

Certification counts Recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students

Overview

The issue of certification of refugee and IDP learning has been identified as a significant policy and research gap. This brief lays out a number of recommendations for ensuring that student learning is validated. It is based on findings presented in the book 'Certification counts: recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students', Kirk (Ed.), IIEP-UNESCO, 2009.

The book and policy brief are the result of the research partnership between IIEP-UNESCO, the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies of the University of Amsterdam and the International Rescue Committee. Produced with support from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is intended both for ministerial officials planning education in crisis or conflict settings and education practitioners in international, non-governmental, refugee and donor agencies.

The value of certification

Access to education during crisis and conflict situations is essential in providing displaced and refugee children and their families with hope for the future. Although education is increasingly provided as part of an emergency response, the certification, validation and recognition of learning attainments of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are often overlooked.

The long-term, positive impact of education is compromised when student learning is not validated through official recognition. The value and quality of education programmes diminishes. Therefore it is essential to focus on the issues of certification and validation from the outset of any crisis. Careful planning and co-ordination between the different actors involved in implementing and validating education programmes are essential. By effectively addressing certification issues, the quality, impact and sustainability of programmes are more likely to be guaranteed.

Knowing that their studies will be recognized is a strong motivation for students. It contributes to individual, family and community well-being and provides realistic employment opportunities. Furthermore, certification of learning can improve the social and economic contributions of refugees and IDPs to their host and home areas, as it provides a pathway to active participation in society.



Liberian students prepare for a West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exam. ©IRC Sarah Smith



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Factors in the certification process

Case studies on Burundi, Chechnya-Ingushetia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Kenya, Pakistan, the Republic of Congo, Sudan, Thailand, and Uganda identify factors which influence decision-making on the certification and validation of learning

Certification - the provision of proof of successful completion of an education programme by a learner

Accreditation - the provision of official recognition or endorsement, most likely by a ministry of education, to an education programme

Validation - the process by which the authenticity of the accreditation is ascertained

Recognition - the acceptance by an outside party of a certificate's worth and validation

Excerpts from *Certification counts: recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students*, Kirk (Ed.), IIEP-UNESCO, 2009.

Language, ethnicity and national identity

Close social and cultural links with the host society can facilitate the certification of refugee learning. For example, despite the large number of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who fled to the neighbouring Republic of Congo in 2000, integration into local schools proved to be effective as an education and certification intervention. Officials from the home country, together with IRC and UNHCR, set up a mechanism whereby the DRC Ministry of Education (MoE) officials crossed the border to administer primary school examinations to refugee students. This ensured that learning would be recognized upon their return home.

Where cultural, political and social differences are significant, it can be necessary to develop a parallel refugee system of education which is accredited by the home country's ministry of education.

For example, the certification of learning for Afghan refugees in Pakistan is ensured through the Afghan consulate. This body acts as an intermediary between UNHCR, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supporting education for refugees and the MoE in Kabul. The consulate contributes to the following: registration for refugee schools, students and teachers following the Afghan curriculum; the transmission of examination papers from the Afghan MoE to refugee education providers; the validation of student grades and records from registered refugee schools; and information sharing and policy dissemination from the MoE Kabul to the refugee education community. Students returning to Afghanistan have

received certificates endorsed with the consulate stamp and thus valid in the country.

Size and length of stay of displaced community

The difficulty inherent in predicting the size or length of stay of any displaced community implies that multiple pathways to certification of learning should be investigated.

Refugee, IDP and host society expectations about the displaced community's length of stay may determine the type of education system established. Refugee expectations may lead to validating education that is specific to the displaced community. This was the case for Liberian refugees in the Côte d'Ivoire where a parallel system was established in 2003 based on the expectation that the Liberian civil war would not last.

Protracted situations of displacement and a massive influx of displaced persons frequently put a heavy burden on the host society. These can become sources of tension if not addressed in a holistic manner.

The Ministry of Education in Guinea, for example, made important efforts to ensure that the Anglophone Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees, who could not be absorbed into the Francophone school system had free access to classrooms after school hours. Furthermore, processes for certification included developing a curriculum common to both of the displaced populations. This corresponded to the WAEC examination subjects, and was agreed upon by both MoEs. IRC facilitated these certification measures by ensuring that teachers were trained accordingly.

The examination system established for Burundian refugees in Tanzania reflects the persistence that is needed in long-term situations of exile. The process of cross-border visits between UN agencies and the Burundi Government started in 1996.

It wasn't until 2004, through the Inter-Regional Examinations Board (IEB), that the examinations refugees took in Tanzania were recognised by the Burundian authorities. Today, this mechanism is recognized for its ability to ensure security of examination papers and grades.

Government policy and capacity

National governments have the primary responsibility for the provision and certification of education. Policies of both the host and the home country influence the certification decision-making process. The government position towards displaced and refugee communities is a determining factor in how certified education is provided for these populations.

Uganda, for example, has been welcoming to refugee populations. It has worked with UN agencies and NGOs to build new schools, train refugee teachers and integrate Sudanese refugees into the national school system. These students register for school and sit examinations with local children. However, other host governments have been reluctant to support certification of learning. In some cases qualified refugees represent a perceived competition for local resources.

The 1999 integration of 20,000 Liberian refugee students into the Ivorian education system proved challenging due to the lack of schools. Despite indications by the Ivorian government that it could not absorb all refugee children into existing schools, financial support

The **West African Examinations Council (WAEC)** is a rare example of a regional educational organization to have played an important role in the accreditation of learning for refugee children as they move within West Africa. Established in 1952 in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, it was given the responsibility of determining the examinations required in West Africa, and of conducting the examinations and awarding certificates. Liberia joined WAEC in 1974.

WAEC has no specific mandate for refugee certification, nor policy guidelines on the issue. However, when a request was made in 1991 to create examination centres in the refugee schools and camps in Guinea, it needed a response. Lack of fixed guidance on this matter meant that the organization could be flexible in finding ways to respond to the situation, initially through collaboration with the MoE in Liberia. WAEC is a government-dependent body which has to maintain a delicate balance between regional norms and standards and national sovereignty.

Excerpts from *Certification counts: recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students*, Kirk (Ed.), IIEP-UNESCO, 2009.

for the construction of additional facilities did not arrive until late 2001.

The Thai Government's commitment to education for refugee children and youth from Myanmar has increased significantly over recent years. The MoE involvement has contributed to the certification of refugee learning by aligning the camp-based curriculum with the Thai curriculum. This alignment was carefully negotiated between the Karen Education Department (KED), the Thai MoE and ZOA, the NGO implementing partner, to allow the community to maintain ownership of the curriculum.

In 1999, the Liberian Government shifted its position on certification, prohibiting WAEC officials from conducting examinations for Liberian refugees in Guinea. It instead promoted the provision and validation of its own curriculum in an attempt to encourage repatriation and facilitate the transition home. However, this shift in policy regrettably meant that thousands of students were unable to take end-of-year exams.

Socio-cultural links and government policy may encourage actions such as integrating refugee students or aligning the refugee curriculum with the host country curriculum

Policy implications

Standards for the validation and certification of displaced communities' learning are presented by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). Standard 4 recommends: "Learner achievement is recognized and credits or course completion documents are provided accordingly" (2004: 62)¹.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s states: "It is wasteful if education and training does not result in documented, officially recognized certificates" (2003: 10)².

Clear policy and formal agreements are first steps in ensuring the certification of refugee and IDP learning

1. INEE. 2004. *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*. New York: INEE.

2. UNHCR. 2003. *Education Field Guidelines*. Geneva: UNHCR.

3. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) formed a Global Education Cluster in 2006. An open platform made up of representatives from organizations working on education preparedness and response in emergencies and early recovery, the cluster aims to improve the predictability, timeliness, effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian preparedness and response.

The following policy recommendations for national officials, implementing agencies, donors and refugee associations are complementary to the guidance put forward by INEE and UNHCR.

Develop clear policy guidelines on certification and include them in refugee policies

Effectively addressing certification issues requires MoEs to develop clear policy guidance for equivalent curricula, programmes and evaluation for IDPs and refugees.

Refugee and IDP associations should lobby decision-makers to ensure clarity and relevance of these policies.

UN agencies and international NGOs need to develop policies on certification in co-ordination with national decision-makers, and can advocate and present alternative

and innovative guidance to these bodies.

As policy development and/or adjustment can be a long-term process, sustainable donor support is essential.

Establish formal agreements between partners regarding the certification of learning

In order to find solutions for certification, national governments, international agencies and other implementing partners, should identify needs for certification-related action, and work together according to the various strengths of the different agencies. This should be undertaken through the established Inter-Agency Standing Committee Global Education Cluster³ and/or other co-ordinating mechanisms.

Governments should support already-existing regional frameworks or develop them



The similarity in language and traditions facilitated the integration of refugees from DRC into the education system of the Republic of Congo.

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where relevant. Regional and supra-national bodies such as the WAEC (see the Box on page 3) can provide frameworks for validating learning achievements. For refugees, host and home governments must draw up legally-binding agreements to ensure that the learning that takes place during displacement is validated upon return. Refugee associations must play an active role in developing these agreements. Agencies and implementing partners should use their institutional influence to make sure that negotiations result in formal agreements.

Donor support for education should encourage curriculum assessment, certification and validation processes within existing regional and international frameworks.

Certify learning according to refugee communities' education choices

Refugee organizations must be consulted and drawn upon as resources in their role as educators and leaders of the community so that certification options take into account local context, capacities and perceptions.

Governments and agencies must work together to ensure that refugees and displaced populations have adequate information regarding school and examination registration procedures in the host area. Agencies can act as intermediaries by distributing application and registration forms.

Donors should assist in breaking down the financial barriers which limit refugee access to examinations (such as fees and travel to examination sites). However, this assistance must not jeopardize relationships with the local community.



The Afghan consulate certifies the learning for refugees in Pakistan.

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Promote and develop multiple pathways to educational certification

National governments and partner agencies must act to ensure safe access to national examinations and the rapid delivery of examination certificates.

Parallel systems of education (such as maintaining home curriculum) are appropriate when the period of displacement is short and when refugees request it. Integrating refugees into the host country education system may be preferable in long-term situations of displacement and when requested by refugees.

For refugees, cross-border examinations could be useful when certifying a home country curriculum. Facilitating access to host country examinations is appropriate when integrating refugee populations.

A variety of solutions for validating learning should be developed in collaboration with the displaced community



In Thailand, the curriculum for refugees from Myanmar has recently been aligned with the Thai curriculum. ©UNHCR

Validating learning should be an early priority in an emergency response and should be sustained after crisis

Address certification issues from the outset of an emergency response

Governments should develop contingency plans that address the certification of learning in cases of conflict.

In IDP situations, MoEs have an obligation to ensure certification of learning for all citizens, including those who are displaced.

Agencies should co-ordinate with local government education authorities and refugee and IDP organizations from the outset to ensure the relevance of educational programming.

Donor investments, often significant at the outset of a crisis, should be aimed at providing access to education which is validated through certification processes.

Maintain programme continuity by ensuring validation of learning in chronic crisis situations and repatriation

In situations of repatriation, agencies must collaborate with home and host national MoEs to ensure a smooth transition for refugee students and teachers. Furthermore, a repatriation unit to support the return of students and teachers, as well as the exchange of curriculum and other teaching and learning materials, should be established within MoEs and education agencies.

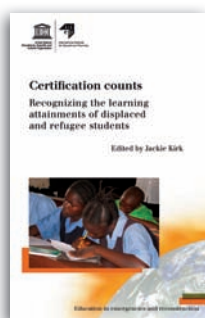
Donors should avoid creating a gap during the transition from humanitarian relief to development inputs by supporting the continuity of approach and by harmonizing refugee education funding with reconstruction efforts in the home country.

Some implementation recommendations

The recommendations presented in the table below are not exhaustive.

Government authorities	International agencies and NGOs
<p>Consider the implications and possibilities for certification of integrating refugee children into the host country's education system</p> <p>Consider the implications and possibilities for certification of aligning the refugee children's curriculum with that of the host country's curriculum</p> <p>Determine teacher capacity needs when integrating large influxes of refugees and/or displaced children</p> <p>Link the certification process with a wider strategy for curriculum reform</p> <p>Develop a conversion course to ease the transition from home to host curriculum or, in the case of repatriation, from host to home curriculum</p> <p>Ensure access to examinations either in the host or home country and a timely delivery of certificates for both primary and secondary school students</p>	<p>Establish and maintain contacts with local education authorities from the outset of the crisis</p> <p>Engage host education ministry officials in discussions and negotiations on cross-border certification and examinations</p> <p>Maintain organizational links with home country authorities to incorporate any changes in the home country's education policy into the refugee education and certification programme</p> <p>Make provisions for teacher training on new curricula, if they might be implemented</p> <p>Devote time and resources to the development of certification tools such as curricula that combine home and host country curricula, syllabi, grade conversion charts, report cards and registration forms</p> <p>Encourage examination flexibility in timing and location</p>
Donors	Refugee associations
<p>Take advantage of existing mechanisms and policy commitments such as the Education for All targets and the Millennium Development Goals to encourage local authorities to provide education to displaced children</p> <p>Ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to capacity development needs of ministries and agencies to provide certification</p> <p>Allocate funds to developing technical tools for certification such as common databases, blended curricula and conversion charts</p> <p>Reduce examination costs for refugees and IDPs by financing necessary travel and accommodation</p> <p>In repatriation programmes, ensure continuity and funding throughout the transition</p>	<p>Lobby local and national officials to incorporate community interests into policies for refugee education certification</p> <p>Liaise with education practitioners in the field so as to effectively co-ordinate efforts and ensure relevance in education provision and certification mechanisms</p> <p>Participate in curriculum development, enhancing relevance to the community</p> <p>Advocate for teacher capacity development in providing certification where needed</p> <p>Ensure that information regarding certification issues reaches the community by centralizing and disseminating necessary information such as syllabi, regulations, examinations and registration forms</p>

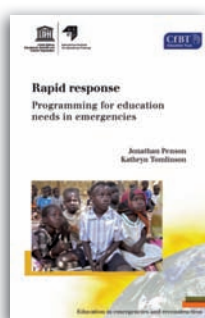
Recent publications



Certification counts: recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students

edited by Jackie Kirk • 2009 • Price: 12 €

Learners need validated proof of their results to continue their studies or to access labour opportunities. However, in situations of displacement, it may not be possible for students to sit the official examinations of either home or host system. This study presents a broad conceptual framework in which to consider issues of certification, illustrated by case studies from around the world.



Rapid response: programming for education needs in emergencies

by Jonathan Penson and Kathryn Tomlinson • 2009 • Price: 12 €

This book takes an in-depth look at the development of standardized education responses to emergencies, and considers the consequences of the widespread use of these initiatives. Drawing on interviews with over 80 specialists worldwide and case studies from Lebanon, Uganda, Sudan and Timor-Leste, the book gives suggestions for moving towards more community-responsive educational programming.

Forthcoming publications

This series is a product of research partnerships between IIEP and the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies, the International Rescue Committee and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and IIEP and CfBT Education Trust. Under these partnerships the following additional global thematic policy studies will be published in 2009:

- **Opportunities for change: education innovation and reform during and after conflict**
- **Promoting participation: community contributions to education in conflict situations**
- **Donors' engagement: supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states**
- **Filling the gap: is this the role of alternative education programmes?**

All books and Policy Briefs can be downloaded free of charge from the IIEP website:

www.iiep.unesco.org/information-services/publications/emergencies-and-reconstruction.html

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