

International Expert Meeting on Public policies Supporting the Right to Education of Refugees

Palau Reial de Pedralbes,
Avinguda Diagonal, 686, Barcelona, Spain
13-14 December 2018

Concept Note and provisional Agenda

As a contribution to the Human Rights Day 2018, which marks the 70th Anniversary of the UDHR, UNESCO, UNHCR, the Center for UNESCO of Catalonia, the Generalitat de Catalunya and the City Council of Barcelona organize an International Expert Meeting on Public policies supporting the Right to education of Refugees, to draw attention to the importance of all refugees enjoying equal access to an education of good quality.

Main expected outcomes:

The International Expert Meeting, emphasizing a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, aims at encouraging and facilitating peer-learning, and identifying relevant policy recommendations, at international, national, regional, local, and school levels, in preparation of a draft Policy Statement on the right to education of refugees to be taken forward at later stages.

The specific objectives of the International Expert Meeting are to:

- Identify and discuss common and specific challenges faced by governments - central, regional and local – dealing with the reception of important numbers of refugees.
- Present and discuss good practices and promising policy measures, as well as their normative implications, analysing how countries have been addressing these issues and identifying success factors.
- Identify specific areas for targeting and strengthening support and discuss key policy levers, at international, national, and local levels.
- Elaborate a set of policy recommendations based on existing good practices.
- Prepare/input the Draft Policy Statement on the right to education of refugees.

Particular attention will be given to how cities address the challenge of providing quality education for refugees, from a lifelong learning perspective.

Background and Rationale

The UN General Assembly adopted 70 years ago the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), aiming to provide “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”. Among the fundamental rights and freedoms it stands for, the UDHR recognizes to everyone the right to education. However, the universal right to education still remains an elusive goal, an aspiration, for the millions out-of-school children and adolescents.

A main challenge of our times in the field of education derives from the growing human mobility across and within regions. Displacement requires States to adapt their educational systems to the arrival of newcomers. The 70th Anniversary of the UDHR is an opportunity to highlight States’ core duty to ensure that no one is denied her/his right to receive an education of good quality, especially those who fled their country. By endorsing the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, States reaffirmed their obligations to fully respect the human rights of refugees and migrants and recognized that education is a critical element of the international response to the refugee crisis. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework laid out by the Declaration calls for greater support for refugees and host States. A Global Compact on Refugees, expected to be endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, will further set out concrete measures to strengthen the international response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations¹.

Education plays a key role in providing refugees the necessary tools for the full development of their personality, insertion in the labour market and for improving their livelihoods. It is also a key to successful integration thereby facilitating a more meaningful contribution to the societies. Education also plays a crucial role in valuing diversity and, as a result, contributing to mutual acceptance and respect with the population in receiving countries. Yet, despite the fact that issues related to education of refugees are not new, this represents a huge challenge today. With over 19.9 million² who are currently refugees, mainly hosted in low and middle-income countries,³ challenges are numerous in relation to access, quality, and equity. Among the fundamental challenges is the need to adapt to a more diverse student population and address issues of integration and inclusion, paying particular attention to intersecting grounds of discrimination; for instance, discrimination faced by refugee girls, refugees with disabilities, etc.

At the forefront of reception and integration of refugees, city administrations have a strategic role in facilitating the inclusion through education. While the responsibilities assigned to local governments in this field vary significantly across countries and regions, in practice local governments are demonstrating resolve and creativity in responding to related challenges. Initiatives include the provision of language and training courses, welcoming material in different languages, and also non-formal education. In her report on the right to education for refugees⁴ recently presented at the UN General Assembly, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education also recommends reasonable flexibility on the recognition of school certificates. Cities often mobilize culture, the arts and sports to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual acceptance. They also offer capacity-building in diversity management for city officials and teachers.

¹ UNHCR, Towards a global compact on refugees <http://www.unhcr.org/towards-a-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

² Under UNHCR’s mandate (that excludes the Palestinian refugees under the UNRWA mandate)

³ Amnesty International, Tackling The Global Refugee Crisis From Shirking To Sharing Responsibility, 2016, p.6.

⁴ http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNSR_Report_July_2018_ENG.pdf

In 2015, the international community agreed on the Education 2030 Agenda-SDG4, which commits Member States to develop inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults including internally displaced persons and refugees. Promoting access for youth to education, skills development and employment is also envisioned in the New Urban Agenda (NUA), adopted by all UN Member States in 2016 as a guide for the local implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular SDG 4.

Governments, international agencies, as well as many Non-Governmental organizations are trying to identify short-term and durable solutions at different levels. Strategies are being developed, funding is often being ensured, and training is being provided to teachers, but challenges remain.⁵ According to UNHCR, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school, and even those who attend schools are less likely as well to complete their education. In 2017, only 61% of refugee children attended primary school, 23% of refugee adolescents received secondary education.⁶

Higher education plays a central role in protecting young refugees. It helps to nurture future generations of highly educated individuals who are not only able to work in the public and private sector, but who also engage in their communities to make a difference. With knowledge and skills obtained from an accredited higher education institution and often the acquisition of a new language, educated young refugees stand a greater chance of becoming self-reliant. According to UNHCR today, only 1 per cent of eligible refugees have access to higher education, compared to 36 per cent of global youth.

Participants

The expert meeting will bring together representatives from Member states, regional governments and cities as well as academics and international experts in the field of refugee education, United Nations agencies, NGOs, and civil society representatives.

Methodology

The expert meeting will comprise three plenary panel discussions. The first panel discussion will identify challenges faced by education national systems in ensuring the right to education of refugees, the second one will explore good practices and promising measures taken by governments and cities and the third panel discussion will be devoted to the policy levers and areas for targeted support.

A background paper will be prepared and will serve as a basis for discussions during the expert meeting. Based on this Background paper, international experts will introduce the topic of each panel discussion and participants will present their experience and share their reaction to the presentations by the experts. In addition to the panel discussions, one parallel break out session will enable discussion in small groups to input the draft working text of the Policy Statement on the Right to education of refugees, including definition of policy recommendations for successfully ensuring the right to education of refugees with a view to achieving SDG4-Education 2030.

⁵ UNHCR, The challenge of Education, <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/the-challenge-of-education.html>

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/5b852f8e4.pdf>

Thursday 13 December 2018: Morning	
08:30 – 09:00	Registration
09:00 – 10:00	<p>Opening session</p> <p>Welcome addresses by the Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of Spain to UNESCO, UNESCO, UNHCR, the Generalitat de Catalunya, the City Council of Barcelona and UNESCOCAT</p>
10:00 – 10:20	Introductory speech by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
10:20 – 10:30	Introduction by UNESCO (Working modalities, programme, working documents)
10:30 – 11:00	<p>Panel Discussion 1, Country-specific and common challenges faced by education national systems in integrating refugees populations</p> <p>Presentation by an international expert</p> <p>Open discussion: country and city representatives as well as international experts will take the floor to present their experience and share reaction to the presentation</p>
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 – 13:00	<p>Panel Discussion 1</p> <p>Continuation</p>
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch break
Thursday 13 December 2018: Afternoon	
14:00 – 16:00	<p>Panel Discussion 2, Good practices and promising measures taken by countries</p> <p>Presentation by an international expert</p> <p>Open discussion: country and city representatives as well as international experts will take the floor to present their experience and share reaction to the presentation</p>
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee break
16:15 – 18:00	<p>Panel Discussion 2</p> <p>Continuation</p>
Friday 14 December 2018: Morning	
09:30 – 11:00	<p>Panel Discussion 3, Policy levers and areas for targeted policy support</p> <p>Presentation by an international expert</p> <p>Open discussion: country and city representatives as well as international experts will take the floor to present their experience and share reaction to the presentation</p>
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 – 13:00	<p>Panel Discussion 3</p> <p>Continuation</p>

13:00 – 14:00	Lunch break
Friday 14 December 2018: Afternoon	
14:00 – 15:30	<p>Parallel Break Out Session</p> <p>Three parallel groups – moderated by experts</p> <p>Discussion on the text of the draft Policy Statement: feedback and comments to improve the text of the working draft, including feasible policy recommendations for ensuring the right to education of refugees with a view to achieving SDG4-Education 2030</p>
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee break
15:45 – 17:00	<p>Plenary session</p> <p>Reporting from the parallel groups by the groups moderators</p> <p>Conclusions and ways forward by organizers</p>
17:00 – 17:30	Closing session