

## REGIONAL BUREAU FOR EAST, HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES

**JULY- DECEMBER 2024**



26-year-old Hanuna, a refugee from Sudan, at her graduation ceremony in South Sudan after completing her university education. © Reason Moses Runyanga

### INTRODUCTION

Refugee inclusion in national education systems, as defined in the [2023 Global Refugee Forum \(GRF\) Education Multi-Stakeholder Pledge](#), refers to refugee children attending schools that are: (i) part of the host country's national public education system - aligned with the national curriculum, teacher qualifications, and oversight mechanisms; (ii) funded through government channels; and (iii) attended by both refugee and host community children together.

This newsletter showcases meaningful actions undertaken by **governments, partners and UNHCR** in the region towards advancing refugee inclusion while highlighting some of the implementation bottlenecks. Central to these efforts is the concept of [sustainable responses](#), which prioritizes a shift from dependency to self-reliance, promoting long-term solutions for both refugees and host communities, with an emphasis on a multi-stakeholder, whole-of-government approach, resource optimization and efficiency.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE DJIBOUTI DECLARATION

### Refugee Inclusion in National Education Systems: Where Do We Stand? An Evaluation of Progress against the Djibouti Declaration in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Member States

The [Djibouti Declaration](#), adopted in 2017 by seven IGAD member states - Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda - is a non-binding regional instrument that represents a pivotal commitment to inclusive, quality education for refugees and host communities.

A recent evaluation jointly commissioned by IGAD and UNHCR analyzed the outcomes of the declaration five years after its adoption, focusing on the inclusion of refugees in national education systems (Commitment C); and financing, partnerships, and monitoring (Commitment E).

The evaluation highlights how the Djibouti Declaration and the role played by IGAD were key in building high-level political will around the inclusion of refugees in the national education systems. This led to significant progress in national legal frameworks. However, despite encouraging developments, none of the seven countries has fully integrated refugee schools into national education systems.

Limited financing is a critical barrier to achieving refugee inclusion in national education systems alongside other aspects such as limitations on rights to work, move, and obtain documentation. Additionally, effective implementation and accountability mechanisms at the national and sub-national levels remain underdeveloped, hindering the translation of existing policies into practice.

Against this background, the evaluation assesses that to achieve sustainable inclusion of refugees in national education systems, three aspects are equally critical:

- 1) establishing an enabling legal and policy environment,
- 2) building effective governance and management structures, and
- 3) mobilizing predictable financing, aligned with costed plans endorsed by governments.

Key progress has been achieved in the region, particularly regarding the legal and policy environment, laying the foundations for sustainable refugee inclusion. However, more can be done to strengthen governance and management, grant access to complementary rights and ensure sufficient, predictable, and long-term financing.

Some clear and **actionable recommendations** for host governments, international and regional actors have been outlined in the evaluation to address the existing gaps\*.

*\*The evaluation will be publicly available starting mid-February 2025*

## COUNTRY UPDATES

### BURUNDI: The Musenyi Site - Refugee Inclusion from the Onset of Displacement

Burundi, hosting 89,153 refugees and asylum seekers as of 31 December 2024, is stepping up efforts to integrate newly arrived refugees directly into its national education system. The country faces increasing challenges due to an ongoing influx of asylum seekers, averaging 300 per month, driven by the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). With the five existing refugee camps operating at full capacity, the construction of a new site in Musenyi, Giharo Commune, Rutana Province, began in April 2024 to accommodate up to 10,000 refugees.

As of 30 November 2024, the Musenyi site hosted 2,128 refugees (606 households). Unlike the traditional refugee camps which deliver education through the country-of-origin system, the site fosters integration by enabling refugees to attend Burundian public schools alongside host communities.

Burundi's Ministry of Education has fully supported this approach for the 2024 - 2025 school year. As of 31 October, 558 children aged 3 -18 (425 boys and 392 girls) were enrolled in schools. Preschool children attend classes in three newly constructed classrooms within the site, while primary and secondary students are integrated into two nearby public schools. To accommodate the arrival of new students, nine classrooms, one administrative block and two latrine blocks were built at Musenyi Primary School with funding from Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Primary Impact Project. Additionally, UNICEF has provided five tents to serve as temporary classrooms and plans are underway to expand the enrolment capacity at Butegeri Primary School, located 1.2 kilometres from the site.

The Musenyi site exemplifies Burundi's commitment to include refugees in national systems. It highlights how well-informed and sensitized authorities at both central and local levels can lead efforts to integrate refugees shortly after their arrival. Additionally, it demonstrates how humanitarian funding can be effectively leveraged to strengthen existing public services through a sustainable approach.

While the Musenyi site establishes a benchmark for inclusion from the onset, challenges remain in older camps, where refugees are still served by parallel systems. In these camps, learners use the DRC curriculum, and all existing pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools (serving 26,975 learners) are managed by UNHCR and partners.

Since December 2023, with support from UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO's IIEP-Paris and other partners, the Ministry of Education has been developing a comprehensive strategy to transition these students to the public system. This strategy also aims to support and improve access and retention for refugees residing in camps, urban areas, the Musenyi site, and returnees.

### **DJIBOUTI: Refugee Students are Integrated into National Education Database**

As of September 2024, refugee students were being registered with individual codes in the National Education Management Information System known as GOSE (*Gestion Orientation et Suivi des Élèves*).

Funded by the World Bank, the integration of refugee data in GOSE ensures that refugee learners are included in the same database as their national peers, creating a foundation for improved planning, resource allocation, and evidence-based decision-making to benefit both refugee and host populations. This marks a significant departure from past practices, where refugee data was collected only at the school level, with aggregated statistics included in the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MENFOP) annual reports. By integrating individual data, this approach enables the tracking of refugee students' educational pathways, with practical benefits such as facilitating access to their educational documentation and supporting their transfer to other Djiboutian schools. GOSE will serve as a trusted source of information, providing clear

data on refugee education and progress. It will also be a valuable tool for enhancing the accountability of the government and education partners in delivering equitable education opportunities. This milestone supports Djibouti's commitment to advancing the inclusion of refugees in its education system, reflecting progress toward fulfilling its pledge at 2019 Global Refugee Forum to integrate forcibly displaced populations into national services.

Registering refugee students in GOSE is a pivotal achievement, however the operational costs of refugee schools are still largely borne by UNHCR, highlighting the persistent reliance on international aid to sustain education services for displaced communities. While this milestone demonstrates progress showcasing Djibouti's dedication to inclusive education, greater efforts are required to secure sustainable funding and achieve full integration, laying the groundwork for a truly equitable and inclusive education system that benefits all learners.

### **ETHIOPIA - Strengthening Government Capacity: Expert Secondment to Build Inclusive Education Systems for Refugees in the Somali Region**

Ethiopia, hosting about 1,073,275 refugees as of 31 December 2024, is advancing its commitment to integrate refugees into its national education system. In the Somali Region, which is home to 357,657 refugees across the Fafan (Jijiga), Doolo (Bokh, Galhamour, and Danood-Hegalle), and Liban

(Melkadida–Dollo and Bokolomayo Woreda) zones, addressing education for the estimated 178,829 school-age children and youth presents a significant challenge.

By the end of the 2023/2024 academic year, only 46,012 refugees were enrolled in school, representing a 26 per cent enrolment rate. This included 16,121 children in pre-primary education, 27,320 in primary education and 2,571 in secondary education.

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and Ethiopia's commitments, the Somali Region is pursuing two key strategies to enhance refugee inclusion: (a) transitioning NGO-managed refugee schools to the Somali Regional Education Bureau (SREB) and (b) integrating refugees into host community schools from the onset of emergencies. While schools in the Fafan and Liban zones will gradually be transferred to SREB management (starting with secondary schools), inclusive approaches in the Doolo zone focus on expanding existing public services to address the needs of both refugees and host communities.

Recognizing the need for specialized technical expertise, UNHCR is recruiting an education expert with in-depth knowledge of refugee education, governance mechanisms and education system management to be seconded to the SREB. The expert will support the Somali Regional Education Bureau in implementing inclusive policies, transitioning refugee schools to government management, and integrating refugees into the national education system. The expert will oversee the transfer of NGO-managed refugee secondary schools to SREB management and support the long-term handover of refugee primary schools. The role will also involve facilitating the direct integration of refugees into host community schools in the Doolo zone.

This secondment underscores UNHCR's commitment to collaborate with government institutions to create sustainable education solutions. By empowering the SREB in integrating refugees into the national education system, Ethiopia is not only addressing immediate needs but also building a framework for long-term inclusion and equity. This approach focuses on enhancing public services to address the needs of both refugees and host communities, promoting coexistence.

#### **RWANDA: Government Advances Refugee Education Inclusion by Registering Refugee Schools**

In Rwanda, refugee students are primarily integrated into the national education system. Schools located in refugee camps have been progressively registered as public institutions by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). This integration reflects Rwanda's strong commitment to including refugees in national systems, with recurrent costs for these schools mainly covered through the government's revenue. UNHCR and its partners complement these efforts by constructing additional classrooms in schools hosting refugee students, providing school material, and uniforms as well as supporting the school feeding programs.

While the ongoing integration of refugees into the national education system has been commendable, three schools in Kiziba - the ECD Amizero, Umubano Primary School, and College Amahoro Secondary School - which host a total of 5,451 students, including 187 nationals, remain registered as private

institutions under UNHCR's management. Together with the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA), UNHCR has been advocating for the three schools to be handed over to the Local Government, Karongi District, since 2017. In 2022, the district informed the Ministry of Education of its willingness to take over the schools from UNHCR.

Following the new [Ministerial instructions](#) guiding the application modalities, UNHCR successfully submitted the application requesting the three Kiziba schools to be registered as public schools for the Government to take over their full management, by allocating teachers and all financial support to run the schools. The outcome is expected by July 2025, marking the beginning of the financial year of the Government of Rwanda. Ensuring the integration of these three remaining schools would be another milestone in the Government's commitment to the inclusion of refugees in national services.

**SUDAN:** UNHCR, through the Local Education Group, supports the development of the Transitional Education Plan to resume education services.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan continues to devastate multiple regions, including Khartoum, White Nile, Sennar, Blue Nile, North Darfur, and West Darfur States, with indiscriminate aerial strikes and artillery causing civilian casualties, displacement, and damage to public structures. The conflict has significantly disrupted education services across the country. UNICEF estimates that nearly 19 million children have had their learning disrupted since the conflict began.



*Internally displaced people (IDPs) collect their belongings from a truck after arriving at an IDP gathering site near Kassala city, Sudan. © UNHCR/Aymen Alfadil*

Approximately 20 per cent of schools have reopened. However, they face significant challenges, including damaged infrastructure, non-payment of teachers and reduced instructional time due to alternating school days for boys and girls. Refugees in Sudan, while a relatively small minority (refugee school-age population is approximately 415,000), share many of the same challenges as internally displaced persons and host community members.

The Sudan Local Education Group (LEG), under UNESCO's leadership, is developing a Transitional Education Plan (TEP) for 2025–2027 to serve as a strategic roadmap, aligning investments to maximize impact. The TEP aims to address the immediate humanitarian needs while acting as a bridge to long-term development planning.

UNHCR's engagement in the TEP development process highlights its role in supporting system capacity and educational quality for all children in Sudan, in line with the Global Compact for Refugees. It also presents an opportunity to promote refugee inclusion from the start, building in the individual student preparation support, as well as system-level inputs, required to integrate refugees and returning refugees in national education services. This includes interventions addressing the administrative barriers to enrolment, mechanisms for equivalency and recognition of prior learning, as well as the provision of non-formal education responding to differences in the language of instruction and curricula. The TEP offers an opportunity to resume equitable and inclusive education services for all children in Sudan, forming a basis from which the next Education Sector Plan can be developed in the future.

## UGANDA: JIGSAW - UNHCR Research on Scaling Refugee Teacher Inclusion Models

UNHCR and [Jigsaw](#) are collaborating on a three-year research project to explore and develop evidence-based models for including refugee teachers in national education systems. This initiative aims to identify strategies that can be implemented, strengthened, and scaled to enhance refugee teachers' professional agency and well-being.

The study will examine three inclusion models across national, regional, and global dimensions:

- Chad: A national model where the government provides training and accreditation for refugee teachers through teacher training colleges.
- Uganda: A regional model focusing on how bodies like IGAD and the East African Community (EAC) can facilitate the recognition of prior teaching qualifications for refugees in host countries.
- Zambia: A global model involving the UNESCO Qualifications Passport, a tool for recognizing prior learning, qualifications, and credentials for refugees and asylum seekers.

UNHCR will collaborate with Jigsaw on the design, implementation, and dissemination of the research study's findings under the title 'Scaling Refugee Teacher National Inclusion Models for Enhanced Agency and Well-being'. This research study is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) [Knowledge and Innovation Exchange \(KIX\)](#).

The study's design uses a participatory approach developed by Jigsaw and UNHCR's Global Evidence for Refugee Education ([GERE](#)) initiative, which places refugee researchers at the heart of generating evidence. By positioning refugee teachers at the centre of the research, the study will provide grounded insights on how to scale the promising national inclusion models whilst simultaneously catalyzing a power shift that will help ensure that refugees are equal partners when building evidence and making decisions relating to teacher professional development, agency, and wellbeing.

The study will generate a range of global public goods including flagship reports, policy briefs, implementation guidelines, peer-reviewed articles, and blogs. The knowledge generated will be mobilized to strengthen the capacity of education stakeholders at different levels in the three countries to implement and scale these innovations. Lessons learned will also inform international education policy and practice, serving as a key reference point for discussions leading to the next Global Refugee Forum in 2027.

## UGANDA: Vocationalizing Secondary Education in Line with National Policies to Foster Self-Reliance

In February 2020, Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports introduced a new lower secondary school curriculum aimed at addressing the skills gap among graduates. A key component of this curriculum is the vocationalization of secondary education, which integrates practical subjects to equip students with skills needed for the modern labor market, strengthening pathways from learning to earning. This curriculum has been implemented nationwide, and schools in refugee settlements, with the support of partners, have taken steps to align with this national policy. At Rhino Camp High School, for instance, refugees and nationals study side by side and benefit from a vocational skills training section established in 2021 with support from UNHCR and Windle International Uganda.

The school offers training in trades such as tailoring, building and concrete practice, welding/metal fabrication, and plumbing. Learners from Senior 1 to Senior 3 select at least one trade to study alongside their academic subjects. By Senior 3, students are assessed under the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF) Level 1, administered by the Directorate of Industrial Training. Successful candidates receive a Certificate of Competence in their respective trades.

In 2023, a total of 98 learners—including 59 refugees—were assessed, and by 2024, this number had increased to 133 learners, 74 of whom were refugees. These students graduate with both a secondary school certificate and vocational qualifications, offering them a dual pathway to further education or employment.

Three years after the introduction of the new curriculum, tangible results are evident. (i) Secondary schools in refugee settlements have successfully aligned with the new policy, ensuring that refugee schools meet national standards. This is a critical step toward fully transitioning these schools to government management in the future. (ii) Learners certified in various trades have reported significant improvements in their livelihoods and those of their families. Many have used their skills for productive activities, while some have secured internships or job placements with local organizations. For example, 50 ICT-trained learners from Rhino Camp High School were recruited as census enumerators in 2024, demonstrating the practical applicability of their training. Data from education partners in refugee settlements indicate that 30 per cent of students who have completed vocational training are now employed in the vocations they studied.

The vocationalization of secondary education in Uganda represents a transformative step toward aligning refugee education with national policies and fostering self-reliance. By equipping learners with practical skills and recognized qualifications, Uganda is creating opportunities for refugees and host communities to build sustainable livelihoods while contributing to broader national development goals.

## REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Reflections from the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) Education Mega Pledge Workshop, Nairobi, 10 – 12 September 2024

While there has been much progress in legislation and policies supporting refugee inclusion in national systems most refugees continue to learn in parallel and segregated schools in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, with varying levels of government involvement. A recent evaluation on progress against the Djibouti Declaration in IGAD Member States (see article above) highlights that policy implementation is hindered by insufficient financial contributions or investments to expand national education systems and make the necessary shifts in governance and management structures for sustainable refugee inclusion.

The UNHCR Education Unit, Regional Bureaux for the East, Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes and for Southern Africa convened members of the [GRF Education Mega Pledge leadership group](#) to explore how states, development, humanitarian, and private sector actors can better support refugee inclusion in national education systems and develop coherent approaches to multi-year, predictable financing. The workshop focused on the experiences of seven countries: Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda.

The workshop concluded with collective commitments to develop joint tools and harmonized indicators, finalize **country-specific roadmaps** to address policy, governance, and funding needs for transitioning refugees into national systems, and strengthening humanitarian-development coherence to ensure short-term interventions align with long-term goals. The participants also committed to enhanced collaboration among development partners and host governments.

Following the workshop, Education Cannot Wait [announced](#) a **USD 2.6 million grant to UNHCR to accelerate refugee inclusion in national education systems**. Building on ECW's long-standing collaboration with UNHCR, the three-year grant includes a contribution from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The grant intends to support strengthened approaches to refugee inclusion across emergency response and protracted crises, including finding innovative ways to meet associated costs. The grant will also track progress and provide evidence on the operationalization of the mega pledge on refugee education.

### Translating policy to practice in Refugee Education and Livelihoods: A UNHCR-Mastercard Foundation Partnership

Despite enabling legislation and policy across the EHAGL region, significant challenges in refugee education and livelihoods persist. While 68 per cent of refugees are enrolled in primary education, only 21 per cent transition to secondary school (16 per cent of girls compared to 25 per cent of boys), and a

mere 2 per cent enroll in tertiary education (1 per cent of women compared to 2.6 per cent of men). Beyond education, refugees encounter difficulties in accessing decent work, including barriers to opening financial accounts and registering land for businesses.

The Mastercard Foundation and UNHCR have partnered to create an enabling policy environment that improves education and livelihood opportunities for refugees and displaced persons (RDPs), with a particular focus on women and girls. This **USD 9 million**, four-year program aims to remove structural barriers preventing RDPs from accessing education and dignified work. The education component of the programme focuses on facilitating refugee inclusion in national secondary education services and supporting the transition to tertiary education opportunities and onward to decent work. The grant will support technical assistance and capacity support in selected countries to identify barriers to policy implementation and identify solutions, while supporting peer learning in and between countries, and engagement with regional economic bodies. Evidence generation will also form a key component of the partnership.

The programme will include a key livelihoods component, emphasizing the removal of policy bottlenecks to enable dignified work opportunities for 2,000 RDPs, with a strong focus on young women. Efforts will also focus on engaging organizations led by forcibly displaced persons and fostering partnerships with the local private sector to advance economic inclusion.

This initiative is in addition to the Mastercard Foundation's [partnership](#) with UNHCR to support Sudanese women and girls affected by the conflict both within Sudan and forced to flee throughout the region. The contribution targets education and livelihoods interventions in the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.

UNHCR and the Mastercard Foundation are working together to remove barriers for refugees and displaced persons, focusing on practical solutions to improve access to education and livelihoods in the EHAGL region.

## FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

ERICC Policy Brief, Expanding Refugee Access to National Education Systems: The State of the Evidence on Enabling Factors, Constraints, and Interventions, ERICC consortium, 2024. ([here](#))

Naylor, R. (2024). From Barriers to Breakthroughs: Progress in Primary Education for Refugees. UNHCR ([here](#)).

Shelby Carvalho and Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Political Economy of Refugees: How responsibility shapes the politics of education, World Development 173, 2024 ([here](#) – with instruction on how to get access to the full article).

UNHCR Education Report – Refugee education: Five years on from the launch of the 2030 refugee education strategy, UNHCR, 2024 ([here](#)).

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