

SA2: Education

*Securing the right to education for
refugees and minorities*

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Forum: Education (SA2)

Issue: Securing the right to education for refugees and minorities

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Introduction

In the current climate of the world, many individuals are forced to flee their homes and move to other countries as refugees. Among these refugee groups, one of the many pressing concerns of communities are their need and lack of education. Many of these children have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, or other forms of violence, and face significant barriers to accessing education. According to UNHCR, only 63% of refugee children worldwide attend primary school, compared to a global average of 91%. In low-income countries, the figure drops to just 50%, and for refugee girls, the figure is even lower, at 43%. In addition, members of minority groups, including ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, often face discrimination and marginalization, which can also limit their access to education. According to UNESCO, there are an estimated 75 million children worldwide who are out of school, and many of them belong to minority groups. This can have significant long-term consequences for both the individuals affected and their communities, as education is a key driver of economic and social development.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugees:

People who are forced to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, or violence and who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin.

Minorities:

Groups of people who are socially, culturally, or linguistically distinct from the dominant population of a country or region.

Discrimination:

The unjust treatment of individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other characteristics.

Marginalization:

The social and economic exclusion of individuals or groups from mainstream society, often due to discrimination or prejudice.

Equity:

The principle of treating all individuals fairly and providing them with equal opportunities and resources to achieve their goals, regardless of their background, identity, or status.

General Overview

Education is a fundamental human right and a key factor in promoting social and economic development. However, access to education is not universal, and many vulnerable populations, such as refugees and minorities, face significant barriers to obtaining a quality education.

The issue of securing the right to education for refugees and minorities has been a priority for the international community for several decades. In 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established to provide protection and assistance to refugees, including ensuring access to education. Since then, the UN and other international organizations have adopted various conventions and goals aimed at ensuring access to education for all, including refugees and minority groups. For example, the Education for All movement, launched in 1990, aimed to ensure that all children had access to quality primary education by 2015. While significant progress was made towards this goal, many vulnerable populations, such as refugees and minorities, were still left behind.

Despite the significant progress that has been made in promoting education for all, many vulnerable populations, such as refugees and minorities, still face significant barriers to obtaining a quality education. According to the UNHCR, in 2021, there were over 82 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including 26.4 million refugees. Of these refugees, more than half are children. The vast majority of these children are out of school, with only 63% of refugee children enrolled in primary school and only 24% enrolled in secondary school. In addition, many countries with large refugee populations lack the resources and infrastructure to provide adequate education to these populations. For example, in Lebanon, which has one of the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the world, only 52% of Syrian refugee children are enrolled in primary school. The statistics for minority groups are similarly concerning, with many minority groups facing discrimination and marginalization in accessing education.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UN agency responsible for protecting and providing assistance to refugees worldwide, including ensuring access to education.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The UN agency responsible for promoting education, science, and culture worldwide, including advocating for education for all and providing support to education systems in crisis-affected countries.

World Bank

The World Bank has supported education initiatives in crisis-affected countries through its Education for the Most Marginalized project, which aims to improve the quality and access of education for vulnerable populations, including refugees and minority groups.

Jordan

Jordan has one of the largest populations of refugees per capita in the world and has implemented several initiatives to support the education of refugees, including the Jordan Compact, which aims to improve access to education, training, and employment for Syrian refugees in the country.

Turkey

Turkey is home to the largest population of Syrian refugees in the world and has implemented several initiatives to support their education, including the Temporary Education Centers, which provide free education to Syrian children.

Uganda

Uganda has one of the most progressive refugee policies in the world and provides refugees with access to education, healthcare, and employment. The country has implemented several initiatives to support the education of refugees, including the Refugee Education Trust, which provides education scholarships to refugee students.

United States

The United States has implemented several initiatives to support the education of refugees and asylum seekers, including the Refugee School Impact Program, which provides funding and support to schools with high concentrations of refugee students.

Timeline of Events

Date of Event	<i>Description of Event</i>
1948	<i>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes education as a fundamental human right.</i>
1951	<i>The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is adopted, which states that refugees should have access to elementary education.</i>
1960	<i>The Convention Against Discrimination in Education is adopted, which prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.</i>
1989	<i>The Convention on the Rights of the Child is adopted, which recognizes the right of every child to education and calls for equal access to education for all children.</i>
2000	<i>The United Nations Millennium Development Goals are adopted, which include a goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015.</i>

2015	<i>The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are adopted, which include a goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.</i>
2019	<i>The Global Refugee Forum is held, which aims to increase support for refugees and their host communities, including in the areas of education and skills training.</i>

Treaties and Events

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, the UDHR sets out the basic human rights that should be protected and promoted by all member states, including the right to education.

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1951, this treaty sets out the rights of refugees and the legal obligations of states to protect and assist them, including in the area of education.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, this treaty outlines the rights of children and their protection, including the right to education.

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: adopted by the UNESCO World Education Forum in 2015, this document provides a roadmap for achieving SDG 4, with a particular focus on equity and inclusion in education.

Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: adopted by the UNESCO World Education Forum in 2019, this document outlines the global vision and priorities for education in the coming decade, including a commitment to leave no one behind and to promote equity and inclusion in education.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been several past attempts to address the issue of securing the right to education for refugees and minorities. The United Nations and other international organizations have adopted various conventions and goals aimed at ensuring access to education for all, including refugees and minority groups. In addition, many countries have implemented policies and programs to address the educational needs of these populations, such as providing language support, offering catch-up classes for students who have missed significant amounts of schooling, and promoting inclusive education. However, despite these efforts, significant challenges remain, including lack of funding, inadequate resources, and ongoing discrimination and marginalization. The issue of education for refugees and minorities requires continued attention and action from the international community to ensure that all individuals have equal access to this fundamental human right.

Possible Solutions

There are several possible solutions that could be implemented to address the challenges faced by refugees and minorities in accessing education. One approach is to focus on improving the quality of education provided in refugee camps and other temporary settlements, including by providing teachers with appropriate training and resources, developing curricula that are relevant to the needs of displaced populations, and ensuring that education is delivered in safe and secure environments. Another strategy is to increase access to education for refugees and minorities in host countries, by providing language and cultural training, facilitating recognition of prior learning, and establishing pathways to higher education and employment. Additionally, efforts can be made to reduce the barriers to education for refugees and minorities, such as by addressing discrimination and stigma, providing financial support for education, and ensuring that education is inclusive and accessible for all. Donor countries and international organizations can also play a crucial role in supporting education for refugees and minorities, by providing funding and technical assistance, advocating for policy changes, and building partnerships between different stakeholders.

Useful Links

- <https://www.unhcr.org>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37114418>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34765657>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/02/dealing-with-the-influx-of-migrants-and-refugees/the-international-community-must-honor-the-right-of-refugees-to-seek-asylum>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/19/us/politics/refugees-asylum-immigration.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/26/universities-are-failing-refugees-they-must-do-more-to-prevent-a-lost-generation>

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