

Committee: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Addressing the lack of educational and employment opportunities for refugees in host nations

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of the Economic and Social Council,

My name is Cristina Papaioannou and I'm an 11th grader in the Geitonas-School. In the 4th ACGMUN I'm honored and excited to be serving as a Deputy President of the ECOSOC. Selecting Model United Nations as an extracurricular activity has had a meaningful impact on me, as it has helped me evolve not only as a student, but as a person as well. In my opinion, MUN helps become better informed and more aware of current-time issues and shapes future active members of society that will contribute to the improvement of our world. That is why I'm really happy to see all of you participating in this conference, especially under these uncanny circumstances.

The issue of the lack of educational and employment opportunities for refugees in host nations is major and affects humanity deeply. That is why, in order to have fruitful debates, I urge you all to research the topic at hand and your country's policy thoroughly. This study guide should only be used as a stepping stone for your research. In case you need any further explanation or clarification regarding this topic, your country's stance on the topic or MUN as a whole, please do not hesitate to contact me via email (papaioannoucristina@gmail.com). I am looking forward to meeting you and I sincerely hope to transmit to you the passion that I have for MUN.

Best regards,

Cristina Papaioannou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of the United Nations in 1945, one of the organization's main goals has been to improve the quality of people's lives. However, the majority of the 80 million forcibly displaced people worldwide¹ are deprived of their right to work and their right to education.

Even though refugees need to start working immediately when they arrive in the host country, in order to be able to afford food, clean water and shelter, they are not given equal employment opportunities as the locals. Instead, they are only offered low income, low-skilled jobs and more often than not are exploited as cheap labor. Nonetheless, just like the CEO of Settlement Services International, Violet Roumeliotis, said: "as well as bringing in new talent, hiring refugees introduces new ideas and perspectives that can enrich any workplace"². Therefore, it is apparent that their integration into the local workforce is advantageous for the host community as well.

Currently, 3.7 million of the 7.1 million refugee children of school age do not go to school³. In the 21st century, it is unacceptable to still consider education a luxury, when in reality it is an essential investment that should be accessible to all. Just like any other person, refugees have the legal right to a full education cycle, however, they still face many difficulties in accessing the education they deserve to have. The solemn fact that both Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals include universal primary education and quality education, proves the importance of education worldwide. Therefore, enrollment of refugees to school and university should remain a priority.

It is evident that changes need to be implemented to ensure the right of refugees to work and education are not violated.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Refugee

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion"⁴. They more often than not are forced to flee their countries without being given the chance to take important possessions, like identity

¹ "Refugee Statistics." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/.

² Neilson, Kate. "World Refugee Day: Why It's Important to Employ Refugees." HRM Online, 19 Dec. 2018, www.hrmonline.com.au/section/featured/important-employ-refugee/.

³ "Refugee Education in Crisis: More than Half of the World's School-Age Refugee Children Do Not Get an Education." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/8/5d67b2f47/refugee-education-crisis-half-worlds-school-age-refugee-children-education.html.

⁴ "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html.

documents or money, with them. Refugees leave their properties, their jobs, their lives and most importantly, their families behind.

Asylum seeker

According to the glossary on Migration an asylum seeker is “an individual who is seeking international protection”⁵ from persecution or human rights violations. This person is expecting a decision on their application for refugee status.

Host nation

Host nations are the countries receiving refugees. They are the ones being asked to provide shelter, food and education to refugees.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR is a United Nations agency responsible for protecting refugees, because their own countries cannot or are not willing to. Its purpose is to ensure that the human rights of refugees are not infringed upon, while assisting them to either be integrated into the countries where they seek asylum or to voluntarily repatriate to their home countries.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the beginning of time, humans have been on the move. Currently, the number one reason for this phenomenon is seeking protection from persecution due to religious, social, racial, or political reasons. This poses a great burden to the countries that are asked to provide that protection. Host countries have not always done the best they can to integrate refugees into their societies and even if they did they were not always successful in integrating refugees into the workforce and into the educational sector.

Refugees, however, can be a source of valuable workforce for host countries and a promise for growth and prosperity. They are usually grateful to the country that offered them asylum and feel obliged to give back to the community that provided them with much needed safety. That is why they tend to be active and productive members of society, willing to contribute in any way they can.

Being integrated into a, sometimes completely different, society is undoubtedly an extremely difficult task and many factors contribute to that.

The most important one is not being fluent in the language of the host country. Inability to communicate in the local language significantly limits the working positions that refugees can apply and be accepted for. For example, no refugee could ever be a secretary, without speaking the native language of the locals. Similarly, many refugee children cannot attend school in the host country, because they lack the ability to

⁵ International Organization for Migration. “Glossary on Migration.” https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. PDF File

speak the host country's language. That renders it extremely difficult for them to attend classes and get educated.

The poor health of many refugees definitely poses difficulties in being integrated into host societies. Fleeing a country and seeking asylum from another can be a traumatic experience. Consequently, many refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), such as anxiety due to family separation or life-threatening experiences, which sometimes reduce the ability of refugees to work and attend school, as these disorders impact their concentration, sleep schedule, and cause distress.

Barriers that prevent refugees from entering the workforce of host nations

“Compared to native populations, refugees are more likely to be unemployed, have temporary jobs and lower income”⁶. The lack of employment opportunities is attributed to several reasons.

Lack of documents

Many refugees leave their country without documents that certify qualifications they have acquired, rendering it impossible for them to attain a working position that requires those qualifications. In this way, doctors cannot practice medicine, engineers cannot work on projects and teachers cannot teach. Furthermore, in the scenario where a refugee does have qualification certificates, many host countries do not recognize foreign qualifications due to the discrepancy between the country of origin's training and the expectations on the local job market. Professionally qualified refugees feel that their qualifications and expertise gained at home are overlooked and their applications are rejected, despite them having the knowledge and skills needed.

Having a driver's license is a prerequisite for accessing employment in rural areas and attaining working positions as drivers for transportation companies. For refugees, having a driver's license requires either exchanging the country of origin's driver's license or passing the host country's driver's test, but both these options are challenging for refugees. Exchanging the existing driver's license, is rarely feasible as most refugees when fleeing their countries leave such documents behind. Additionally, many countries refuse to exchange driver's licenses from other countries based on the suspicion that they were forged. The solution of contacting the country of origin's consulate to authenticate the license is unrealistic, as most refugees it could be dangerous to contact the authorities of their home country. On the other hand, taking the host county's driver's test is also extremely difficult, as it requires passing a theoretical component of the test, which poses language issues for refugees that do not speak the host country's language.

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe.” https://www.unhcr.org/52403d389.pdf#UNHCR-RICE-New_Begining-screen.indd%3A.10940%3A53. 2013. PDF File

Discrimination and stigmatization

Having differences in body characteristics, such as skin color, acts as a disincentive for employers to employ refugees. The same applies for having foreign-sounding names.

On similar grounds, there are often preconceived notions of what refugees can or should do. They are frequently expected to work in construction sites, tolls and other jobs that do not require specific skills. However, many refugees have indeed studied to acquire knowledge and skills. For instance, 38% of Syrian refugees have a university education.⁷ It is reasonable for them to not be willing to simply set aside their knowledge and accept any kind of job. A refugee in Ireland once said: “I want to give something back to the Irish people⁸”, meaning that he wanted to offer his expertise as a way of showing his gratitude to the country that offered him asylum.

Job availability

Many countries face significant unemployment issues and have failed to provide working positions to locals. Therefore, the integration of a whole new group of people, refugees, into the workforce is an impossible task.

Zero-sum game

Many refugees are denied working positions, because of misguided assumptions, like the zero-sum game. According to this, when two parties are involved in a situation, it is impossible for both to win, therefore if one wins, the other inevitably loses. Regarding refugees, many believe that gains made by refugees come to the expense of citizens of the host societies. Therefore, refugees are seen as competitors “stealing” working positions from locals and depriving them of opportunities. Even governments seem to worry about the potential of refugees to displace locals from jobs and drive wages down. On the contrary, refugees have proven to provide advantages to their host countries, as they are more prepared to take on low-paid, low-skilled jobs that citizens of the host country would not consider in the first place.

Factors that impede providing access to education for refugees

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), only 50% of refugee children are in primary school and 25% of refugee adolescents are in secondary school⁹.

⁷ “The Refugee Employment Crisis.” Breaking Barriers, www.breaking-barriers.co.uk/the-cause/refugee-employment-crisis/.

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe.” https://www.unhcr.org/52403d389.pdf#UNHCR-RICE-New_Beginning-screen.indd%3A.10940%3A53. 2013. PDF File

⁹ “Refugee Children Are Five Times More Likely to Be out of School than Others.” UNESCO, 26 May 2016, www.en.unesco.org/news/refugee-children-are-five-times-more-likely-be-out-school-others.

Insufficient school capacity

Many schools fail to provide proper education to refugee children, as they do not have the capacity or personnel to do so. They are already functioning at their limits having to educate only the local children and lack teachers, classrooms and materials for new pupils.

Lack of previous education

Refugee children coming from countries that have long been in armed conflicts and wars, like Syria, are very likely never to have gone to school, because in such cases the first priority is safety and thus their education is overlooked.

Domestic responsibilities

Many refugee children cannot invest in their education, because of their domestic responsibilities. The parent's low income and long working hours renders it necessary for children to take up many household responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, taking care of younger or older relatives. Most refugee families, when deciding which members will have to sustain the house and which will go to school, prioritize the education of the boys, as they are considered to have better earning potential.

Secondary education

Enrolment of refugee children is even lower when it comes to secondary education. As the UNHCR mentioned in a report "As each year passes, the likelihood of a refugee child progressing to the next academic grade drops sharply."¹⁰ Taking into consideration that secondary education is a ticket to a brighter future, and therefore better employment opportunities, it is crucial. The main reason why less refugees receive secondary education, is its availability due to cost. Subject learning at secondary level is more advanced and often require more enhanced facilities, materials and better qualified teachers. The fact that most schools do not have the

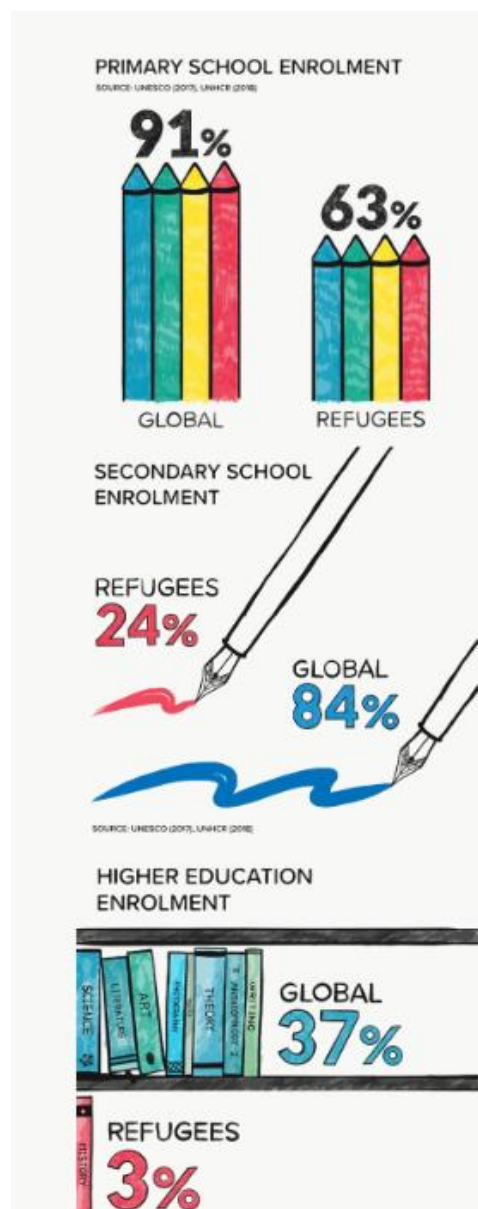


Figure 1: Differences in education enrolment between refugees and the rest of the world

¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis." <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>. PDF File

resources to provide these, disincentivizes children from going to school and contributes to the rise of dropout rates.

When adolescents do receive secondary education and thus have better employment prospects, they can not only contribute to the host society's advancement, but they can also contribute to rebuilding their home countries.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Germany

1.5% of Germany's total population are refugees¹¹. In order to be granted work authorization in Germany, refugees need to have lived in the country for at least three months. The authorization is only granted under the prerequisites that a refugee's employment will not negatively affect the employment prospects of EU citizens or permanent residents. When it comes to education, Germany seems to have been successful in providing it to refugees, since only 5% of refugee children were not attending school in 2016¹². These pupils usually participate in special integration courses, which mainly focus on learning the German language and acquiring basic knowledge, before attending regular classes. This success is attributed to the fact that "German policymakers began to introduce a series of regulations to improve the speed and efficiency of asylum procedures¹³" and even allowed some asylum seekers to participate in integration courses before even having received a decision on their application. Germany also provides scholarships to refugees going into tertiary education through the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative and the German Academic Exchange Service.

Syria

The Syrian civil war, which started in 2011 when young people protested peacefully against the government of Bashar al-Assad, has rendered Syria the largest displacement crisis in the world. Increased rates of violence, poverty and violations of human rights, have made Syrians no longer feel safe in their country. For many Syrians fleeing the country is the only way to ensure their security. "Since early 2011, the Syrian conflict has resulted in enormous suffering for millions of people, displacing an estimated 12 million Syrians, nearly half of the estimated pre-war population. Of the displaced Syrians, 5.4 million are living as refugees in neighboring countries"¹⁴, writes journalist Olivia Giovetti.

¹¹ Eirik Christophersen Published 01. Nov 2020. "These 10 Countries Receive the Most Refugees." NRC, www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/the-10-countries-that-receive-the-most-refugees/.

¹² "The State of Refugee Integration in Germany in 2019." WENR, 22 July 2020, www.wenr.wes.org/2019/08/the-state-of-refugee-integration-in-germany-in-2019.

¹³ Dempster, Sekou Keita and Helen. "Five Years Later, One Million Refugees Are Thriving in Germany." Center For Global Development, 4 Dec. 2020, www.cgdev.org/blog/five-years-later-one-million-refugees-are-thriving-germany.

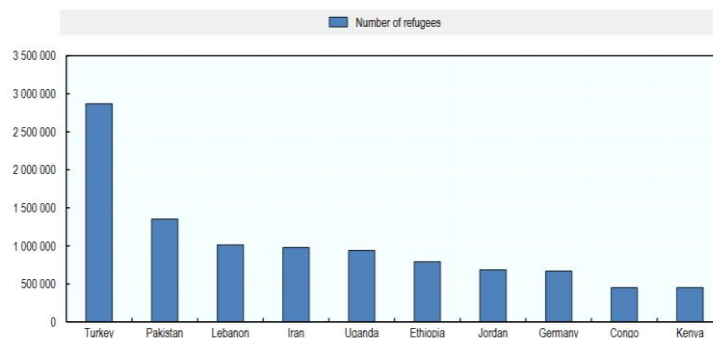
¹⁴ "The Syria Crisis 10 Years Later: 5 Things to Know in 2021." Concern Worldwide, www.concernusa.org/story/syria-crisis-explained/.

South Sudan

“On January 1st, 1956, Sudan gained its independence from Britain. Unfortunately, the differences in religion, culture, and even racial composition between the North and South made it difficult for the two to unify after independence.”¹⁵ The north was mostly composed of Muslims, whereas the south of Christians. In 2011 a voting procedure was held, which led to the independence of South Sudan. No more than two years after the creation of the nation of South Sudan, a civil war emerged, leading to financial decline, disease, poverty and violence. The civil war has forcibly displaced 4.3 million people¹⁶, the majority of which are children and women, who have experienced violent assaults and sexual attacks. Armed groups have been obstructing humanitarian agencies from helping those in need, while some areas have been rendered inaccessible due to fighting. Being one of the most violent countries in the world towards foreign aid workers, over 100 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since 2013 and 23 aid workers have been abducted since December 2017¹⁷. Many international organizations have seized to provide help to South Sudan due to safety reasons, but lack of mediation and aid has only worsened the crisis.

Turkey

Turkey is the country hosting the most refugees worldwide. “Turkey currently hosts some 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees along with close to 370,000 persons of concern from other nationalities.”¹⁸ Turkey’s refugee response is based on a comprehensive legal framework, specifically the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013) and the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014).



Source: UNHCR (2017a).

Figure 2: Number of refugees in different countries

¹⁵ Franck Azobou Tonleu. “South Sudan Refugee Crisis.” https://med.virginia.edu/family-medicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/285/2018/12/Azobou_South-Sudan-Refugee-Crisis-112018.pdf. 2018. PDF File

¹⁶ “South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA for UNHCR.” South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR, www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/.

¹⁷ Franck Azobou Tonleu. “South Sudan Refugee Crisis.” https://med.virginia.edu/family-medicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/285/2018/12/Azobou_South-Sudan-Refugee-Crisis-112018.pdf.

¹⁸ “Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkey.” UNHCR Turkey, www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) spacing

UNICEF has responded to refugee crises, by providing education, water, nutrition and social protection to refugee children living in camps. For instance, UNICEF provided in 2019 school kits containing a school bag and learning supplies to more than 300,000¹⁹ Venezuelan children.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1950	UNHCR was founded
2011	The Syrian civil war started
2015	Major refugee crisis that affected Europe
26 June 2015	The European Council agreed to relocate 40,000 migrants from Italy and Greece to other EU member states
11-12 November 2015	Valletta summit on migration

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The UN significantly contributes to the improvement of living standards of refugees, facilitating their access to education and their integration into the workforce, through resolutions, treaties, partnerships and events.

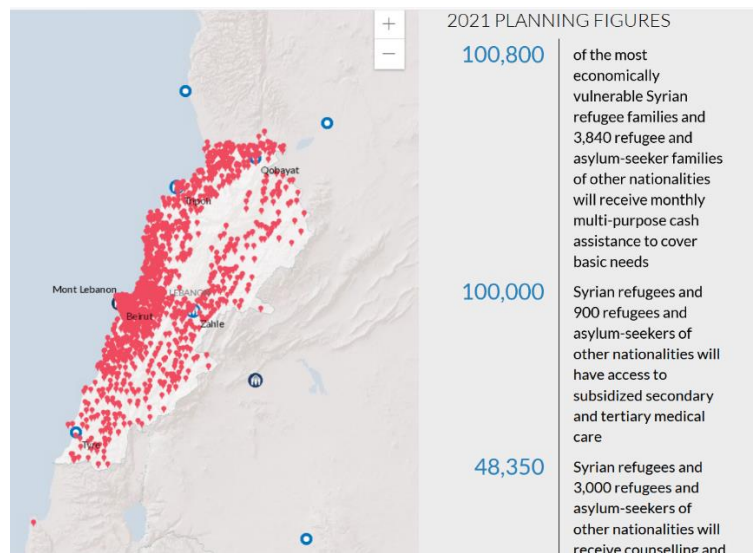


Figure 3: Planning figures of the UNHCR for Syria in 2021

¹⁹ "Venezuela: UNICEF Providing More than 300,000 Children with Education Supplies to Help Keep Them in School." UNICEF, 12 Mar. 2021, www.unicef.org/press-releases/venezuela-unicef-providing-more-300000-children-education-supplies-help-keep-them.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has played an important role in facilitating access of refugees to host countries. It provides them with funds, shelter, transportation and healthcare.

In the Valletta summit on migration, leaders from European and African countries were brought together to address the opportunities and challenges of migration. The summit recognized the need for a partnership between the two continents in order to resolve the issue. It also created an action plan designed to “address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility, reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers, prevent and fight irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, work more closely to improve cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration”²⁰

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, is a tool available for countries worldwide. It defines the term “refugee”, analyses the refugee’s rights and the obligations of host countries.

United Nations Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Supplement No.12, Covering the period 1 July 2018-30 June 2019

This report points out the importance of always maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, despite mode or place of origin and assesses the issue of refugee displacement. It also mentions the mechanisms for both emergency responses and voluntary repatriations.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There have been both international and local initiatives designed to help refugees gain access to education and join the workforce of their host country.

Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative

The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) tertiary scholarship program provides assistance to refugees wanting to earn an undergraduate degree either in their host country, or in their country of origin. It advocates using skills acquired as a way to peacefully coexist with host communities and to provide role models, so that refugee children understand the importance of using knowledge to contribute to the development of the host society.

²⁰ Leyts, Barend. “Valletta Summit on Migration, 11-12 November 2015.” Consilium, 11 Nov. 2015, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-12/.

The Friendly Nation Initiative

The Friendly Nation Initiative, led by the Migration Council of Australia, “encourages Australian businesses to provide employment, mentoring, internship and work experience opportunities to refugees²¹”. Furthermore, it provides support to companies and employers that welcome refugees into their workforce.

Karam Scholars

Karam Scholars is an organization that helps Syrian students in Turkey and Jordan access higher education. They work to “ensure these students are empowered with the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to make informed decisions about their futures.”²² Through an active collaboration with refugees they provide guidance and mentorship, allowing them to uncover their talents and passions and achieve their goals.

The Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

The Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) together operate a Foreign Credential Recognition Program, which aims to create a framework that will lead to the development of a common approach to foreign credential recognition.

The Medical Profession Project

The Medical Profession Project, is a project that helps refugee doctors requalify to UK standards, in order to be able to practice medicine in the UK and acquire a job equivalent to their studies. It has been successful; however, it only works with 50 refugee doctors per year.

Even though these initiatives have been important, they have been proven to be insufficient, as most of them apply only to a specific country. Enforceable, global methods have to be implemented if we wish to successfully integrate refugees into host societies worldwide.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

This issue has proven to be not only economic but also social. Despite multiple attempts of international organizations and initiatives to help, changes still need to be made. Since there are countries like Germany, France and the Netherlands that have managed to integrate refugees into their societies and use the workforce they provide to their benefit, there is still hope that other host nations will accomplish the same.

It’s vital to understand that long term approaches need to be adopted in order to successfully integrate refugees into host societies. Having high levels of language

²¹ Friendly Nation Initiative, www.fni.org.au/.

²² “Karam Scholars.” Karam Foundation, 4 Sept. 2020, www.karamfoundation.org/programs/karam-scholars/.

training available to both refugee adults and children would be a huge step in this direction. Language classes should be offered as soon as possible; on the one hand they could help adults find a job that would support their family's needs and on the other hand, they would allow children to become fluent on the local language much faster and therefore enroll in school sooner. Language training should definitely be adequate for a good labor market entry, by focusing on terminology and vocabulary needed for both everyday life and work.

On a similar note, school catch-up classes, which ideally would be taught by teachers that speak the native language of most refugees, are also important. Classes and projects about the history and culture of the refugee's nations could also help the children of the host country get to know their new classmates better and therefore help prevent racist and prejudiced behavior.

Training and re-training programs for refugees should be based on needs and availability of jobs, so as to ensure the best possible workforce integration.

Reliable and multi-year funding allocated to host nations is also essential. Financial support would allow countries to invest in materials and properly equip schools, so that refugees are offered education of good quality. Furthermore, it would provide the much-needed resources to support refugee families that would otherwise rely on the income of their children; this would allow children to attend school instead of working in order to financially assist their family. Similarly, when it comes to refugee scholarships, countries should take into consideration not only the cost of tuition, but also the financial impact on the student's family, because full-time studying, either in the host nation or abroad, could mean that he/she cannot work and therefore cannot have an income.

Since many refugees lose or leave their certificate behind, it's also critical to develop a universal framework validating their qualifications.

The equal distribution of refugees in nations, would also ameliorate the situation, as the burden of providing educational and employment opportunities to refugees would now fall on more countries. This would not only relieve the host nations of the high cost they now need to attribute to integrating refugees, but it would also render the integration process more quick and thus effective.

This battle is a marathon not a sprint. With the correct framework and initiatives, providing educational and employment opportunities to refugees is a distant, yet achievable goal.

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