



Save the Children®

# HEAR IT FROM THE TEACHERS

GETTING REFUGEE CHILDREN  
BACK TO LEARNING



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Photo: Alun McDonald



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around the world, 4 million refugee children are out of school and missing out on their right to an education due to displacement, poverty and exclusion.<sup>1</sup> For the refugee children who have found a way back to the classroom, it is likely they are not receiving an education that supports them to recover from their experiences or ensures they are learning.

As the international community convenes in December to adopt the Global Compact on Refugees, which contains key refugee education commitments to right these wrongs, it must be reminded that when it comes to delivering on the world's promise to provide all refugee children with a quality education, teachers are on the frontline of this effort, and it is good teachers who will make the difference.

Teachers matter more to children's learning than any single other factor.<sup>2</sup> There may be no classroom, no books, no blackboard, or no chalk. But if children have a good teacher, they will learn.

If we are to achieve our goal to provide quality education to all refugee children, investing in teachers should be the highest priority. In reality, however, well-prepared and supported teachers are often an afterthought and, to date, there has been a woeful lack of investment in ensuring teacher quality. The purpose of this report is to throw light on the situation that teachers of refugees face, allowing them to speak directly about what they believe are the biggest challenges they face to do their jobs well, which includes supporting refugee children to recover, learn and thrive again.

To elevate the voices of teachers and discover the key challenges they face in teaching refugee students, we interviewed 28 teachers and facilitators who work in refugee and host communities in Save the Children education programs in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh; Bekaa and Mt. Lebanon, Lebanon; and Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Uganda. The information collected during the interviews was then combined with desk research to form the body of evidence for this report. The concept of this report follows a series of "Hear it from the Children" reports on the aspirations of children to access education – even during crises – but this time asks teachers why it is critical to rapidly return refugee children to learning. It also asks what support teachers need to make sure that every day in the classroom counts.

As you will read in this report, teachers made it clear that they love their jobs and take seriously the responsibilities that come with working with refugee children when they are at their most vulnerable. They all noted they face considerable challenges and need to be better supported to do their jobs well. They told us that their ability to support refugee children's learning and recovery is often thwarted by four key issues:

- Refugee children's psychosocial well-being;
- The struggle of refugee children to learn the new language of instruction;
- The limited capacity of the most marginalized children to catch up and start learning without targeted support; and
- The lack of professional development and support teachers receive to meet refugee children's distinct needs in these respects.

To remedy these issues, Save the Children teachers recognized the need to provide refugee students with targeted psychosocial and language support. Marginalized children must also be able to access learning opportunities that are flexible to their needs. Teachers stressed that helping children recover psychosocially, and supporting them to learn in a new language, is also a key challenge, and for which they need continuous teacher development and support. They called on host governments, agencies and the international community to do all they can to ensure that teachers are supported and able to address the distinct issues refugee children face. Their desire is for each of these children to thrive in their classrooms, and that even the most marginalized can return to learning.

If member states are truly committed to delivering the refugee education promise of the Global Compact on Refugees, they must listen to what teachers have to say. As teachers have the biggest influence over whether a refugee child will learn or not, they are our biggest ally and our biggest asset in the effort to return every refugee child to learning. These teachers must be heard.

**“Around the world, four million refugee children are out of school and missing out on their right to an education due to displacement, poverty and exclusion.”**



# INTRODUCTION

Forced displacement is at an all-time high. In 2017, 68.5 million people were displaced globally - a 50% increase in the last decade. Within this number, there are now 25.4 million refugees – the highest known total to date and an increase of 2.9 million from 2016.<sup>3</sup> Last year, the largest numbers of refugees came from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar. The four countries hosting the largest populations of refugees were Turkey, Pakistan, Uganda and Lebanon, with Lebanon continuing to bear the biggest burden relative to national population size.<sup>4</sup> While Bangladesh hosted the seventh-largest refugee population, it saw by far the most dramatic surge in 2017, when the number of refugees increased more than three-fold as a result of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar.<sup>5</sup>

Children shockingly make up over half of the global refugee population. In terms of education, it is estimated that 4 million school-age refugees globally are currently out of school.<sup>6</sup> Since 2011, the number of out-of-school refugee children has grown by 600,000 on average a year. At this pace, UNHCR predicts at least 12,000 additional classrooms and 20,000 additional teachers needed each year.<sup>7</sup>

Compared to other children and youth around the world, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school.<sup>8</sup> Globally, only 61% of refugee children attend primary school, compared to 92% of non-refugee children.<sup>9</sup> Refugee children are also less likely to progress with their educations. Only 23% of refugee adolescents attend secondary school, compared to 84% globally, while only 1% make it to university.<sup>10</sup> On average, refugee children are likely to be out of school for at least three to four years, making it harder for them to catch up on learning, and more likely to drop out if they do not receive the right support.<sup>11</sup>

The reasons why refugee children are out of school are varied. Often, it is because host countries either do not have the space, capacity, or will to cater to the large number of refugee children who need to return to school, or to meet their distinct needs. At the same time, refugee children may be excluded from education due to poverty, gender, disability, age, ethnicity or legal status.

The historical under-prioritization and underfunding of refugee education is also a key factor. In recent years, however, education in emergencies, and refugee education in particular, has garnered greater attention and support. Several key global events and agreements illustrate this positive momentum. The importance of refugee education has been recognized in several recent global-level resolutions and frameworks, including the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. These documents acknowledge that Sustainable Development Goal 4 (“Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”) cannot be achieved without meeting the educational needs of vulnerable populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons. In May 2016, world leaders convened for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Turkey, where they pledged support for a Grand Bargain to strengthen responses to humanitarian crises through better collaboration, additional and more flexible multi-year funding, and practical action to

address both immediate and long-term needs. At the WHS, governments, non-governmental organizations, companies and philanthropists also launched the Education Cannot Wait fund, an initiative to meet the educational needs of millions of children and youth affected by crises around the world. Then in 2016, member states gathered for the UN General Assembly’s Summit for Refugees and Migrants. There, they adopted the non-binding New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration), through which signatories commit to “ensure all refugee children are receiving education within a few months of arrival,” and to “prioritize budgetary provision to facilitate this, including support for host countries as required.” At the same time, world leaders attended the Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis and pledged to increase global responsibility sharing for refugees worldwide, including improved access to education for 1 million refugee children globally.<sup>12</sup>

In December 2018, the international community will come together again to establish a ground-breaking new international agreement – the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) – to put the commitments they made in the New York Declaration into action. The GCR presents a huge opportunity to improve the way the international community responds to large movements of refugees and their education needs. A Programme of Action, which will form part of the GCR, includes commitments by stakeholders to “contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children and youth,” ideally making refugee children part of their national education systems within a maximum of three months. While the GCR presents a crucial step in the right direction, and Save the Children calls on all member states to fully endorse it in December, practical and effective actions need to start now to meet the urgent and overwhelming educational needs of refugee children.

In this report, we advocate that prioritizing and investing in teachers of refugees is central to achieving this purpose. As outlined below, refugee children’s learning and future development is often thwarted by their psychological wellbeing, their new language of instruction, and their exclusion from education. Teachers play a defining role in helping children overcome these challenges if they are provided with the right professional development and support.

When the international community endorses the GCR this year, Save the Children calls on all countries to put their cards on the table and make clear undertakings to:

- Return all refugee children to learning as quickly as possible
- Help refugee children to recover and progress
- Support host country language learning
- Prioritize inclusion
- Invest in teachers

These things will help ensure that the refugee education aspirations of the GCR become a reality.



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**on average per year**

is the growth of out of school  
refugee children since 2011

**12,000**   
**additional classrooms**

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**20,000**   
**additional teachers**

are needed per year, predicts UNHCR


**It is 5X  
more likely**



refugee children and youth around  
the world will be without school

**Just 61%**   
**of refugee children**

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**Only 23%**   
**of refugee adolescents**

attend secondary school compared to 84%  
globally, while only 1% make it to university



# WHY REFUGEE EDUCATION MATTERS

When we asked Save the Children teachers why it is important to educate refugee children, they emphasized four key things:

- Education is a refugee child's right and should be prioritized;
- Education helps refugee children cope and hope in their new environments;
- Education will improve their futures; and
- Ensuring refugee children are educated will help bring peace and stability.

Teachers consistently stated that without an education, the opportunities of refugee children and youth will be limited: They will be in “darkness.” Their futures will be “blind.” They may “follow the wrong path.” And that we – national and international organizations, host governments, and the international community – have a duty to help children access their right to education and the power for change it can bring.



“Education is essential for those children. It's like the difference between light and darkness. Without knowledge, their options are limited. Children who go to school are more prepared to develop mentally and physically. When they go to school, they make friends, their imagination is stimulated, and their memory and communication skills get better... school is participation and joy. Children open up to the world and think of their responsibilities. They go back to tell their family about their day, what they learned and saw. They discuss their dreams of becoming doctors and architects. I always liken it to saving children's education to saving someone from drowning. Education is very important because we need a generation equipped with knowledge. That's strength.”

– Mahmoud, Syrian Early Childhood Care and Development teacher in Lebanon



“Despite the challenges they want to come back to school. They tell me they want to be better people in the future. They have ambitions to be a doctor or a teacher, or even the President! So they want to know how to read and write”

– Arikuru, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme Teacher

## EDUCATION IS A RIGHT AND A PRIORITY

Save the Children teachers consistently recognized that refugee children, like any children, have a right to education while they are displaced, and it is the international community's moral and humanitarian obligation to provide it. Some teachers considered teaching refugee children a “humanitarian profession” and appreciated how it helps children “get their basic right.”

As most refugee children and youth will spend their entire childhoods in exile,<sup>13</sup> the education they receive in host countries is their main shot at learning.<sup>14</sup> Ensuring refugee children and youth can access a quality education in host countries must be supported if they are to realize their right to education.

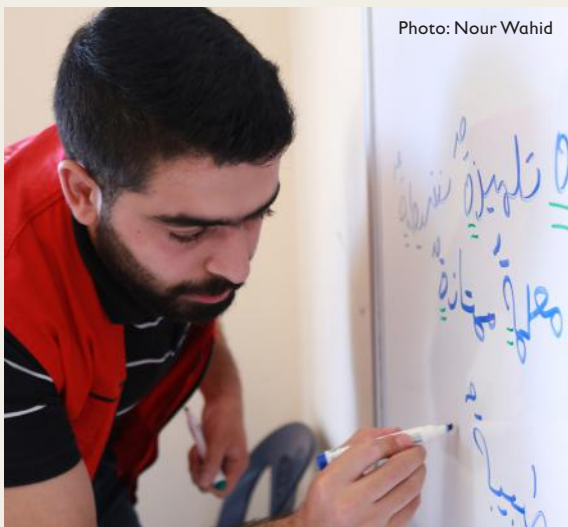
Teachers also identified that time is of the essence, and that refugee children's futures will be at risk the longer they are out of school. Teachers acknowledged it will be difficult for them to catch up on “lost years,” they might “lose momentum and the enthusiasm to learn” and risk becoming “distracted.” The teachers are right to be concerned. The longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return and the harder it will be for them to catch up. Globally, only 34% of out-of-school children are likely to re-enroll in education.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, the need to get children back to learning as soon as possible is recognized in the GCR, which includes a commitment to return

refugee children to education “within three months.” But as any delay in learning is likely to have an impact, children must return to education within 30 days wherever possible.

Save the Children teachers also reported that refugee children prioritize education. They want to go back to school, as they want a better life and a chance to get a better job.

Refugee children all over the world tell us the same thing: That they prioritize their return to education along with other essential needs, such as food and shelter. When Save the Children reviewed 16 studies, from 8 organizations, reflecting the voices of 8,749 children, and covering 17 different emergencies – ranging from conflict to protracted crises and disasters – we found that 99% of children saw education as a high priority.<sup>16</sup>

Save the Children teachers also noted that while financial hardship is a key barrier to refugee children's learning, most parents and caregivers see their children's return to education as a high priority. Refugee parents and caregivers globally also consider education a No. 1 priority.<sup>17</sup> In Greece, one in three Syrian refugee parents and caregivers reported that education for their children was the key reason for choosing Europe as their destination.<sup>18</sup> An assessment of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq showed that 80% of caregivers identified lack of access to education as their main source of stress.<sup>19</sup>



“Education is the most fundamental right for all children, wherever they are. International organizations, governments and the international community have a duty to enable children to access that right. If we don't help them, we risk doing a whole generation of Syrian children harm. No-one can imagine a generation of Syrian children without education.”

– Ragheb, Palestinian Homework Support Group teacher in Lebanon



“Our chief goal is humanitarian. We are all humans and that's the principle we hold. We believe in the power of education for all children, Lebanese, Syrian, or any other. We support children who have had their rights taken away.”

– Hiba, Lebanese Early Childhood Care and Development teacher

**“We have a child who is 16. He asks whether he would be able to go to university when he is a refugee. He is searching for future success on which he can hang his hopes. He asks himself, can I still achieve my dreams or all has vanished after I’d left Syria?”**

**– Abir, Syrian Homework Support Group teacher in Lebanon**

## **EDUCATION PROVIDES HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

When we asked Save the Children teachers why it is important for refugee children to return to education, many teachers stressed that refugee children are looking for purpose. They are “searching for future success,” something on which to “hang their hopes,” and they are acutely aware that education is their key to a brighter future. Teachers noted that refugee children still have ambition and hope, despite what they have gone through. One teacher said that when she meets refugee children who are not in school, she can see “the pain in their eyes,” and that they wish they could “get the same right as their friends.”

Providing refugee children with access to education is key to helping them make meaning of the adversity they have experienced, as well as to find purpose again. For some refugee children and youth, learning is a source of control in an otherwise uncontrollable context.<sup>20</sup> It can also help them overcome stress from traumatic memories and cope with their upturned lives.<sup>21</sup>

Refugee children’s lives have been thrown into a state of chaos because of what they experienced in their home countries prior to displacement, as well as on their journeys to find safety. When a child experiences adversity and their world is turned upside down, they instinctively engage with their immediate environment to, first, find safety and reassurance and, second, to find future purpose and meaning.<sup>22</sup> While this is an unsettling and fraught transition point for refugee children and youth, evidence shows that if access to education and similar resources are put in place during this uncertain time, the possibility of post-traumatic growth - in which refugee children and youth continue to achieve positive development outcomes despite their experiences – can be an alternative trajectory.<sup>23</sup>

Photo: Nour Wahid



**“Syrian children have ambition. The war has affected them but the ambition is still there. They want to achieve their dreams.”**

**– Moussa, Lebanese Early Childhood Development and Care teacher**

Around the world, refugee children and their families often recognize the power education can have during these turbulent times. They often express the idea that education is the one thing that cannot be left behind. It gives them hope for the future and is why they are keen to restart their learning as soon as possible.<sup>24</sup> This is supported by a growing number of studies on the resilience of refugee students. They show that when these students are confronted with overwhelming adversity and search for meaning and purpose in their new environments, they consistently state that finding a pathway back to education is how they will find hope and purpose in the future.<sup>25</sup>



## EDUCATION HELPS CHILDREN START TO FEEL SAFE AGAIN AND RECOVER

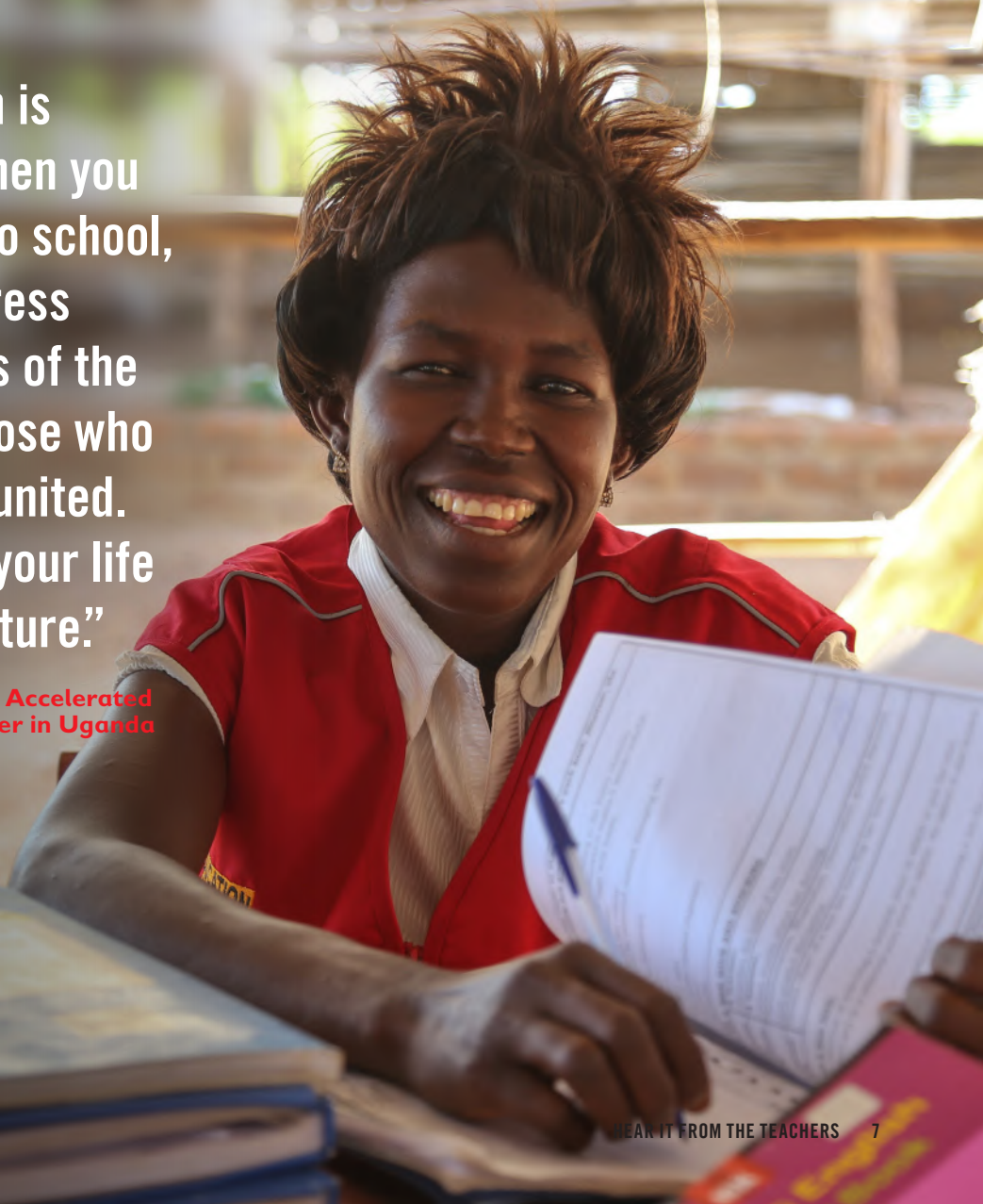
Save the Children teachers regularly noted that being back in the classroom helps bring refugee children “out of their trauma” and to “forget the bad things.” Many teachers noted that their students were “isolated” and “quiet,” but that they can help them “overcome their challenges” by teaching them how to deal with them, help them socialize and involve them in normal activities.

As discussed in more detail below, most refugee children are likely to experience some form of psychological or emotional distress because of their past experiences, and some may require specialist help. Too often, however, refugee children and youth are portrayed as traumatized victims. Their capacity for hope, and thirst to find meaning and purpose in their new

environments, is under-recognized. It is important to view refugee children’s experiences through a lens of recovery and resilience<sup>26</sup> and start with the assumption that they will meet new challenges as adolescents with agency, not merely as victims of their refugee past.<sup>27</sup> If psychosocial support and social and emotional learning approaches are incorporated and prioritized in classrooms, and teachers are well-prepared to deliver them, many refugee children can be supported to recover within the school environment. By simply being in school, refugee children are also shielded from increased risks of harm that come with conflict and displacement, including trafficking, early marriage, and forced labor or recruitment.

**“Investing in education is important because when you bring refugees back to school, it will rub out their stress and the bad memories of the incidents at home. Those who feel isolated will feel united. Education is a key to your life and a light for your future.”**

**– Tabu Agnes, South Sudanese Accelerated Education Programme teacher in Uganda**



## EDUCATION LEADS TO GREATER PROSPERITY AND STABILITY

Save the Children teachers also recognized the link between access to education and greater economic and social benefits. They acknowledged that refugee children's futures would most likely be bleak if they missed out on school. These children would struggle to feed their families, as well as face countless other hardships. The negative impact of missed education on refugee children and youth can be significant and life-changing. The less education a child receives, the more likely he or she is to have limited earning potential and to live in poverty. This has key multiplier effects in terms of health and development impacts. Less-educated girls are more likely to become pregnant, marry early, have more children, and lose more of their children in infancy – all of which have negative consequences on their physical, emotional and economic wellbeing.<sup>28</sup>

Save the Children teachers also recognized that communities would suffer if refugee children were uneducated. Teachers, especially those who are also refugees, regularly noted that refugee children are the “next generation of leaders,” and educating them while they are displaced is essential because they will be the key to restoring peace and stability in their

home countries and “preventing future wars.” They also noted that when refugee children are not in school and without purpose, they will “feel they are inferiors,” that this will be a “problem for their surroundings” and there is risk they will “become troublemakers” and “resort to unwanted behaviour.” Conversely, if children are educated and put on the right track, they “will become good citizens in their societies.”

The teachers' observations are supported by research from UNESCO, which identified that access to quality educational opportunities can contribute to peace and security, as well as mitigate factors that lead to conflict and displacement in the first place.<sup>29</sup> The UNESCO research found that low levels of access to education and high levels of inequality in education in turn heighten the risk of violence and conflict, creating a vicious cycle of lost educational opportunities, conflict, and displacement. Observed over 21 years, regions with very low average rates of education had a 50 percent chance of experiencing conflict.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, in another study, higher levels of education in a country lead to more peace and lower chances of conflict.<sup>31</sup>



Photo: Nour Wahid

**“Children are the most vulnerable category, they are the future. Education is important and if they don’t get it now, we risk a lost generation. If host countries don’t help them, children will be left to the street... We should change the narrative. Those children, if educated well and put on the right track, will become good citizens in their societies.”**

**– Moussa, Lebanese Early Childhood Development and Care Teacher**



Photo: Daphnee Cook

**“I love teaching children because they’re the future of the nation. If the children become educated, the nation will also become educated. If you plant the seed, if it isn’t good, the tree will not be good, and the fruits will not be good.”**

**– Tahmina Begum,\* Bangladeshi Temporary Learning Centre Facilitator**



Photo: Alun McDonald

**“Many of the children in my class have been out of school for three years. Some never went to school at all. When they join they tell me they came back to education because they have suffered too much, they face difficulties in heading their family. They want a better life and the chance to get a better job through education.”**

**– Eguma, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme Teacher**





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The importance of returning refugee children to education as quickly as possible is clear – education is a refugee child’s right and should be prioritized; education helps refugee children to cope and hope in their new environments; education will improve their futures; and ensuring refugee children are educated will help bring peace and stability.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors have a moral and ethical responsibility, along with a humanitarian obligation, to prioritize and invest in refugee children’s access to a quality education, ensuring these children return to learning as soon as possible. As outlined in Save the Children’s recent report, *Time to Act*,<sup>32</sup> we challenge host governments, implementing agencies and donors to:

- Endorse and work to implement the GCR commitment to return refugee children to learning “within three months” and reduce this delay to no more than 30 days wherever possible; and
- Use the unique opportunity of the GCR to agree on a global costed plan to deliver on the promises they have made with practical action to close the refugee education gap and ensure all refugee children return to education as quickly as possible.

## PROFILE

# Monsur\*, Rohingya refugee, Temporary Learning Centre facilitator, Bangladesh

We have seen terrible things, dead bodies, burning. We have come here and have a new life. We are teaching. I enjoy teaching children. The children find it difficult to focus, because they need psychosocial support. We have come from burning houses, with guns, missiles, bombs, dynamite. They throw these things at us. We are hurt and fearful. We have bad dreams and nightmares. I like to take their attention away from bad things.

I come from a family of teachers. My father and uncle are headmasters in Myanmar. I have been an education facilitator with Save the Children for 7 months. Before that, I was a substitute teacher in [Myanmar] government schools. As a Rohingya, you're not allowed to be a formal teacher in Myanmar government schools.

The children are the future of the country. If I teach them, they can be able to be engineers, doctors. They can become all of these things. Education can help our country be improved in the future. If [a child] doesn't go to school, his [or her] future will be backward. It will be blind. No future. The community will be a weak community if there is no education.

In Myanmar, the school can be closed for one-half year or a whole year... the government closes them. If children come here [to the refugee camps], they can come to school. They can be happy, they get friends here. Now everyone can learn here. In Myanmar, though, the education is step by step, with Classes 1, 2, 3, 4. With books, with classes, I want to teach that [more formal system] here.

The difficulty is that each learning session only goes for 2 hours. Then the children go back, and there is no light to read at night. Their shelters are very hot. They have no solar energy on their houses. In the rainy season, they don't have any shoes. They have been given them, but they lose their shoes. The mud is very deep. The road is very muddy from home to the learning center. It takes a long time to walk, and it goes up to their thighs. Then, they have to wash for a long time.

Some students experienced trauma because they lost their parents, which is why they don't come to class. Sometimes the families can't afford a shirt to come to class. For bigger children, some girls stop coming. Some parents are aware of how important education is, and some parents are not. In Myanmar, women and men aren't allowed to work, but here they see that women and men are working together. So, they are encouraged to work and encouraged to have education. They can see that education is important for men and women.

Older women see that they have lost their own opportunity to learn. They say, "Why didn't I get to go to school?" They realize they lost their life, so they want to encourage their children to come. They hold their hands and send the children to class.

We need more training to teach them, to keep their attention and focused. We need training on teaching, quality teaching. The classrooms should also be reinforced. They need to be stronger. If there is strong wind, the roof will come off, and it will need to close.

Developed countries should help Bangladesh to support Rohingya people to give their children education. We could use this support to give better educations to children. We want our children to attend university. We want to also attend university ourselves, but we can't. It's not my country, so I can't go to university. We are refugees. We must live like refugees. We do not have nationality in this country. I am crying. I want to go back to Myanmar. If we get nationality, we will go. We would spend years here in difficulty to get our nationality.

I will never forget Bangladesh – thank you. We get support. We have the opportunity to teach here in Bangladesh. Many thanks. I salute!

**“The children are the future of the country. If I teach them, they can be able to be engineers or doctors. They can become all of these things. Education can help our country be improved in the future.”**







## WHAT THE TEACHERS THINK: KEY BARRIERS TO REFUGEE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

While teachers have made clear the importance and value of ensuring refugee children go to school, refugee children continue to face numerous barriers that prevent them from both entering school and learning once in the classroom.

To better understand the main challenges refugee children and youth face, we also asked Save the Children teachers what they perceive to be the key barriers to refugee children's educations in these contexts. They identified the following challenges as key obstacles, which need to be addressed:

- Psychosocial wellbeing and its impact on learning
- Language of instruction;
- Access for marginalized groups; and
- Professional development and support for teachers





## CHALLENGE #1

### Refugee children are experiencing psychosocial issues and it affects their learning

75% of Save the Children teachers identified refugee students' psychosocial wellbeing as a significant issue in their classrooms. Teachers noted that affected refugee children were often "very quiet," "frightened," "start crying for no reason at all," "distant," "always alone" and had difficulty concentrating in class and engaging with other students. Others had behavioral issues and were "loud and hyperactive" or "hostile and arrogant," making classrooms sometimes "chaotic." Teachers regularly reported that they needed to provide refugee students with targeted support to better understand what was behind their behaviors, so they could help "bring them out of their trauma" and begin to recover, integrate them into the classroom, and get the entire classroom back to learning.

These observations, in terms of the prevalence of psychosocial issues in refugee learners and the impact on their capacity to concentrate, learn and interact, reflect the reality of many refugee-hosting classrooms all over the world.

When young refugees arrive in first asylum countries, they will most likely be experiencing a significant period of destabilization and coping with traumatic or distressful memories of the past, as well as concerns about the future. It is highly likely their psychosocial wellbeing will be affected in some way, and it will impact their capacity to learn.

The extent to which refugee children and youth are affected by traumatic experiences will vary widely and depend on the type and frequency of their experiences, as well as on their individual coping skills and responses to a disaster or conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Many children are resilient and are likely to recover if their basic psychosocial needs are supported. Others will be highly distressed, especially if they have lost a parent or other close family member, and may need more specialized support. Children are particularly susceptible when they encounter stressful experiences during sensitive periods of their emotional, cognitive, and endocrinological development.<sup>34</sup> In the extreme cases, exposure to the traumatic events such as war, loss, fear for life and violence can cause a state of "toxic stress."<sup>35</sup> For example, in a Save the Children research study of Iraqi refugee children who lived under ISIS, it was found that exposure to extreme levels of violence and deprivation caused all children interviewed to display clear signs of toxic stress.<sup>36</sup> Toxic stress can occur when there is a strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the child's stress response systems while buffering adult relationships are unavailable. When a toxic stress response occurs continually or is triggered by multiple sources, it can weaken the architecture of the developing brain, causing long-term consequences on a child's physical and mental health, including impaired learning and behavior.<sup>37</sup>

Refugee children may also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. In a review of 22 studies of 3,003 resettled refugee children from 40 countries, prevalence rates of anxiety ranged from 33 to 50%, depression from 3 to 30%, and PTSD from 19 to 54%, whereas PTSD prevalence in the general child population ranges from 2 to 9%.<sup>38</sup>

When it comes to how mental health issues can impact learning, research involving non-refugee at-risk students shows that traumatic experiences (including violence, abuse and neglect) can cause cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes that affect learning and academic performance.<sup>39</sup> For example, poor concentration (a symptom of PTSD), anxiety and depression can have direct adverse effects on both the acquisition of new information, cognitive skills and school performance.<sup>40</sup> Intrusive memories of traumatic events may cause children to be distracted from a learning task and to develop a style of forgetting that dismisses the traumatic memories, but also inhibits spontaneous thought.<sup>41</sup> This is supported by what Save the Children teachers said. They regularly reported working with children who seemed "distant," "absent minded" and not "mentally present."



Photo: Alun McDonald

**"The traumatized children isolate themselves in class, stay very quiet, and don't follow instructions... trauma brings a lot of changes. We try and guide them and understand what they're going through. We help them socialize and involve them in normal activities."**

**– Lilian, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme Teacher**

While there are limited studies on the impact of traumatic events on refugee children's learning, the correlations between trauma and cognitive function noted above would be expected to apply to any child.<sup>42</sup> In the research that does exist on refugee learners,<sup>43</sup> studies show that their cognitive function

can be detrimentally affected by trauma,<sup>44</sup> with one study showing that Sri Lankan children displaced by the civil war and who had PTSD performed worst in subjects that were language skills-based, which was attributed to impaired memory function caused by their PTSD.<sup>45</sup>



Photo: Alun McDonald

**"Sometimes in class a child is distant. I ask them what's wrong and they say 'I'm thinking of my brother who was killed'. We have to try and identify the children who are suffering psychologically and give them guidance and counselling... Some of the teachers are also traumatized. We are also refugees and have been through a lot."**

**– Charles, South Sudanese Accelerated Education Programme Teacher in Uganda**

**"We have seen cases of children with concentration or comprehension problems. We have a girl who even when she is listening carefully is not able to grasp the information properly. Some students are aggressive towards others. We try to dedicate extra time and effort to them. For the girl, for example, we try to repeat the point and try to engage her in the exercises. You have to say her name every two or five minutes to make sure she is still mentally present."**

**– Ragheb, Palestinian Homework Support Group teacher in Lebanon**





## SUPPORTING REFUGEE CHILDREN'S PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING AT SCHOOL

**“Our role is important. They are now used to seeing us. Now they come with a big smile. It shows the impact of school on them.”**

**– Mahmoud, Syrian Early Childhood Care and Development teacher in Lebanon**

Many teachers identified that a core part of their role was to help refugee children “forget the bad things.” Most Save the Children teachers interviewed have received specialized training to provide children with this support. The teachers talked about the different techniques they use, saying they need to “work across layers” and take a gradual approach. Teachers make sure children “who are still in fear and trauma” know that they can come to them to “confide their feelings and fears,” and that the teachers are “there to listen.” Teachers also reported helping children to socialize and engage in normal activities like play “to reduce their fear from their minds.” Many teachers reported seeing a slow but steady improvement in their students.

This experience of teachers reflects the general consensus that while some refugee children and youth will require specialist mental health services and treatment to support their recovery, most refugee children and youth can cope with short-term disruptions and crises and will benefit from accessing school-based psychosocial interventions.<sup>46</sup>

The UN Inter-agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings underscore the importance of school as a part of the holistic psychosocial response necessary for assisting war-affected youth.<sup>47</sup> The supporting literature also suggests that being in school, under the right conditions, can promote refugee children’s psychosocial recovery. Schools can play a fundamental role in supporting refugee children and youth to deal with psychosocial transitions.<sup>48</sup>

A key way to support the psychosocial recovery and wellbeing of refugee children and youth at school is to incorporate interventions, such as psychosocial support (PSS) and social and emotional learning (SEL) activities, into curricula or school-based activities.<sup>49</sup> These approaches help teach refugee children with how to regulate strong emotions and deal with traumatic stress reactions, such as concentration problems and flashbacks, which is critical for refugee children and youth who have survived war violence.<sup>50</sup>

**Psychosocial** refers to “the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person, where the one influences the other.”<sup>51</sup> The psychological aspects of development refer to an individual’s thoughts, emotions, behaviors, memories, perceptions, and understanding. The social aspects of development refer to the interaction and relationships among the individual, family, peers, and community.<sup>52</sup>

**Psychosocial support (PSS)** is the processes and actions that promote the holistic wellbeing of people in their social world. It includes support provided by family and friends.<sup>53</sup> PSS can also be described as a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities.<sup>54</sup> PSS aims to help individuals recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events.

**Social and emotional learning (SEL)** is the process through which children acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.<sup>55</sup>

PSS and SEL approaches – including those that involve storytelling, creative arts and play – have led to significant reductions in symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD, as well as shown improvements in the wellbeing of war-affected and refugee children.<sup>56</sup> Save the Children teachers also observed that engaging refugee students in play and dance assisted them emotionally. Education that incorporates PSS and SEL approaches has also been proven to help refugee children learn more readily and participate more fully in educational opportunities.<sup>57</sup>

Whether PSS and SEL approaches have a positive impact on both refugee children's wellbeing and learning, however, is highly dependent on well-trained and supported teachers.

Teachers play an instrumental role in improving the ability of refugee children and youth to cope with crisis, recover and thrive. Save the Children teachers reported they regularly work with refugee students who appear distant or sad. These teachers often need to devote extra time to assist refugee children, providing guidance or engaging students in activities to help distract them from their thoughts and bring some happiness to their days. To create safe and supportive classrooms and effectively implement approaches like PSS and SEL, teachers of refugees require targeted professional development and ongoing coaching and support in these areas. Teachers also need guidance on how to spot signs of deeper psychological needs, refer at-risk learners to mental health

specialists through the appropriate referral mechanisms, and ensure that responses and referrals are provided in a professional and confidential manner.<sup>58</sup>

When it comes to providing teachers with the right skills to support refugee children's psychosocial wellbeing, there are several programs and resources that host countries, implementing agencies and teachers can access to help guide their professional development in these respects. For example, the Training Pack for Teachers in Crisis Contexts contains key modules on child protection, wellbeing and inclusion.<sup>59</sup>

Supporting the wellbeing of teachers is also critical. As some Save the Children teachers noted, their psychological wellbeing has also been impacted, either by what they have experienced as a refugee or from the pressure of working in challenging classroom environments. Some teachers reported that “teachers are traumatized too,” but “you have to ignore everything around you; the harsh conditions and the war,” and “you become very focused on the mission at hand, helping children to learn and develop.” To help teachers more in this respect, Save the Children has developed a Learning and Wellbeing in Emergencies Teacher Training Package that focuses on promoting the wellbeing of both teachers and students, as well as assessing their related social and emotional needs. Teachers are trained in SEL strategies, how to contribute to their own self-care, and how to encourage their students to do the same.<sup>60</sup>



Photo: Alun McDonald

**“Some have seen their parents killed. They feel restless and out of place. They are not listening in class and look like they are absent-minded. They start crying for no reason at all. When you ask them in the right way, they tell you their story. We encourage them to talk and stay in school.”**

**– Christine, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme Teacher**



Photo: Alun McDonald

**“Save the Children trained us on how to help children through psychosocial support. Many children from South Sudan are traumatized and psychologically tortured. They don't participate fully in lessons. They are often quiet in class and seem absent minded. We have to help bring them out of their trauma.”**

**– Eguma, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme Teacher**





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Refugee children's capacity to learn and make progress is significantly impacted by their psychosocial wellbeing. They must be supported to recover and move on from their adverse experiences, so they are able to start learning again and get back on track. The best place to support most refugee children's psychosocial recovery is in educational settings.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors must:

- Prioritize and invest in psychosocial support programming and social and emotional learning approaches in refugee educational settings; and
- Provide teachers with specialized and ongoing professional development to implement these approaches effectively and support teacher wellbeing.

## CHALLENGE #2

Refugee students struggle with their new language of instruction, and it is difficult to teach them

Surveys showed 61% percent of Save the Children teachers reported that language of instruction is another key challenge both they and refugee students face in the classroom. Teachers in all three contexts noted that refugee children struggle to understand in class as they cannot “catch immediately what we teach.” Teachers must also spend extra time either translating or supporting students’ new language acquisition.

Language of instruction is a key barrier for refugee children around the world. Due to the current nature of conflict and average length of displacement, most refugee children in protracted situations will live in exile for the duration of their school lives, rather than return to their home countries.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence, prioritizing their inclusion in host country educational systems is now the preferred approach to refugee education, as recognized in the GCR.<sup>62</sup> This means, however, that most refugee students will have to follow their host country’s curriculum, and that they will be taught and examined in their host country’s language. While taking this approach is the most effective and sustainable way to ensure refugee students access a relevant, quality education that is recognized, it is highly likely that refugee students will not know their host country’s language or have the level of competency required for academic learning.

Ensuring refugee children are supported to learn their new language of instruction is essential, as it holds the key to whether they will be able to access past learning, keep learning in their new classrooms, and integrate and recover.

**“There was a girl who didn’t know the English letters when she first joined our activities. Today, she is top of her Grade 8 class at school. The transformation took 18 months to realize. You can imagine how we felt.”**

**– Abir, Syrian Homework Support Group Teacher in Lebanon**

In terms of refugee children’s learning to date, if their second-language learning is supported, the academic skills, literacy development, subject knowledge, and learning strategies they have already developed in their mother tongue language will transfer to the host country language.<sup>63</sup> When a child can speak, write and learn in the language of the host country, this also creates confidence and self-assurance, allowing children to communicate with their peers.<sup>64</sup> Achieving competence in host country language has also been associated with a reduced likelihood of depressive symptoms and disruptive behavior in young refugees.<sup>65</sup> Save the Children teachers also reported the positive impact that mastering language of instruction can have on refugee students.



**“The main problem is the difference of language<sup>66</sup>. I think they’re not getting the right message all the time.”**

**– Tahmina Begum,\* Bangladeshi Temporary Learning Centre Facilitator**



**“There is a big problem with language... There are some students who cannot catch immediately what we teach. The small children – it takes them a long time to understand... For the older children, some of them have never been to school before. It is very difficult for them to write and pronounce the letters of the alphabet, but they are improving day by day.”**

**– Mohammed Nur,\* Bangladeshi Temporary Learning Centre facilitator**



On the other hand, if refugee students are not provided with intensive support to learn their new language of instruction, their confidence and positivity will decrease, and the risk they will drop out of school or achieve below their potential is acute.<sup>67</sup> If refugee students struggle to demonstrate competency in their new language of instruction, this can also be misdiagnosed as a learning problem, and they may be placed in the incorrect grade or special education classes, leaving them to feel disenchanting, understimulated and, again, at risk of dropping out.<sup>68</sup> In some countries, if a refugee student cannot speak the host country language, they are arbitrarily placed in grades significantly below their academic level. In a recent Save the Children research study on refugee children in Indonesia and Thailand, it was found that children who speak no Thai, regardless of their age, are automatically enrolled in the first grade, which can be difficult for children and can deter school attendance, especially when the age difference is extreme.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, if refugee students struggle with their new country's language, it also affects their ability to make new friends and puts them at greater risk of bullying and discrimination.<sup>70</sup>

While there is limited research on what host language programming is the most effective for refugee students, an approach that incorporates a refugee child's mother tongue language in some way with host language learning is key to their successful transition.<sup>71</sup>

In studies of English language learners, including resettled refugee students, who attended English-immersion classes only and had experienced interrupted schooling before resettlement, it was found that these students were more likely to drop out than students who accessed bilingual services.<sup>72</sup> A reason why English language-only programs disadvantage language learners is that they need to learn a new language and new academic content simultaneously, which can result in an ever-increasing academic gap.<sup>73</sup> Instead, it is better to develop academic work through students' mother tongue language, while teaching the new language during other periods of the school day through meaningful academic content.<sup>74</sup>

While a transition approach to language learning works best when the majority of refugee learners originate from the same home country and speak the same mother tongue (such as Syrian refugee children), a different approach needs to be taken in host community schools that are serving refugee children who come from a range of countries and speak many different languages (such as the situation in Uganda). As noted by Save the Children teachers, it is more difficult to support the language transition of these students in the same classroom and, in these situations, teachers can spend a significant amount of time translating lessons into multiple languages, further fragmenting children's learning time and disrupting continuity.

When it is not possible to provide instruction or support to refugee learners in their mother tongue language, encouraging children to use their mother tongue language to communicate and cooperate with each other is also beneficial and can still have positive impacts on second language learning and literacy.<sup>75</sup>

While host country language acquisition is important for refugee children's learning and acculturation, taking a bilingual approach to refugee education also provides refugee children with the opportunity to improve and maintain an understanding of their mother tongue language, retain linguistic and cultural links to home and preserve a sense of identity.<sup>76</sup>

Teachers also need targeted training on how to support refugees to transition to new languages of instruction. When it comes to supporting refugee students' language transition, a growing range of resources and language training programs have been developed to assist teachers of refugees, such as the Refugee Class Assistance 4 Teachers project in Turkey<sup>77</sup> and the British Council's Language Project in Lebanon.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, as discussed further under Challenge #3, helping children learn their new language of instruction also needs to be supported through investing in catch-up, bridging and remedial programs.

Ideally, as discussed further under Challenge #4, teachers also need to be supported by teachers or teaching assistants who can speak refugee students' mother tongue language. To realize this goal, refugees must be allowed to work as teachers or teaching assistants and, if they have trained in their home countries, their qualifications must be recognized.



Photo: Shannon Orcutt

"Language is a challenge. We teach in English, but some of the children have never been to school before and don't know English. Some of the refugee teachers help us explain in Arabic or a local language. I speak three languages – English, Lubara and Kakwa, which is spoken on the border of South Sudan and Uganda, and so we sometimes can use that in class too."

– Eguma, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme teacher









## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

For refugee students, mastering their new host country language holds the key to unlocking their past learning, enabling them to continue to learn, and feel included, in national schools and host communities. However, learning a new language of instruction is a significant challenge for refugee students. Teachers are also struggling to support children to learn in a language they do not understand. If we fail to better support both teachers and refugee students in their efforts, new language learning could delay or derail refugee children's academic progress.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors must:

- Invest in targeted language support to refugee students, either in the classroom or through dedicated catch-up, bridging or remedial programs, so that language of instruction is not a barrier to their learning;
- Prioritize approaches that incorporate refugee students' mother tongue language in some way to maximize their successful transition from learning in their mother tongue language to new language of instruction; and
- Support host country teachers to assist refugee children's second language learning through professional development and ongoing coaching and support. The distinct role that refugee teachers can play at this crucial transition point should also be supported.

## PROFILE

# Amina, Syrian refugee, Homework Support Group teacher, Lebanon

I have always wanted to teach. It was a childhood dream come true for me. I have been teaching Syrian children for 15 years. I know how capable they are, and I know how they think.

We had never been in war, so the crisis came out of nowhere. The children weren't used to the war, so the consequences were increased learning difficulties and psychological distress. My personal ambition is to teach and do something that creates a positive impact on them to make them ready whenever they go back home. I want to help create a generation of minds.

The children are smart, but the language makes it difficult. The second language, English or French, is the number one challenge. Children come from Syria, where everything is taught in Arabic, to study in English textbooks. At our Homework Support activities, we try to concentrate on that. We try to bridge the gap and lay the new foundation.

When it comes to the environment around us, it's a difficult context, but you have to keep going. You have to separate the personal from the professional for the sake of the children you're serving. We don't merely teach here, we try to care for individual learning needs for all children. It takes some time to understand how children need to be supported, because each one of them has a unique area where they need to develop. We have built our relationship with the children based on mutual trust. Individually, the ability to cope with psychological stresses helps children perform better. When they are confident, nothing will stop them. Everyone reacts differently to pressure, and it always reflects on their behavior and performance. They come to us and confide their feelings and fears. They know we are here to listen.

Sometimes, families don't have enough to support their children, and they are forced to resort to cutting off education and sending their children to work, so child labor is the number one barrier. I know many children who can't go to school because they'd have to compromise their working hours. Families around here [at Mt Lebanon] tend to send their sons to work while enrolling their girls at school if they could. There was a girl at our Basic Literacy and Numeracy class who we referred to school. We were so happy that, after several years without education, she finally realised her dream. Unfortunately, two years after joining, she dropped out to get married.

I think treatment [at public school] is a top issue. There is much violence at school. In Syria, children felt they belonged to the school. Here in Lebanon, you have two shifts, a morning shift and an afternoon shift, which Syrian children attend. This division caused sensitivities between Lebanese and Syrian students at public school. That becomes evident when the two shifts swap. Boys and girls quarrel at the exit door. We've tried to solve this issue through our activities. We promoted integration, we told the children that we can't react with anger and that, instead, we should face up to the challenges and become better. Things have got a bit better in recent years. [At the Homework Support Group], we show respect and are putting them on the right track. Children trust us and feel comfortable. There is a great learning environment that offers a lot of things, like fun activities they don't get to enjoy outside; sports, painting, singing - very simple activities. We try to prepare them here. But, as we often see, the shock happens with the transition, when they go to the formal school and find out it's not the same as here.

Children are the future. They need to get back [to education] immediately. But when you have a generation deprived of education, the future is uncertain. The longer they stay without school, the more their future will be at risk and the more it will become difficult for them to catch up on lost years. Whether they stay here or go back to Syria, children who are left behind will present problems for their communities. There will be a social chasm that won't be filled.

**"I want to create a generation of minds"**







### CHALLENGE #3

Refugee children who have been out of school for a long time or are excluded due to poverty, gender, disability, age, ethnicity or legal status need better support

# 92%

OF SAVE THE CHILDREN  
TEACHERS REPORTED THAT  
MANY REFUGEE STUDENTS  
HAD MISSED EDUCATION DUE  
TO CONFLICT, FINANCIAL  
HARDSHIP, OR SOCIAL  
REASONS.

### ECONOMIC BARRIERS

Save the Children teachers identified that many refugee children do not come to school regularly or drop out due to family financial hardship. In all three contexts, teachers noted that some parents did not support their children's educations either because they could not afford it, or they needed their child to contribute to the family's income instead. More than 70% of teachers noted that children, particularly boys, would miss school to earn an income or collect food distributions.

Teachers also noted that unaccompanied and separated children, and child-headed households, were the worst-affected, as they could not afford school fees or materials and needed to take care of their siblings or work instead.

Poverty and child labor are major barriers to refugee children's access to education around the globe. While some refugee children try to juggle work and school, they are more likely to drop out if they work long hours and undertake heavy work, as the result is low energy and concentration in class, which hamper their learning and ability to keep up.<sup>79</sup> Once engaged in child labor, children's chances of re-entering school diminish significantly.<sup>80</sup> Working children are also more likely to suffer health problems, particularly if they are involved in hazardous work. They are also more vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuse.<sup>81</sup>



Photo: Nour Wahid

“Another issue is parents’ understanding of the importance of education. Some people don’t prioritize education because they have to worry about money and food.”

– Mahmoud, Syrian Early Childhood Care and Development teacher in Lebanon



Photo: Alun McDonald

“Orphans lack support, and there are many children who are separated from their parents. They came here alone. Maybe their parents are in another settlement or back in South Sudan. Boys are often also absent when they are orphans and don’t have parents, as they have to work at home and do digging to get some money. They don’t have time or money to come to school.”

– Christine, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme teacher





Photo: Daphnee Cook

“As a father of eight girls, I think education is more important for the girls because girls are the nation makers. They give birth to children and take care of children. If they will be educated, they can teach their children well. Also, if the girls learn, they can differentiate between bad things and good things.”

– Kadir\*, Rohingya Temporary Learning Centre facilitator in Bangladesh



Photo: Daphnee Cook

“For some girls, they are deprived [of education] because of religious superstitions. I think it has a bad impact on their mental health. We have the opportunity here for them to learn, but they can’t participate in the educational activities. When I went to the house to talk to the girls who didn’t come to the school...they were quiet or smiled. It’s hard to tell what is happening with girls. In front of me she is smiling, but this is because the parents are there.”

– Nayari\*, Bangladeshi Temporary Learning Centre facilitator

## GENDER

Many teachers also raised significant concerns for refugee girls, noting that their educations were regularly cut short due to early marriages and pregnancies, cultural customs or safety concerns.

Teachers noted that girls contend with cultural conventions and expectations related to going to school, especially in communities where marriage and motherhood are considered their next step. One teacher noted that the environment in which girls live “is the first red line that girls face.” In Bangladesh, 78% of facilitators noted that once girls reach puberty, their parents stop sending them to school due to cultural and religious norms. As found in a recent education needs assessment in Rohingya refugee camps, conservative social norms about mixing with the opposite sex, which is exacerbated by a lack of gender-segregated classrooms, and restricting movement outside the household after the onset of puberty is preventing many Rohingya girls from attending school.<sup>82</sup> Teachers in Lebanon also noted that parents worried about their daughters’ safety on the way to school, particularly as they got older. Many parents’ chief concern is that girls are more likely to be subjected to harassment or exploitation when they walk or take public transport to school.

In Uganda, teachers identified early marriage and pregnancy as being the biggest barrier to girls’ education. Teachers also spoke about how menstruation impacts the ability of older girls to attend school. One teacher noted that Save the Children trained teachers to instruct girls on how to make their own menstrual pads to increase their school attendance, and that providing girls with sanitary items is a practical way to keep them in school. Menstrual hygiene issues are a key barrier to girls’ education around the world. According to the World Bank, menstruation – and associated issues such as lack of access to clean water, sanitation and private toilets – leads girls in sub-Saharan Africa to miss four days of school every four weeks, adding up to a loss of 10-20% of school time.<sup>83</sup>


The teachers’ observations reflect the distinct disadvantages experienced by refugee girls. Globally, refugee girls are

less likely to finish primary education or transition into, and complete, secondary education. For every ten refugee boys in primary school, there are fewer than eight refugee girls. At secondary school, the figure is worse, with fewer than seven refugee girls for every ten refugee boys.<sup>84</sup>

While school costs are a barrier for both boys and girls, refugee girls often bear a greater burden in terms of “opportunity costs.” If girls go to school, other family members will have to take on the domestic duties that girls usually perform, including looking after younger children or older relatives. This means fewer hours for those other family members to earn an income. Conversely, marrying daughters off removes them as a household “expense,” as they are one less person to provide for.<sup>85</sup>

Teachers also recognized the impact that limited education is likely to have on girls’ futures, as well as on the next generation of girls. One teacher talked about how generation after generation of girls “will be in the dark.”

Yet the benefits of educating girls are significant and far-reaching. Ensuring girls are educated has a profound impact on when they marry and have children, how many children they have, and whether their families are healthy.<sup>86</sup> In terms of ending child marriage, if all girls completed primary school, early marriage would fall by 14% and plummet by 64% if they all finished secondary school.<sup>87</sup> In turn, by helping reduce rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, education also lowers maternal and infant mortality, as well as leads to improvements in child health.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, research shows that one additional year of school can increase a woman’s earnings by up to one-fifth. In countries where education is equal for both sexes, per capita income is boosted by 23%.<sup>89</sup> In June 2018, G7 countries recognized the importance of investing in girls’ educations by endorsing the Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls and Women in Developing Countries, which was coupled with a substantial financial commitment of \$2.9 billion to help unlock the power of girls living in the world’s most difficult places.



“Many children and communities feel that disability is an inability, but this is not the case. We do home visits to try and encourage children with disabilities to come. It’s important to have the right facilities. Here we have latrines that are designed for disabled children, but not all schools have these.”

– Eguma, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme teacher

Photo: Alun McDonald

## DISABILITY

As many as 43% of Save the Children teachers also noted that many refugee children with disabilities were out of school and faced distinct challenges to attend school. Teachers recognized that children with disabilities have the same right to education as any child. These teachers often made home visits to encourage parents to bring their children to school. They acknowledged, however, that schools often did not have the right facilities to accommodate children with disabilities. Once disabled children came to school, there was often a lack of specialized services to assist their learning needs. While research on barriers to education for refugee children with disabilities is limited, in one survey, Syrian refugee children with disabilities were nearly three times more likely in Jordan

and twice as likely in Lebanon to have never gone to school, compared to Syrian refugee children without disabilities. In Jordan, 12.5% of respondents reported “refused entry” as a key barrier to their education.<sup>90</sup>

Based on global estimates, it is likely refugee children with disabilities face significant exclusion. UNICEF found that the disability gap in attendance measured across 15 countries in primary and secondary education is an average of 30%, suggesting that children with disabilities consistently face more problems than peers without disabilities in educational participation. Additionally, more than 85% of primary-age children with disabilities have never attended school.<sup>91</sup>



## ETHNICITY AND LEGAL STATUS

In terms of exclusion based on ethnicity and refugee status, 62% of teachers in Lebanon reported that bullying and discrimination in both the classroom and on the way to school were significant issues, causing some parents to take their children out of school. Bullying and discrimination have also been reported as two of the most commonly reported problems facing refugee students in Jordan<sup>92</sup> and as key barriers to education in other countries with high percentages of urban refugee populations.<sup>93</sup>

In terms of the impact of discrimination on children's mental health, children who are discriminated against by their peers or unable to form supportive peer relationships are more likely to exhibit problem behaviors and symptoms of greater anxiety, aggression, loneliness, hopelessness and depression.<sup>94</sup> Racism, bullying and abuse were all found to negatively affect school performance and educational experience, according to a systematic review of the evidence on educational outcomes and learning problems among refugee children living in resettlement countries.<sup>95</sup> Teacher discrimination has also been shown to have negative academic effects. Children who experience discrimination from their teachers are more likely to have negative attitudes about school and lower academic motivation and performance, as well as are at increased risk of dropping out of school.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, even if children are performing well, they report feeling worse about their academic abilities and a weaker sense of school belonging if they are discriminated against by teachers.<sup>97</sup>

Lack of access to national schools or curriculum due to ethnicity or legal status is also an issue for refugee children in several host countries. In Malaysia, refugees are considered illegal immigrants, and refugee children are prohibited from attending public schools. To educate their children, refugees have instead created community schools, which are hidden due to a constant threat of civilian harassment and deportation of refugee teachers and students.<sup>98</sup> In Egypt, only Syrian and Sudanese refugee children can attend national schools, while refugee children from countries such as Iraq, Yemen and sub-Saharan Africa are excluded.<sup>99</sup> When refugee children are not included in national education systems or have access to an accredited curriculum, there is a high risk that they will not return to school or, if they do, the education they receive may be low quality, their teachers may not be trained and their learning will go uncertified, as they will not have access to accredited examinations.

Facilitators in Bangladesh raised this as a key issue in their interviews. While efforts have been made to provide Rohingya refugee children with access to informal education in camps, over half are still missing out on their right to education. Those who are attending temporary learning centers there have yet to access a standardized learning framework. As a consequence, facilitators noted, many students stopped coming to temporary learning centers, as they were not learning anything new and lacking activities to "further their minds."



Photo: Nour Wahid

**"Bullying exists among the children. Some children get suspended due to misbehavior. Sometimes, children from the local community start a fight with refugee children. We had several incidents where Lebanese children attacked Syrians on the bus. It scared the parents to the extent that they stopped sending their children to school altogether."**

**– Mahmoud, Syrian Early Childhood Care and Development teacher in Lebanon**

**"The difference for the Bangladeshi [students] is that education is standard education. They have exams, get promoted, they have books. Here they have nothing. [They have] only the same stuff, same lessons, no way to get promoted. Always the same."**

**– Saliha\*, Bangladeshi Temporary Learning Centre facilitator**

**“There is very little support for secondary education. Learners complete Primary 7, but then there is no free secondary school for them to go to. There is one private school, but it needs fees, so most can’t afford it and stay home... We need to support all levels of education. We can’t just stop at primary.”**

**– Taban, South Sudanese Accelerated Education Programme teacher in Uganda**



Photo: Alun McDonald

## **AGE**

Save the Children teachers also raised concerns for older refugee children and their access to educational opportunities beyond primary school. Teachers noted that key barriers to refugee youth continuing their educations included a lack of secondary schools or vocational training facilities in their communities, along with increased fees and transport costs. Teachers’ perceptions matched the global situation for older refugee children, who are even less likely to attend school. While 61% of refugee children attend primary school, only 26% progress to secondary school. This drops as low as 9% in low-income countries, with a mere 1% reaching university in all locations.<sup>100</sup>

Yet the economic returns for a secondary education are huge. While each additional year of formal education on average adds about 10% to an individual’s earnings, secondary education adds 20% for low-income individuals. The rates of return for secondary educations are particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa, at 25%, and in non-OECD Asia, at 16%.<sup>101</sup>



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IS A GLOBAL PRIORITY

The inclusion of refugee children in national education systems is recommended by UNHCR<sup>102</sup> and is an approach supported by many organizations,<sup>103</sup> including Save the Children, as the most practical and sustainable way to provide displaced children with accredited and certified learning opportunities that can be monitored for quality.<sup>104</sup>

Ensuring refugee children are included in national education systems is also a primary objective of the GCR, which encourages host countries to include refugee children and youth in their national education systems without discrimination. The GCR also urges all member states to provide financial and technical support to help those hosting refugees achieve this aim.

To make this happen, host country governments need to have inclusive policies and practices that ensure, wherever possible, all refugee children, including the most marginalized, can access and thrive in the formal education system. Refugee children can also benefit from accredited non-formal education.

However, realizing this goal is a challenge. More than 92% of the world's refugees live in developing regions where education systems are under-resourced and already struggling to meet the needs of host country children.<sup>105</sup> Not only do many host countries lack the capacity to scale up their education systems to accommodate refugee learners, but they also often lack political will or, worse, take political decisions to obstruct the education of certain groups. Of 25 UNHCR priority countries, only 16 allow refugees full access to their education systems at primary and secondary levels, with the rest placing limits on their access.<sup>106</sup>

Some governments are taking commendable steps forward. At the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees in New York and 2016 Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London, many host country governments committed to expanding their school systems to all refugee learners, and donor governments committed billions of dollars in support for education. In December 2017, IGAD member states adopted the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education. It included far-reaching commitments, including the integration of all refugees in national education systems by 2020.<sup>107</sup>

## READYING REFUGEE CHILDREN FOR THEIR RETURN TO EDUCATION

While the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems is the end goal, most refugee children will need additional support to enable them to successfully enter national schools. For others, alternative pathways to vocational and skills training will be needed.

Depending on the refugee children's specific needs, there are a range of approaches to help them catch up and prepare for their transition to host country schools.<sup>108</sup> Accelerated education is a common approach, especially for refugee children who went to school in the past, but have missed months or years of learning. It comprises a condensed curriculum so that students can complete it in half the number of years normally required for that level, or even fewer.

Students should then be able to sit for accredited examinations that allow them to integrate into mainstream education at the right level or move on to skills-based technical and vocational education. As there are a wide variety of accelerated learning programs of differing quality and effectiveness, however, the Accelerated Education Working Group has developed the "10 Principles for Effective Practice" to guide best practice and foster better-quality accelerated education programs for refugee children.<sup>109</sup> In addition to accelerated education classes, catch-up and bridging programs help students learn specific content they missed or give them the knowledge and skills they need to adapt to a different system, such as acquisition of a new language.<sup>110</sup> Remedial education provides additional classes in subjects such as numeracy and literacy for students who are falling behind in core academic areas.

Save the Children teachers emphasized that refugee children need different forms of support, noting that many refugee children have been out of school for several years or have never been to school. In both circumstances, it is a challenge for them to return to learning.

In Lebanon, Save the Children runs a homework support group to provide extra assistance to refugee children currently enrolled in Lebanese schools. A key focus of the group is to help children with their language transition and foster the retention of students at risk of dropping out of school. Teachers described how the homework support group "makes all the difference," as it provides the right skills for children so they are "ready to join education." Teachers also talked about how they often received positive feedback from national school teachers on the progress and achievements of students who come to the homework support group. One teacher described a girl who knew no English on arrival. After 18 months of support, however, the girl is now top of the class at her national school, which was a great source of pride for both the student and the homework support group teachers.



Photo: Nour Wahid

**"Our Homework Support students have become more confident. They go to school having done their tasks and prepared for the day. They have solved their exercises and are psychologically ready to take anything that comes their way. We have seen this in the marks they get. We have received thank you notes from school teachers, telling us how children here have turned out to be good achievers."**

**– Ragheb, Homework Support Group teacher, Lebanon**

## SAVE THE CHILDREN'S ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN UGANDA

In Uganda's Rhino Refugee Settlement, Save the Children has implemented an Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) targeting refugee youth ages 12-17 who have dropped out of school or have gone several years without access to education. Condensing the national primary school curriculum and compressing seven years of learning into three, the program uses age-appropriate learning methods to help refugee children more easily catch up on learning and integrate back into formal education systems.



**“In the AEP, we get children who missed a lot of school. Some dropped out in 2013 when the war began. Others dropped out in 2016 when they came here. Many dropped out through poverty and not being able to afford to go. We also get some Ugandan children as well, though most are refugees. We can’t handle the AEP class the same way as the formal primary school. There are children who are badly traumatized, some are child mothers, some are unaccompanied minors. Some have disabilities and can’t do physical activity. Teachers have to make sure the place of learning is friendly. [Child mothers] drop out at 14, and they often feel afraid or intimidated to go back to school with the younger children. But the AEP helps them to come back. Despite the challenges, they want to come back to school. They have ambitions to be a doctor or a teacher, or even the president! So they want to know how to read and write.”**

**– Arikuru, Ugandan AEP teacher**

For refugee children who have been excluded from education due to gender, disability or financial hardship, they may need to access targeted programs that provide for their distinct needs. For example, if girl students are mothers, they may need to access a learning space that provides childcare or supports home learning. Similarly, for working children, it may not be feasible for them to stop work to return to school. Schools and timetables need to work around them. Flexible learning programs that are designed around children's lived

experiences – whether they be mothers, working children or disabled – allow for instruction to happen on a schedule when, and in locations where, children are available. These programs often take a blended approach to teaching and learning, where technology – including tablets and apps – enables children to learn at home and at a time that suits them. They also generally include individual and group sessions in the student's neighborhood to supplement home and online learning.<sup>111</sup>





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Many refugee children are excluded from education due to poverty, gender, disability, age, ethnicity or legal status.

Host countries, implementing agencies and donors must support their inclusion in education through increased investment in accelerated and flexible learning opportunities that:

- Meet refugees' distinct needs and effectively prepare them to transition to host country schools or move on to skills-based technical and vocational education;
- Align with best practice and guidance, are contextualized to address the distinct needs of excluded refugee children in each context, and embrace effective and innovative approaches to access and learning, including technology;
- Are recognized and financially supported through official certification with clear pathways to national education systems;
- Are underpinned by inclusive national education policies that encourage refugee children to attend and stay in school, as well as address the barriers that exclude them; and
- Are well-coordinated among host governments, education ministries and other actors, including non-government and community-based organizations, to collectively support the diverse education needs of refugee students and bridge gaps in public provision.



## PROFILE

# Wani, South Sudanese refugee, Accelerated Education Programme teacher, Uganda

I was a refugee right here in Rhino settlement more than 20 years ago. I studied here. In 1995, I came through DR Congo to get here and then went back to South Sudan in 2006, after the peace agreement. Ten years later, I came back here with my family.

It was here in Rhino that I decided I wanted to be a teacher. I admired one of my Ugandan primary school teachers. He taught social studies, and I liked the way he spoke. I would repeat and imitate his voice after class. I did a two-year teacher training course, and then my first deployment as a teacher was to the same school that he was teaching at! We got to teach together. I like dealing with children, and I like that teaching has no boundaries. If you are a teacher, you can do any job.

I've taught for 16 years in both South Sudan and Uganda. In South Sudan, the schools are very overcrowded. In my old class, there were around 200 children. It was hard to move! Here, there are less than 100. It's still very big, and the number of children is too many for the number of available structures, but it's more manageable.

When the refugee children came, they thought they would go home to South Sudan quickly. They thought they wouldn't be here long enough to need to learn. But the war went on, and they realized they will be here longer, and they realized the importance of education.

Many children came on their own or with some distant relatives. They stay and exist by themselves, and it's hard for them to stay in school. Maybe their parents were killed or missing. Sometimes their parents spent so much time as refugees when they were younger that they didn't want to leave their home again this time. They wanted to stay in South Sudan. But the younger generation wanted to come. But now they live on their own and lack basic needs like food. If they have nothing at home, they won't learn well. Their quality of learning suffers.

Some are traumatized after they lost their parents or other bad things happened to them. They refuse to come to school. But school is important to help them to forget the bad things.

When I think of quality learning, I think of equality and inclusive learning. We want learning that doesn't discriminate by sex, age or disability. In some areas of the settlement, there are children with wheelchairs who are not in school. There's no place for them, as it's difficult to use wheelchairs on this rough ground.

Our country is our home, and once there is peace, we can go back. That's why it's so important to invest in education. In future, when there is peace, the children will use the knowledge and skills they acquired here to develop our country.

**“When I think of quality learning, I think of equality and inclusive learning. We want learning that doesn't discriminate by sex, age or disability.”**







## CHALLENGE #4

### Teachers need better training, support and remuneration

All Save the Children teachers recognized that they play a central role in helping refugee children to “shine bright” and “forget their problems.” Despite what is going on around them, they said they also needed to be very focussed on the “mission in hand – to help children learn and develop.” Several teachers talked about how they admired their own teachers, how teachers are “an example to the community,” how they wanted to “change and influence the community the same way my teacher changed me” and “leave that stamp” on the children they taught. Teachers often spoke about how they are not just teaching lessons, but “creating a generation of minds” and “building a human, a person.”

Teachers have a profound influence in any educational setting and matter more than any other single factor to learning.<sup>112</sup> The game-changing role that teachers can play in both student learning and wellbeing is even more pronounced in refugee contexts. As outlined above, refugee children enter classrooms with a range of distinct needs. What they experience, and the support they receive, when they first access education in host countries is crucial. Teachers play a central role in helping refugee children mediate their new environments and find the right pathway to continue their education, learn and recover. For refugee children, teachers are not only their academic tutors, but also their mentors, motivators, protectors and champions.<sup>113</sup>

Save the Children teachers consistently recognized the multi-faceted role they play in refugee children’s lives in these respects. They are highly aware of their responsibility to support and guide refugee students at a time when they are at their most vulnerable. The key role that teachers play in helping refugee children move on with their lives, and the part they play in shaping who they become, is also a source of motivation and pride for those interviewed.



Photo: Nour Wahid

**“Teaching is a noble profession. You raise generations and give them a feeling of trust and safety. It’s positive work that creates change.”**

**– Mahmoud, Syrian Early Childhood Care and Development teacher in Lebanon**

**“Here, when you’re working, you’re not just teaching. You are dealing with individual cases. You work for the future. You’re not just teaching science and math. You’re building a human, a person. That makes all the difference, and it’s what convinces me that, for the future, I am doing something worthwhile.”**

**– Abir, Syrian Homework Support Group teacher in Lebanon**



**“I love it when I meet former pupils who have got jobs as nurses or teachers. Some have gone on to university and are now studying law or engineering. I’m happy to see how they are doing.”**

**– Edward, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme teacher**



## KEY CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE

When undertaking their important role, Save the Children teachers also reported working in exceptionally challenging circumstances. While all teachers received training, teachers identified that they would benefit from more training and ongoing support across a number of areas, including classroom management, supporting children who are distressed or need additional support to learn, and teaching multilingual or multi-grade classrooms.

A lack of effective teacher professional development is a key issue for teachers of refugees around the globe.<sup>114</sup> Without the right training and support, some teachers of refugees may misinterpret refugee students' behavior due to misunderstandings of culture, language, or how children manifest underlying mental health issues. This can lead to teachers using teaching styles that are insensitive to refugee children's needs and create the opposite of a healing classroom.<sup>115</sup>

For example, teachers may adopt a teacher-centred or authoritarian approach to instructing refugee learners, either because this is the prevailing pedagogical style in host countries or teachers perceive it to be the best way to teach and manage

large class sizes or deal with "problem" behaviors. These teaching styles can marginalize refugee students, especially if they are experiencing mental health issues or have fallen behind. They do not encourage children to re-engage and enjoy learning. While there is limited research on the topic, the lack of teacher professional development and experience in working with, and understanding, the experiences of refugee children in these respects is likely to impact their learning and wellbeing outcomes, increasing the chance they will lose their appetite for learning and drop out of school.<sup>116</sup>

Many Save the Children teachers also identified a lack of quality teaching and learning materials, and working in unsafe or substandard structures, as key challenges they face at work. All Save the Children facilitators in Bangladesh noted lack of learning materials and equipment as a key challenge, while 82% of teachers from Uganda and facilitators from Bangladesh reported lack of space in classrooms, poor construction and lack of functioning sanitation facilities.

Some Save the Children teachers also talked about their long journeys to school and how, like their students, they may also be suffering psychologically.



"It's hard work. I have to walk 8kms here and back home every day. I wake up by 5am and set off at 6am. It takes me an hour and a half or two hours to get to school. Then, I leave at 5pm and walk home, just in time to get back before dark."

– Charles, South Sudanese Accelerated Education Programme teacher in Uganda



"I used to be short tempered, but the Save the Children training helped me improve. At my old school, teachers used to beat any child who did something wrong. Now, we talk, guide and counsel the children; make the child feel comfortable. The teachers, students and administrators here all have a really good relationship."

– Arikuru, Ugandan Accelerated Education Programme teacher



"Another challenge is the infrastructure. My class is open, just a bamboo roof and a divide between classrooms. There are no walls. So when it rains or there are strong winds, it's a big problem. But there's nowhere else to go."

– Mary, South Sudanese Accelerated Learning Programme teacher in Uganda



## TEACHERS NEED TO BE PREPARED AND SUPPORTED

In the face of these complex needs, there is increasing awareness that teachers of refugees, like all professionals, must be carefully recruited, prepared and supported to work effectively with refugee children. They also need to receive professional development throughout the course of their careers to remain effective. In particular, teachers of refugees need targeted support on how to teach refugee children. Teacher education should range from what teaching styles work best, to how to manage large class sizes, to how to teach different children at different learning levels, to how to support children's psychosocial recovery and cater for second language learners.

In line with best practice principles,<sup>117</sup> teachers of refugees also need to implement these approaches "on-the-job" with

the support of peers and mentors to ensure their development and continual improvement. Innovative approaches that enable teachers of refugees to collaborate, learn and support each other, as well as provide access to tools, materials and guidance, such as those developed by the Teachers in Crisis Contexts Working Group, should also be invested in and scaled up.<sup>118</sup> Education technology could also play a game-changing role in how teachers' professional development is supported. Some key initiatives already embrace technology to improve teachers' access to support and training.<sup>119</sup> Although the evidence base on the added value of mobile solutions for teacher training is still being established, effective approaches to teacher professional development are likely to have significant impact and should be invested in and scaled up.



**"Right now, I am doing my job well. But if I had more training, I could improve myself. I would like to have training on how to teach students more effectively."**

**– Nayari\*, Bangladeshi  
Temporary Learning  
Centre facilitator**



**"Training is important.  
The more I receive training,  
the better I can be."**

**– Farida Islam\*, Bangladeshi  
Temporary Learning Centre  
facilitator**

## **BEYOND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – OTHER WAYS REFUGEE CHILDREN'S TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT**

In addition to effective teacher professional development, greater investment in teacher training must be coupled with a concerted effort to reduce the pressures on teachers of refugees and ensure their expertise is retained. Ways to do this include reducing classroom size, providing an appropriate context-specific curriculum and education materials, and providing children with dedicated language support. Teachers of refugees must also be ensured that their professional competencies will be recognized and compensated, that they will be certified, and that they will receive on-going supervision and training.<sup>120</sup>

Teachers also need more assistance - both in the classroom and through the increased provision of catch-up, bridging, and remedial programs outside the classroom. As reported by Save the Children homework support group teachers in Lebanon, national school teachers have expressed gratitude to them for the catch-up support they have provided and noted their impact on students' progress. Save the Children teachers in Uganda also recognized the invaluable support refugee teachers play in the classroom, particularly in relation to supporting refugee students with language transition, and relieving pressures on host country teachers.

As outlined in the Promising Practices in Refugee Education: Synthesis Report, there is a need to develop an innovative model that allows refugee and host country teachers to co-teach with specific methods to support the transition from one language to another, allowing for participants to gain literacy skills in both languages.<sup>121</sup> Save the Children in Uganda recognizes the value of the co-teaching model. It is recruiting South Sudanese teachers who have qualified in Uganda to assist host community teachers in accelerated education classes, with the express purpose of assisting with students' English language acquisition.

Beyond their ability to communicate in refugee students' mother tongue language, refugee teachers may also be more empathetic to the lived realities of refugee learners and can have strong personal influences on them.<sup>122</sup> Research on Syrians serving as assistant teachers in Jordanian camps showed they helped smooth the transition to the new curriculum, mediated between children and helped new Jordanian teachers in large classes.<sup>123</sup> Refugee learners also reported closer relationships and greater academic support from refugee teachers, in contrast with national teachers, due to similar cultural background and language, as well as a shared refugee experience.<sup>124</sup> In a study of Somali refugees who completed secondary school in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, most students attributed their education success to their teachers – both their qualified Kenya teachers and Somali refugee teachers. They valued the benefits of being taught by qualified Kenyan teachers, who helped them master the curriculum and language of instruction, but they had closer relationships with their refugee teachers, who could provide kinds of support that Kenyan teachers could not.<sup>125</sup>

**“When we first arrived here, I was thinking that our little children are ruining their lives doing nothing. Before, we were not able to access education back in Myanmar, and here we were not getting access to education. Then one day, I saw some posters that said if you want to drop your CV to be a teacher, if you have qualifications, you can. And I thought, I have education. I can use that for the wellbeing of my community. This will be good practice for my brain, and a good result for my community and my brain.”**

**– Mostafiz,\* Rohingya Temporary Learning Centre facilitator in Bangladesh**

Despite international protections that guarantee refugees the right to work in host countries, there are several obstacles to refugees securing teaching jobs. Many refugees are not allowed to work for a salary, or work as a teacher in public education systems, due to host country policies. In Lebanon and Jordan, for example, Syrian refugees cannot be employed as teachers, owing to labor laws that restrict public sector jobs (like teaching) to citizens. For refugees who have trained and worked as teachers in their home countries, sometimes their credentials are not recognized in host countries, and they have to re-train and re-certify. Several Save the Children teachers noted that since they trained in Uganda, they were “allowed to teach” in Uganda. If refugees work in educational settings, they are often only permitted to work as volunteers or teacher assistants, and are likely to be paid incentives rather than salaries. These incentives are commonly lower than national teacher salaries and may be paid irregularly.<sup>126</sup> Save the Children teachers identified pay as a key issue, with some noting their pay was less than that of national teachers.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Teachers have a significant influence on both refugee children's learning and wellbeing. If we want refugee children to return to learning and achieve, host countries, implementing agencies and donors must prioritize and invest in trained and motivated teachers in the following key ways:

- Teachers need to be provided with effective professional development that gives them the skills to support refugee students' distinct needs, including their psychosocial wellbeing and second language acquisition;
- Pressures on teachers should also be addressed by reducing classroom sizes and by providing adequate school structures and education materials. Teacher retention needs to also be supported by paying teachers a fair wage, providing ongoing supervision and training, and by supporting teacher wellbeing;
- The potential for refugee teachers to support refugee learners successfully transition in host country schools, and relieve pressure on teachers of refugees, must also be recognized. Refugees' teaching qualifications from their countries of origin should be recognized by host countries, and they should be allowed to work as teachers or teaching assistants. Refugees should also be supported to train as teachers or teaching assistants, and all refugees working in teaching roles should have pay parity with national teachers and access to effective professional development. Co-teaching models of instruction should also be prioritized, invested in and scaled up in host country contexts; and
- The power of technology should be harnessed to support teachers to teach and continue to learn.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Teachers are at the frontline of refugee education and can make the biggest impact on whether refugee children will recover, learn and progress in educational settings. When they tell us what the key challenges are to achieving quality, inclusive education for all refugee children and what support they need to help children overcome these barriers, we need to listen.

Save the Children teachers have clearly stated that if refugee children are to succeed academically, the psychosocial, language and inclusion challenges they face must be addressed. Teachers also need to be supported in their efforts to meet the distinct needs of refugee children and cope with the challenging environments in which they work. Host countries, implementing agencies and donors need to hear what teachers are saying and take the following key actions:

**“If refugee children are to succeed academically, the psychosocial, language and inclusion challenges they face must be addressed.”**

## 1. PRIORITIZE AND INVEST IN RETURNING ALL REFUGEE CHILDREN TO LEARNING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

The importance of returning refugee children to education as quickly as possible is clear. Education is a refugee child's right and should be prioritized. Education helps refugee children to cope and hope in their new environments. Education will improve their futures. Ensuring refugee children are educated will help bring peace and stability.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors have a moral and ethical responsibility, as well as a humanitarian obligation, to prioritize and invest in refugee children's access to a quality education and ensure they return to learning as soon as possible. As outlined in Save the Children's recent report, *Time to Act*,<sup>127</sup> we challenge host governments, implementing agencies and donors to:

- Endorse the GCR commitment to return refugee children to learning “within three months” and reduce this delay to no more than 30 days wherever possible; and
- Use the unique opportunity of the GCR to also agree on a global-costed plan to deliver on the promises they have made with practical action to close the refugee education gap and ensure all refugee children return to education as quickly as possible.

## 2. HELP REFUGEE CHILDREN RECOVER, LEARN AND PROGRESS

Refugee children's capacity to learn and make progress is significantly impacted by their psychosocial wellbeing. They must be supported to recover and move on from their adverse experiences, so they are able to start learning again and get back on track. The best place to support most refugee children's psychosocial recovery is in educational settings.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors must:

- Prioritize and invest in psychosocial support programming, as well as in social and emotional learning approaches in refugee educational settings; and
- Provide teachers with ongoing, specialized professional development to implement these approaches effectively and support teacher wellbeing.





Photo: Shannon Orcutt

### 3. SUPPORT HOST COUNTRY LANGUAGE LEARNING

For refugee students, mastering their new host country language holds the key to unlocking their past learning, enabling them to continue to learn and feel included in national schools and host communities. However, learning a new language of instruction is a significant challenge for refugee students. Teachers are also struggling to support children to learn in a language they do not understand. If we fail to better support both teachers and refugee students in these efforts, new language learning could delay or derail refugee children's academic progress.

Host governments, implementing agencies and donors must prioritize and invest in:

- Targeted language support for refugee students, either in the classroom or through dedicated catch-up, bridging or remedial programs, so that language of instruction is not a barrier to learning;
- Prioritize approaches that incorporate refugee students' mother tongue language in some way, maximizing students' successful transition from learning in their mother tongue language to new language of instruction; and
- Support host country teachers to assist refugee children's second language learning through professional development and ongoing coaching and support. The distinct role that refugee teachers can play at this crucial transition point should also be supported.

### 4. PRIORITIZE INCLUSION

Many refugee children are excluded from education due to poverty, gender, disability, age, ethnicity or legal status.

Host countries, implementing agencies and donors must support their inclusion in education through increased investment in accelerated and flexible learning opportunities that:

- Meet refugees children's distinct needs and effectively prepare them to transition to host country schools or move on to skills-based technical and vocational education;
- Align with best practices and guidance, are contextualized to address the distinct needs of excluded refugee children in each context, and that embrace effective and innovative approaches to access and learning, including technology;
- Are recognized and financially supported through official certification with clear pathways to national education systems;
- Are underpinned by inclusive national education policies that encourage refugee children to attend and stay in school and address the barriers that exclude them; and
- Are well-coordinated among host governments, education ministries and other actors, including non-government and community-based organizations, to collectively support the diverse education needs of refugee students and bridge gaps in public provision.

## 5. INVEST IN TEACHERS

Teachers have a significant influence on both refugee children's learning and wellbeing. If we want refugee children to return to learning and achieve, host countries, implementing agencies and donors must prioritize and invest in trained and motivated teachers in the following key ways:

- Teachers need to be provided with effective professional development that gives them the skills to support refugee students' distinct needs, including their psychosocial wellbeing and second language acquisition;
- Pressures on teachers should also be addressed by reducing classroom sizes and by providing adequate learning structures and educational materials. Teacher retention needs to also be supported by paying teachers a fair wage, providing ongoing supervision and training, and supporting teacher wellbeing;
- The potential for refugee teachers to help refugee learners successfully transition into host country schools, and to relieve pressure on teachers of refugees, must also be recognized. Refugees' teaching qualifications from their countries of origin should be recognized by host countries, and they should be allowed to work as teachers or teaching assistants. Refugees should also be supported to train as teachers or teaching assistants, and all refugees working in teaching roles should have pay parity with national teachers and access to effective professional development. Co-teaching models of instruction should also be prioritized, invested in and scaled up in host country contexts; and
- The power of technology and other innovative approaches should be harnessed to support teachers to teach and continue to learn.

**IF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS TRULY COMMITTED TO DELIVER ON THE REFUGEE EDUCATION PROMISE OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES, THEY MUST LISTEN TO WHAT TEACHERS HAVE TO SAY AND TAKE THESE KEY ACTIONS NOW. THEY WILL ENSURE REFUGEE CHILDREN ARE GIVEN THE BEST CHANCE TO RECOVER, LEARN AND PROGRESS, AND THEY WILL ENABLE TEACHERS TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY DAY REFUGEE CHILDREN ARE BACK IN THE CLASSROOM COUNTS.**







# COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

## LEBANON

Lebanon hosts more refugees per capita than any other country in the world. There are currently over 976,000 registered Syrian refugees in the country, with an estimated 500,000 additional unregistered asylum seekers, representing a quarter of the country's total population.<sup>1</sup> Syrian refugees have not been granted official refugee status by Lebanon, which has limited UNHCR's response and prevented the agency from setting up refugee camps. This has left Syrians scattered throughout the country, many in rudimentary tented settlements without limited access to services.<sup>2</sup>

Due to restrictions limiting the ability of Syrians to obtain legal status, refugees have a limited ability to work, access medical care and formal education, and "face evictions, raids arrests and detentions, curfews, and restrictions on residency and freedom of movement."<sup>3</sup>

One in every three school-aged children in Lebanon is a refugee.<sup>4</sup> There are currently some 488,000 school-aged Syrian refugee children in Lebanon (3-18 years).<sup>5</sup> To accommodate the massive influx of refugee children into the Lebanese school system, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) developed a double shift system where students either attend classes in the morning or afternoon. The MEHE received international donor support during the last four

school years, as part of its [Reaching All Children with Education \(RACE\)](#) plan to provide free education for all children, including Lebanese, up to grade 12 through the double shift system. More than 221,000 Syrian refugee children aged 3-18 years were enrolled in both morning and afternoon shifts during the 2017/2018 school year (with 71% attending the second shift). Nevertheless, more than half of refugee children in the age group 3-18 are still out of school, mainly adolescents and youth.<sup>6</sup>

In 2016, the international community committed to getting 1 million Syrian refugee children living in neighboring countries into school, but have not provided the funding necessary to deliver on this pledge.<sup>7</sup> Some Syrian refugee children have never been to school or have not been in many years, making it difficult for them to integrate into Lebanese schools and catch up on learning. Save the Children spoke to Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese teachers of refugee children in Bekaa and Mt. Lebanon. Teachers raised a number of obstacles that limited attendance by refugee children, noting challenges with language, bullying, high transportation costs, and the competing need for children to work to support their families.







Photo: Alun McDonald

## UGANDA

There are currently over 1.4 million refugees in Uganda, 60% of which are children.<sup>8</sup> The majority of these refugees come from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where violence and instability forced them from their homes. After civil war reignited in July 2016, nearly 1 million South Sudanese fled to Uganda. Since the beginning of 2018, 100,000 refugees have also arrived from DRC due to increased conflict.<sup>9</sup> Despite the huge influx of refugees into the country, Uganda's Refugee Response Plan is severely underfinanced.

Uganda is widely recognized as one of the world's most welcoming countries for refugees. Rather than traditional refugee camps, Uganda hosts refugees in settlements that are integrated with local host communities. Refugees are given plots of land, permission to work and enroll in local schools, and their movement is not restricted. While the Ugandan government has been incredibly accommodating for refugees, the overwhelming influx has greatly strained their response capacity.

More than half of all refugee children in Uganda – over 350,000 – and 171,000 children from local host communities are currently out of school.<sup>10</sup> As many as 61% of South Sudanese refugee children of primary school age are currently enrolled in school. That number significantly decreases for secondary school, where only 12% of refugee children are enrolled.<sup>11</sup>

As part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the Ugandan government in September 2018 launched the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities. The plan is designed to be “a realistic and implementable plan to ensure improved learning outcomes for increasing numbers of refugee and host-community children

and adolescents across Uganda” and represents a critical milestone in substantial planning for education in refugee situations.

Save the Children interviewed 11 teachers in Rhino Refugee Settlement to hear their perspectives of the challenges they experience and witness, as well as the value of educating refugee children. The teachers come from both the South Sudanese refugee and Ugandan host communities, with many of the South Sudanese teachers having once been students in Ugandan schools during previous periods as refugees.

The teachers raised several challenges preventing refugee children from accessing education and impacting their learning. All of the teachers interviewed spoke to the psychosocial challenges refugee students cope with as a result of the trauma many witnessed, or experienced, in South Sudan. They also reported early marriage as a key issue. There are many girls that are also mothers and do not have someone to care for their children so that they can attend school. Child labor is also a problem, with many boys leaving school to try to earn an income. There are also many child-headed households, along with more than 5,000 unaccompanied minors from South Sudan in Uganda – many of whom miss school to collect food distributions, earn an income, and take care of younger siblings.<sup>12</sup>

To address these issues, Save the Children and partners have established programs to get out-of-school refugee and Ugandan children back to learning by using accelerated education, innovated technology, and recreational activities to support psychosocial healing.



## BANGLADESH

In August 2017, the Myanmar military began a brutal campaign against Rohingya civilians in Rakhine state in response to attacks on Myanmar police posts. Since that time, over 725,000 Rohingya – more than half of whom are children – have fled to refugee camps, make-shift settlements, and among host communities in neighboring Bangladesh, where over 200,000 had already been displaced by previous violence.

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group without official citizenship in Myanmar, and almost all of those living in Cox's Bazar have no official refugee status recognized by the government of Bangladesh. This limits their rights, making them highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They have settled in a relatively small area in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which has added pressure on existing camps and settlements, as well as on surrounding host communities.

An estimated 625,000 children and youth from both Rohingya and host communities need education services. Three out of every four Rohingya refugee children and youth are unable to access learning opportunities. Despite tremendous needs, the Joint Response Plan as of August 2018 has been massively underfunded, with education only financed at 25% of what was requested.

While the government of Bangladesh should be applauded for hosting nearly 1 million refugees and keeping its borders open, it does not currently consider education for refugees to

be a humanitarian priority intervention, which together with limited funding from donors, has resulted in limited education opportunities for refugee children.

Civil society organizations have opened Temporary Learning Centres (TLC) in refugee camps, where Bangladeshi and Rohingya facilitators are teaching refugee children basic literacy, numeracy and life skills in Rohingya, English and Burmese.

The facilitators from the host and refugee communities interviewed raised concerns about the lack of a standardized curriculum and education response plan, giving examples of how it impacted their ability to support refugee learning. They noted that the lack of systematization of education programming meant that quality, learning content, and materials varied by TLC, and that the lack of higher levels and opportunities for progression has led students to drop out. Due to the temporary nature of the learning centers, poor construction and infrastructure impacts the ability of facilitators to instruct, particularly during the monsoon season when flooding occurred. Many children also do not attend the TLC for cultural and economic factors. Teachers voiced concerns about cultural norms preventing girls from attending TLC sessions after they reach puberty and of boys missing courses to earn an income.





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### **Hear it from the Teachers: Getting Refugee Children Back to Learning**

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“Hear it from the Teachers” sheds light on the situation for teachers of refugee children, hearing directly from them what they see as the biggest challenges to doing their jobs well and in supporting refugee children to recover, learn and thrive.

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