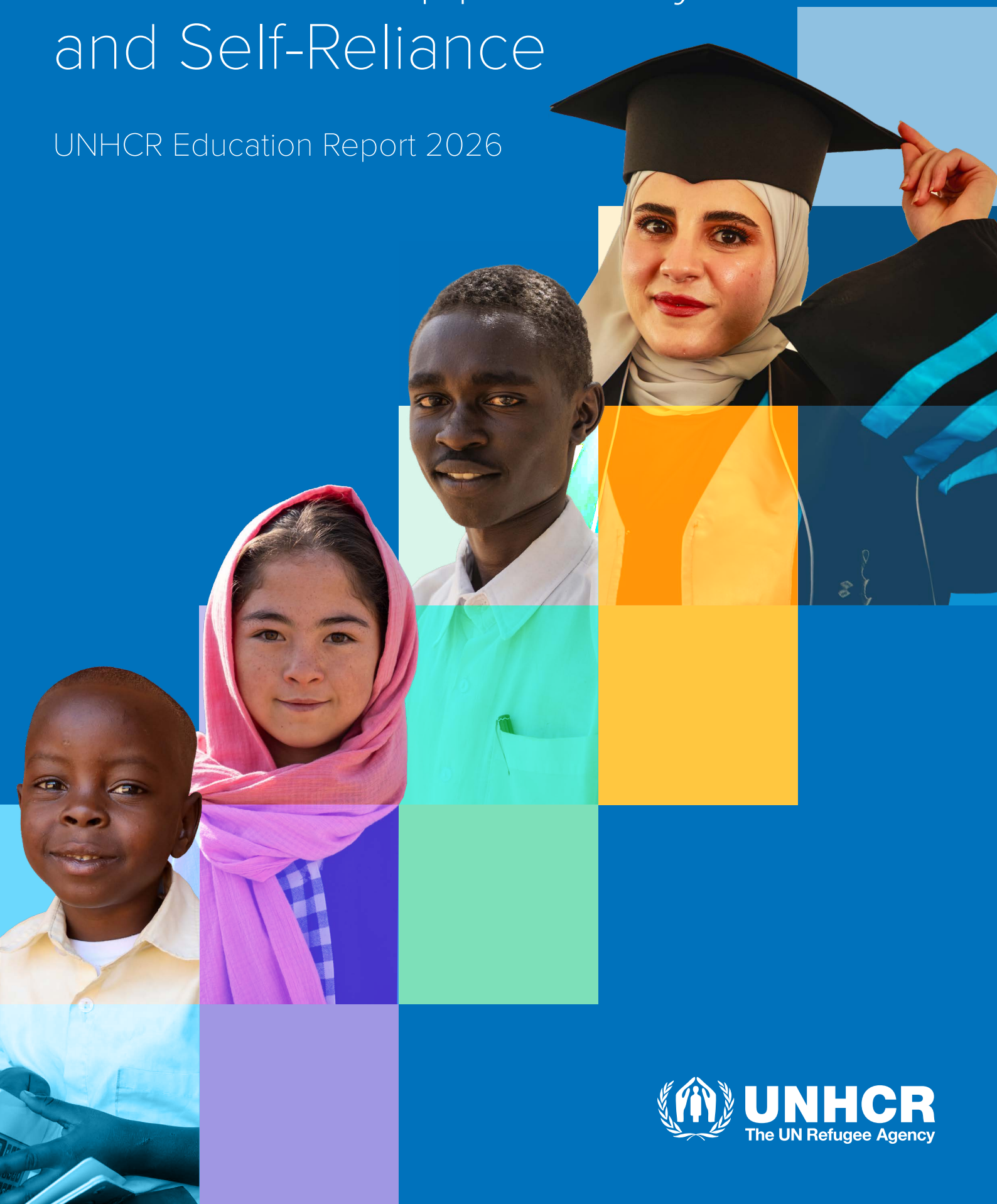


Pathways to the Future

Education, Opportunity and Self-Reliance

UNHCR Education Report 2026



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



Ethiopia. Refugee students attend the Akuda-Tumet Inclusive Primary School at Ura site.

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Foreword • Barham Salih, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

In my first months as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I made it a priority to visit countries hosting refugees. From Kenya and Chad to Jordan, Türkiye, Lebanon, Ethiopia and Egypt, I met people who had been recently displaced and others who had lived away from their homes for decades. Despite loss and hardship, they were determined to rebuild their lives and contribute to the communities where they now live. Parents and young people spoke about the importance of education for their future.

Looking back on my own years as a refugee, I understood exactly what they meant. Education gave me opportunities that displacement might otherwise have denied me. It helped me rebuild my life and shape my own future.

In 2026, we commemorate 75 years since the adoption of the Refugee Convention, founded on the principle that people forced to flee must be protected. That commitment remains as urgent as ever. At the end of 2025, nearly four in ten forcibly displaced people – some 45 million – were children under the age of 18 years.

Education is protection. But it is also a pathway to opportunity and self-reliance. This is why education is integral to our 50 by 35 vision, which seeks to halve the number of refugees in protracted situations who depend on humanitarian assistance by 2035. The foundations for self-reliance are laid early. Refugee children and young people need the opportunity to enter school, continue learning, and progress into higher education, skills development and employment.

The most sustainable way to achieve this is through inclusion. Integrating refugees into national education systems gives them the same opportunities as their peers, while strengthening the systems and communities that host them. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, more governments are making this possible, supported by development partners, civil society and the private sector. This progress reflects the leadership of host countries and the determination of refugee learners and their families.

But this progress cannot be taken for granted. At a time of severe pressure on humanitarian and development financing, cuts to education risk reversing decades of collective investment and closing opportunities for a generation of young people.

Investment in refugee education is an investment in people and in the societies in which they live. A child who can learn today is better equipped to work, contribute and support themselves tomorrow, whether they ultimately return home, build their future in the country that has given them refuge or pursue opportunities elsewhere.

As this report shows, our ambition must be greater than keeping children in classrooms. We must aim to ensure that displacement does not determine the limits of their lives. **Education gives young people the tools to shape their own futures. Our responsibility is to make sure they have that chance.**

Kenya. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Barham Salih attends an English class at The Big Heart Foundation Secondary School in Kalobeyei.

© UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

“Education is protection. But it is also a pathway to opportunity and self-reliance.”





Cameroon. Seven-year-old Melissa Agnes and eight-year-old Fele Mbangue Steve, both refugees from the Central African Republic, study at the Section 1A public primary school in Gado-Badzéré.
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“Education gives young people the tools to shape their own futures.
Our responsibility is to make sure they have that chance.”

— **Barham Salih** • United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

State of refugee education

Education remains one of the most important investments in the future of refugee children and young people. Beyond protecting children during displacement, it builds the knowledge, skills and qualifications needed to rebuild lives, strengthen self-reliance and contribute to host communities and, ultimately, countries of origin. Yet these opportunities depend not only on whether children enter school, but also on whether they are able to continue learning and progress through each successive stage of education.

By the end of 2025, an estimated 35.6 million refugees and other people in need of international protection were under UNHCR mandate,¹ including approximately 13.1 million school-aged refugee children.² **Of these, an estimated 5.8 million remained out of school. That equates to 44 per cent of the global school-aged refugee population,**³ a modest improvement on the 46 per cent recorded in 2024. Continued population growth, however, meant the absolute number of children excluded from education was largely unchanged.

Participation varies sharply by stage: it peaks at primary level and falls away on either side, at pre-primary and secondary through to tertiary. Primary education remains the point of greatest access, with a global gross enrolment rate of 65 per cent. At pre-primary level, the rate falls to 33 per cent and at secondary level to 32 per cent, declining further in tertiary education to 11 per cent.⁴ Gender parity remained broadly balanced in pre-primary and primary education but widened at secondary level, reflecting the additional barriers many girls face during adolescence.

1 UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2025* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2026).
2 The school-aged refugee population is estimated by applying the age distribution observed across reporting countries to the global refugee population under UNHCR mandate.
3 UNHCR, *The Unbreakable Promise: Resilience and Resolve in Refugee Education* (Geneva: UNHCR, August 2025).
4 All 2025 refugee enrolment, gender parity and teacher figures in this report are drawn from the UNHCR 2026 annual education data collection process unless otherwise stated.

Each stage builds on the one before it, making progression between education levels just as important as participation within them. Children who miss out on organised early learning are more likely to begin primary school at a disadvantage. Those who do not complete primary education are far less likely to continue to secondary school, and limited access to secondary education, in turn, narrows opportunities for skills development, tertiary study and future employment.

Participation also depends on more than the barriers that refugees face directly. **As more and more refugee children are educated within national systems, their access and progression are increasingly shaped by the capacity of those systems.** The availability of school places, qualified teachers, learning materials and sustained financing all influence whether refugee children enrol, remain in school and continue progressing.

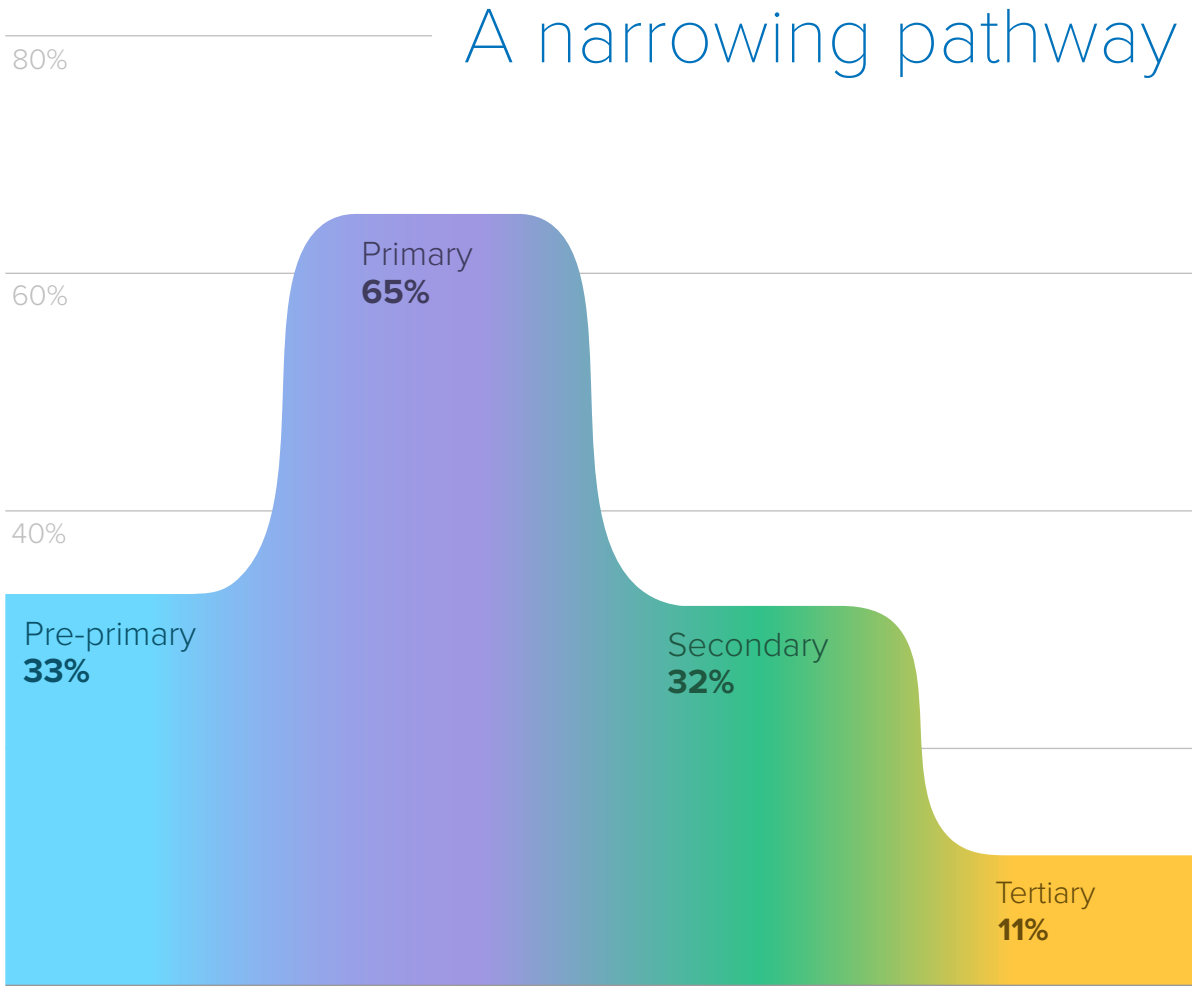
That capacity came under strain in 2025. Humanitarian needs continued to rise as many refugee-hosting countries faced mounting pressure on public services, while preliminary figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that official development assistance declined by approximately 23 per cent in 2025, the largest annual contraction on record.⁵ Aid to education had already declined by 8 per cent between 2023 and 2024, the most recent period for which sectoral data are available and one that precedes the steepest reductions.⁶ Where national systems are already absorbing additional learners, reductions on this scale constrain the resources available to expand provision, and changes in participation should be read alongside demographic change, population movements, financing constraints and the capacity of national systems to respond to rising demand.

5 OECD, *Preliminary official development assistance levels in 2025. Detailed Summary Note* (Paris: OECD, April 2026). Final data are due in December 2026.
6 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, *Counting the loss: aid to education in 2024 and 2025*, Global Education Monitoring Report Policy Paper 52 (Paris: UNESCO, July 2026).

National inclusion sits at the centre of both the Global Compact on Refugees and the UNHCR Refugee Education 2030 strategy.^{7,8} What follows tracks participation stage by stage, from pre-primary through to tertiary, alongside what the data show about learning, teachers, operational context and system capacity: where children are being reached, and where investment still needs to go.

7 Global Compact on Refugees (United Nations publication, New York, 2018).
8 UNHCR, *Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2019).

FIGURE 1
REFUGEE PARTICIPATION
ACROSS THE EDUCATION
PATHWAY | 2025



Consistent with previous UNHCR education reporting, Ukrainian refugee-hosting countries in Europe are excluded from pre-primary, primary and secondary gross enrolment rate calculations. Tertiary gross enrolment rate calculations include available data from countries in Europe.

Refugee education in context: How host country conditions shape access

Many refugee-hosting countries face significant resource constraints and competing demands on public spending. Comparing refugee enrolment with national enrolment in countries facing similar constraints therefore provides important context for understanding the education opportunities available to refugee children and young people.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) publishes national gross enrolment rates but does not report refugee-specific enrolment.⁹ This report therefore compares refugee gross enrolment rates, reported through the UNHCR 2026 annual education data collection process, with mean national rates for low-income countries and for countries affected by fragility and conflict.

At primary level, the global refugee gross enrolment rate of 65 per cent remains well below the overall aver-

⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. National gross enrolment rates, latest available observation for each country and education level. Available at: <https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/>.

age for low-income countries (92 per cent) and for countries affected by fragility and conflict (89 per cent). At secondary level, the global refugee rate of 32 per cent compares with national averages of 38 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. The smaller gap at the secondary level reflects, in part, much lower participation in secondary education for all learners rather than stronger participation among refugees.

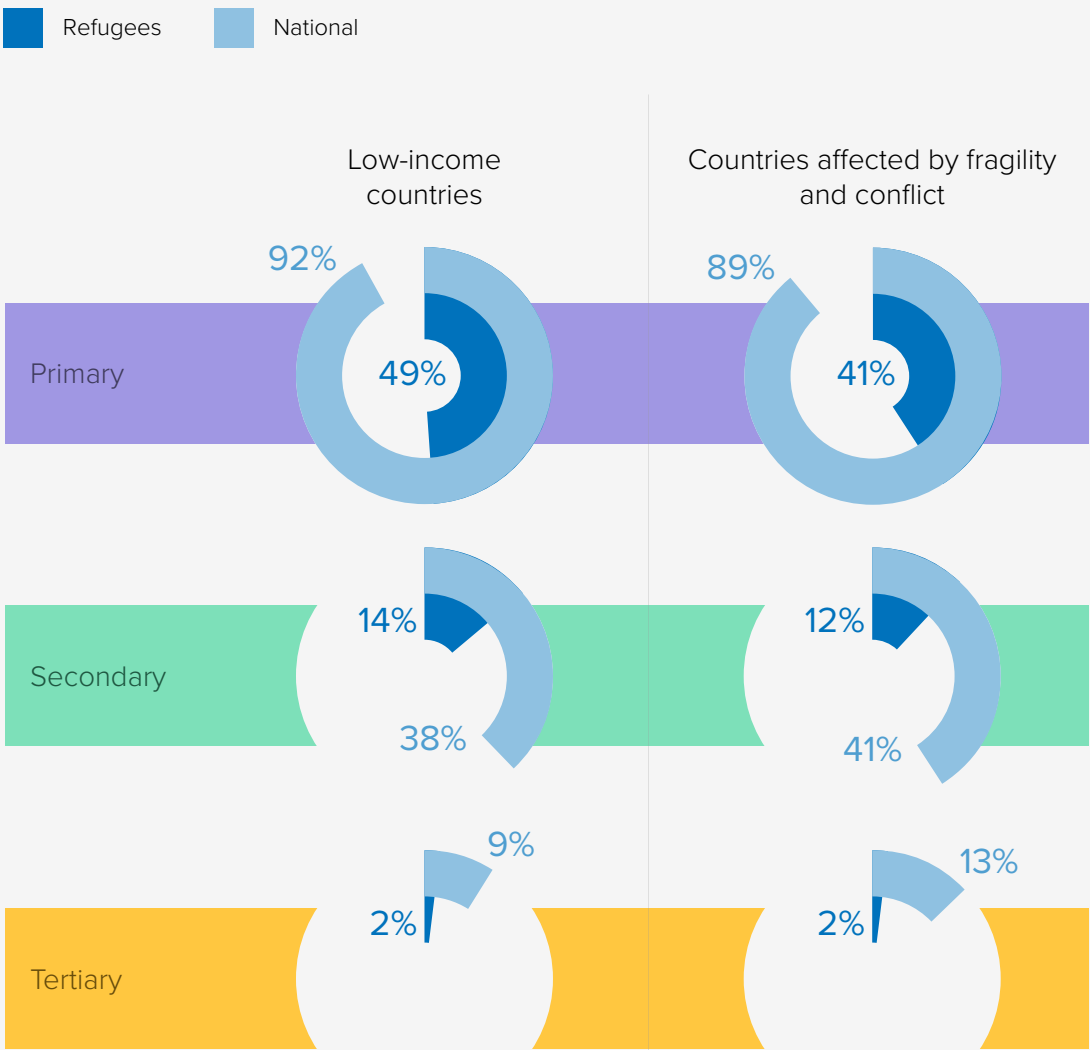
However, global refugee averages mask substantial differences according to where refugees are hosted. Among refugees living in low-income countries, gross enrolment falls to 49 per cent at primary level and 14 per cent at secondary level. Among refugees living in countries affected by fragility and conflict, the corresponding rates are even lower, at 41 per cent and 12 per cent.

At tertiary level, the picture is more mixed: the global refugee enrolment rate of 11 per cent is slightly above the 9 per cent national average for low-income countries, but below the 13 per cent average for countries affected by fragility and

conflict. However, the situation is dramatically different for refugees in low-income countries and those affected by fragility and conflict. In 2025, tertiary gross enrolment was just 2 per cent among refugees living in low-income countries and 2 per cent among those living in countries affected by fragility and conflict.

These findings underline the dual challenge facing refugee education. Refugee children and young people encounter amplified barriers to entering and progressing through education, as many are hosted in countries where education systems face severe resource and capacity constraints. Strengthening refugee inclusion while investing in the national education systems that serve them is essential to expanding opportunities for refugees and host communities alike.

FIGURE 2
REFUGEE GROSS ENROLMENT RATES BY HOST COUNTRY CONTEXT, PRIMARY TO TERTIARY 2025



- Refugee gross enrolment rates are calculated using 2025 refugee enrolment and school-age population data reported through the UNHCR 2026 annual education data collection process.
- National gross enrolment rates are drawn from the UNESCO UIS, using the latest available observation for each country and education level.
- National benchmarks are unweighted mean gross enrolment rates. Refugee rates by host-country context are population-weighted, based on World Bank FY27 low-income and GPE FY26 fragility and conflict classifications. The two groups overlap.
- No pre-primary benchmark is presented because available national data are not comparable with the gross enrolment rates used in this report.

Pre-primary education

Laying the foundations

The global pre-primary gross enrolment rate was 33 per cent in 2025, highlighting the limited reach of organised early learning. Quality provision in pre-primary supports language, cognitive and socioemotional development and strengthens school readiness. For children in displacement, it can also offer stability and protection.¹⁰

The pre-primary stage is the least well measured, for refugees and in national systems. Provision spans national, community-based and non-formal approaches, and official entry ages and durations often differ between countries. Only around one third of reporting operations were able to provide both the enrolment and school-age population figures required to calculate a gross enrolment rate. The apparent fall from 42 per cent in 2024 therefore reflects data availability as much as reduced participation.

Provision is also uneven where it exists. Enrolment ranged from 40 per cent in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) and 39 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), down to 19 per cent in West and Central Africa (WCA) and 13 per cent in Asia (Figure 3). The regional variations are driven by differences in national policy, investment and the inclusiveness of those early learning systems.

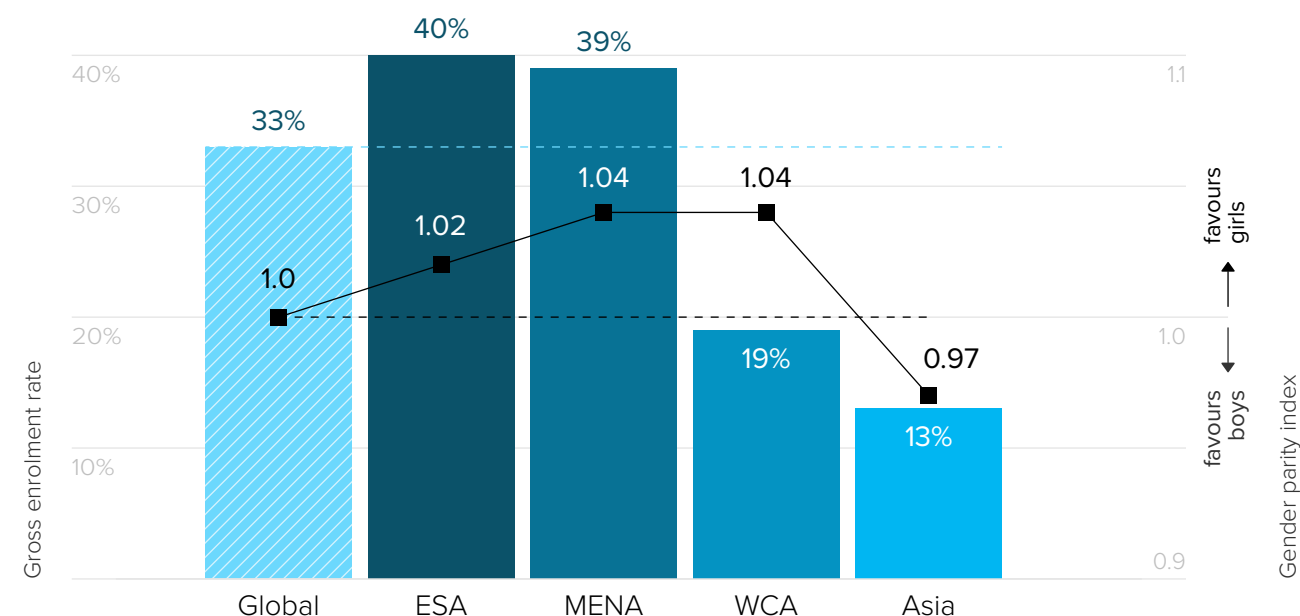
Country-level results also illustrate how changes in provision and reporting can affect enrolment rates. In South Sudan, the pre-primary gross enrolment rate fell from 28 per cent in 2024 to 3 per cent in 2025, following the withdrawal of donor support for early childhood education in Maban and Jamjang. In Ethiopia, the rate increased from 57 per cent to 87 per cent, largely due to a change in the official school-age definition used for pre-primary education rather than a comparable increase in participation. These shifts illustrate both the vulnerability of pre-primary provision and the importance of interpreting year-to-year changes in the context of variation in services, definitions and data.

¹⁰ UNESCO and UNICEF, *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education: The right to a strong foundation* (Paris: UNESCO and UNICEF, 2024).

Where national provision is limited, early learning for refugee children depends substantially on refugees themselves. Refugee teachers make up a higher share of the workforce at this stage than at any other, and three quarters of them are women. Participation among children is evenly balanced here, with a global gender parity index (GPI) of 1.00 and a narrow regional range of 0.97 to 1.04.

Too many refugee children still arrive at primary school without the early learning that supports school readiness and later progression. Extending provision depends on a larger early childhood workforce, the inclusion of refugee children within national systems, and reliable reporting capable of showing where refugee children are and are not being reached.

FIGURE 3
PRE-PRIMARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATE AND GENDER PARITY INDEX, BY REGION | 2025



No pre-primary GER or GPI is presented for the Americas because the required data were not available.

Too many refugee children still arrive at primary school without the early learning that supports school readiness and later progression.



Sky learns, plays and makes friends in Rwanda

Holy Sky Mwizerwa, 5, sits with his mother, Aline Uwingabire, in the courtyard of ECD Site 2, the early childhood development (ECD) centre he has attended for the past two years. He will soon start his last year there before moving to primary school.

Sky's family, originally from Burundi, lives in Mahama Refugee Camp, in neighbouring Rwanda. In Rwanda, refugee children have access to the national education system from ECD through tertiary education. In Mahama Refugee Camp, there are four ECD centres. UNHCR provides young students with school supplies and teachers with didactic resources and incentive payments.

Sky is an energetic young boy who loves school. "We learn English and math, and I meet other children. I play and talk with them," he chats happily. Observing him from a close distance, Aline mentions that she has sent all five of her children to ECD programmes. "When a child attends ECD, they begin primary school already knowing a lot and feeling more confident," she states. She has observed Sky's progress since starting ECD. "Sometimes I

"We learn English and math, and I meet other children. I play and talk with them."

— **Holy Sky Mwizerwa** · Student

ask him what they learn at school, and when he explains it to me, I feel very happy. It shows me that his teacher is doing a good job," she adds.

Aline talks often with Sky's teacher, Révérien Karangwa. "When a teacher follows up on a child, you can see the difference," she notes. Révérien, also a refugee from Burundi, has taught Sky for over a year and has seen Sky's personality grow. He remembers when Sky came to class one day singing a song along the lines of "my father

has a car." Révérien had never heard this song before, but he liked it so much that he taught his whole class. "When I see things like that, I feel that the children have reached a point where they are curious and can come up with something on their own."

Aline nods approvingly. She believes more parents should enrol their children in ECD centres, where they can learn faster and benefit from teachers' guidance in a safe, welcoming environment from an early age.

© UNHCR/Eric Didier Karinganire



Rwanda. Holy Sky Mwizerwa, from Burundi, attends an early childhood development centre in Mahama Refugee Camp.

© UNHCR / Eric Didier Karinganire



“When a child attends early childhood development, they begin primary school already knowing a lot and feeling more confident.”

—Aline Uwingabire · Sky’s mother

Primary education

The point of greatest access

Primary education represents the point of greatest access, with a global gross enrolment rate of 65 per cent, compared with a rate of around one third at both pre-primary and secondary levels. This is close to the 67 per cent reported in 2025. More refugee children are enrolled in primary school, which provides the foundational skills that later learning, secondary progression and future opportunity all depend on. But the achievement is partial: **a third of primary-aged refugee children remained out of school, and being enrolled is no guarantee of regular attendance, learning or progression to secondary education.**

Access also varies widely by region. The Americas reported the highest rate at 79 per cent, followed by Asia (73 per cent) and the MENA region (72 per cent). Participation was lower in ESA (56 per cent), while WCA reported the lowest regional rate at 41 per cent (Figure 4). Benchmarked against national

gross enrolment rates for the same countries, the pattern is consistent across every region: refugees remain enrolled at lower rates than national populations, with the largest gaps in WCA and ESA. Refugee participation therefore reflects both the strength of national education systems and the additional barriers refugees face within them.

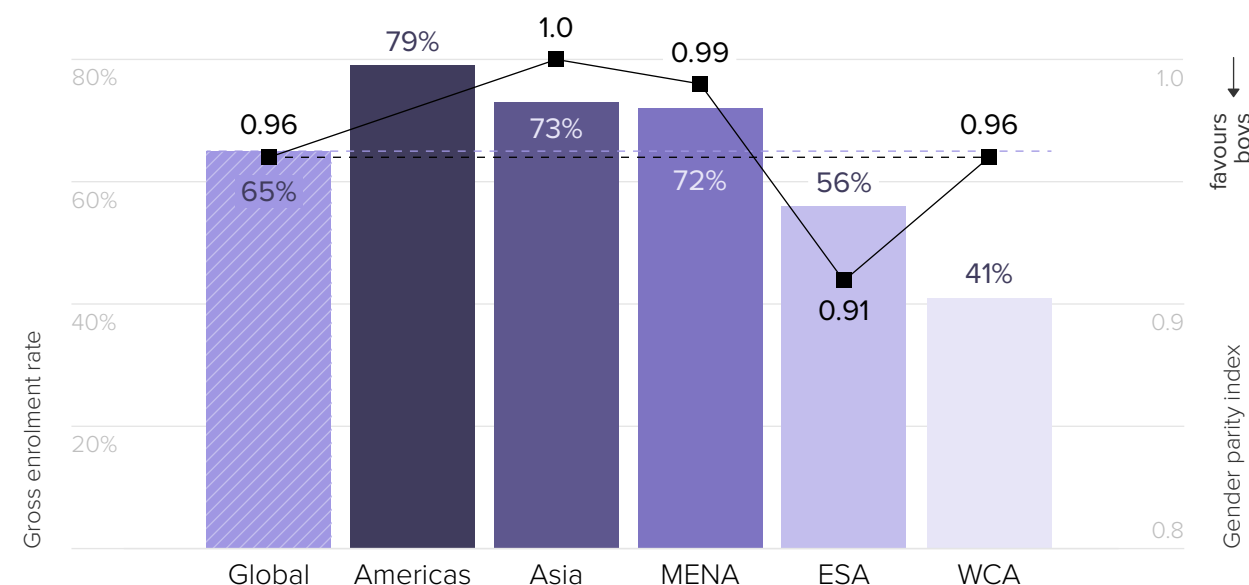
Country experiences illustrate that progress depends on both inclusive education policies and the capacity of national education systems. In Rwanda, a primary gross enrolment rate of 125 per cent reflects the successful enrolment of overage learners through flexible

education pathways, demonstrating how inclusive education policies can help children who missed schooling to re-enter formal education. In Burundi, by contrast, continued demand for primary education exceeded available school capacity, with limited infrastructure and shortages of qualified teachers constraining further expansion. Across several operations, year-on-year changes also reflected demographic revisions, population movements and humanitarian financing, underscoring the importance of interpreting enrolment trends within their broader operational context.

Gender parity is relatively strong at this level. Girls' gross enrolment reached 62 per cent against 64 per cent for boys, giving a GPI of 0.96. Regional differences were modest, ranging from 1.00 in Asia to 0.91 in ESA, with Asia and the MENA region close to parity at 1.00 and 0.99.

Being enrolled is no guarantee of regular attendance, learning or progression to secondary education.

FIGURE 4
PRIMARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATE AND GENDER PARITY INDEX, BY REGION | 2025



GPI is based on operations with available sex-disaggregated enrolment and school-age population data. GPI was not calculated for the Americas because these data were not available.

National examination data provide one indication of learning among refugee learners. Fourteen countries reported national examination data,¹¹ with an average primary pass rate of 63 per cent, though results varied considerably across education systems and assessment frameworks, and are not directly comparable between countries. They suggest that refugee learners who remain in school are broadly meeting national standards and are therefore positioned to continue into secondary education.

Primary education has delivered the greatest gains across the education pathway. Sustaining these gains now depends less on enrolling more children than on what happens after enrolment: having qualified teachers in sufficient numbers, strengthening evidence on learning outcomes, and ensuring the transition into secondary education.

¹¹ National examination results are reported by operations through the annual education data collection process and reflect national assessment frameworks, which differ between countries. Results are not directly comparable across education systems.



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In Cameroon, Solange discovers her love for education

Solange Bathe, 7, never misses school. “I love school because I love to write,” she says.

Solange is a refugee from the Central African Republic and a pupil at the Section 1A public primary school in Gado-Badzéré, eastern Cameroon. She is one of thousands of refugee children growing up in a community that has been hosting refugees fleeing violence across the border for over a decade.

Gado 1 A hums with the energy of young children. In this school, like many others in the area, refugee and Cameroonian students study side by side. In Solange’s classroom, there are more than 150 pupils, reflecting both the community’s commitment to ensuring all children can go to school and the considerable pressure on available classrooms and teachers.

Inside the classroom, distinctions disappear. “They sit together, they play together, they eat together,” says her teacher, Jacqueline Aissinga. To her, welcoming displaced families is both natural and necessary. “What happened to them could happen to us. So, we open our hands.”

“When I enter the classroom, I know I’m building the future of the whole village.”

— **Jacqueline Aissinga** · Solange’s teacher

For Solange and her classmates, primary school is where they learn to read and write, form friendships and develop the skills they need to continue their education. Jacqueline is deeply aware of the importance of those primary years. “It’s up to us to provide them with the foundation,” she explains. “When I enter the classroom, I know I’m building the future of the whole village.”

Already, the children are imagining where their education may take them, as they dream of becoming surgeons and teachers. For Jacqueline, the children’s ambitions are a reminder of what education can make possible inside and outside the classroom. “I don’t want to see them with guns,” she says. “I want to see them succeed, become leaders and responsible people. That is my hope.”

Cameroon. Solange Bathe is a refugee from the Central African Republic and attends primary school in Gado-Badzéré.

© UNHCR / Charity Nzomo



“I love school,
because I love
to write.”

— Solange Bathe · Student

Secondary education

A critical transition

The global secondary gross enrolment rate was 32 per cent in 2025,¹² compared with 37 per cent in 2024.¹³ Participation falls further here than at any other transition in the system, even though secondary school builds directly on primary foundations and is where adolescents prepare for further study, skills development and employment.

The decline is not uniform. Secondary gross enrolment reached 56 per cent in both the Americas and the MENA region, but fell to 23 per cent in the ESA region, 13 per cent in WCA and 8 per cent in Asia (Figure 5). As with primary education, regional differences should be interpreted alongside the performance of national education systems. Benchmarking refugee enrolment rates against national gross enrolment rates for the same reporting countries shows that refugees remain enrolled at lower rates than national populations across all regions. Although national participation varies considerably, the overall pattern is consistent: refugee adolescents continue to face additional barriers to progressing through secondary education.

Limited school places, shortages of qualified teachers, indirect costs and long travel distances all constrain secondary participation, and each of these pressures grows more acute once primary school ends. Education becomes more specialised at this stage and, in many low-income refugee-hosting countries, secondary school is not fee-free; where public investment falls short of demand, both refugee and national learners struggle to afford enrolment.

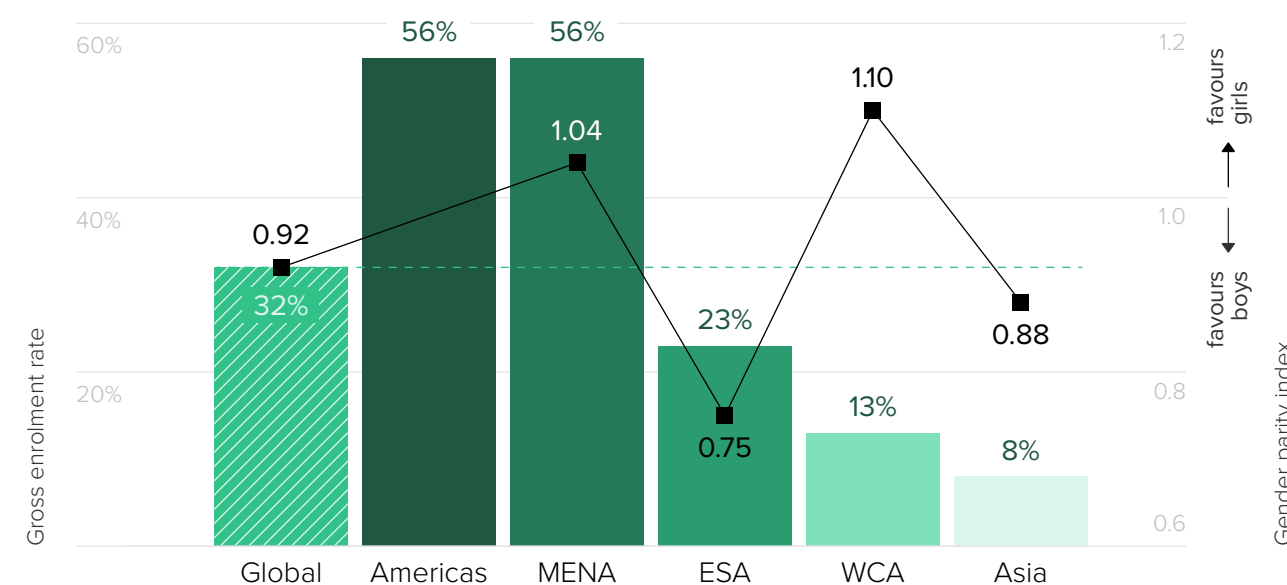
In Cameroon, secondary enrolment increased following refugee inclusion in national schools, back-to-school campaigns, assistance with school and examination costs, and stronger coordination with education authorities. In the Central African Republic, secondary participation increased following the expansion of formal and non-formal education opportunities and broader reporting coverage. By contrast, in Lebanon, conflict disrupted the 2024–2025 school year, with schools damaged or used as collective shelters. Documentation requirements created additional barriers to enrolment, while the delayed opening of second-shift classes reduced instructional time for refugee learners.

Secondary education is also where the gender gap widens. Girls and boys participate at similar rates at pre-primary level, with a GPI of 1.00, declining to 0.96 at primary and 0.92 at secondary. The largest gaps were observed in the ESA region, at 0.75, and Asia, at 0.88. Girls face additional barriers to continuing

¹² The revised global estimate excludes Iran, whose figures reflected approximate estimates from before substantial voluntary returns to Afghanistan, and Afghanistan, where secondary enrolment was reported without a corresponding school-age population denominator.

¹³ Year-on-year changes should be interpreted with caution because of changes in reporting coverage and data sources across operations, particularly in the Americas.

FIGURE 5
SECONDARY GROSS
ENROLMENT RATE AND
GENDER PARITY INDEX,
BY REGION | 2025



GPI is based on operations with available sex-disaggregated enrolment and school-age population data. GPI was not calculated for the Americas because these data were not available.

into secondary education, including increased household responsibilities, safety concerns, early marriage and pregnancy. Parity should not be mistaken for participation: in the WCA region, the secondary gross enrolment rate for girls was 13 per cent against 12 per cent for boys, meaning girls and boys alike are largely absent from secondary school. Where parity has been achieved, raising participation for all adolescents remains the priority.

National examination data from 14 countries show an average pass rate of 70 per cent at lower secondary and 58 per cent at upper secondary. Although results are not directly comparable across countries, they suggest that many refugee learners who remain in school successfully complete secondary education. These findings should be interpreted alongside the low secondary enrolment rate, as they reflect only those learners who remained in school long enough to sit national examinations.

Secondary education remains the principal transition bottleneck in the refugee education pathway. Removing it will require addressing what makes this stage different from primary: the direct and indirect costs families face, the shortage of specialist teachers and school places, and the responsibilities and risks that draw adolescent girls, in particular, out of education.



© UNHCR / Mohamed Mostafa

Back in school, Jamila rekindles her dreams

When conflict erupted in Sudan, 19-year-old Jamila Mostafa and her family fled to neighbouring Egypt. Despite the challenges, for Jamila, staying in school was a priority.

“When we left Sudan, I was worried that my education would stop. I had worked hard in school, and I didn’t want the war to take away my achievements.”

With support through the UNHCR-Mastercard Foundation partnership, she was able to continue her high school education. The support has given her greater stability and allowed her to focus on her love for learning and her motivation to build a better future for herself.

Jamila has developed a particular interest in artificial intelligence (AI) and the ways technology can help address social and economic challenges. She spends her free time reading about emerging technologies and following developments in the field. “Every day, technology is changing the world around us. I want to be part of that change and use AI to solve problems and improve people’s lives.”

To Jamila, education is much more than continuing her studies. Learning allows Jamila to hold on to the future she imagined before the war.

“School gives me confidence,” she says. “It reminds me that even though I lost my home because of the war, I have not lost my dreams.”

After high school, Jamila hopes to pursue higher education in technology. She is passionate about serving her community with the knowledge she acquires and creating opportunities for others.

“School gives me confidence. It reminds me that even though I lost my home because of the war, I have not lost my dreams.”

— **Jamila Mostafa** · Student

Measuring learning beyond enrolment

Expanding access remains one of the most important priorities for refugee education, but enrolment alone cannot show whether children are acquiring the knowledge and skills they need. Understanding what children learn, and what shapes that learning, is essential to ensuring that investment in education translates into meaningful outcomes.

Two complementary learning assessments in refugee-hosting areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo provide new evidence.¹⁴ The assessments were conducted by UNHCR, the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) and REACH, a humanitarian research organisation. Across both studies, refugee and host-community children performed similarly, while learning outcomes were closely associated with schooling experience.

The first assessment evaluated 487 refugee and host-community chil-

14 REACH/UNHCR/JDC Holistic Learning Assessments, South Ubangi and North Ubangi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2025.

dren aged 7 to 11 in South Ubangi who were out of school or had experienced interrupted schooling. The second assessed 511 refugee and host-community children enrolled in grades 2 and 4 in North Ubangi. Both measured literacy, numeracy and socioemotional learning, providing evidence on learning within and outside the education system.

In South Ubangi, previous participation in education was the strongest predictor of learning. Refugee and host-community children performed similarly across all three domains, suggesting that the challenges affecting learning were largely shared between communities. Compared with children who had never attended school, **those with previous school experience were more likely to reach the selected competency levels across all three domains.**

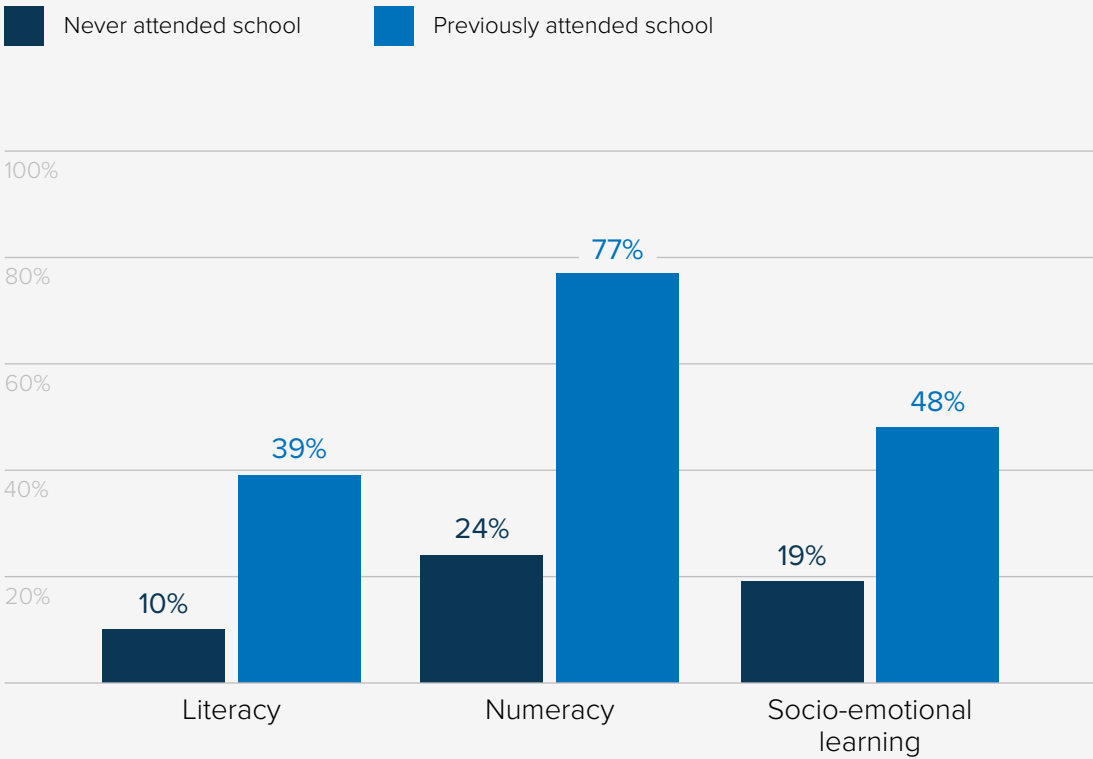
The North Ubangi assessment reinforced these findings from a different perspective. Refugee and host-community learners again performed similarly, while many children continued to struggle with founda-

tional literacy and numeracy despite being in school. Learning outcomes improved with progression through primary education, but persistent gaps underline the importance of strengthening the quality of teaching alongside expanding access.

The two assessments show that expanding access and improving learning must advance together. Ensuring that refugee children enter school as early as possible, remain engaged and receive the support they need to build foundational skills is critical to their progression along the pathway. As more countries include refugees within national education systems, learning assessments provide an important tool for identifying children who have fallen behind and directing support towards them.

Expanding access and improving learning must advance together.

FIGURE 6
LEARNING OUTCOMES BY PREVIOUS SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, SOUTH UBANGI, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO 2025



Note: Percentages show children reaching emerging literacy or above, basic numeracy or above, and advanced self-awareness. The socio-emotional learning bars refer specifically to self-awareness. Results combine refugee and host-community children; competency levels differ across domains.

Source: Authors' calculations based on rounded percentages in the REACH/UNHCR/JDC Holistic Learning Assessment, South Ubangi (2025).

Tertiary education Skills for self-reliance

Tertiary education is not merely the final stage of the education cycle. The benefits compound at each level, building momentum across the entire educational system and reinforcing the link between higher education and self-reliance. **In 2025, the global refugee higher education enrolment rate experienced its greatest advancement to date, reaching 11 per cent.** This notable progress from 2024 (when the rate was 9 per cent) was driven by the largest annual increase in refugee tertiary enrolment in the last three years accompanied by only a slight increase in the refugee population of tertiary education age (18–24¹⁵). **For the first time on record, enrolment of refugees in higher education surpassed 450,000.**

Across the higher education pillars,¹⁶ the largest enrolment increases were reflected in universities in countries of first asylum and in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), particularly in the Americas, ESA and the MENA region. The growth in TVET enrolment in particular reflects a promising trend. TVET systems¹⁷ are recognised as an essential mechanism for targeting skills development, increasing employability and potentially improving social inclusion.¹⁸ This highlights the tremendous potential of TVET to prepare refugees for the labour market and to help close the striking gap between market demand and candidates with the right skills.¹⁹

Finally, continued improvements in data availability, particularly in national higher education management information systems in Europe, as well as dedicated advocacy and engagement with partners and data focal points, have strengthened reporting on refugee tertiary education access.

¹⁵ UNHCR considers an expanded tertiary school-age population beyond the five-year age group immediately following upper secondary education defined by the UNESCO UIS, as overaged learners are disproportionately overrepresented among refugee students. See UNHCR, 15by30 Roadmap: Expanding Higher Education, Skills and Self-Reliance for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/15by30-roadmap-expanding-higher-education-skills-and-self-reliance-refugees>.

¹⁶ The higher education pillars UNHCR identifies include traditional university and college enrolment in countries of first asylum, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee scholarship programme (Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein – DAFI), technical and vocational education and training (TVET), connected higher education and complementary education pathways in third countries. See the 15by30 Roadmap for more details.

¹⁷ TVET is understood as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. As part of lifelong learning, TVET can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels, and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development which may lead to qualifications. TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities adapted to national and local contexts.

¹⁸ Ralf Lange, Christine Hofmann and Manuela Di Cara, *Guide on making TVET and skills development inclusive for all* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation (ILO), March 2020). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_755869.pdf.

¹⁹ International Finance Corporation, Focus Area: Connecting Learning to Jobs, updated August 2025. Available at: <https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/education/employability>.

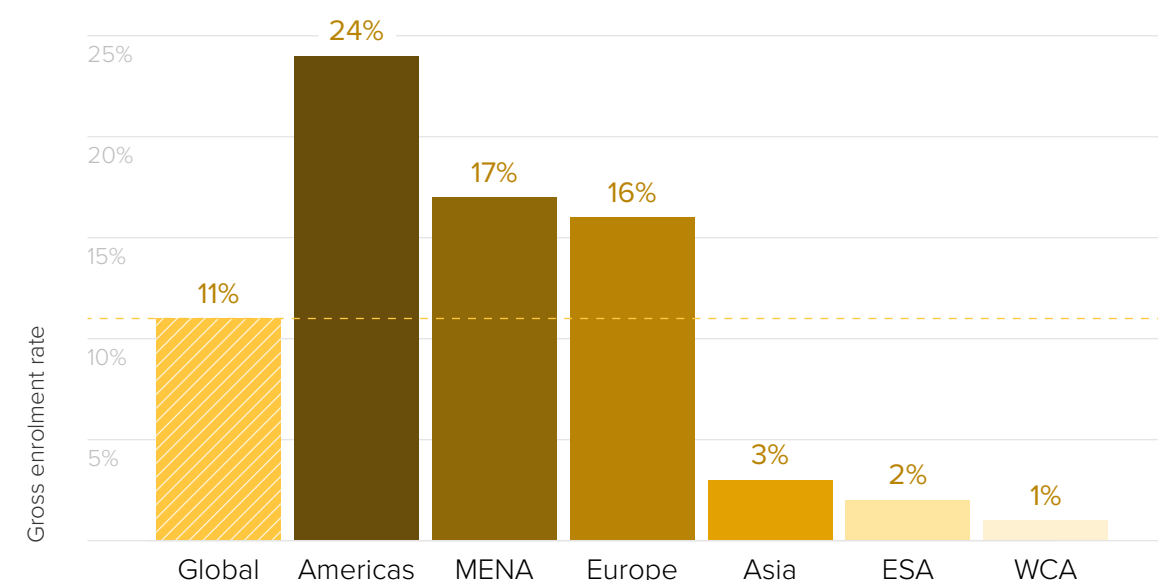
Importantly, refugee enrolment continues to vary greatly by region due to context-specific financial, capacity, infrastructure and administrative barriers, as well as limited scholarship opportunities for refugees. Asia, MENA and Europe reported an increase in the tertiary gross enrolment rate of refugees in 2025. This can be partially attributed to a decrease in their respective higher education-age refugee populations, which aligns with the rise in returns seen in some of the world's largest displacement situations in 2025, including Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Myanmar.²⁰ At the same time, **in over 80 per cent of reporting countries, refugee enrolment in higher education falls below the national average.** For example, overall tertiary enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa hovers just below 10 per cent,²¹ while the latest data on refugee enrolment in the same region stands at 2 per cent.

The latest growth in refugee higher education access is encouraging. UNHCR and partners remain on track to achieve 15 per cent enrolment of refugees in higher education by 2030 (the 15by30 target). However, the regional variation is telling: in the countries that host the largest numbers of refugees and where higher education systems are at their most strained, the gap in refugees' access to higher education is at its greatest. Collective action and investment from universities, UNHCR, governments, student groups and the private sector will be essential to tackling this disparity and enabling a transformative shift towards self-reliance through higher education.

²⁰ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2025*.

²¹ World Bank, School enrollment, tertiary (% gross)—Sub-Saharan Africa (2026). Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?locations=ZG>.

FIGURE 7
**TERTIARY GROSS
ENROLMENT RATE,
BY REGION | 2025**



In the countries that host the largest numbers of refugees and where higher education systems are at their most strained, the gap in refugees' access to higher education is at its greatest.



Faiza promotes mental health at her university in Kazakhstan

Faiza Qudrati, originally from Afghanistan, grew up in Kazakhstan in a family of six. Her parents strongly believed in girls' education and encouraged her to see learning as a pathway to independence and confidence. She initially studied medicine and later, with support from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee scholarship programme (Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein – DAFI), she went on to specialise in psychology.

Her interest in psychology came from recognising that everyone needs support in life. “I have always noticed that people can be going through a lot internally, even when they do not show it on the outside.” A turning point was when she struggled with severe depression. “That period changed the way I viewed emotional well-being and helped me understand how important it is for people to have support.”

Today, she runs a space at her university where everyone can feel heard. In the psychology club, students can reach out if they are experiencing emotional difficulties and stress. For some students, par-

ticularly refugees, their life experiences may make it difficult to break the silence. “Support and a sense of safety and acceptance are especially important for anyone who is going through significant changes and trying to build a life in a new environment,” Faiza observes.

She has already taken her first professional steps, gaining practical work experience through an internship at a primary school. In this role, she facilitated developmental activities and sessions focusing on emotions and fears for children with special educational needs.

Looking ahead, Faiza aspires to become a qualified psychologist specialising in child and adolescent mental health. She hopes to contribute to educational and social programmes that expand access to psychological support and promote well-being among vulnerable populations, showing through her own example that even small interventions can make a meaningful difference.

“Higher education gives me a chance to grow, learn and one day help other people in the same way that support was once provided to me.”

— **Faiza Qudrati** · DAFI scholar



© Qudrati Ahmad Farokh

“Many students have the will but they don’t have the opportunities. I’ll hope to pave the way for all refugees.”

The image shows four young people standing in front of a large digital display at an airport. The display lists various flight routes, times, and statuses. The group consists of a man on the left in a grey blazer, a woman in the center with long green braids, a man in the center-right in a grey hoodie, and a man on the right in a white shirt and glasses. They are all smiling at the camera.

22 Published in 2023, the 15by30 Roadmap is the strategy developed by UNHCR and partners to expand refugee higher education, skills and self-reliance.

France. Four refugee students selected for the university corridor program UNIV'R arriving in Roissy Airport (Paris) to pursue their higher education.

© UNHCR/Elodie Carette

In France, the UNIV'R corridor programme was launched in 2022. Over the past five years, UNIV'R has enabled 62 refugees to pursue two-year master's degree programmes in the country across 22 higher education institutions, demonstrating the growing commitment of French universities to supporting education pathways for refugees. UNHCR and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) run UNIV'R, with the support of the Migrants in Higher Education (MENS) network.

Italy. Rehema Amisi is pursuing her master's degree at the University of Cagliari, with support from the UNICORE programme.

© UNHCR/Valerio Muscella

“Why does education matter so deeply in refugee communities? Education matters so deeply because when opportunities become limited, it is one of the few tools that can still change a life. It is the bridge between dependency and self-reliance.”

— **Rehema Amisi** · Education activist



© UNHCR / Santiago Proaño

Miguel builds skills, community and a new life in Ecuador

Miguel Ángel Chávez, 32, arrived in Ecuador from Venezuela in 2016. From the beginning, he set his sights on pursuing higher education. However, unstable economic circumstances put this out of reach for his first few years in the country. Instead, he prioritised the development of practical skills aligned with in-demand work opportunities in construction and joined a men's community group.

“Electrical work can be well paid, and for a time I had quite a bit of work in that field. Later I also learned to work with gypsum (drywall), which allowed me to expand my possibilities and make a living from both activities.”

For Miguel, the opportunity to participate in technical training and learn relevant skills alongside his peers laid the foundation for building his own future and sparked his desire to contribute positively to his community. He led electricity training for six people who went on to secure professional work opportunities in the sector. This reinforced Miguel's vocation for teaching and his belief in collective, practical skill-building as an important tool for social transformation.

In 2022, Miguel was awarded a DAFI scholarship that finally made his dream of higher education possible. He was selected to study architecture at the University San Gregorio de Portoviejo and as a student, Miguel continued to seek out opportunities to build and apply his newly acquired skills to support those around him. He completed a solar panel course and helped to install a photovoltaic system at the Centro de Desarrollo Comunitario El Palmar, a community development centre in Manta, Ecuador. He then passed on this knowledge by delivering training on renewable energies to younger students.

Miguel explains that higher education is not solely about skill development and professional growth. It also helps create genuine ties with his host community and fosters a sense of belonging. “Higher education allows you to feel part of a community and to build a future alongside other people,” he says.

Looking ahead, Miguel hopes to develop entrepreneurship initiatives that build on his technical skills in renewable energy and sustainable architecture to generate employment opportunities for others, while continuing to promote sustainable construction practices in his community.

Ecuador. Miguel Ángel Chávez, from Venezuela, pursues higher education as a DAFI scholar to build his skills and foster a sense of belonging.

© UNHCR / Santiago Proaño

“Higher education allows you to feel part of a community and to build a future alongside other people.”

— Miguel Ángel Chávez · DAFI scholar





Teachers

Across the education pathway

Teachers are central to every stage of refugee education, from early childhood classrooms to universities. They help young children develop the foundations for learning, equip primary learners with literacy and numeracy skills, support adolescents through the transition to secondary education and prepare young adults with the knowledge and skills needed for higher education and employment. As more refugee children are included in national education systems, the availability, preparation and support of teachers increasingly shape both access to education and learning outcomes.

The 2025 data show that the composition of the teaching workforce changes across the education pathway. Refugee teachers make up a substantial share of the reported workforce at pre-primary level, accounting for 44 per cent of teachers, compared with 21 per cent at primary and 8 per cent at secondary level. This highlights the particularly important role refugee teachers play in early learning, while their declining share at higher levels reflects the increasing reliance on nationally recruited and subject-specialist teachers as education becomes more specialised.

The profile of the refugee teaching workforce also changes across education levels. Three quarters of refugee pre-primary teachers are women, compared with 26 per cent at primary and 19 per cent at secondary level. Although the relationship is complex, the availability of female teachers can help create supportive learning environments and encourage girls to remain in school during adolescence, when participation begins to decline.

Understanding teacher qualifications is more challenging.²³ Across the teacher data reported in 2025, 66 per cent of pre-primary teachers, 41 per cent of primary teachers and 31 per cent of secondary teachers met minimum national qualification standards. However, in some operations, the same figure was reported for total and qualified teachers, effectively indicating that all reported teachers met national standards. Differences in reporting practices may therefore affect comparability across countries.

Teacher numbers and composition also vary considerably across reporting operations, reflecting differences in refugee populations, national education systems and the extent to which operations directly support teachers.

The available data also reflect the challenges of reporting on teachers in increasingly inclusive education systems. While primary enrolment data was captured from 87 country operations in 2025, only 25 operations reported teacher data.

²³ Teacher qualification data should be interpreted with caution because reporting practices vary across operations. In some operations, the same figure was reported for total and qualified teachers, effectively indicating that all reported teachers met national minimum qualification standards.

As refugee learners become more integrated into national schools, teachers are increasingly employed and managed by ministries of education rather than by UNHCR or its partners. In these contexts, operations may only be able to report on teachers they directly support, rather than the full workforce teaching refugee learners. The figures presented here should therefore be understood as reflecting the reported teaching workforce rather than a comprehensive global picture.

As refugee inclusion within national education systems expands, comprehensive information on the teaching workforce will increasingly depend on national education and teacher management information systems. Strengthening alignment between these systems and UNHCR reporting could improve the completeness and comparability of teacher data over time.

Teachers underpin every stage of the refugee education pathway. The 2025 data show that refugee teachers continue to play a substantial role, particularly in pre-primary education, though they make up a smaller share of the reported workforce at higher levels. Strengthening teacher recruitment, preparation and professional development, alongside better integration of refugee education into national teacher data systems, will be essential to improving both access and learning.

“Today I have the opportunity to help children, no matter where they come from, to believe that their future is full of possibilities.”

— **Norayma Velasco** · Pre-primary teacher

Norayma Velasco brings love and empathy to the classroom

Norayma Velasco, 47, originally from San Cristóbal, Venezuela, worked in early childhood education for many years. After coming to Peru in 2018, however, she had to put her teaching career on hold while finding ways to support her family. She worked selling cosmetics, as a street vendor and cleaning hotel rooms.

Norayma now teaches Peruvian and Venezuelan children at an early childhood education centre in Lima, which was recently renovated by UNHCR and the Ministry of Education, with support from the Government of Japan.

“Going back to the classroom meant getting an important part of my life back. It reminded me that education is my purpose.”

Leaving her country and raising a son with autism who has experienced discrimination in school have changed her approach to teaching. “I know what it feels like to face uncertainty and to try to find your place in a new environment,” she

reflects. “I try to create a classroom where children feel safe, respected and free to be themselves.”

For refugee students, in particular, attending an early childhood learning centre can better prepare them for primary school. “Having a classroom where they feel accepted and included helps them build confidence and enjoy learning,” Norayma asserts.

For her, education is not just a job. **“Today I have the opportunity to help children, no matter where they come from, to believe that their future is full of possibilities.”** In the faces of her students, she sees the next generation. **“These children will become the doctors, teachers and professionals of tomorrow.** That is why we must teach with love and dedication.”



© UNHCR / Jaime Giménez



© UNHCR / Philip James Lukudu

Imad Rabi Dafallah is building a school where every child belongs

Imad Rabi Dafallah, 27, is impeccably dressed in a blue shirt and tie. He has an air of quiet authority and speaks candidly about his experiences as a refugee and as an educator.

Imad lost his mother when he was 3 years old and fled Sudan when he was 13. Today, he is the headteacher of Nur Primary School in Doro Camp, located in Maban County in South Sudan. His school has 1,745 students, with 640 coming from the host community. They represent 30 different tribes, each with its own language, beliefs and traditions. And they share the same classrooms and teachers. “We put together host-community and refugee children to build their relationships and promote peaceful existence,” he remarks.

Nur Primary School is considered among the best in the camps. However, when Imad arrived in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he found a school in need of reform: exam results were low, student absenteeism was high and teaching quality was poor. Undeterred, he took a whole-of-community approach, holding long meetings with teachers, parents and elders. The results were remarkable: last school year, all 82 students passed the Certificate of Primary Education national examinations, enabling them to progress to secondary school. Nur Primary also achieved top marks in the county.

Imad not only heads the school but continues to teach. Looking back, he fondly remembers his primary school teacher in Sudan. “One day, she told me, ‘In the future, you will become someone people will follow.’ And I asked her, ‘How?’” All these years later, he remains grateful to her for believing in him. Now, he wants his own classroom to feel welcoming to boys and girls of all abilities, and to inspire them to discover their potential. He also shares his own struggles and successes to motivate them. “When a child learns,” he explains, “they will serve the community and speak on its behalf.”

In his career, Imad has seized every opportunity to build his skills through courses and in-service training. He is now pursuing a diploma in business administration and hopes to further his studies. His journey continues to shape the teacher he wants to be, inspiring his students to believe in themselves and stay in school. “I am still learning,” he says with a smile.

“We put together host-community and refugee children to build their relationships and promote peaceful existence.”

— Imad Rabi Dafallah · Primary teacher

Leila Nunow teaches a new generation of students to love science

Born in Somalia, Leila Nunow, 21, arrived at the Dadaab Refugee Complex in Kenya in 2011 as a young child. She is now a secondary school teacher at the Amani Comprehensive School in Hagadera, sharing her love of science with her students.

When Leila started school, she had one thing in mind: playing with her friends. This changed in Grade 4, when a science teacher realised her potential. She remembers him saying: “You can do everything. You are young, and you can make the effort to reach your goal and become successful.” These words changed the way she approached her education, eventually leading her to become a science teacher herself.

The school where Leila teaches has been severely impacted by funding cuts. There are only 12 teachers for 1,500 students, materials are in short supply and the mobile laboratory is under-equipped. To manage classes of 100 learners, she sometimes organises shifts and sets clear expectations for her students to listen, remain disciplined and ask questions when they don’t under-

stand. Despite the challenges, Leila has already witnessed changes among her students. Some have formed science study groups and told her that her lessons have made the subject more interesting.

*“Madam,
one day I want
to be like you.”*

Many girls leave school after completing primary education, making family support critical to progressing to secondary school. Leila’s success would not have been possible without her mother. “I would tell my mom about any challenge I faced, and she would support me to continue,” she says. With her mother’s encouragement, Leila hopes to secure a university scholarship to further her studies.

Leila also looks to other women to remain motivated. “When I see an educated girl, I find myself smiling. I feel like I am like her, and I can do it,” she explains. Leila realises that she too is now a role model with an important role in her community. She wants to show girls that they can also pursue professional careers. Some of her students already tell her, “Madam, one day I want to be like you”. Just as a science teacher once helped her recognise her potential, Leila is now doing the same for the next generation.



© UNHCR/Charity Nzomo



Kenya. Leila, a Somali refugee, teaches science in the Amani Comprehensive School in Hagadera Camp.

© UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

“When I see an educated girl, I find myself smiling. I feel like I am like her, and I can do it.”

— **Leila Nunow** · Secondary teacher

Dr. Ammar Azzouz teaches about destruction, displacement and hope

Dr. Ammar Azzouz, 38, is in Homs, Syria. This is the fourth time he has visited his home city after more than 13 years in exile. He is an architect, a lecturer in human geography, British Academy Research Fellow at the University of Oxford and, as he proudly states, a Homs.

He became an academic to better understand the relationship between communities and their cities. For years, he studied Homs from afar. Now, like other academics, he is re-evaluating his research questions and methodologies. “I return as a resident who was displaced, but I also return as a researcher.”

For Dr. Azzouz, teaching is a great responsibility. “It is important to show the struggles, pain and sorrow that communities are going through. But it’s also important to bring a new wave of hope to students,” he remarks. This desire to find a path from the devastation of war towards hope led him to develop a course titled “Violence and Cities: From Destruction to Reconstruction”, which he teaches at the Oxford

Refugee Studies Centre. The course covers issues such as cultural heritage, memory and architecture across different regions.

“Nobody would ever experience the feeling of being displaced unless they are displaced,” he observes. So, he organises his classes to make the topic accessible to all students. He brings in guest speakers, assigns articles by authors with lived experience of conflict and uses multimedia and poetry to foreground the voices of those affected. He also aims to equip his students with the tools to conduct their own research. “My teaching builds on creating an open and welcoming space where every student feels that their voice is valued and heard,” he notes.

Dr. Azzouz believes that refugees can have a positive impact on academia. “When universities engage with the voices of displaced communities, they contribute to their richness, diversity and intellectual knowledge.” Academia can also give people forced to flee a sense of belonging. “Through education, we can create a new homeland in

the words that we write and in the words that we read,” he reflects. Asked what his advice is to young refugees dreaming of going to university, he says: “Continue building your education because this is the way that we can rebuild our countries, back home and even when in exile.”

“When universities engage with the voices of displaced communities, they contribute to their richness, diversity and intellectual knowledge.”

—Dr Ammar Azzouz · Academic

United Kingdom. Dr. Ammar Azzouz teaches at the University of Oxford, focusing on the relationship between communities and their cities.

© Dr. Ammar Azzouz





Lebanon. Chef Georges Debs, executive chef and culinary trainer.

© Assem Nayrab

A restaurant of his own: Chef Georges trains Chef Younes

Chef Georges Debs is an executive chef with more than 25 years of experience in the culinary and hospitality industry. Over time, he has become more involved in training aspiring chefs, including refugees, at culinary institutes as well as through vocational programmes with local and international organisations.

Each day, he strives to instil discipline, teamwork and continuous learning in his trainees. “I have found that refugee trainees are often especially motivated to learn, succeed and develop themselves because they understand how valuable these opportunities can be,” Chef Georges explains. “I feel that, as a trainer, I can be a doorway to hope by helping trainees acquire practical skills that they can use to enter the job market and start building their professional lives.”

Chef Younes Malek, 26, has lived in Lebanon since he arrived there from Syria in 2015. Finding himself in a new place, Younes set about building his future. He always had a passion for cooking, especially seafood, and worked as an entry level

commis chef in several commercial kitchens. To develop essential techniques and take the next steps in his career, he signed up for commis chef training in Tripoli through Semeurs d’Avenir Association, where he met his mentor, Chef Georges.

Chef Georges has developed strong, lasting relationships with his trainees. Many have successfully found employment after training with him, including Younes, who went on to secure an internship and then open his own restaurant. “From the beginning of his [Younes’] training, I could see that he had a genuine desire to learn and improve,” Chef Georges shares. “I gave Younes the knowledge, guidance, and foundation he needed, but his success is the result of his own hard work, determination, and willingness to keep developing.”

While establishing his own restaurant, Younes kept in contact with Chef Georges to consult him on his career and to seek practical advice. For Younes, training with Chef Georges gave him the technical skills and confidence to turn his passion for cooking into a profession and true source of independence, as he explains: “This training was a ray of hope for me. It gave me the opportunity to learn, work, and build a future for myself.”

“As a trainer,
I can be a
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ing trainees
acquire prac-
tical skills that
they can use
to enter the
job market and
start building
their profes-
sional lives.”

—Georges Debs · Chef

Lebanon. Chef Younes Malek,
a refugee from Syria and owner
of a seafood restaurant.

© Assem Nayrab



“This training was a ray of hope for me. It gave me the opportunity to learn, work and build a future for myself.”

— Younes Malek · Chef

Final word • Maya Ghazal

In 2016, as a 16-year-old refugee, I landed in the United Kingdom with a couple of suitcases and my immediate family by my side. Today, as a Second Officer Pilot, I take off regularly to carry passengers to destinations around Europe. I am Maya Ghazal, and I have become the person I dreamed of being.

Growing up in Damascus, I led a happy, normal life until the war broke out in 2011. My parents highly value education, so even during the war, my brothers and I never stopped going to school. During that time, I attended three schools because each one was bombed. Yet, every morning I would put on my uniform, take my schoolbag and say goodbye to my family as if it were the last time before heading to class.

When I arrived in the UK, I faced new challenges as I came to realise the profound change in my circumstances. The first few months were isolating and daunting. I only had a basic grasp of English and a limited understanding of British society. I was rejected by three schools because they didn't recognise my Syrian secondary school qualifications. Once I was finally accepted onto a two-year national diploma in engineering, my new life began.

During that time, I stayed with my mom in a hotel by Heathrow Airport. Fascinated by the planes landing and taking off, I decided that I wanted to become a pilot. Was that even possible for a Syrian, hijab-wearing refugee woman in the male-dominated aviation industry? Some people thought not, but I was determined. When I told my teacher that I wanted to apply to study aviation engineering with pilot studies at Brunel University in London, he encouraged me. After graduating from university, I was selected for TUI Airways' intensive 19-month cadet programme. Today, I am the world's first female Syrian commercial pilot from a refugee background.

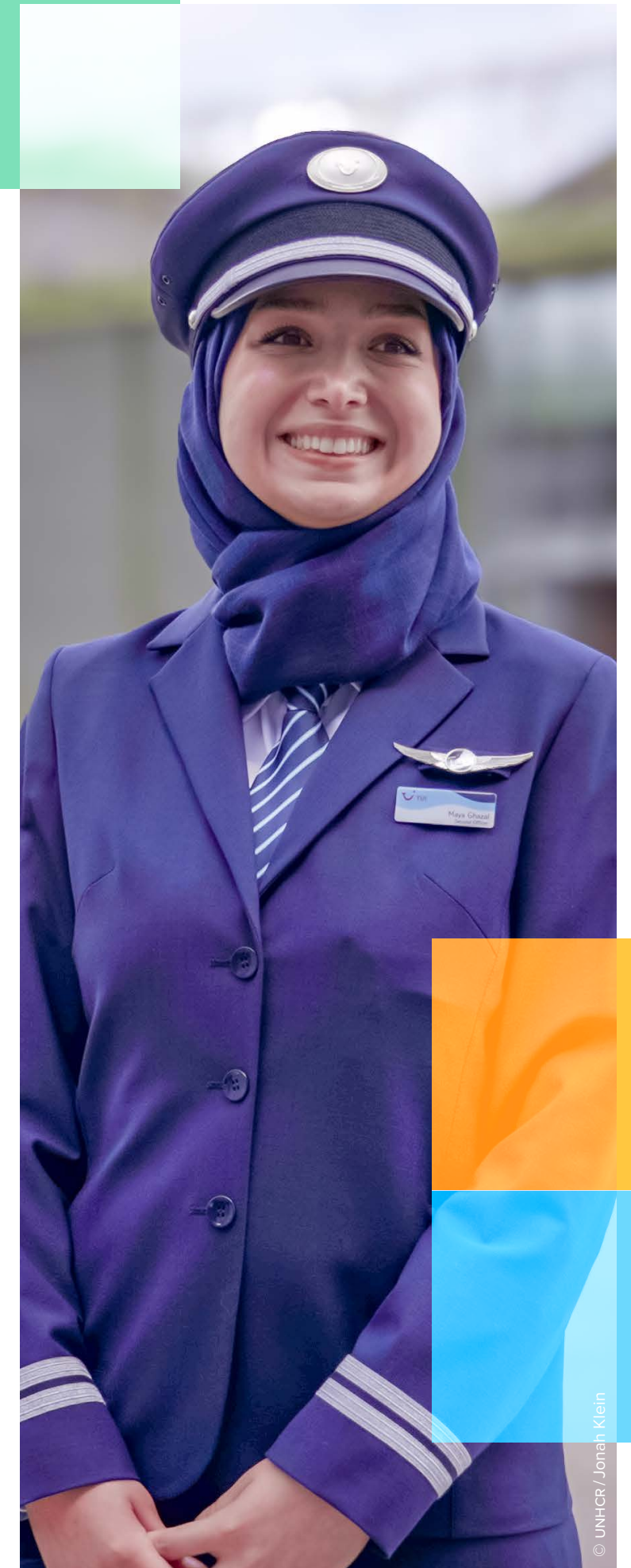
I have come this far because my parents supported me, my teachers believed in me, the education system opened its doors, and my employer saw a reliable crew member in me. Refugees who become educated professionals should not be treated as rare diamonds. We are living

proof that dreams are only limited by a person's determination and the opportunities they get.

Investing today in refugee education—from early childhood all the way to university—is betting on the potential of a whole generation. Refugees can become tomorrow's leaders, contribute meaningfully to their communities and rebuild their countries, lifting themselves and their families out of dependency and poverty. For girls in particular, education can determine their future health, autonomy and standing in society.

In the air, all pilots are equal. Passengers trust me to take them safely to their destination and back in the arms of their loved ones. As I take flight once again, I think of all the young refugees who are quietly fighting for their dreams, attending overcrowded classes, reading under dim solar lights and scouting around for a stable internet connection to submit university applications. All these youths strive to become their future selves, as I became mine. I want to tell them: don't give up, no matter how many times you are knocked down. And I want to tell those who hold the resources and the opportunities: be part of the change, so refugees can study, grow, and share their gifts with the world.

“Refugees who become educated professionals should not be treated as rare diamonds. We are living proof that dreams are only limited by a person's determination and the opportunities they get.”



Acknowledgements

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To contact the education team at UNHCR for more information on our education work or to discuss donations, funding, scholarships, data, partnerships and other forms of collaboration, please email Becky Telford at telfordm@unhcr.org.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We lead international action to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

We deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place called home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

We work in 128 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for millions.

COVER PAGE PHOTOS

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Rwanda. Holy Sky Mwizerwa, from Burundi, attends an early childhood development centre in Mahama Refugee Camp.
© UNHCR / Eric Didier Karinganire

Afghanistan. Student in English class at the Youth Learning Centre in Bamyān.
© UNHCR / Oxygen Empire Media Production

Chad. Sudanese refugee Mohamend Adam Suleiman attends secondary school in the Farchana Refugee Camp.
© UNHCR / Ala Kheir

Jordan. Mais Ahmad Khtabi, a Syrian refugee and DAFI scholar, celebrates graduating with a bachelor's degree in nursing from Zarqa University.
© UNHCR / Shawkat Alharfoush



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