriate facilities? What would you prioritise?
- What can universities, schools, professors and students do to support access to education for refugees?
- Can online learning help refugees access education, especially in remote areas? If yes, under what conditions? How to incentivize governments, universities and tech companies to expand online learning opportunities for refugees?
- In some regions, communities can be culturally resistant to educating girls. How can they be persuaded that the advantages outweigh the perceived disadvantages? ¹⁴

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BACKGROUND GUIDE

ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES



UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is launching the MUN Refugee Challenge to encourage students worldwide to shape solutions for people forced to flee their homes. This guide was drafted to help students prepare for their debates.

The challenge

Access to education for refugees is much worse than for non-refugees.

Today, there are around 3.7 million refugee children out of school – more than half of the 7.1 million school-age refugee children.

- At **primary level**, **63 per cent** of refugee children are enrolled in school, compared to a global level of 91 per cent.
- At **secondary level**, **24 per cent** of refugees are in school, compared to 84 per cent of secondary-age children worldwide.
- At **higher level**, the figures are **3 per cent** for refugees and 37 per cent for non-refugees.

Despite major investment in primary education, the rise in forced displacement around the world – including refugees, asylum-seekers, people displaced within their own borders and the stateless – means there are big gaps between refugees and their non-refugee peers when it comes to access to education.

Nature of displacement: By its very nature, displacement disrupts children’s education because of the difficulties and dangers they face in reaching safety, accessing vital basic resources, acquiring new identity documents and helping their families in often vulnerable situations.

Protracted situations: In 2018, almost four in every five refugees were in protracted situations, meaning that refugee children are very likely to go through an entire school cycle, from age 5 to 18, in exile. Those who had begun school before being uprooted may well never return to the classroom they went to at home.

Stretched resources: In the under-resourced regions in which millions of refugees are located, there may not even be a school to attend. In 2018, 85 per cent of refugees were located in low or middle-income regions; a third were in the lowest-income countries. Where schools exist, they may already be stretched to breaking point – overflowing classrooms, a lack of teachers, a shortage of basic facilities such as water, sanitation and hygiene, and insufficient teaching and learning materials.

Lack of documentation: The chaos attending forced displacement also means that many people flee home without the documents – birth certificates and other forms of identification, educational records and exam certificates – that grant them entrance to a local school in a new country. Even when they have those records, a school in another country will not always accept them.

The growing gap: The contrast between primary and secondary enrolment is stark (63 per cent versus 24 per cent). Secondary education costs more than primary. Subject learning is more advanced, with some subjects requiring better facilities and learning materials, and secondary studies demand better qualified teachers.

Pressure to earn: As they grow up, refugee adolescents come under greater pressure to support their households. In this regard, girls are often at an even greater disadvantage in terms of “opportunity costs” – perceived losses in terms of income and domestic duties. Collecting water or fuel, taking care of

younger siblings or older relatives, and carrying out household chores are all tasks that fall heavily on girls. Such domestic contributions are often seen as more valuable than any investment in their education. As they reach adolescence, girls can face added pressures to give up educational ambitions so that they can marry early or start earning an income instead.

Parallel schooling: Uncertified parallel systems persist as a temporary response to refugee emergencies, even though they are usually of poor quality, are far less likely to follow a formal curriculum, and result in unrecognized certification. An extreme example might take the form of an open-air school run by adults who are educated but not trained as teachers, improvising a curriculum; in other cases, refugee children might be refused access to the curriculum and national education system and be taught the curriculum of their home country, even though there is no way they can sit official exams and thus be rewarded with certification for their endeavours. Both examples reduce a refugee student's chances of progressing to a formal secondary education.



Why it matters

Education is the key to the future of individuals, communities and countries.

Education is a basic human right, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is protective and empowering, giving refugees the knowledge and skills to live productive, fulfilling and independent lives. It provides a route to employment and self-sufficiency. It provides new generations with leaders, doctors, scientists, engineers, writers, historians and spokespeople.

Education as protection: UNHCR considers school to be fundamentally protective. It provides displaced children, many of whom will have witnessed or experienced violence, hunger, isolation and other stressful situations, with a place of normality and routine. It shields them from adult cares and responsibilities that should not be part of their lives. It also provides a physical barrier to anyone seeking to exploit children such as people traffickers, criminal gangs, armed groups looking to forcibly recruit children, and others.

Advantages for girls: Education reduces girls' vulnerability to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

According to UNESCO, if all girls completed primary school, child marriage would fall by 14 per cent. If they all finished secondary school, it would drop by 64 per cent. Other UNESCO research shows that one additional year of school can increase a girl's earnings by up to a fifth – bringing benefits for the girls themselves, their future families and their communities. However, at secondary level there are only about seven refugee girls for every 10 refugee boys enrolled. Furthermore, there are not enough female teachers to act as role models and encourage families to send their girls to school.

Higher education crisis: The effect of low enrolment rates at secondary level – especially at the upper levels – has been to keep refugee enrolment in higher education to abysmally low levels. In 2018, only 3 per cent of refugee youth was enrolled in university or on a technical or vocational course.

For those refugees who have succeeded in making it all the way through secondary school, there are some recurrent barriers keeping them from progressing: certification, languages and cost. Educational certification is often lost during the chaos of flight, or it may not be recognised for entry into an institution in another country. Advanced courses call for advanced language skills. And the high cost of tertiary education can deter or exclude many students – especially if, as is the case in some countries, refugees are required to pay the higher international student rates.

Responses and solutions

Inclusion on the rise: The slight rise in primary school enrolment in 2018 over the previous year reflects a commitment by an increasing number of host governments to include refugee children and youth in their national education systems. The rise is particularly noteworthy given that overall refugee numbers are constantly increasing. Inclusion is key to boosting enrolment. Providing all learners with a proper curriculum and school certification is the pathway to progressing to secondary and higher education, and onwards to employment.

- In Rwanda, for instance, thousands of refugee children have been enrolled in primary schools thanks to progressive government policies and targeted funding from donors.
- In Uganda, 23,000 over-age learners who were previously out of school are now participating in primary education thanks to accelerated education programmes.

- Turkey, which now hosts 3.7 million refugees, including 1 million school-age children, has implemented a Turkish-language programme – along with new learning materials, subsidized transport, additional teacher training and other measures – to prepare refugee children for the transition from unofficial temporary schools to Turkish ones.
- Ecuador has passed legislation to make school enrolment much more accessible for Venezuelan refugee children and youth, even in cases where they do not have the required documentation.

Mutual benefits: Inclusion also creates conditions in which refugee children and youth can learn in peaceful coexistence with each other, and with local children. Host communities should always be considered in education planning. For example, between 2009 and 2018, the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas initiative in Pakistan invested more than US\$45 million in over 730 educational projects. Of the nearly 800,000 children who benefitted, 16 per cent were Afghan refugees while the rest were local Pakistanis.

Dealing with costs: The cost of tuition, exam fees, uniforms, learning materials and transport can all act as deterrents.

Cash transfers not only give families the ability to prioritize what they need (and benefit the local economy to boot), they also reduce the likelihood of their turning to child labour and forced marriage as ways of finding an income. They have improved access, attendance and participation in schools in a range of countries, including Kenya, Turkey, Chad and Egypt. In the latter case, a project implemented by Catholic Relief Services that is tied to proof of enrolment and attendance – but with no restrictions on how the money is spent – has helped improve refugee children’s school attendance, particularly at secondary level.

Scholarships can also help young refugees overcome financial barriers to accessing education. Programmes such as DAFI offer scholarships that provide undergraduate refugee students with scholarships that cover a wide range of costs, from tuition fees to study materials, food, transport, accommodation and other allowances. DAFI scholars also receive additional support through language classes, psychological support, mentoring and networking opportunities.

Connected learning programmes can also help refugees access higher education, especially from remote areas. The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, encourages universities to provide online education in contexts of

conflict and displacement. This allows refugee students to complete university degrees by following courses and interacting with their professors and fellow students online, usually from computer labs.

Catching up: The realities of displacement can mean that refugee children miss out on significant periods of schooling. Also, many refugee children come from countries where education was already difficult to access – meaning that their new environment as a refugee could be their best or even first chance to go to school. Increasingly, aid and development agencies and educational organisations are using accelerated education programmes – flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth – particularly those who missed out on education or had it interrupted because of poverty, marginalisation, conflict and crisis. In most cases, the idea is to enable children to enter or re-enter the standard school system at the correct level for their age and ability.



Questions to guide debates

- How can host countries provide more educational opportunities for refugee populations? How can they be helped to achieve this?
- What is more important: teacher numbers, textbooks and other learning materials, school buildings, sports facilities, scholarships, language learning, WASH and gender-appropriate facilities? What would you prioritise?
- What can universities, schools, professors and students do to support access to education for refugees?
- Can online learning help refugees access education, especially in remote areas? If yes, under what conditions? How to incentivize governments, universities and tech companies to expand online learning opportunities for refugees?
- How can families be incentivised to ensure their children get a full education when the costs of lost income and domestic care are high? How can refugee families be better involved in school life?
- In some regions, communities can be culturally resistant to educating girls. How can they be persuaded that the advantages outweigh the perceived disadvantages?