



# PROVIDING HOPE, INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES & PROTRACTED CRISES



# Providing Hope, Investing in the Future: Education in Emergencies & Protracted Crises

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Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organization whose mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

Headquartered in Rome, JRS has Regional offices in: Bangkok (Asia Pacific), Beirut (Middle East and North Africa), Bogota (Latin America and the Caribbean), Brussels (Europe), Bujumbura (Great Lakes Africa), Johannesburg (Southern Africa), Nairobi (Eastern Africa), New Delhi (South Asia), Washington, D.C. (North America), and Yaoundé (West Africa).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**oday, 75 million children and adolescents aged 3-18 have had their education directly affected by emergencies and protracted crises.<sup>[1]</sup> Of those identified as refugees or internally displaced persons by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 50 percent are enrolled in primary school, 25 percent in lower secondary school, and very few have access to pre-primary or tertiary education.<sup>[2]</sup>

The severity of this education gap has garnered a new groundswell of support for investing in education in conflict and crisis settings. The magnitude of the need also calls for an opportunity to re-think the way that educational programs are developed and funded.

Given that the average length of displacement for a refugee is 17 years,<sup>[3]</sup> it is impractical to consider emergency assistance and long-term development as separate endeavors. Rather, the longevity of these problems require us to creatively approach new partnerships and new models of funding. Likewise, protracted conflicts are changing the long-term options for those who are displaced. They must be given the opportunity to forge a future for themselves and their families.

This paper details the work of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a Catholic, non-governmental organization working with refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in over 40 countries. In the past 35 years, JRS has placed an emphasis on ensuring that the most vulnerable have access to an education, regardless of their circumstances. Working both in newer emergencies, like Syria, and in protracted displacement settings including Chad, Ethiopia and Kenya, JRS is poised to offer substantive, thoughtful insight on providing effective, quality education programs for the forcibly displaced.

JRS aims to employ the following critical strategies to increase access to a quality education for the forcibly displaced:

- Parental Involvement to Ensure Access and Retention
- A Holistic Approach that Meets All Student Needs
- Complementary Programs for Parents and Families
- Investment in Teacher Training and Tertiary Education
- Emphasis on Language Skills and Remedial Education
- Youth Programming Focused on Life Skills & Leadership Training

Access to schools and quality education is an urgent priority for all refugee children and youth. It is a basic human right and is fundamental to a better future for their communities. For these reasons, JRS advocates for the basic right to emergency and long-term educational opportunities and urges better access

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1. The Overseas Development Institute (2016). "Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a Fund for Education in Emergencies." <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10497.pdf>

2. The Overseas Development Institute (2015). "Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises: Toward a Strengthened Response." <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9714.pdf>

3. The UN Refugee Agency (2014). "Resolve Conflicts or Face Surge in Life-Long Refugees Worldwide, Warns UNHCR Special Envoy." <http://www.unhcr.org/53a42f6d9.html>

to formal, informal and skill-building and vocational training programs for refugee children, youth and adults.

To improve the quality of, and access to, education in emergencies and protracted crises, JRS recommends the following:

- **Prioritization of access to education** in all stages of humanitarian response and through development initiatives.
- **Adequate and sustainable funding** for the education of all refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, both in emergency and protracted crisis settings.
- **Better coordination of education programs** between host countries and humanitarian agencies and alignment of programs with country plans and systems.
- **Effective transition from humanitarian response** programming to long-term education development, through coordinated planning between humanitarian and development actors.
- **Improved quality of education** for the displaced, with a focus on special needs and equal access across genders and the prioritization of language training, long-term livelihoods development, and the use of technology.
- **Integration of refugees** into host communities, as appropriate, including integration of children into local school systems, access to employment opportunities and equitable compensation for the displaced.
- **Assurance that schools remain safe** and secure places free from armed groups, forcible military conscription, sexual violence, and discrimination.
- **Academic institutions accept international certificates, diplomas and degrees** and explore the possibility of mainstreaming the accreditation process across countries and school systems.
- **A diverse group of partners mobilize support for education in emergencies and protracted crises** and support new efforts – including *Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies* – to address this critical issue.

Past investments in educational progress are in jeopardy as we face a record number of long-standing conflicts and resulting global displacement. Donors, governments and the humanitarian and development communities must take action and seize an historic opportunity to grow, and leverage, the political will to address the lack of access to education for the forcibly displaced.

## INTRODUCTION

The world has been transfixed over the overwhelming images of refugees and their stories in the media today. Violent conflicts and other emergencies have motivated more than 60 million people to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere, exceeding all previous records for global forced displacement.<sup>[1]</sup> As a result of the increasing movement of people worldwide, there is a greater need to provide basic necessities and services to affected communities.

The right to education is a fundamental right, and its importance has been outlined in multiple international covenants, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed in 1948.

Article 26 of the Declaration states that everyone has a right to free and compulsory elementary education, and that technical training and higher education be equally accessible to all.<sup>[2]</sup> Similarly, the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention focuses explicitly on the inherent right to primary education by stating that “elementary education is to be provided to refugees in the same manner as for nationals.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Education is more than just a right and a response to an immediate need; education also engenders hope as it prepares refugees to meet future challenges. Education provides stability and a sense of normalcy, and acts as a form of vital psychosocial support to children whose lives have been affected by crisis. An education can also lessen a child’s vulnerability to child labor, sexual violence, recruitment into armed groups, or early marriage.

Education plays a critical role in preparing individuals and their communities to recover and rebuild after conflict or disaster. Education is an important tool to promote and ensure greater peace and rehabilitation following an emergency situation. With access to a quality education, individuals can better fulfill their own potential and fully contribute to the growth, strength and stability of their society.

Despite education services being a recognized human right, many refugee populations are facing increasing challenges in accessing a quality education. Today, 75 million children and adolescents aged 3-18 have had their education directly affected by emergencies and

If all children were to leave school with the ability to read, there would be a 12 percent decrease in global poverty levels.

protracted crises.<sup>[4]</sup> This number includes children who are out of school due to education disruption or drop out, as well as those whose education is poor quality or who are affected by psychosocial or safety concerns.

Of those identified as refugees or internally displaced persons by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 50 percent are enrolled in primary school, 25 percent in lower secondary school, and very few have access to pre-primary or tertiary education.<sup>[5]</sup> Given that the average length of displacement for a refugee is 17 years,<sup>[6]</sup> the importance of access to an education is critical.

Lack of educational opportunities can have a profound effect not only on the individual in question, but also the society in which they live. Education has been proven to jumpstart economic growth, and current figures estimate that each additional year of education brings a 10 percent increase in income with it. If all children were to leave school with the ability to read, there would be a 12 percent decrease in global poverty levels.<sup>[7]</sup>

Though the need for adequate and equitable education for all cannot be denied, current programming for education in crises faces many obstacles. These include lack of prioritization as part of emergency response, limited funding, and lack of coordination with development actors. Practical challenges include barriers to access, change in language or curriculum and significant lapses in time spent in school.

Yet, while the global community faces unprecedented challenges, we are witnessing a never-before-seen opportunity. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals with Goal 4 focused on access to education; and Government ministers from more than 100 countries adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, which contained a specific commitment to education for refugees and the internally displaced.<sup>[8]</sup>

In July 2015, the Oslo Summit on Education for

4. The Overseas Development Institute (2016). “Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a Fund for Education in Emergencies.” <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10497.pdf>

5. The Overseas Development Institute (2015). “Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises: Toward a Strengthened Response.” <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9714.pdf>

6. The UN Refugee Agency (2014). “Resolve Conflicts or Face Surge in Life-Long Refugees Worldwide, Warns UNHCR Special Envoy.” <http://www.unhcr.org/53a42f6d9.html>

7. UNICEF (2015). “The Investment Case for Education and Equity.” [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Investment\\_Case\\_for\\_Education\\_and\\_Equity\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Investment_Case_for_Education_and_Equity_FINAL.pdf)

8. UNESCO (2015). “World Education Forum Adopts Declaration on the Future of Education.” [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/world\\_education\\_forum\\_adopts\\_declaration\\_on\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_education/#.Vs9lkvkrLq4](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/world_education_forum_adopts_declaration_on_the_future_of_education/#.Vs9lkvkrLq4)

1. UNHCR (December 18, 2015). “2015 likely to break records for forced displacement – study.” <http://www.unhcr.org/5672c2576.html>

2. United Nations (1948). “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

3. United Nations (1951). “The Refugee Convention.” <http://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>

Development laid the groundwork for a new common platform for education in emergencies and protracted crises, set to be launched at the inaugural World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. This platform – Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies - aims to adequately finance efforts to meet the educational needs of millions of children and young people affected by crisis, improve processes within the humanitarian and development spheres to better provide long-term educational services, and cultivate new political will to tackle this critical issue.

Amid this renewed commitment for education in crisis settings and as the global community seeks to operationalize the delivery of quality educational programs in new and long-standing crises, Jesuit Refugee Service offers insights, lessons learned and recommendations gleaned from over 35 years of work in this sector.

Informed by a February 2016 survey of JRS programs in East Africa, West Africa and the Middle East/North Africa, as well as best practices from JRS programs in other parts of the world, this paper provides a snapshot of JRS education programs. The resulting analysis offers a broader picture of the challenges and opportunities available to those providing education for the displaced, as well as recommendations for the global community to better serve the most vulnerable among us.

## The Jesuit Response

The Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers known as the Jesuits, have been deeply engaged in education since founding a network of high schools across Europe beginning in the 16th century.<sup>[9]</sup>

Jesuit Refugee Service is similarly rooted in the Jesuit tradition of educating young people. Founded in 1980 by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., then Superior General of the Jesuits, JRS currently operates education programming in more than 25 countries serving over 110,000 refugees and displaced persons.

JRS considers education a life-saving intervention and offers a variety of opportunities for refugees and displaced persons to achieve an education both in refugee camps and in non-camp settings. These include access to pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education. In addition, JRS offers vocational and teacher training programs, targeted outreach to women, girls and those with disabilities, and supports the building of new schools and distribution of school books and materials.

In emergencies, JRS is on the ground organizing educational activities to heal trauma, promote human dignity, and build skills. The JRS approach fosters positive change. It nurtures both individual growth and long-

term, durable solutions that draw communities away from conflict and toward a shared, peaceable future. An element of education finds a place in all programs offered by JRS from health promotion to sensitizing individuals about their rights, to teaching respect for the environment.<sup>[10]</sup>

In November 2015, Pope Francis gathered the leadership of Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome to commend JRS on its 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and ask for participation in the 2016 Year of Mercy by undertaking a Global Education Initiative. Through an increased focus and investment in education, JRS aims to double the number of refugees currently served through its education programs by the year 2020.

## JRS Education Programs

JRS' approach to education is a comprehensive, holistic one, rooted in the model of accompaniment, which refers to "walking with" an individual as they begin their journey as a refugee. In 35 years of serving refugees, JRS has developed education programming that aims to feature several key strategies, including:

- **Parental involvement** through regular parent-teacher meetings, information sessions and individual meetings between social workers and parents whose children are having challenges at school.
- **Holistic approach** that support students' nutritional, transportation, hygiene and health needs in order for them to benefit from a quality education.
- **Complementary programs for parents and families** including psychosocial support and education centers that also act as a community hub for families to interact with each other.
- **Teacher training** provided regularly both for current and new teachers, focused on participatory methods and new learning approaches.
- **Language skills and remedial education** to ensure that children are able to catch-up and integrate into formal education programs.
- **Youth programming** focused on life skills and leadership to promote social cohesion, tolerance and building resilience.

These successful strategies are incorporated into much of JRS' programming from pre-primary through tertiary education, as well as other critical interventions.

**Pre-Primary** – Investing in early childhood development programs is crucial to ensuring that children have a strong start in their personal and intellectual development. Pre-primary education plays a unique role in the lives of children and families who have been displaced. JRS has witnessed the benefits of pre-school interventions to

9. Raper, Mark, S.J. (2000). "Everybody's Challenge." <https://www.jrsusa.org/assets/Publications/File/EverybodysChallenge.pdf>

10. Jesuit Refugee Service (2005). "Horizons of Learning: 25 Years of JRS Education."

## JRS Education Programs: A Global Snapshot

**Asia Pacific** (Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand) Primarily offering continuing education services for Burmese refugees in Thailand and formal education IDPs and returnees in Myanmar, JRS serves more than 8,400 people.

**South Asia** (Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka) From providing tertiary education to the internally displaced in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, with a focus on women, to serving the final Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, JRS is serving close to 28,000 people through its education programs in South Asia.

**Eastern Africa** (Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda) JRS offers a broad range of education programs in both urban and camp settings and serves both refugees and internally displaced persons, reaching more than 20,000 people.

**Great Lakes** (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo) Working in one of the most volatile regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, JRS is serving more than 9,700 people through its tertiary education program and vocational training.

**Southern Africa** (Angola, Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe) JRS offers primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as vocational training in places like Dzaleka camp in Malawi, which hosts refugees and asylum seekers from all over Africa, and Tongogara camp in Zimbabwe, serving more than 9,600 students throughout the region.

**West Africa** (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad) JRS serves more than 37,000 refugees in seven refugee camps through formal education programs (pre-primary through tertiary) and vocational and skills-based training programs.

**Middle East** (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) Working primarily in urban areas, JRS offers a full range of services to accommodate local needs including remedial learning programs as well as formal education programs, teacher training, life skills and vocational training, reaching more than 5,600 people.

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address issues related to displacement, including trauma. In West Africa, JRS partner iAct implements an innovative “Little Ripples” early childhood education program, which trains and employs refugee women to provide culturally inspired home-based preschool education.<sup>[11]</sup> This unique program improves the early development of refugee children by emphasizing social-emotional learning, peacebuilding, language and mathematics literacy, and physical development of the child.

**Primary** – JRS primary school programs offer stability and a sense of normalcy for children who have either been recently displaced or have only known camp-life since they were born. Primary schools offer safe spaces and supervision that parents and caregivers can trust and psychosocial sensitive programming to help children better cope with their changed environment and circumstances.

**Secondary** – Most education responses in humanitarian settings focus predominantly on primary school with little emphasis on access to secondary education. There is a significant drop in enrollment rates from primary school to secondary school, yet access to secondary school is critical for displaced persons to gain access to greater opportunities, including jobs and the possibility of tertiary education. JRS places an emphasis on establishing opportunities for secondary education and aims to increase its work in this area as part of its newly-launched Global Education Initiative.

**Tertiary Education** – Very few refugees or displaced persons have access to tertiary education, although it is higher education that will produce the leaders and skilled workforce that societies need to move forward, in particular after crisis and conflict. Beginning in 2010, JRS sought to find a solution to this dilemma and partnered with Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) to offer a distance-learning tertiary education program for refugees and other displaced persons. By

11. iAct (2016). “Little Ripples: Building Preschools in Darfur Refugee Camps.” <http://littleripples.org>



### **Program Highlight: Bhutanese Refugee Education Program**

In the early 1990s, over 100,000 southern Bhutanese of Nepalese origin fled Bhutan due to ethnic discrimination. Settling in refugee camps within Nepal, JRS played a pivotal role in educating thousands of Bhutanese by administering the Bhutanese Refugee Education Program (BREP), in partnership with Caritas.

At one time the largest formal education program for refugees in the world, BREP offered pre-primary through secondary education programs and was highly successful due to an emphasis on teacher training, gender equity, the inclusion of children with disabilities, and significant community participation. In the early years, BREP administrators invested time in raising awareness about the importance of education, going from hut to hut to meet parents and encouraging them to send their children to school.

With no prospect of returning home, the global resettlement of Bhutanese refugees began in 2008, with plans for the process to be completed and camps closed by the end of 2016. Understanding this reality, BREP offered a hybrid Bhutanese and Nepalese curriculum and the language of instruction was English. With a strong educational foundation, resettled refugees have begun their new lives at a significant advantage.

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offering a Diploma in Liberal Arts as well as certificate courses in counseling, special needs education, English as a second language and healthcare, JRS currently reaches students in six different countries, who otherwise may not have a chance to access higher education opportunities.

**Teacher Training** - The importance of qualified, trained teachers - in any educational setting - cannot be underestimated. JRS places an emphasis on teacher training in its programs by training both new teachers and promoting skills formation for current teachers and administrators. Prioritizing teacher training ensures a supply of skilled teachers, alleviates classroom overcrowding, and improves the overall quality of education in schools.

**Remedial Learning Programs** - In areas where refugee children are enrolled in host country public schools, JRS offers programs to supplement the education they are receiving, and to fill some of the gaps where needs are not being met. Where children are not able to access public education for any reason, JRS offers non-formal education programs that follow national curricula and help children improve their basic education skills, increasing their chances of being enrolled in formal education programs in the future.



## Student Profile: Nora Issa Ahmat — Goz Amir, Chad

Nora Issa Ahmat, 14, lives in Goz Amir Camp in eastern Chad. She was born in Darfur, Sudan and fled with her family when she was three years old, due to violence in the region. She lives with her parents, brothers and grandparents, a total of 13 people.

“We are poor, my parents farm to feed the family but it is not enough. I have to participate; I sell biscuits in the market.” Nora attends a JRS-run school and took part in a JRS-organized session for girls on the importance of education. “I told my parents and my friends what I learned. I understood how important it was for me to go to school. I try to convince the girls around me to study.”

**Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Courses** – Working to ensure that adults also have access to educational programs is a key part of JRS’ work across the globe. By developing and implementing programs focused on literacy and building basic skills – including knowledge about nutrition, agriculture, and basic math – JRS is meeting the educational needs of refugees and displaced persons. For example, JRS staff in Chad report that when basic math skills are introduced to otherwise illiterate young mothers, they are better able to contribute to their family’s income. Yet, while adult literacy programs can convey immediate benefits, opportunities remain limited for students to enter formal education programs.

**Vocational Training** – JRS works closely with displaced communities to offer a wide variety of vocational training programs that provide otherwise unskilled individuals with income-generating opportunities. This includes tailoring, embroidery, catering, plumbing, and hair dressing, among many others. In some cases, JRS is able to offer small business loans to empower refugees to access the labor market, but this is also an area where JRS staff identify significant gaps and high demand from the populations they serve. There is a need for more technical and vocational skills-based programming, tied closely to local market needs and generating livelihood opportunities for program participants.

**Accommodating Special Needs** - JRS places a special emphasis on identifying and offering assistance to children with mental or physical disabilities as well as orphans and separated or unaccompanied children. In some countries where JRS operates, special needs students are escorted to and from school by JRS staff, are exempted from any fees and receive their own school supplies. Yet, JRS staff report that in some places, there is still hesitation from teachers to instruct disabled children due to lack of training in how to integrate them into a classroom. Some parents are also reluctant to allow their disabled children to attend school. JRS continues to prioritize accommodation in its programming by assessing how many disabled children are out of school and

conducting trainings with teachers on inclusive education.

**Extracurricular Activities** - Offering students opportunities to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives extends to extracurricular activities outside of the classroom that complement formal instruction. JRS organizes sports activities, hosts libraries and offers a variety of clubs including ones focused on painting, music, and newspaper production. In Ethiopia, JRS offers programs in music for Eritrean refugees to help preserve and sustain their cultural heritage as well as courses in theater and acting, play writing and directing. In Iraq, JRS runs a Youth Empowerment Program which includes discussion groups, outings, and theatre workshops.

Overall, JRS places a special emphasis on working closely with communities to identify their particular educational needs and to develop a broad range of programming to address those needs. JRS embodies its mission to accompany refugees and other forcibly displaced persons through its personalized approach, whether providing support for school supplies, engaging adults through literacy programs, or encouraging families to enroll their daughters in school.

### Focus on Women & Girls

In many displaced communities, girls face a particular disadvantage in being able to access an education. In fact, girls are almost two and a half times more likely to be out of school if they live in conflict-affected countries, and young women are nearly 90 percent more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict.<sup>[12]</sup> JRS works closely with families to raise awareness about the benefits of education for girls and address the gender norms that impede female students from having access to school.

In South Sudan, JRS implements a program focused on girls as they enter secondary school, the time when they are most at risk of being pulled from school. The onset of puberty creates cultural and logistical barriers to girls’

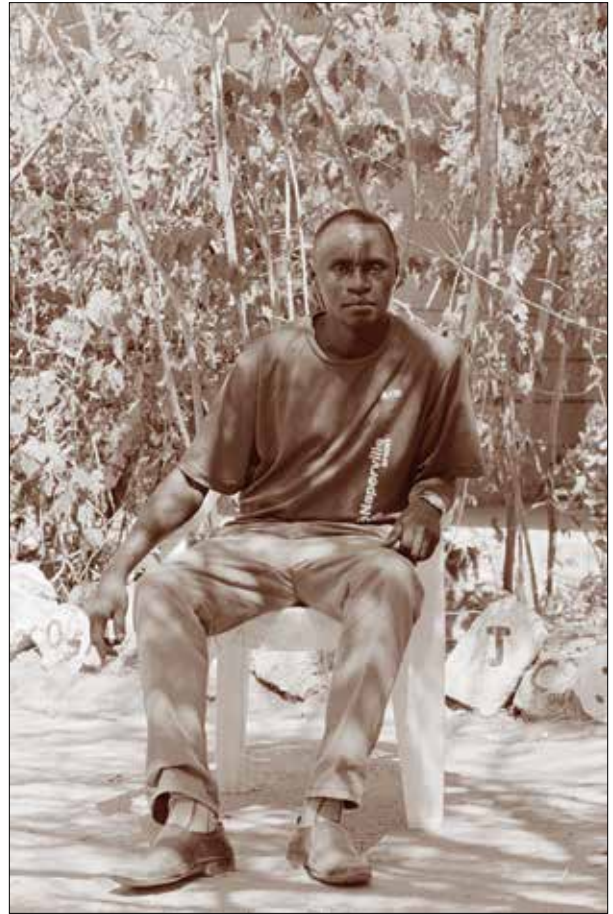
12. UNESCO (2015). “Education for All Global Monitoring Report Policy Paper.” <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002335/233557E.pdf>

## Student Profile: Patrick Owwa – Kakuma, Kenya

Patrick Owwa, 31, (right) came to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya at the age of 13 after fleeing conflict in South Sudan. He arrived without his parents and had never attended a day of school in his life but was eventually able to complete primary and then secondary school. After scoring high marks in the camp schools, he was accepted into the JC:HEM higher education program available in the camp and given the chance to pursue a diploma in education from Regis University in Denver, Colorado.

Growing up in the camp alone was difficult, he says but his focus remained on securing an education. “I can only restore hope through education because learning helps me transform myself and to discover my dignity and uniqueness,” he said.

Since graduating with his Regis University diploma, Patrick currently runs a community-based organization in the camp called the Refugee Advancement Education Program. He aims to help refugees who haven’t yet completed school to finish a primary certificate or to take job training courses. “It is a window of opportunity for them to be able to learn to read, do basic math for their businesses and learn English and Swahili,” he said.



continued education. Early marriage and pregnancy contribute to many girls dropping out of school, and for those who aren’t married, other cultural constraints and even a simple lack of sanitary supplies keeps many from regularly attending school. To address this challenge, JRS sponsors girls by helping to cover their school-related fees and providing sanitary kits as well as school supplies. While the number of boys enrolled in JRS schools in South Sudan is still higher than the number of girls, this type of intervention has helped to increase opportunities for girls to finish their formal education.

In Chad, staff make a concerted effort to engage women in a number of ways. This includes forming clubs for women and promoting women as leaders in groups like the Parent Associations at JRS-run schools. Women also play an important role in mass “sensitization” campaigns organized by JRS to reach out to the refugee communities about the importance of educating women and girls. JRS distributes scarves and math kits to girls to incentivize them to take part and enlists women from the community to visit families in their homes and at the local mosque to share their views on education. Many talk about how learning to read and write at an earlier age would have allowed them to better cope with life and the challenging circumstances they have endured.

There is also a strong hesitation on the part of young mothers to attend school and leave their children. JRS works closely with young mothers, including unmarried women, who do not have the resources for childcare while they attend classes. For example, in Chad, JRS organizes daycares near some of its schools so that mothers can leave their children without worry. These daycares are also available to teachers and women taking part in literacy courses or income-generating activities. The daycare facilitators are trained by JRS and engage in meaningful play and formative activities with the children.

### Barriers to Achieving an Education

Families and children seeking access to education during humanitarian emergencies or protracted crises face a variety of barriers. Through their work implementing education programs in both settings, Jesuit Refugee Service staff identified the following areas as posing the most significant challenges.

**Access** - During conflict, many displaced families and children lack crucial information on school admission procedures or face barriers due to legal status. In Ethiopia, refugee children are able to access free education from government-run educational institutions from primary through tertiary levels, yet for those without official



*Students share a text book in Chad's Djabal refugee camp.*

refugee status, expenses are not covered. This includes fees for tuition, school uniforms, books and transportation which are impediments to their education. In Kenya, lack of host country recognition of student qualifications from their home countries poses another barrier to access. In Uganda, while there are no real restrictions for displaced students to enter school and refugees are able to work and contribute financially to education-related costs, JRS staff report that school credits from refugee home countries are rarely recognized.

**Infrastructure** - Adequate, easily accessible and safe school spaces pose a challenge in many areas serving refugees and other displaced persons. In West Africa, staff share that there is a lack of construction materials as well as water and power sources for JRS-run schools. In Chad, most school structures were built by UNHCR 12 years ago when the Darfur crisis first began. At that time, it was unclear how long the displaced would need housing, so construction was done with non-durable materials. With no long-term solution in place, the current infrastructure is now collapsing. Similar challenges exist in Sudan, where JRS staff report that 90% of students sit on the ground during school lessons due to the lack of furniture.

**School Fees & Materials** - Lack of adequate resources in conflict and crisis settings often means that families cannot cover the cost of school fees or that there are not enough materials to ensure quality instruction and an effective learning environment. JRS staff report a broad range of challenges across regions, with notably

more significant challenges in protracted crisis settings, where funding and support from the global community has increasingly diminished. In Kenya, although refugee children legally have equal access to public primary schools and tuition is free, additional expenses such as school uniforms and meals often make it difficult for refugees to afford. In Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, students and their families incur some school-related costs including a percentage of transportation costs to travel to school. This is compared to schools in Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi where the teacher to student ratio is approximately 1:90; or Chad where one textbook is shared among 20 refugee students.

**Language & Curriculum** - When displaced, many children face a language barrier or change in curriculum in their host countries. Syrian refugees face foreign language barriers in Turkey and Lebanon and differences in curricula that are often difficult to adapt to. In Lebanon, French or English are used for teaching certain subjects, including Math and Science, while the official language of instruction in Syria is Arabic. Refugees in Turkey face similar challenges, since the language of instruction is Turkish. In these circumstances, an emphasis on language skills and instruction is critical, to ensure that students are able to adequately integrate and prepare for formal schooling.

JRS staff in Chad recently managed a significant change in curriculum for Darfuri refugees. Starting in 2015, the Chadian Government required schools serving refugees to



### **Program Highlight: Psychosocial Support in Lebanon**

All students in JRS-run education programs in Lebanon begin with a five-day psychosocial program that helps refugee students integrate into the local school system. The program covers a central theme each day, including discipline and classroom procedures, communication, emotions and expressing oneself, family and hygiene. A social worker remains present at the center at all times and continues to monitor students through observations, one-on-one meetings with students and families, weekly meetings with teachers, and by conducting regular workshops for families as well as teachers.

In addition, JRS social workers, assisted by art teachers, have partnered with No Strings International, a UK-based nonprofit that helps children deal with loss due to conflict or disaster through puppetry (above).

By presenting vital messages about trauma and how to adapt to a new environment, JRS students have been able to better express their emotions and cope with their circumstances. Feedback from this program has been very positive and JRS is exploring expanding it in other areas.

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transition from the Sudanese curriculum to the Chadian curriculum. While the language of instruction remained Arabic, students were now required to also learn French. Other differences included gaps in the degree equivalence between the two educational systems and in training among Sudanese refugee teachers who are now being asked to cover a number of new subjects as part of the Chadian curriculum. While in some camps refugees have integrated well and did not oppose this change, others retain hopes of returning home and resisted this transition.

**Discrimination** - For some displaced children who are integrated into host country schools, the school environment can pose its own challenges. In the Middle East, JRS staff report discrimination against refugees in some cases, which results in bullying by other students or even teachers. Staff have witnessed stolen items, locked bathrooms or even locked classrooms as a means of creating challenges for refugee students. In addition to further degrading a student's psychosocial wellbeing, this type of discrimination has caused some families to withdraw their students from school.

I am Mahdi Al Hussein, I am a Syrian refugee in Lebanon. I am from Homs. My favorite hobby is football. I wanted to become a doctor.

### Student Profile: Mahdi Al Hussein – Beirut, Lebanon

*Excerpt from letter to JRS:*

I am Mahdi Al Hussein [15 years old], I am a Syrian refugee in Lebanon. I am from Homs. My favorite hobby is football. I wanted to become a doctor before the Syrian Revolution. I think the most dangerous result was the schools and universities closure. That's why I stopped my study for almost one year. I moved with my family to a "peaceful" area. I studied there the 7th Grade and passed this class with high degrees. [After my grandfather was kidnapped and killed we were] forced to leave the country and travel to Lebanon. I registered my name in JRS school. It helped me in many ways, I learned the basics in English and French languages. In addition, I met new friends. I hope to become a pilot in the future, to go away from the discrimination and bigotry in this world. Finally I hope that peace returns to Syria, my lovely country.

**Learning Gaps** - Students who have experienced crisis and conflict often endure significant gaps in their education. Children who have missed years of education or never started formal education as a result of war and displacement often face difficulties adapting to the school environment when they first enroll, particularly when their education skills are far behind other students in their age group and class. JRS remedial learning programs aim to minimize the effects of these learning gaps as much as possible, but in some instances students who have experienced a gap in their learning must share a classroom with younger students. This age difference can be challenging for some students to accept and sometimes is the cause for bullying or harassment by younger students.

**Trauma** - Children who have experienced conflict are at risk for a range of mental health issues resulting from their traumatic experiences. The trauma of violence and war, loss of loved ones, tense family life, and challenging living conditions take a toll on the psychosocial wellbeing of displaced children. In the Middle East, JRS staff report that refugee families are experiencing high levels of anxiety, depression, lethargy, eating and sleeping problems, anger and fatigue. JRS staff report that some children attending JRS education centers in Lebanon suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and are treated by social workers with the support of the psychiatric department at a local hospital. There are also children with language and speech impediments, often connected to the trauma they have witnessed.

In the Central African Republic, despite security challenges and program suspensions due to ongoing fighting among warring parties, JRS has been engaged in

peace building and reconciliation programs for conflict-affected communities, with a particular focus on young internally displaced persons. In Ethiopia, JRS identifies students who have suffered trauma or torture through individual and group counseling sessions, in collaboration with parents and teachers.

**Food & Nutrition** - Cuts in food rations and limited access to income for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons create significant problems for families and their ability to provide the proper nutrition necessary for their children to learn. In the Middle East, JRS staff report that some parents are forced to reduce the size and frequency of meals for their families, and this lack of nutrition inhibits children's learning ability by interfering with concentration and focus. Children may not attend school or be forced to leave class because of mild to severe stomach pain from hunger. JRS staff in North Darfur report similar challenges due to lack of access to adequate food and water, also resulting in school drop outs.

**Security** - There are persistent security challenges in crisis-affected countries, which prevent children from attending school. In the Central African Republic, continuous armed rebellions due to political instability make it challenging to offer consistent access to education for students. In Sudan, where JRS operates education programs in the Northern Darfur region, insecurity due to sporadic militia attacks poses a constant challenge. Not only are roads made inaccessible and children cannot walk to school, but frequent displacement of families and children make regular school attendance difficult. In Syria, where JRS offers tutoring programs and supplementary school instruction, security is an



### **Student Profile: Sylvia — Kampala, Uganda**

*Sylvia is 19 years old and was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She studies English at the Jesuit Refugee Service Center in Kampala, Uganda.*

In my dreams I am a journalist, a college-educated writer, but, today, I am a refugee. Becoming a refugee changed my life for the worse - I can't study anymore and I'm raising my sisters alone without an income. It's very hard to find food and pay the rent.

Sometimes, I fear I may have to sell my body to make ends meet. I can't work here and don't have parents to rely on. Luckily, I have a house to live in but I don't know how to find money for my survival.

When I think about the day my parents were killed I feel so sad to realize we can't be together anymore. We used to share many things, we danced and talked and loved each other. I never thought I would lose them all to war until it happened and I was in exile.

Coming to another country has been my chance to share with other people. I am proud of myself for learning so much from my experience and especially for improving my English. I know if I study, I can achieve more. I hope peace returns to my country so I can go back or that I can go overseas to make my dream come true: to become a journalist.

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ongoing concern. But JRS staff continue to find solutions by locating programs in areas close to where students reside, minimizing transportation challenges and travel in insecure areas.

### **Link to Livelihoods**

The link between education and livelihoods for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons is inextricable. Lack of employment rights for refugees in many places results in limited opportunities to earn an income for themselves and their families. On one hand, this makes it difficult for families to cover the costs associated with educating



*JRS works to ensure women with children have access to school.*

their children. And, on the other hand, individuals are discouraged about completing their education when there are no opportunities for employment.

Even after completing formal (or informal) education, displaced persons face challenges finding employment opportunities in a camp setting and outside of camps, among the host country population. In camp settings where JRS operates programming, some employment opportunities are available, including teacher positions in camp schools or managing youth programs. Yet, wages are so low that many have to take on multiple jobs or feel discouraged due to the minimal compensation.

Outside of a camp setting, many host countries do not grant employment rights to refugees. In Chad, JRS staff report that, apart from teaching and nursing positions, refugees are not able to secure employment. Even in these instances, refugees are refused the same salary as Chadians even after securing state qualifications as either a teacher or a nurse.

In Ethiopia, refugees do not have a legal right to engage in any kind of formal employment, although informal work is tolerated. In Kenya, the government implements a total encampment policy and refugees are in theory allowed to work through the acquisition of a special permit, although in practice they are “very difficult to obtain,” according to a JRS staff person. In South Sudan, an area experiencing active conflict, opportunities for employment outside the camps are almost non-existent.

## The Impact of Inaction

For children in crisis situations, education is an absolute necessity. Neglecting refugees’ right to education – and the protection it affords – undermines not only their future, but also the future of their societies. Lack of education leaves children more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including recruitment into armed groups, child labor, and early marriage.

Children who are not formally educated are more likely to feel marginalized and hopeless, making them vulnerable targets for radicalization. Recruitment into armed groups remains a threat - JRS staff in Chad often witness instances where young, vulnerable refugees are targeted by paramilitary groups in Darfur looking to recruit members to fight on their behalf, back in Sudan.

In Mai Aini camp in northern Ethiopia, JRS staff witness many young Eritrean refugees leaving out of desperation, upon realizing that they have limited education and work opportunities. They put their trust into the hands of smugglers and often endure torture in the desert, death in the Mediterranean or become embroiled in complicated European asylum processes or held in detention centers.

In many regions where JRS operates programming, children are not in school or have dropped out due to the burden of domestic work, including collecting water, firewood, cooking, housekeeping and taking care of children. Others are asked to contribute to their family’s livelihood by helping with the grazing of animals or working in food kiosks or by delivering water to homes, as reported in the North Darfur region of Sudan. In a number of countries where JRS operates programming, staff have witnessed students leaving their studies because they are



### **Program Highlight: From “Lost Boys” to Leaders**

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, thousands of boys and girls fled Sudan’s second civil war, losing their families along the way. The fortunate few made it to Kakuma refugee camp in northeastern Kenya, first established in 1992 to house Sudanese refugees.

From 1995 until the mid-2000s, JRS offered scholarships for hundreds of unaccompanied minors living in Kakuma to attend local secondary schools. In addition to empowering the students themselves, the scholarship program also raised the standard of education in the camp. Scholarships could only be provided to the top one percent of primary school graduates, so all students worked hard to try to secure a spot in secondary school.

Most of these young refugees were eventually resettled to Australia, Canada, or the United States in the early 2000’s. There they were able to attain Bachelor’s degrees, and many also Master’s and Doctorate degrees, in part due to the education they received while living in Kakuma.

After years in exile and impressive academic and professional achievements, many have returned home to South Sudan, the world’s youngest nation, as it struggles to find peace in the midst of new conflict. JRS continues to offer educational opportunities to refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in South Sudan, in the hopes that a new generation will also be able to give back one day.





*An adult education class for refugees in Kenya's Kakuma camp.*

forced to work informally and, in some cases, submit to exploitative labor conditions in order to survive.

As noted earlier, JRS places a special emphasis on encouraging families to send their daughters to school, although early marriage is both a cause and consequence of limited educational opportunities. In some cases, cultural norms dictate that girls are pulled out of school so that they can be married. In other cases, families that are unable to send their daughters to school may see marriage as the only way to ensure that they are provided for.

The cost of denying children and youth access to an education is too high. We must take action to identify a path forward, and find a solution to the current challenges that are before us.

### **Financing Education in Crisis Settings**

The funding gap for education in emergencies and protracted crises is significant. Despite increased recognition of the importance of education, many decision-makers continue to prioritize other sectors - including water, food and shelter - that are in line with more traditional humanitarian responses.

The Overseas Development Institute has estimated that approximately \$11.6 billion per year is needed to provide educational support to the 75 million children aged 3-18 whose education is impacted by crisis, with an average cost of \$156 per child per year. Based on an analysis of the likely contribution of domestic governments, this leaves a total global funding gap of \$8.5 billion.<sup>[13]</sup>

13. The Overseas Development Institute (2016). "Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a Fund for Education in Emergencies." <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10497.pdf>

This funding gap is perpetuated not only by increasing conflict and numbers of displaced persons around the world, but limited support being offered by the donor community. On average, less than 2 percent of humanitarian aid supports education and learning opportunities.<sup>[14]</sup> And less than 10 percent of official development aid for education supports children in crisis countries.<sup>[15]</sup>

Challenges related to funding are evident throughout JRS education programs, as staff and partners struggle to deliver quality education with limited and ever-shrinking resources. JRS staff report that, on average, 70 percent of funding is provided on a short-term basis through annual contracts. Although not unique to JRS, this trend makes it difficult to develop any type of long-term, sustainable plan including any sort of exit strategy. In protracted crisis settings, which are becoming ever more common, some donors expect that refugees have gained some level of autonomy and self-sufficiency, when limitations in access to education, livelihoods and legal status make it all but impossible.

Overall, JRS works to empower families and students to share in the cost of education and build resilience by incorporating some form of cost sharing in much of its programming. Yet, in the most vulnerable cases, JRS seeks to provide accommodations to ensure that all students are able to access an education, and that no one is left behind.

14. The Overseas Development Institute (2015). "Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises: Toward a Strengthened Response." <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9714.pdf>

15. Lake, Anthony (July 3, 2015). Education in Emergencies. <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/oslo-education-summit-conflict-area-schools-by-anthony-lake-2015-07>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to schools and quality education is an urgent priority for all refugee children and youth, as it is a basic human right and is fundamental to a better future for their communities. For these reasons, JRS advocates for the basic right to emergency and long-term educational opportunities and urges better access to formal, informal and skill-building and vocational training programs for refugee children and youth.

To improve the quality of, and access to, education in emergencies and protracted crises, JRS recommends the following:

- **Prioritization of access to education** in all stages of humanitarian response and through development initiatives.
- **Adequate and sustainable funding** for the education of all refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, both in emergency and protracted crisis settings.
- **Better coordination of education programs** between host countries and humanitarian agencies and alignment of programs with country plans and systems.
- **Effective transition from humanitarian response** programming to long-term education development, through coordinated planning between humanitarian and development actors.
- **Improved quality of education** for the displaced, with a focus on special needs and equal access across genders and the prioritization of language training, long-term livelihoods development, and the use of technology.
- **Integration of refugees** into host communities, as appropriate, including integration of children into local school systems, access to employment opportunities and equitable compensation for the displaced.
- **Assurance that schools remain safe** and secure places free from armed groups, forcible military conscription, sexual violence, and discrimination.
- **Academic institutions accept international certificates, diplomas and degrees** and explore the possibility of mainstreaming the accreditation process across countries and school systems.
- **A diverse group of partners mobilize support for education in emergencies and protracted crises** and support new efforts — including *Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies* — to address this critical issue.

## CONCLUSION

Education is fundamental to recovery from humanitarian emergencies, preventing future conflict, and fostering stability and peace. Yet, past investments in educational progress are in jeopardy as the world faces a record number of long-standing conflicts and resulting global displacement. Governments, donors, and the humanitarian and development communities must take action and seize an historic opportunity to grow, and leverage, the political will to address the lack of access to education for the forcibly displaced.

Jesuit Refugee Service remains committed to ensuring that all displaced persons have access to an education, and will continue to work with governments and partners throughout the world to deliver a quality education to those who are most in need. Join us in this effort, to ensure that no child is forgotten.

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