



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
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Conclusions & Recommendations

"SUPPORTING REFUGEES'
AND IDPS' ACCESS TO
HIGHER EDUCATION"

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is host to more than one-fourth of the world's 68.5 million people forcibly displaced within or beyond their country's borders. Children and young people make up more than half this displaced population and an increasing number is now displaced for a period of time that represents at least one cycle of education. Hence, **access to education is key**. While 91% of non-refugee children worldwide have access to primary school, only 63% of refugee children do. At secondary level, 84% of youth are enrolled in secondary school while this is the case for only 24% of refugee youth. When it comes to tertiary education, **just 3% of refugee youth have access to higher education**, while enrolment among non-refugees is 37% (UNHCR 2019 "[Refugee education in crisis](#)").

Conclusions & recommendations

The workshop "Supporting refugees' and internally displaced persons' (IDP) access to higher education" in the context of the conference "[Investing in people, by investing in higher education and skills in Africa](#)" discussed the challenges and opportunities of the access for displaced populations in Africa. As a result, a set of recommendations for further action was formulated.

First and foremost, participants and speakers underlined importance of increasing access of displaced populations to higher education. Education can "empower" individuals and it has a lasting effect on entire communities. The [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR), adopted in December 2018, affirms that participation in tertiary education can generate positive change in crisis- and protracted situations and that higher education plays an important role in recovery and rebuilding after conflict. The African Union's nomination of the year 2019 as "year for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons" reflects the importance of this topic for the African continent.

There are several **obstacles and challenges** refugees and IDPs¹ are facing in accessing higher education. These include:

- structural barriers to access higher education institutions, such as unawareness of procedural steps

¹ Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution to another country. They are defined and protected in international law. Internally displaced people (IDPs) have not crossed a border; they stay within their own country and remain under the protection of its government. See for definition: <https://www.unhcr.org/who-we-help.html>

or necessary paperwork;

- policy barriers such as certification and documentation of previous learning and required identity documents as well as recognition of prior learning;
- language barriers, e.g. lack of knowledge of the language of instruction;
- lack of financial means, especially for university fees, but also living costs during studies;
- protection concerns;
- posttraumatic psychological problems;
- succeeding in the academic system;
- uncertainty about further learning or employment prospects after graduation;
- distance to locations of higher learning from settlements or camps.

There was a strong plea not to risk losing the potential of a young refugee and IDP generation and therefore to significantly increase the number of refugee and IDP youth with access to higher education.

Recommendations

- A large scale and long-term multi-stakeholder approach for **investments** in both the **higher education systems of the respective host region** (e.g. extra study places, additional staff, infrastructure upgrading etc.) as well as in **individual funding possibilities for refugee youth** (e.g. high-quality scholarship programmes, language and preparatory courses, short courses as well as digital learning opportunities and mentoring possibilities) are required as well as opportunities to authenticate prior education achievements. Respective instruments and solutions need to be innovative, evidence-based, scalable, sustainable and flexible.
- Humanitarian responses alone are insufficient to support host countries to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure access to quality education for all, including higher education. To address this gap, sustained, **coordinated effort of all humanitarian, development and national stakeholders** is urgently needed.
- Refugee support schemes should include measures **favouring social cohesion**, inclusion of refugees in host communities and understanding of their situation, by working with and supporting local communities (for example setting-up buddy systems, providing support to local youth in need).
- Refugee situations in Africa and in particular those **protracted refugee crises** lasting for more than 20 years, require **specific attention** and need to be tackled with a holistic approach, taking the entire educational pathway into account. The **lack of prospects for post-graduate possibilities** and limited access to the labour market might discourage refugees to seek higher education or even to complete secondary education. Preparation within and support for secondary education, guidance towards technical or academic higher education and supporting entrepreneurial education and the access of graduates to the labour market need to be addressed.
- Existing scholarship models with multi-year experience such as the [DAFI programme](#), the [HOPES programme](#) and others show that academic and leadership results can be achieved through a combination of individual support, cooperation with higher education institutions, social engagement and internship opportunities and peer-to-peer support. Such programmes take into consideration the protection needs of refugees as a priority and can inform new regional initiatives.

- The European Commission has addressed the topic of education in emergency situations in a [policy paper](#) and it is, for example, providing assistance to Syrian refugees to access higher education through the EU's Regional Trust Fund in response to the crisis in Syria, the [Madad Fund](#). Comparable support schemes should be made available to refugee populations in Africa.

*Recommendations stem from a workshop that took place in the framework of the conference “**Investing in people, by investing in higher education and skills in Africa**”, organised by the European Commission, the African Union Commission, DAAD, British Council, Campus France and Nuffic on 25th October 2019 in Brussels.*

The following speakers have contributed to the debate:

- *Almarat Mohamed Omar, Student, University of Geneva-InZone Kakuma Campus, Kenya (by video)*
- *Barbara Moser-Mercer, founding Director of InZone, Global Studies Institute, University of Geneva, Switzerland*
- *Susan Alupo, Programme Manager of the Access to Justice, Refugee Law Project, Makerere University, Uganda*
- *Dr. Yohannes Woldetensae, Senior Education Expert, Education Division, African Union Commission*
- *Caroline Schmidt, Education Specialist, UNHCR*
- *Fouzia Warsame, Dean of Faculty of Education & Social Sciences, Somali National University, Somalia*

*Chair: Dr. Christian Hülshörster, Head of Division Scholarship Programmes Southern Hemisphere, DAAD
Rapporteur: Mareike Khaskeia, Head of Section Africa, DAAD*

Presentations and further reading on the topic of refugee integration in higher education are accessible on the [conference website](#).