



THE UNBREAKABLE PROMISE: RESILIENCE AND RESOLVE IN REFUGEE EDUCATION





📷 Jordan. Laila, a Syrian refugee, learns how to use a laptop in Za'atari Camp. © UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfoush

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD: Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees4

Refugee education caught between progress and pressure: advancing access and quality in a time of strain8

 A regional lens on change: five years of refugee education data8

 Towards gender parity: modest gains but parity still out of reach 13

 Advancing quality education: insights from learning outcomes and classroom realities 16

Final Word: Dr Charles CHEN Yidan 21

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Cirenía Chavez Villegas, with support from Alanna Heyer, Xiao Liu, Emiko Naka and Becky Telford. Communications supported by Barney Thompson.

Special thanks to graphic novelist Syd Fini for his original artwork and the short story in graphic format which is included throughout the report, telling the powerful story of why education matters.

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

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

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

We work in over 130 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for millions.



📷 Ukraine. High Commissioner visits 'Metro Schools' in Kharkiv underground network. © UNHCR/Iryna Tymchyshyn

FOREWORD: Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees

Education takes root in every imaginable environment

It can be found in the refugee camps in Chad filled with Sudanese people fleeing the war in their country – teachers and students doing their best with meagre resources, just desperate to keep the learning going.

It can be found in the many countries hosting Ukrainians who have been forced from their homes, schools and communities by relentless missile and drone strikes.

On World Refugee Day in June, I saw it for myself in Dar'a, southern Syria, when a busload of refugees from Jordan arrived home after years in exile – including children of all ages, delighted to be on Syrian soil, ready to go back to school as one small but vital brick in the rebuilding of their shattered country.

Education's value is beyond dispute. We view it as a fundamental right, acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and other international agreements.

Inclusive and equitable education is one of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Education has been a key component of the two Global Refugee Forums held in 2019 and 2023. Over the past few years, collaboration between education-focused charities and foundations, national and local authorities, grassroots organizations, the private sector, tech companies and many others has flourished. Many more refugee-hosting countries now have inclusive policies allowing refugees to access national education systems.

But just as you can see refugees determined to learn no matter how adverse the conditions, you can also see the absence of education for too many children – ambitions thwarted, dreams dashed, curious minds with nothing to satisfy that curiosity. While we must celebrate the successes, the challenges only multiply.

Over the past decade, the total number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate has more than doubled. At the end of 2024, the number stood at 31 million; 41 per cent of them are under 18. Each year, we estimate that more than 330,000 children are born as refugees – one of many indications that conflicts and crises are lasting



📷 Syria. High Commissioner visits Syria to mark World Refugee Day 2025. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

longer and becoming more intractable, damaging countless futures. Even though more refugee children and youth than ever are getting an education, the ever-rising numbers mean that around half are still not in school.

Almost three quarters of refugees live in developing or the least developed countries, many of which struggle to provide enough schools and teachers for their own populations – yet they still offer safety to desperate people fleeing war and persecution. Language barriers, new and unfamiliar curriculums, a lack of spaces and resources, financing, missing documentation... all present immense challenges to both refugee children and host governments. And while millions of children and youth have enrolled in school over the past decade, the inexorable rise in the global refugee population means that the overall percentages are difficult to shift.

In short, while more refugee children have received an education over the past decade, millions more have missed out.

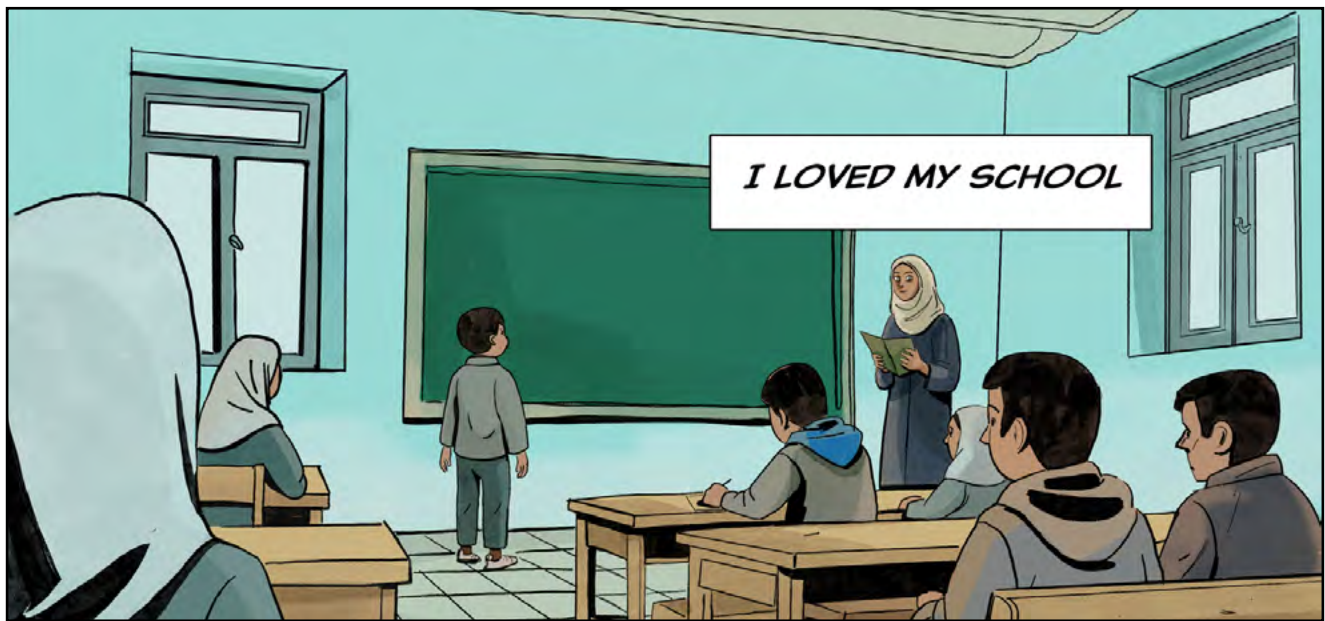
Almost every state with sufficient resources makes sure to invest in education. Their citizens expect it – not just for the sake of numeracy and literacy, but to develop critical thinking, social and technical skills, and a range of other abilities that will help their children grow and prosper into adulthood. Education matters to children, parents, employers and governments. Just think of

how much you value education, for yourself and for successive generations.

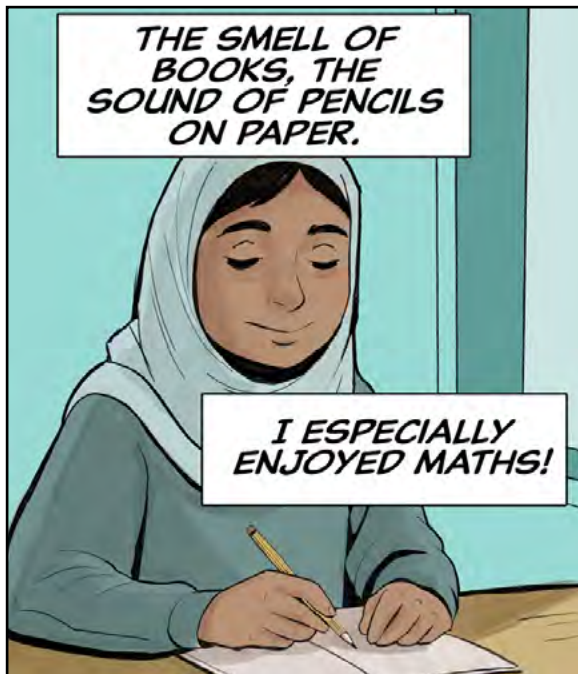
For young refugees, the stakes are even higher. Being in school can protect them from an array of dangers – child labour; early marriage and pregnancy; filling the empty hours with petty crime; forced recruitment, or worse.

This is the tenth edition of UNHCR's annual Refugee Education Report. Taking the longer and more positive view, one could say it has been a decade of more and better data, expanded partnerships, policy evolution and inspirational stories from all over the world of students and their teachers. There have been tremendous efforts to increase enrolment at all levels for refugees, and some progress has been made at the secondary and tertiary levels.

But there is still so much more to do – and this year's cuts to humanitarian and development aid have made access to education for young refugees that much harder, putting the hard-won recent progress at risk. We must not give up. Ensuring that refugees can learn is vital to their futures, and to ours.



I LOVED MY SCHOOL



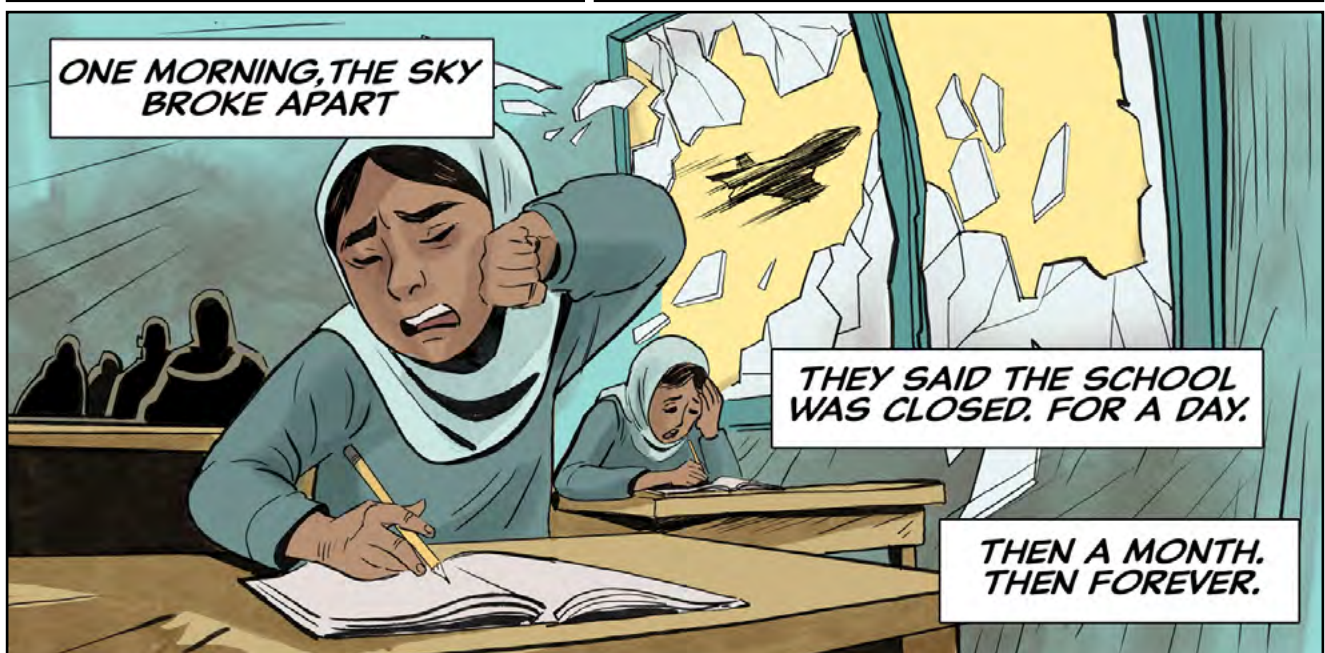
THE SMELL OF BOOKS, THE SOUND OF PENCILS ON PAPER.

I ESPECIALLY ENJOYED MATHS!



5 TEACHERS, 150 KIDS. ADD 2 MORE, STUDENTS PER TEACHER?

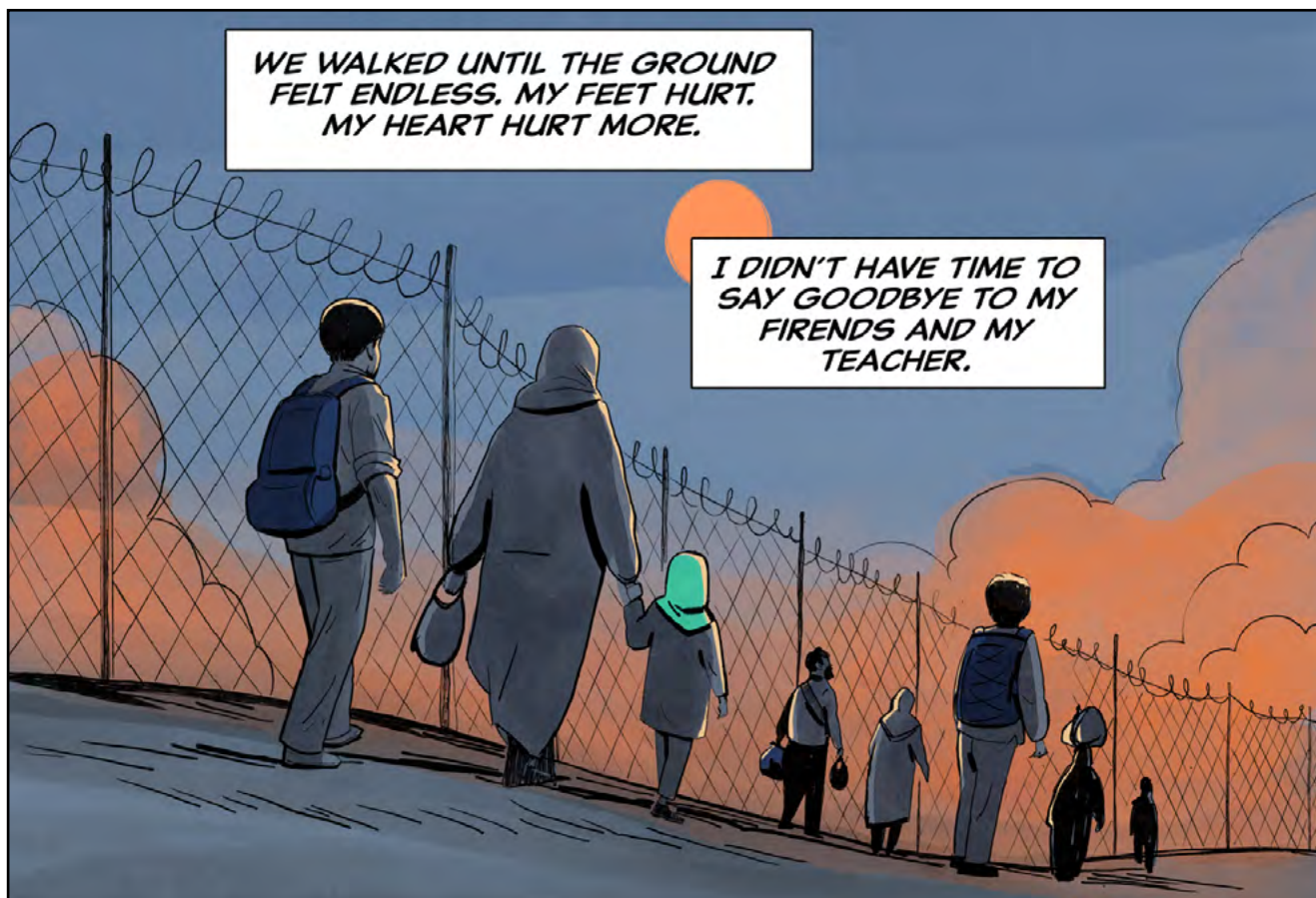
I BET LAYLA KNOWS THE ANSWER!



ONE MORNING, THE SKY BROKE APART

THEY SAID THE SCHOOL WAS CLOSED. FOR A DAY.

THEN A MONTH. THEN FOREVER.

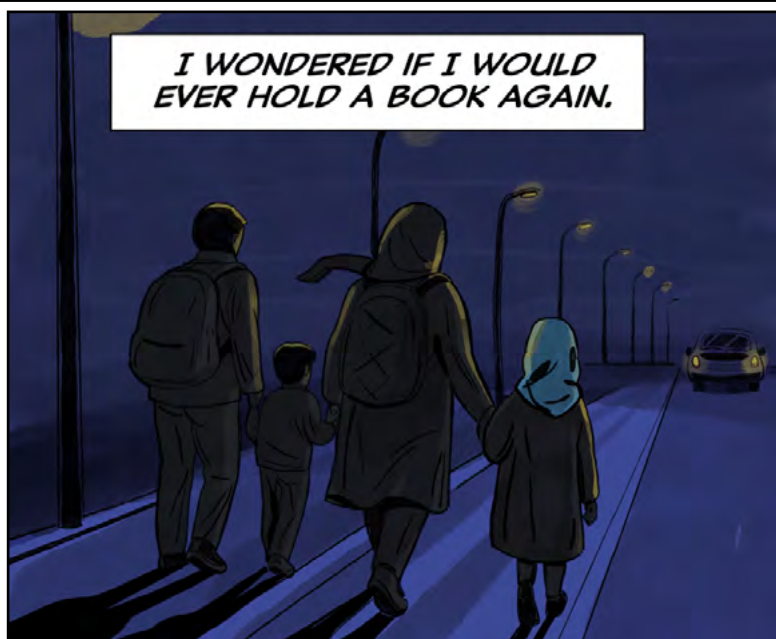


*WE WALKED UNTIL THE GROUND
FELT ENDLESS. MY FEET HURT.
MY HEART HURT MORE.*

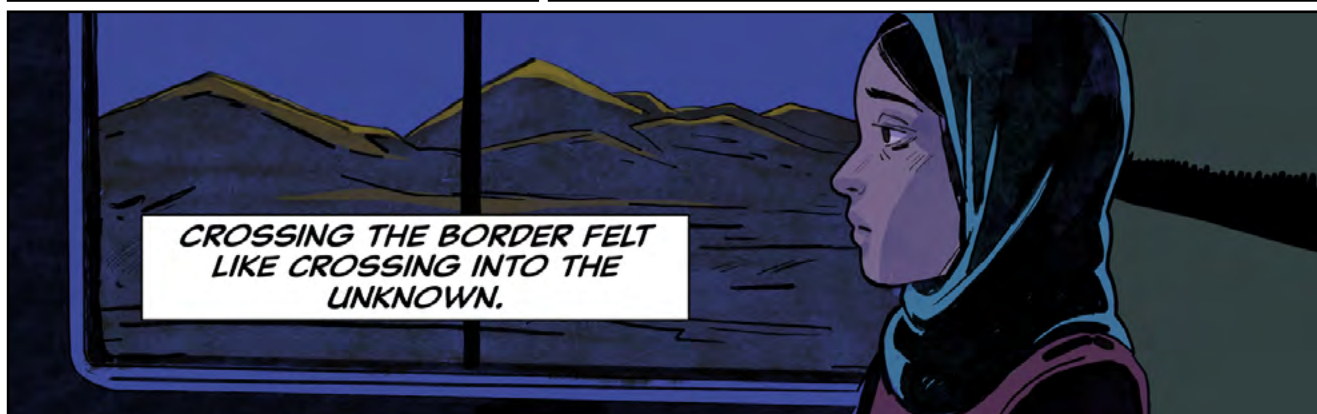
*I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO
SAY GOODBYE TO MY
FRIENDS AND MY
TEACHER.*



*MAMA SAID WE
WOULD FIND SAFETY.*



*I WONDERED IF I WOULD
EVER HOLD A BOOK AGAIN.*



*CROSSING THE BORDER FELT
LIKE CROSSING INTO THE
UNKNOWN.*

REFUGEE EDUCATION

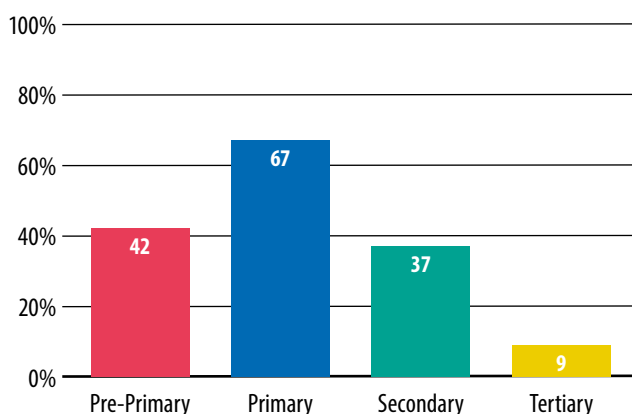
caught between progress and pressure: advancing access and quality in a time of strain

At the end of 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people across the globe had exceeded 123 million, including 31 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate.¹ This represents an increase from the 120 million forcibly displaced persons reported in 2024.²

The school-aged refugee population is estimated to stand at 12.4 million this year. Of those children, 46% per cent are estimated to be out of school – that means approximately 5.7 million refugee children are missing out on an education.³

For this report, covering the academic year 2024, **more than 70 refugee** hosting countries are included in our analysis.⁴ Data from these countries indicates that the average gross enrolment rates (GER) for refugees for 2024 stood at **42 per cent** for pre-primary, **67 per cent** for primary, **37 per cent** for secondary and **9 per cent** for tertiary.⁵ (Figure 1). Last year, UNHCR reported enrolment figures of 37, 65, 42, and 7 percent at the pre-primary to tertiary levels, indicating some progress at the pre-primary and primary levels, a notable improvement at the tertiary level, and a decrease at the secondary level.⁶

Figure 1: Refugee gross enrolment rates – Average, reporting countries



Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations

A regional lens on change: five years of refugee education data

The data for 2024 presented in this report does not reflect the impact of the financial turmoil in the past months, as those impacts will likely be reflected in reporting in 2026. Data from refugee hosting low and middle-income countries suggests that progress on enrollment by regions has varied considerably in this five-year period.

In the Americas for example, primary and secondary gross enrollment for refugees has shown an increase when comparing data for 2019/20 and 2024. For example, in Colombia, only 48% of Venezuelans displaced abroad were enrolled in school in UNHCR's first reporting in 2019/20, a number that has increased to 99% in 2024. Likewise, the GER for secondary increased from 30% to 66% in Colombia in the same time period. In Ecuador, likewise, important strides have been made in increasing the primary gross enrollment rate, from 29% in 2019/20 to 78% in 2024 and at the secondary level, the country has more than doubled its GER, from 15% to 49% in the same period (Figure 2). These positive increases are closely linked to the response of states and key actors to address the situation of mobility of people from Venezuela, with public policies developed in favor of access to fundamental rights including education, the development of regional processes (e.g Quito Process), as well as the advocacy and key actions of UN organizations and civil society through the Inter-agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V) and the several coordination mechanisms established by the countries of the South.

¹ UNHCR, *Global Trends Report 2024* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2024), <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024>.

² UNHCR, *Global Trends Report 2023* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2023), <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023>.

³ Calculation by author based on data from UNHCR country operations.

⁴ This year, as per previous years, we are not including Ukrainian hosting countries in enrolment calculation figures.

⁵ UNHCR country operations.

⁶ Data from these two time periods (2024 and 2022/3) is not directly comparable as the sample of countries reporting enrollment data across years is inconsistent.

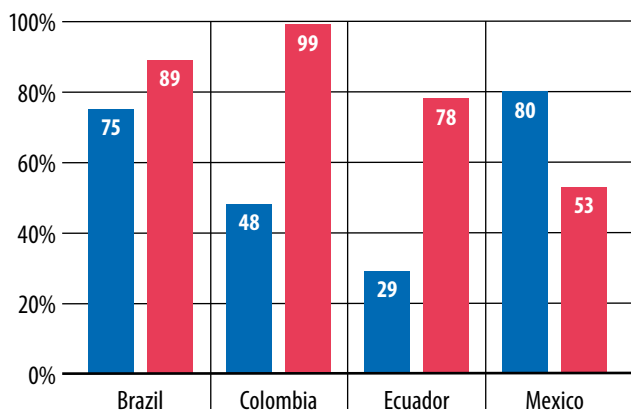


📷 Colombia. Yukpa indigenous children attend school in the Sokorpa reserve, located in the Serranía del Perijá region near the Colombia-Venezuela border. © UNHCR/Marina Calderon

Figure 2: Primary and Secondary GER: Americas – 2019/20 & 2024

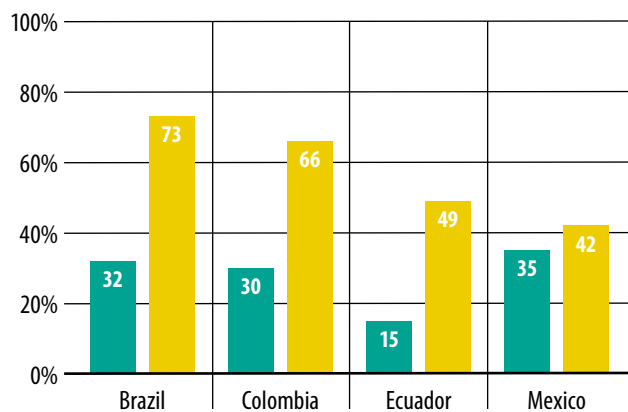
Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations

PRIMARY



LEGEND: ■ 2019/20 ■ 2024

SECONDARY



LEGEND: ■ 2019/20 ■ 2024

In other regions, such as East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, there have only been increases in the primary gross enrolment rate in 3 out of 10 reporting countries. In the rest of the countries, some visible decreases can be discerned. In Burundi, the GER has decreased from 90% to 67% at the primary level. Likewise, at the secondary level, the GER decreased from 83% to 55% in the period from 2019/20 to 2024. In Sudan, the decrease in the primary GER has been very

drastic - from 57% in 2019/20 to 24% in 2024, largely due to the eruption of the conflict in April 2023 which displaced more than 13 million people. There has also been a decrease in the secondary enrollment in the same time period, from 6% to 4%. In West and Central Africa, 4 out of 8 countries reporting data from these two time periods have had increases in the primary GER.

BOX 1

Pre-primary Education Access: Gains and Gaps

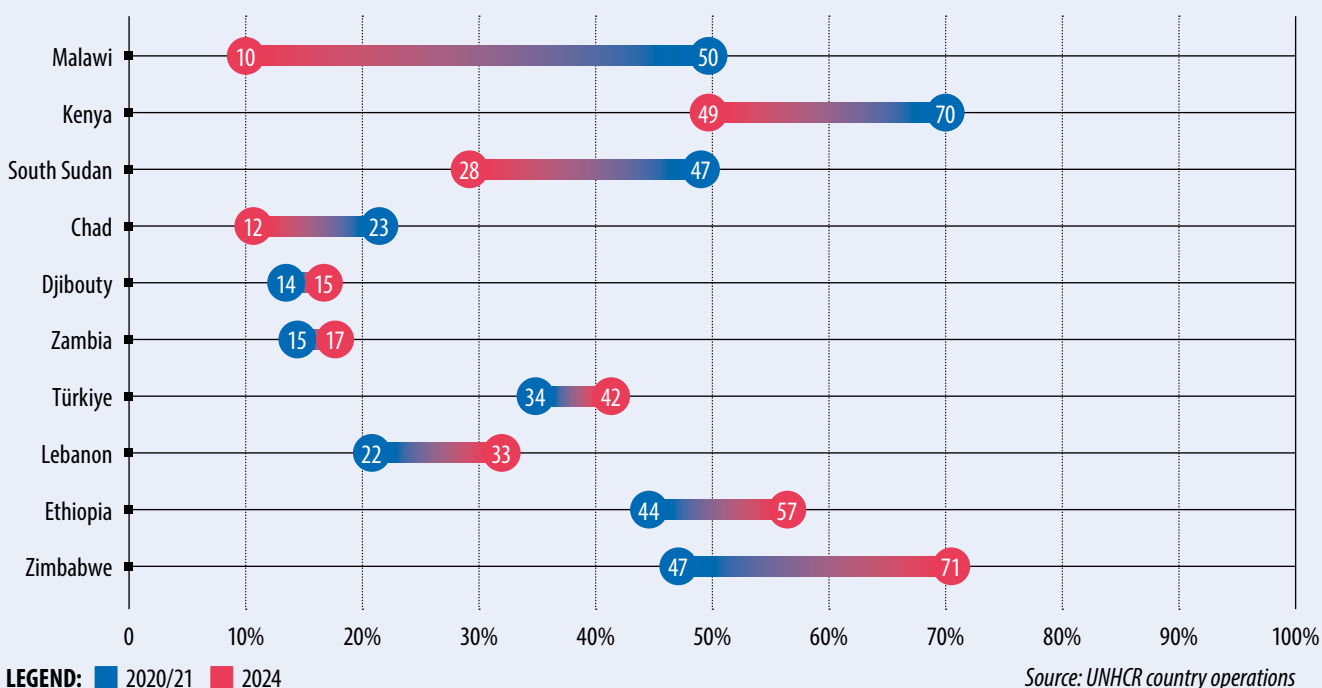
Access to quality pre-primary education is a lifeline for refugee children who face distress, instability, and limited opportunities for learning and development. The early years offer a vital window for building foundational cognitive, social and emotional skills. Evidence shows that early childhood education in refugee settings, particularly when it is play-based, culturally responsive, and emotionally supportive, can help children recover, thrive, and transition to school with confidence. Investing in pre-primary education for displaced children is one of the most cost-effective ways to foster resilience, support integration, and lay the groundwork for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

The graph below illustrates how far select countries have come in increasing pre-primary enrolment rates for refugee children between 2021 and 2024, with encouraging gains recorded in several countries. For example, in Zimbabwe, the rate rose markedly from 47% to 71%, while Ethiopia saw an increase in the enrollment rate from 44% to 57% in the same time period. Steady progress was also observed in Türkiye -from 34% to 42% -and Lebanon, from 22% to 33%. These improvements reflect targeted national efforts to integrate refugee children into early learning systems through strengthened policies, expanded access, and improved teacher training.

Conversely, some countries saw concerning declines, highlighting the fragility of early learning systems in protracted crises. Kenya, once a high performer with 70% enrolment in 2020–2021, experienced a noticeable drop to 49%. Malawi fell from 50% to 10%. These trends point to persistent funding gaps, competing priorities, and a lack of sustained support for refugee early childhood services. In some contexts, increasing refugee inflows have added pressure. By end-2024, over 2.7 million Sudanese refugees had crossed into Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt, straining already fragile social service systems:⁷ enrolment in South Sudan fell from 47% to 28%, and in Chad from 23% to just 12%.

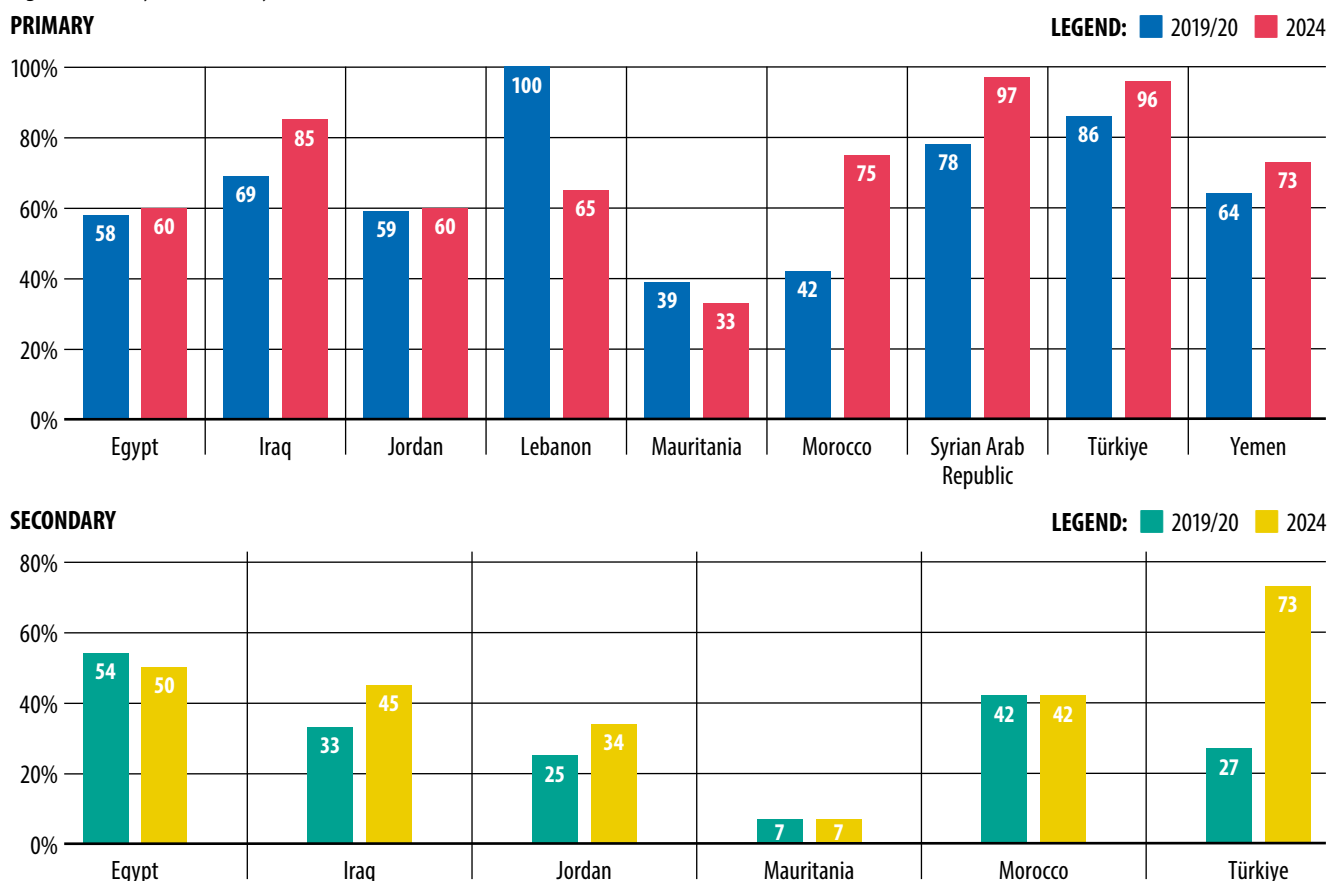
Despite varied progress, disparities persist across regions and population groups, often shaped by national policy frameworks, financing, and the capacity of host communities. Addressing these gaps requires long-term investment, stronger alignment with SDG 4.2 - which aims to ensure access to quality early childhood development and pre-primary education for all - and improved monitoring of refugee education data. Ensuring that no child is left behind at the start of their learning journey must remain a global priority.

Figure 3: Change in pre-primary gross enrolment rate for refugee children in major hosting countries - 2020/21–2024



⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). Sudan. UNHCR. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://tinyurl.com/4x6z9yzc>

Figure 4: Primary and Secondary GER: MENA – 2019/20 & 2024



Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations

In the MENA region, most countries have had modest to high increases in the primary gross enrollment ratio when comparing both time periods. In Türkiye, one of the top five refugee hosting countries, the GER has increased from 86% to 96% from 2019-20 to 2024, while in Jordan, also a major hosting country, the increase has only been 1%. (Figure 4). The small increase in Jordan can be explained by a change in the approach in the data reporting methodology. In the past, only Syrian nationals were reflected in enrollment figures, whereas the latest data is based on data provided by Ministry of Education, which includes all refugee children registered with UNHCR and enrolled in public schools in the country. This shift has resulted in a more comprehensive representation of the refugee student population; though means that direct comparisons across years is limited.

At the secondary level, increases have been modest, with the exception of Türkiye, where the GER has increased from a low of 27% to more than 70% in the time period from 2019/20 to 2024. In Morocco and Mauritania, GER has remained the same in the two time periods and in Iraq there has been a slight increase observed.

At the tertiary level, 2024 saw the greatest progress towards achieving 15by30 on record. Today, 9 per

cent of refugee youth are enrolled in higher education, compared to the global goal to enrol 15 per cent of refugee youth in higher education by 2030. A significant increase from 7 per cent reported in 2024, this is due to additional data availability and improved tracking in specific regions. Notable increases in access to higher education are evident in rapidly evolving digital higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) pathways, and moderate yet widespread growth in opportunities and reporting on refugees in higher education is a result of continuing dedicated advocacy for inclusion of refugees in higher education. This year, all regions reported an increase in enrolment of refugees in higher education, with the largest jump in Europe (6 percentage point increase) due to data available on the new Ukrainian Refugee Regional Education dashboard (launched in May 2025 by UNESCO and the Regional Technical Hub on Refugee Education). Importantly, Southern Africa also reported an increase of one percentage point, up from two percent enrolment reported in 2024, largely attributed to increases in enrolment in digital higher education and TVET, particularly in Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. These gains are especially notable alongside an increase in the tertiary education-aged refugee population recorded in Southern Africa in 2024.

BOX 2

Widening gaps: Education access lags behind in fragile countries

Figure 5 presents a comparison of gross enrollment ratios across three education levels—primary, secondary, and tertiary—among refugees in hosting countries (2024), and population in low-income and fragile or conflict-affected countries (latest available).⁸ Important differences are visible.

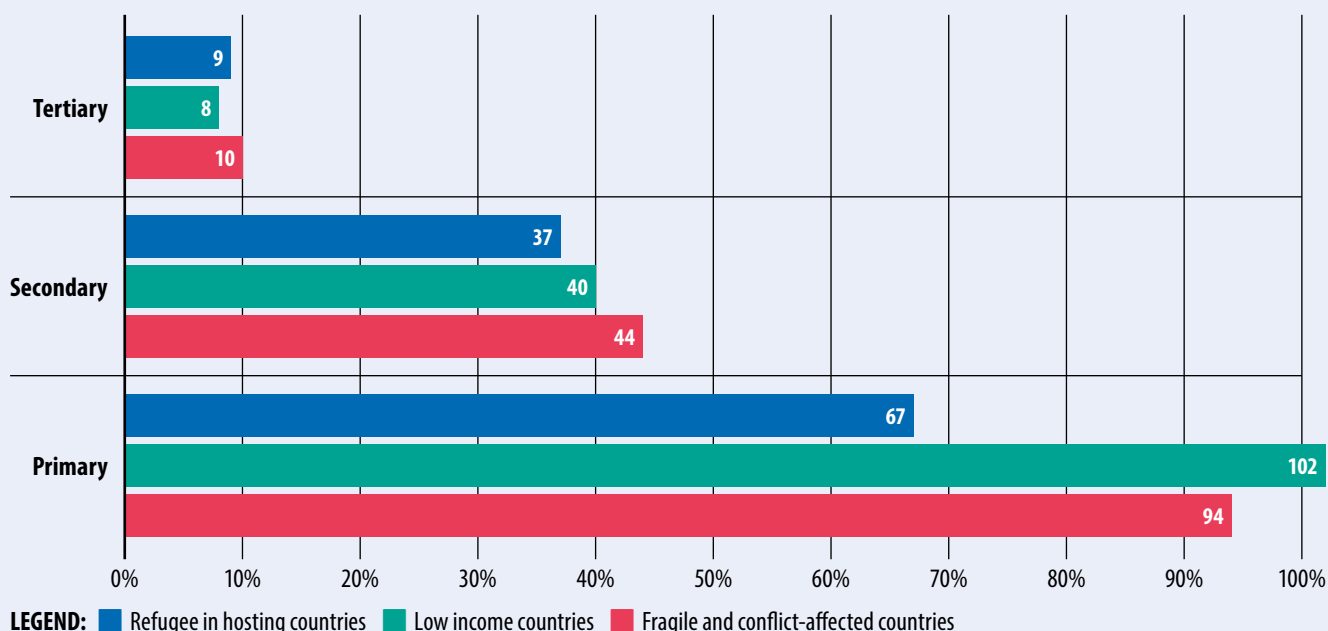
At the primary level, gross enrollment for refugees in hosting countries stands at 67%, significantly below both low-income countries (102%) and fragile or conflict-affected countries (94%). This suggests that, even at the foundational level of education, refugees face greater barriers to access compared to children in other low-resource settings.

The secondary enrollment gap is similarly stark. Refugees in hosting countries report only 37% gross enrollment, compared to 40% for population in low-income countries and 44% in fragile states. Although all three groups have relatively low enrollment at this level, refugee students appear to be particularly disadvantaged, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to address transition and retention challenges beyond primary school.

At the tertiary level, 9% of refugees in hosting countries are enrolled, compared to 8% in low-income countries and 10% in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. Although overall tertiary enrollment remains low across all groups, refugee youth continue to face systemic and amplified barriers such as legal status limitations, language barriers, lack of recognition of prior learning, and financial constraints.

Although refugee-hosting countries often face their own resource limitations, refugee children and youth remain systematically underserved in education—more so than peers in other low-income and fragile settings. These highlight the urgency of strengthening education systems to be more inclusive of displaced populations.

Figure 5: Comparison of gross enrolment rates – fragile or conflict-affected countries, low-income countries & average refugee enrolment ratios in reporting countries



Source: UNESCO-UIS & UNHCR country operations.

⁸ UNESCO UIS data presented here is categorised following the Global Partnership for Education classifications for low-income and fragile or conflict-affected countries. Refugee data presented is global. UNESCO UIS tertiary data are from 2021, while primary and secondary data are from 2022.

Towards gender parity: modest gains but parity still out of reach

In past reports, we have highlighted how gender disparities in access to education for refugees remain, and last year we tracked the evolution of gender disparity by computing the refugee Gender Parity Index (GPI).⁹ When we mapped the countries that had the largest gender disparities, the data indicated that none of these countries had achieved gender parity in access to primary education although some important increases had been made.

This year, gender disaggregated data for enrollment indicates that at the primary level, access for girls is 62% in reporting countries, on average, while it is 64% for boys, indicating a slight disparity of two percentage points. At the secondary level, the enrollment rates are 29% and 31%, respectively for girls and boys.

Despite these remaining disparities, progress is visible. In all countries featured below, there have been slight to modest increases in the primary enrollment rate for girls, with all countries seeing an increase in the Gender Parity Index (GPI) when comparing data for 2019/20 and 2024 (Figure 6). In Angola, remarkably, the GPI has increased to more than 1, indicating that boys are now at a disadvantage in regard to enrollment. In Ethiopia, the GPI has increased by 10 points, from 0.69 to 0.79, indicating progress towards parity, though still not at the desirable parity value of 1.

At the secondary level, we see that all lines are further away from gender parity in comparison to lines at the primary level (Figure 7). However, notable progress has been made in all countries featured in the analysis as well, with the exception of Ethiopia where the GPI has decreased by one point. In Kenya, for example, the GPI at the secondary level has increased from 0.46 to 0.78, an increase of .32 points, indicating remarkable progress in the move towards gender parity at the secondary level.

Table 2: Primary gross enrolment ratios and Gender Parity Index

| Country | 2019-20 | | | 2024 | | |
|----------|---------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| | F | M | GPI | F | M | GPI |
| Angola | 145% | 155% | 0.94 | 91% | 86% | 1.06 |
| Uganda | 71% | 79% | 0.90 | 84% | 92% | 0.91 |
| Kenya | 85% | 111% | 0.77 | 70% | 82% | 0.85 |
| Ethiopia | 54% | 78% | 0.69 | 41% | 52% | 0.79 |
| Cameroon | 37% | 48% | 0.77 | 47% | 56% | 0.84 |

Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations

⁹ UNHCR. (2024). *Refugee Education: Five years on from the launch of the 2030 refugee education strategy*. <https://tinyurl.com/2ck6evxu>

Figure 6: Closing the gaps – Getting girls in school: Primary refugee Gender Parity Index

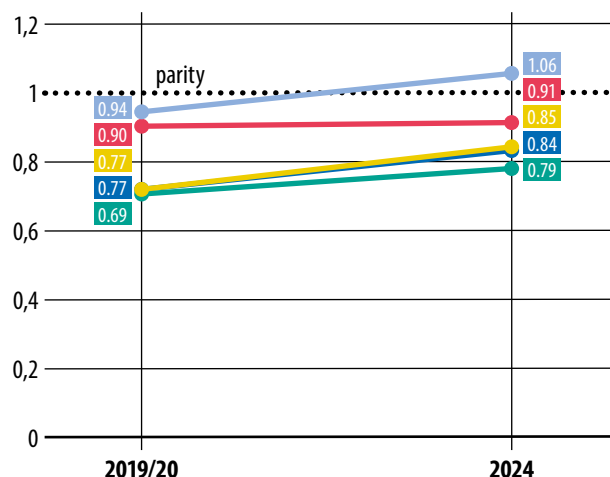
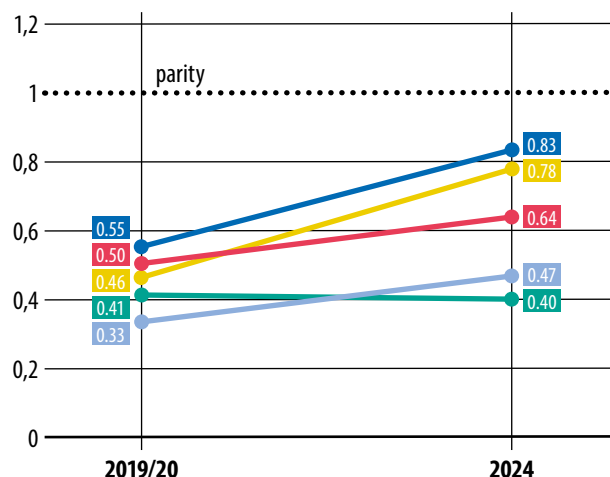


Figure 7: Closing the gaps – Getting girls in school: Secondary Refugee Gender Parity Index



LEGEND: Angola Uganda Kenya Ethiopia Cameroon

Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations.

Note: Includes countries where girls were most disadvantaged in access to education.



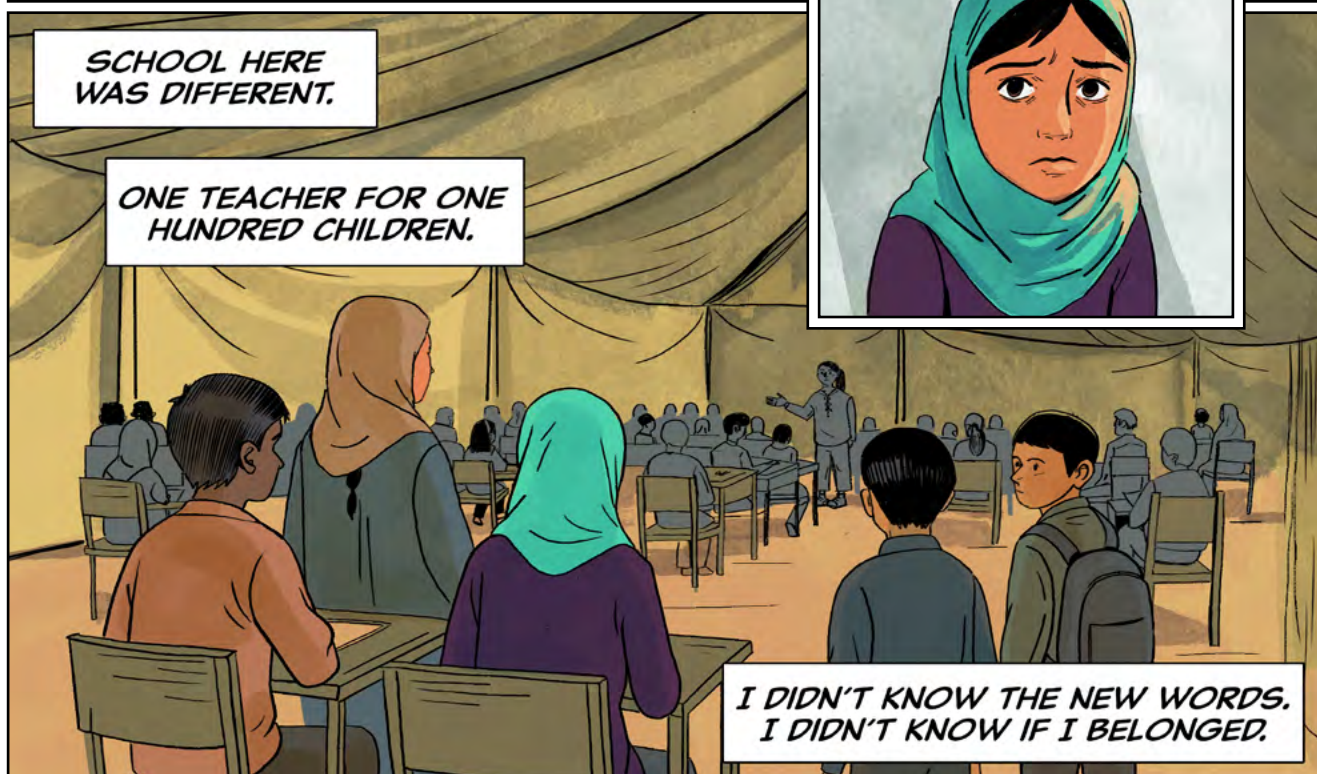
THE CAMP WAS NOT
A HOME.

IT WAS A
WAITING ROOM.



I LOST TWO YEARS.
MAYBE MORE.

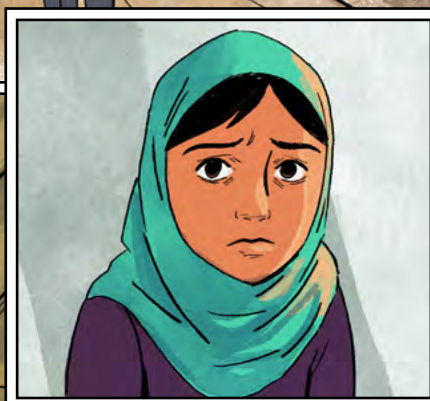
ALL MY DREAMS,
DELAYED.



SCHOOL HERE
WAS DIFFERENT.

ONE TEACHER FOR ONE
HUNDRED CHILDREN.

I DIDN'T KNOW THE NEW WORDS.
I DIDN'T KNOW IF I BELONGED.



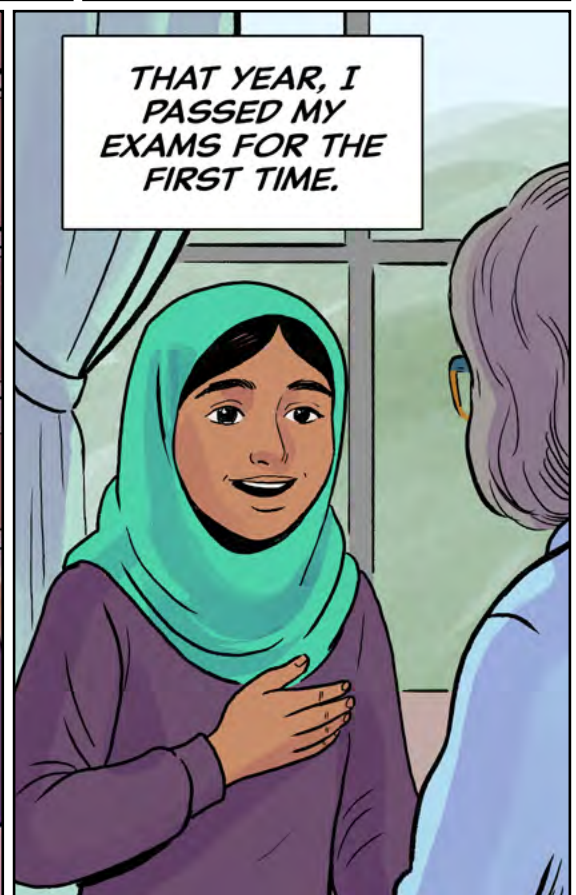


Table 2: Secondary gross enrolment ratios and Gender Parity Index (Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations)

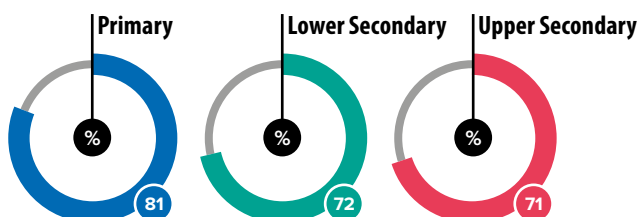
| Country | 2019-20 | | | 2024 | | |
|----------|---------|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| | F | M | GPI | F | M | GPI |
| Angola | 5% | 15% | 0.33 | 45% | 21% | 0.47 |
| Uganda | 7% | 14% | 0.50 | 11% | 7% | 0.64 |
| Kenya | 31% | 67% | 0.46 | 58% | 45% | 0.78 |
| Ethiopia | 7% | 17% | 0.41 | 20% | 8% | 0.40 |
| Cameroon | 6% | 11% | 0.55 | 6% | 5% | 0.83 |

This increase can be attributed to two main factors: first, during this period, there has been a significant increase in secondary school enrollment among refugees, with 8,000 scholarships awarded of which 3,221 benefited girls. This targeted support greatly boosted access to secondary education, especially for girls facing additional barriers. Additionally, Kenya's recent shift in its education structure with the introduction of the lower secondary level and the enforcement of a 100% transition policy has further contributed to increased participation of girls in secondary education. Despite this progress, none of the countries have achieved gender parity at the secondary level, though Cameroon has moved remarkably closer, with a GPI of 0.83 in 2024.

Advancing quality education: insights from learning outcomes and classroom realities

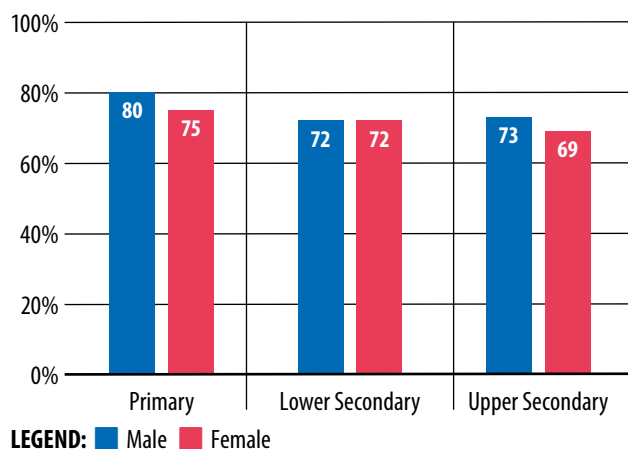
Enrolment is a start, but when refugees are in school, we need to understand if learning is taking place as well as the realities of classroom environments for refugee learners.

In past editions of this report, we have looked at national examination pass rates to provide an indication of whether children are learning, though we have made important strides in measuring learning in contexts of forced displacement (see Box 3). In previous years, we have highlighted that examination pass rates for refugees tend to be high, though few students sit for assessments and few countries are able to report this data. For reporting countries, average pass rates at the primary level were 81 percent for primary, 72 for lower secondary and 71 for upper secondary (Figure 8).

Figure 8: National examination refugee pass rates – Average reporting countries

Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations (N=17 countries)

As with enrolment, gender differences in pass rates also appear to be small. For example, average pass rates in reporting countries at the primary level were 80% for boys, and slightly lower, at 75% for girls. At the lower and upper secondary levels, differences by gender are non-existing or negligible (Figure 9). What is notable is that in contrast to the global trend indicating a significant gap in reading assessments favoring girls,¹⁰ for refugees, boys seem to have slightly higher pass rates at the primary and upper secondary levels. However, the literature has also found that girls may underperform in contexts where there is pressure for girls to leave school early or where families may not see the benefits of educating girls,¹¹ which might explain this discrepancy in performance in refugee households.

Figure 9: National examination refugee pass rates - comparison

Source: Author's analysis using data from UNHCR operations (N=17 countries)

¹⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics -UIS. (2017). More than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide. UIS Fact Sheet No.46. Montreal: UIS; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). Database of Learning Assessments. <https://tinyurl.com/3v6tfm6m>

¹¹ UNGEI. (2018). *Situation Analysis of SDG4 with a Gender Lens*. <https://tinyurl.com/bp6vdt9u>

BOX 3

Measuring holistic learning outcomes in contexts of forced displacement

Globally, learning poverty is alarming: 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple text, up from 57% before COVID-19. This learning deficit could result in \$21 trillion in lost lifetime earnings.¹² Despite growing attention on learning crisis, data on forcibly displaced children's learning outcomes remain scarce—particularly on social and emotional learning (SEL), which is vital for achievement, well-being, and resilience.¹³ To address this gap, UNHCR launched the *Measuring Holistic Learning Outcomes for the Forcibly Displaced* project to generate evidence on forcibly displaced children learning in Mauritania and Mexico, using Save the Children's Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO) tool, which captures foundational literacy, numeracy, SEL and Executive Function (EXF) skills.

Mauritania: In Mauritania, the assessment was implemented in all eight schools in Mbera camp¹⁴ and four out of five host community schools in the commune of Fassala, targeting 509 students in grades 4 and 6 (256 girls, 253 boys).¹⁵ The assessment results reveal that only 10% of grade 4 and 25% of grade 6 students could achieve the most difficult task on HALDO literacy which means they could read and understand simple story. A similar pattern is seen in numeracy; just 17% of grade 4 and 33% of grade 6 students could complete two-digit addition and subtraction tasks correctly. In SEL, students performed well on basic questions, but scores dropped on more complex items, and the overall SEL average is not significantly different by grades. Executive functioning results followed the same pattern: high performance on simple memory tasks, but a sharp decline on harder items. Overall, **the results show that most students are not mastering foundational skills expected at their grade level.** Additionally, none of the variables on socio-economic background of the students, such as possessions in the home, are predictors of assessment scores, except having books at home.

Mexico: The HALDO on the Move tool, an adapted version from the original HALDO for the context of the migration situation in the Latin America and the

Caribbean region was used in Mexico. Target locations include three cities with high numbers of arrivals of forcibly displaced persons: Tapachula, Tijuana, and Monterrey. A total of 433 children aged 4 to 18 years old (222 girls, 211 boys) participated in the assessment. This includes children from 15 countries, 299 from the Northern Triangle of Central America, 50 from Haiti, 19 from Mexico, and 65 from other countries in the Latin American region. Data were aggregated and analyzed by age group (4–8, 9–13, 14–18), gender, and nationality.

The results show that literacy skills improved with age, but progress slowed in adolescence. About 60% of both 9-13 and 14-18-year-olds could read and comprehend basic texts, compared to 12% for 4-8 years old. In numeracy, only 13% of 4-8 years old can achieve two-digit operations which is the most difficult task on HALDO. Although these percentages are higher for the older groups, between 60-70%, nearly one-third of them remain at the level of performing only basic one-digit operations. In SEL, about 30% of children aged 4-8 could demonstrate empathy without direct information (through imagination) which is the most advanced SEL task in HALDO, compared to 45% and 38% for aged 9-13 and 14-18, respectively. For EXF, children in all age groups perform better on simple memory tasks but find harder items such as working memory particularly challenging. Among all background factors, age was the strongest predictor of performance, while gender and nationality were not. However, Haitian children whose native languages are French and Creole performed lower in literacy and numeracy, likely due to language barrier as the assessment was administered in Spanish.

The findings from both Mauritania and Mexico underscore the urgent need to strengthen foundational learning and ensure age-appropriate and inclusive interventions. While the challenges are complex, addressing them is essential to improving learning outcomes and ensuring that education systems remain accessible, trusted, and responsive to the needs of displaced children.

Full reports are available at: [Education | UNHCR](#)

¹² World Bank. (2022). 70% of 10-Year-Olds now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text. <https://tinyurl.com/yynn4tfp7>

¹³ UNHCR. (2024). *An Overview of the Evidence on the Effects of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) on Learning and Well-Being of Forcibly Displaced Children*. <https://tinyurl.com/5f78ab77>

¹⁴ In 2024, Mbera camp hosts approximately 116,000 people, 37% of whom are school-aged refugee children.

¹⁵ The samples for both Mauritania and Mexico are not representative of the overall population.

Few countries are able to provide data on national examination pass rates, and most of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. Comparing data indicates that in four countries out of ten, primary national examination pass rates have increased in the period from 2021/22 and 2024, while in seven countries, there has been a decrease in the pass rates. Notably, in Central African Republic, there has been a 45% increase in the primary national examination pass rate when comparing both time periods, and in Nigeria, there has been a 35 percentage point increase in national examination pass rates. [blurb on how pass rates have increased in CAR] (Figure 10).

While exam pass rates and learning assessments provide critical insights into whether refugee children are learning, the role of teachers- and the size of their classroom- is equally important.

From the scarce data available, only a small share of the workforce engaging with refugee learners are refugee teachers, only 12% in reporting countries. These figures vary by region and country, based on a wide range of factors ranging from encampment to the right to work, the level to which refugees are able to access public education, and more. Data from East, Horn of Africa indicates, 50% of teachers engaging with refugee learners are refugees themselves, a higher share than in other regions, depending on these factors. So in

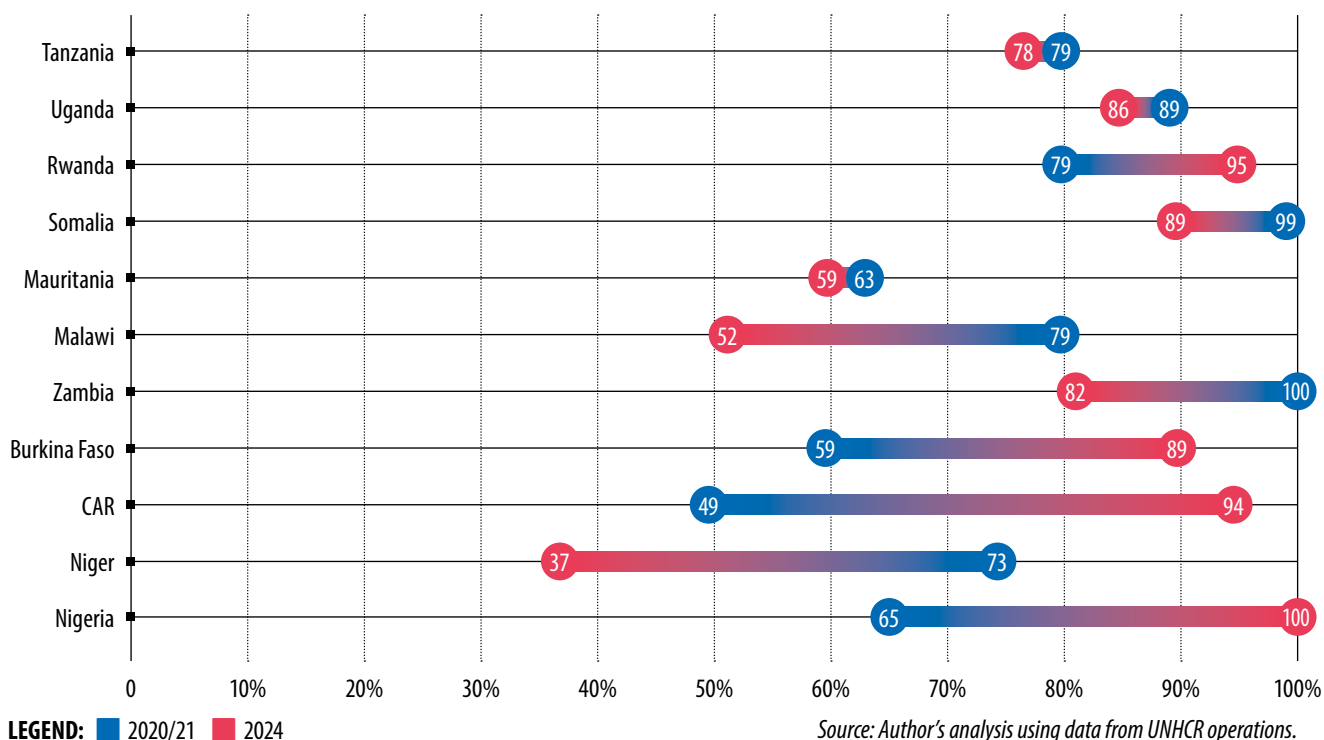
Kenya, more than 80% of teachers are refugees, while in Rwanda, the figure is only 13% are (Figure 11).

We lack sufficient data to know the proportion of teachers engaging with refugee learners who have acquired a minimum level of qualifications, but the scarce data we have suggests that the proportions are not high. On average, for 21 reporting countries that provided data, 64% of teachers engaging with refugee learners had the minimum required qualifications, with significant variation across regions and countries in this regard.

Previous editions of this report have highlighted a critical challenge: refugee classrooms often face alarmingly high pupil to teacher ratios (PTR), which can directly undermine the learning experience. It is widely agreed that younger children and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may need smaller class sizes to thrive- yet this basic standard is far from the reality in refugee settings.¹⁶ Last year, we illustrated how there were countries with very high PTRs compared to national averages.¹⁷ This year, we have taken a step further by calculating pupil-qualified teacher ratios- revealing an even starker picture.

What is striking is that nearly all countries listed in Table 4 below, the number of students per qualified teacher far exceeds the overall PTR. In the case of Ethiopia, for example, while there are 54 students per teacher

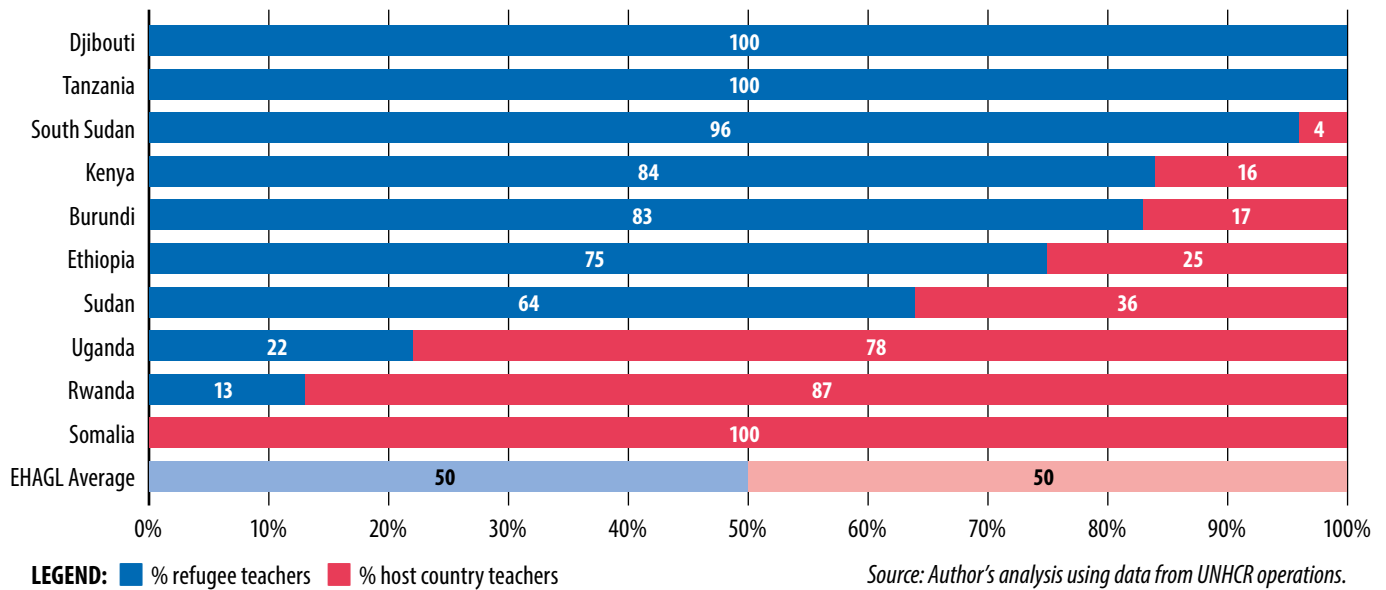
Figure 10: Refugee primary examination pass rates – 2020/21 and 2024, select countries



¹⁶ OECD, *Education GPS: Class Size & Student-Teacher Ratio* (Paris: OECD, 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/4r38awtm>.

¹⁷ UNHCR country operations.

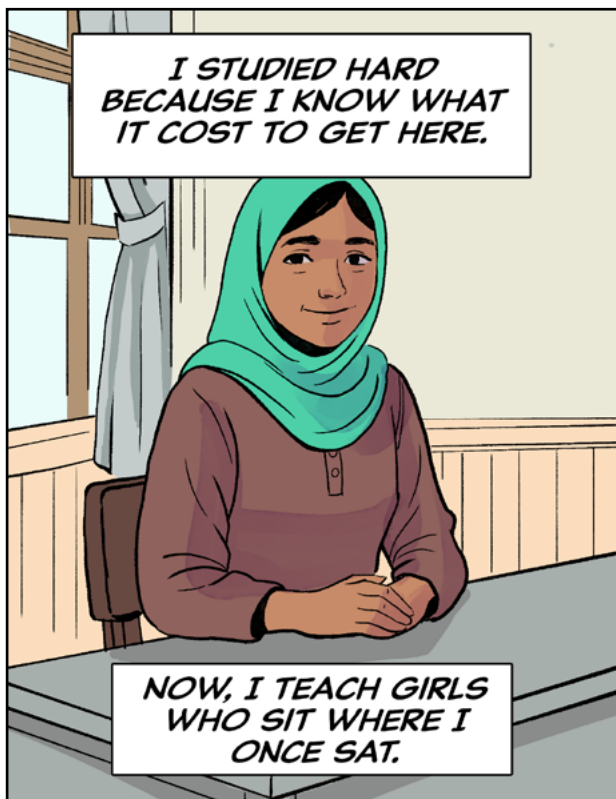
Figure 11: Share of refugee and host country teachers –select countries



on average, there are a 148 students per *qualified* teachers. The situation is even more severe in the DRC, where the PTR is already high at 35 students, but the qualified pupil to teacher ratio is almost 300 students per qualified teacher- highlighting a critical shortage of trained teachers. This gap signals a significant barrier to quality education for refugee children.

Table 4: Pupil teacher ratios

| Countries | # of qualified primary teachers | # of primary teachers | # of refugee students enrolled in primary | Pupil teacher ratios | Qualified pupil teacher ratios |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Burundi | 179 | 200 | 13,051 | 65 | 73 |
| Djibouti | | 75 | 2,272 | 30 | |
| Ethiopia | 700 | 1,930 | 103,405 | 54 | 148 |
| Kenya | 491 | 1,391 | 119,659 | 86 | 244 |
| Rwanda | 622 | 668 | 26,003 | 39 | 42 |
| South-Sudan | 229 | 760 | 61,597 | 81 | 269 |
| Sudan | 173 | 891 | 50,690 | 57 | 293 |
| Tanzania, United Republic of | 694 | 866 | 48,759 | 56 | 70 |
| Uganda | 4,902 | 6,290 | 330,235 | 53 | 67 |
| Angola | 18 | 32 | 1,406 | 44 | 78 |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | 61 | 514 | 18,207 | 35 | 298 |
| Malawi | 98 | 98 | 5,363 | 55 | 55 |
| Mozambique | 43 | 43 | 1,147 | 27 | 27 |
| Republic of Congo | 62 | 581 | 5,980 | 10 | 96 |
| Zambia | 74 | 117 | 10,221 | 87 | 138 |
| Zimbabwe | 48 | 51 | 2,057 | 40 | 43 |
| Burkina Faso | 940 | 945 | 4,370 | 5 | 5 |
| Central African Republic | 29 | 162 | 4,454 | 27 | 154 |
| Chad | 681 | 1,163 | 107,126 | 92 | 157 |
| Niger | 2,040 | 2,040 | 32,071 | 16 | 16 |







FINAL WORD

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan

Like many people in the 1910s, my grandmother lived through tumultuous times. In an era of conflict and seismic change, she knew what it was like to endure war, famine and poverty.

It was an exceptional feat, therefore, to have made sure that her son, my father, received an education – in the process becoming the very first person from his village to graduate from college. Whether pursuing my own schooling, my career as an entrepreneur or my philanthropic work, I in turn have always been inspired by her unshakeable belief in education as the greatest force for human progress.

The times, places and contexts may be different, but this report on refugee education tells the story of people facing similar adversities. In many ways it is a story of hope – the refugees who were able to go to school and on to college, who found safety and stability there, and who went on to pass exams and get jobs. They are now better able to stand on their own two feet and enrich their communities, or to become leaders in their academic or professional fields – or, indeed, to become teachers and mentors, enabling others to travel the same path as they did. That story is one of education transforming lives.

But there is another story here – one of young refugees whose ambitions have been thwarted, the children and youth who lie behind the statistics showing the large numbers who have not gone to school. Not because they did not want to, but because they didn't have the chance.

My own journey from running a business to getting involved in charitable work was deeply inspired and influenced by my family. But it was also made possible by the many others who support education. We needed teachers, administrators and communities. We needed classroom blocks, textbooks, school transportation. We built on generations of accumulated knowledge and insight, but we also benefitted from new thinking and new technology. Today's students benefit hugely from computers and the internet, while artificial intelligence will transform educational systems in ways we are only starting to comprehend.

In short, education must be a collective endeavour. As a consequence, it has collective rewards. We must recognise how much we all stand to gain if children acquire the skills and knowledge to tackle the huge challenges of our time, ranging from poverty and inequality to conflict and climate change – challenges, incidentally, that refugees experience directly.

Young, creative minds will help us find solutions to these issues. In this rapidly changing and challenging world, they will create and grasp opportunities we have only begun to imagine.

But this will happen only if we make it happen, removing the obstacles and finding solutions. And that requires collaboration across all sectors and geographies, at all levels, combining pragmatism, vision and innovation – and turning it all into action.

My grandmother would look at young refugees today and understand, in ways that most of us cannot, what they have gone through. And if she was to speak over the decades to address the many different people and organisations who must work together so that every child gets the education they deserve, she would reflect: what are we waiting for?

Dr Charles Chen Yidan is a core founder of the global internet conglomerate Tencent. As part of his varied charitable and philanthropic activities, he founded the Yidan Prize to spotlight bright ideas in education research and development. For more information, visit www.yidanprize.org.



📷 South Africa. Recipient of UNHCR DAFI scholarship studies Sports Science at the University of the Western Cape.
© UNHCR/Antoine Tardy

THE UNBREAKABLE PROMISE: RESILIENCE AND RESOLVE IN REFUGEE EDUCATION



© 2025 United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

This document along with further
information is available on UNHCR's
education website: www.unhcr.org