



Press Release

World Refugee Day marked in Ethiopia with a call for inclusion in education

18 June 2021

Addis Ababa/Ethiopia: The Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, (ARRA) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, together with humanitarian partners, commemorate World Refugee Day amid a continuing COVID-19 pandemic, which has put a strain on health care, schools and the daily lives of refugees and the communities hosting them.

In keeping with COVID-19 safety standards, a hybrid (in-person and virtual) early commemorative event was organized today in Addis Ababa with refugees taking an active part. On the occasion, the principals of ARRA and UNHCR paid homage to refugees, their hosts and frontline humanitarian workers for staying strong and doing their part to keep each other safe.

The key messages of the day revolved around education, highlighting the need for including refugees in national education systems for the benefit of both communities. Education gives refugee children a sense of normalcy, routine and social cohesion, while also providing them skills and development that will help them build a better future

In Ethiopia where 55 percent of refugee children are in school, UNHCR's Representative Ann Encontre commended the efforts and inclusive policies of the Government which have resulted in "remarkable progress in increasing the enrolment of refugee children and the youth over the last few years".

She added: "Nevertheless, too many refugee children are still out of school – and COVID-19 has only exacerbated the situation. We all need to come together to do more to ensure that even more refugee children get the chance of realizing their potential."

Schools have reopened following extended closure due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, meeting the necessary COVID-19 precautionary measures remains a challenge as most schools are congested and have limited handwashing facilities and other amenities.

Ethiopia's progressive refugee law grants refugees access to education and allows qualified refugees to obtain work permits. At the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the Government pledged to provide quality and accredited skills training to 20,000 refugee and host community youth on an equitable basis, taking into account the labour market demand and linkages with existing and new commitments in expanding socio-economic opportunities.

"Ethiopia is doing its part in ensuring refugees have access to primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as to include them in the national education system", said Tesfahun Gobeze, Director General of ARRA. "However, lack of resources is limiting the Government's ability to make good on its promises."

With a call for responsibility and burden-sharing in line with the key principles of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Director General assured his "Government's commitment to continue with enduring generosity which demonstrates an exemplary level of solidarity to brothers and sisters who happen to be refugees in Ethiopia."

World Refugee Day 2021 is being commemorated at a time when global displacement figures have hit a historic high of more than 82 million people, according to new figures released today in UNHCR's Global Trends in Forced Displacement-report. Girls and boys under the age of 18 account for 42 per cent of all forcibly displaced people.

As the third largest refugee-hosting country on the African continent, Ethiopia hosts nearly 800,000 refugees of whom 52 percent are school-aged children, and nearly half of them are still waiting for a chance to go to school.

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