



## Securing education for the world's refugees at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum

**The Send My Friend to School coalition is calling on the UK Government to work with the international community to mobilise the funding needed to support low- and middle-income hosting countries to provide inclusive, equitable and quality education for refugee and host community children.**

Having already lost their homes, many refugees are now losing their education. Refugees experience some of the lowest access rates to education in the world and more than half of the world's refugee children are out of school.

The need to support the countries that host refugees is the key to addressing this crisis. Three-quarters of refugees live in low- and middle-income countries. Yet many of these countries receive little to no international assistance for education from the UK and other donors, despite the global public good they perform in educating the world's refugees.

The Global Refugee Forum, taking place this December, is an opportunity to unlock the funding that is required to educate the world's refugee children and ensure their future prosperity.

**We urge the UK to play a leading role in ensuring that the 2023 Global Refugee Forum delivers strong commitments on education, including by making its own ambitious education pledge.**

## Record levels of forced displacement increase the education needs of refugee children

There are more forcibly displaced people now than at any time in modern history. An unprecedented 108.4 million people – including 35.3 million refugees – have been forced from their homes.<sup>1</sup> **Children are over-represented among the world's refugees.** They make up less than one third of the global population, but more than 40% of the world's refugees.<sup>2</sup>

As crises become more frequent and protracted, unprecedented increases in displacement levels have been recorded:

- The **climate crisis** has already displaced more than 50 million children, who have been forced to leave their schools and classmates behind.<sup>3</sup> An additional 1.2 billion people could be displaced, both within countries and across borders, by 2050, due to climate change alone.<sup>4</sup>
- The **hunger crisis** in East Africa has driven millions to leave their homes in search of food and shelter.
- **Conflict** has spiked dramatically in the last decade, with protracted crises continuing to displace millions across borders. 449 million children currently live in violent conflict zones.<sup>5</sup>

### Over half of all refugee children are out-of-school

In 2018, the UK affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees, an international agreement for more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing to better protect, assist and support refugees, host communities and countries. The Compact includes the landmark commitment to get all children in school and learning within a few months of their displacement and makes this a shared global responsibility.

**Despite international commitments, an estimated 51% of refugee children – more than 7 million children – are not enrolled in school.**<sup>6</sup> The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, estimates that refugee children miss out on an average of three to four years of schooling.<sup>7</sup> Specific groups of refugees also face additional barriers to education due to gender, disability, poverty, ethnicity and legal status. Refugee girls are half as likely to enrol in secondary school as their male peers<sup>8</sup>, and refugee children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to exclusion from education.

As we mark the halfway point in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), education outcomes for refugee children are amongst the lowest in the world. **Without urgent action and funding to reach and teach the world's refugees, we risk falling short of the promise in the SDGs and leaving an entire generation of refugees behind.**

1 Figures as of end of 2022. Source: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder

2 UNICEF (2023) Child displacement

3 UNICEF (2022) Climate mobility and children

4 Institute for Economics & Peace (2020) Ecological Threat Register

5 Save the Children (2022) Stop the War on Children: The forgotten ones

6 UNHCR (2023) Education Report 2023

7 UNHCR (2016) Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis.

8 UNHCR (2018) Her Turn: It's time to make refugee girls education a priority

### Low- and middle-income countries host the highest number of refugees without adequate international support

Countries like Chad, Sudan and Uganda have shown incredible generosity in opening their borders and national systems, and putting in place policies to ensure refugees can access education on the same terms as the host community, which is the most effective way to meet refugee children's needs for quality and accredited education.

Hosting large refugee populations puts a huge strain on these countries' already stretched services. **Yet host countries often receive little to no international assistance for education from the UK and other donors, leaving them to absorb these overwhelming costs alone.**

This lack of predictable, long-term financing from the international community means that access to education that is guaranteed at the national level is in constant jeopardy.

### Investing in refugee education

As a champion of education in emergencies, the UK Government has made strong commitments to reach refugees with quality and inclusive education. **Recent aid cuts by the UK to large refugee hosting countries, like Jordan and Lebanon which together host more than 4 million refugees, have however undermined this commitment.** A recent inquiry by the International Development Committee identified that UK ODA for programmes in Jordan decreased by 61% between 2019–20 to 2022–23.<sup>9</sup> The scale of cuts in Lebanon was even greater, with funding decreasing by 88%. UNHCR has warned that the UK's aid cuts have reduced confidence among host governments that the international community would 'stay the course' in supporting Syrian refugees and host countries.



### Securing the funding to educate the world's refugees at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum

In 2021, the World Bank and UNHCR, estimated the annual global cost of educating the world's refugee population in low- and middle-income countries at US\$4.85 billion a year.<sup>10</sup> This is close to equivalent to the £3.7 billion (US\$4.54bn) spent by the UK from its aid budget in 2022 on 'in-donor refugee costs' associated with hosting refugees in their own country.<sup>11</sup>

Opening national education systems up to refugee children is not just an investment in the future of the world's refugees but also in the children in hosting countries, who will benefit from improved education services, which are currently strained from the influx of learners.

**At the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) this December, the international community urgently needs to commit to unlocking the financing needed to educate the world's refugees.** Taking place every four years, the GRF is a central process for enacting the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and brings together states and other actors to commit to financial or technical support or policy changes to help meet the Compact's objectives.

At the 2019 GRF, 223 pledges were made on education. However, unlike many other donors - including Germany, Ireland and Norway which committed significant financial resources - the UK did not make a pledge on refugee education.

<sup>9</sup> House of Commons International Development Committee (2023) UK aid for refugee host countries

<sup>10</sup> World Bank & UNHCR (2021) The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Library (2023) The UK aid budget and support for refugees in the UK in 2022/23

## Recommendations

The Send My Friend to School coalition is calling on the UK Government to work with the international community to mobilise the funding needed to support low- and middle-income hosting countries to provide inclusive, equitable and quality education for refugee and host community children.

We urge the UK to play a leading role in ensuring that the 2023 Global Refugee Forum delivers strong commitments on education, including by making its own ambitious education pledge that includes:

- 1. More and better financing for refugee education:** the UK should commit to providing predictable, multi-year financing for refugee education. For example by increasing bilateral education ODA to hosting countries, making new multilateral contributions to Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education, and providing flexible humanitarian funding to respond to education needs from the onset of a refugee crisis. We also urge the UK to work with ECW, GPE and the World Bank to renew their joint pledge to improve the coordination and financing of education for refugees and host communities.
- 2. Alignment with the needs of host countries:** pledges should support and resource the commitments made by host governments, with a focus on the poorest host countries and the education needs of the most marginalised refugee children and youth.
- 3. The meaningful participation of refugee children, communities and refugee-led organisations:** refugee children and youth, and refugee-led organisations and networks, should be empowered to participate meaningfully prior to and at the Forum, including through virtual and child-friendly platforms and representation in the UK's own delegation. Refugee children and communities should also be consulted in the design, implementation and review of the UK's existing and future GRF pledges.
- 4. Monitoring, tracking and reporting mechanisms:** any pledges that are made should include timelines for completion and measurable targets and indicators so that progress can be properly tracked. The UK should also commit to publicly report regular updates on its pledges (at least once a year).

### About Send My Friend to School

Send My Friend to School is the UK civil society coalition of international development NGOs, teachers unions and charities. It brings together young people, politicians, teachers, civil society and the media in joint campaigning to demand quality education for all children across the globe.

Find out more about our "Let My Friends Learn" campaign on education in emergencies in our policy report.

**#LetMyFriendsLearn @sendmyfriend**