



General Assemblies
Topic Guide

SOCHUM

Social, Humanitarian and
Cultural Committee

Yale Model United Nations China III

May 15-17, 2026

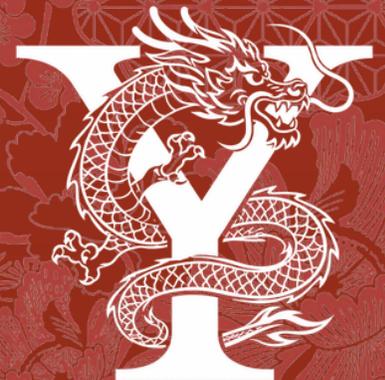


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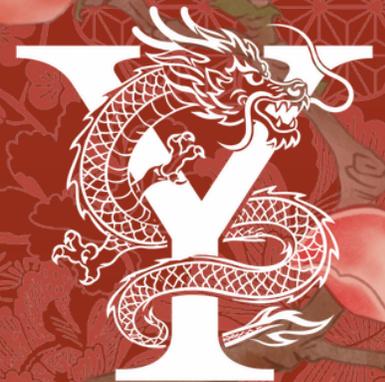
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Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to YMUN China 2026, and to the Committee on Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Issues! This Committee (also referred to as SOCHUM, or C3) is one of the six main bodies of the General Assembly, and all 193 member states can attend. SOCHUM focuses on social issues, passing resolutions to address a wide variety of global concerns - mainly centered around human rights and humanitarian affairs.

During this iteration of the conference, SOCHUM will consider the rights of displaced persons and refugees, which are becoming increasingly jeopardized as conflicts and insecure conditions around the world push people away from their homes. Specifically, the Committee will be narrowing in on two main issues that have arisen: Topic A, which looks into challenges within education systems that refugees face, and Topic B, which examines employment opportunities available to refugees.

During your time as a delegate, I hope you'll be able to look deeply into these problems and contemplate potential solutions, understanding not just the importance of the issues but also the difficulties that can arise with implementation. You should then seek to address these through lively debate, careful research, and innovative ideas.

My name is Greta Garrison, and I am a sophomore studying Global Affairs at Yale University. I'm originally from Ithaca, New York, and am hoping to eventually pursue law school. I play classical and jazz trumpet, I love to read, listen to music, and be outside - I actually grew up on a fruit and vegetable farm! Finally, I work as a Yale Admissions Ambassador and help high schoolers with college applications, so if you have any questions about this process, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I'm thrilled to be serving as the Committee Director for SOCHUM, and can't wait to see you all in Shenzhen this May.

Signed,
Greta Garrison
greta.garrison@yale.edu



Committee History



The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) was established by the United Nations as the third committee of the General Assembly; thus is one of the United Nations General Assembly's six main committees. Also known as the Third Committee, or C3, SOCHUM seeks to promote fundamental freedoms and uphold the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

SOCHUM considers issues related to violations of basic human rights, such as the right to life and freedoms like political participation and cultural expression. These critical issues are incredibly relevant today, and the committee recognizes that they often affect various groupings of people disproportionately. Because of this, SOCHUM also emphasizes the importance of considering these challenges in direct regard to several specific groups, including refugees and displaced persons, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The committee aims to do this through the creation and implementation of peaceful solutions and by conducting research and advocacy efforts. In accomplishing these goals, the committee works closely with experts and other UN agencies.

Delegates of Member States in SOCHUM often include delegates based in capitals or Geneva-based delegates to the Human Rights Council, in addition to those based in New York.

SOCHUM meets annually, with sessions typically concluding before Thanksgiving Day. In its most recent session this past December, SOCHUM passed a variety of resolutions, including one focused on the elimination of racial discrimination and xenophobia, as well as a report on the Human Rights Council, with which SOCHUM works closely alongside. More information is available on the United Nations official website about recent sessions and developments.

Today, SOCHUM is considered one of the most important bodies of the United Nations General Assembly and is instrumental in protecting many rights outlined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



General Assemblies
Topic Guide

1



Topic
One



Advancing Education Opportunities For Displaced Persons

Introduction

Conflicts and insecure living conditions have forced people around the world to seek safety in refugee camps or host countries. Education is an essential way for people to continue their lives and assimilate into new spaces; however, many challenges can arise in accessing adequate resources.

Glossary

- **Refugees** - A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster
- **Displaced Persons** - A person who has been forced to leave their home in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Includes both refugees and IDPs.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)** - A person who has been forced to leave their home in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster, but still resides within their home country.
- **Refugee camps** - temporary, emergency settlements established to provide shelter, food, and safety to people fleeing conflict, persecution, or disasters
- **De jure** - according to entitlement or claim, by law, rule, or legislation
- **De facto** - according to reality, empirical situations
- **Duka** - Small shop
- **FDP** - Forcibly displaced persons
- **NGO** - Non-governmental organization

- **Asylum-seekers** - individuals seeking international protection from persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group, but whose claims are still pending.
- **Neocolonialism** - the use of economic, political, and cultural pressures by developed nations or transnational entities to indirectly control, influence, or exploit developing nations, particularly former colonies.
- **Humanitarian Aid** - providing life-saving material, logistical, and medical assistance. This includes things such as food, water, and shelter, provided to people affected by events such as natural disasters, conflicts, and pandemics.

Topic History

Groups of people have been forcibly displaced throughout human history, and the question of how to best support them is one that has been considered for many years. With records dating back to antiquity, people have sought refuge abroad, leading to many mass migrations and much cultural exchange. As wars became increasingly large-scale, the number of displaced persons drastically increased as a result, and it became necessary to seek out large-scale solutions. One of these, refugee camps, was introduced as a product of World War I. Earl's Court, a London showground that was transformed into a camp to accommodate Belgian refugees who were fleeing invasion from Germany, is often cited as being the first of many.

With refugees making up an increasing portion of the general population, and many seeking either permanent refuge abroad or to remain in camps for extended periods - even full lifetimes, ensuring refugees have resources and support is a crucial issue in the humanitarian world. One of the most critical areas of concern is that of education. Education allows for opportunities and assimilation in host countries, and for many in refugee camps, education can provide the fundamentals necessary to succeed within the unstable setting, and even the chance to leave. More than this, education can provide safety: being in school can protect students from many different dangers, including child labour, early marriage and pregnancy, petty crime, forced recruitment, or even worse.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, brought education to the forefront of issues to consider regarding children. This important convention constrained two important provisions: that primary education be made “free and compulsory” for all, and that secondary and higher-level education be made available and accessible.

When it comes to these notions for refugee children, there are notable gaps in enrollment for secondary and higher-level education, which suggest that there is much to be done in making these components accessible.

Historically, failures of education systems to support refugees have been measured by enrollment numbers, graduation rates, grades, and test scores. All of these areas have tended to see low rates, sometimes alarmingly so, among student-aged refugees.

These discrepancies in education have had lasting effects and created a cycle in which refugees are often left behind and in situations of poverty, social isolation, and poor mental health. Education has the potential to change people's lives and plays an incredibly instrumental role in determining what options are available to t

hem. With this understanding, it is essential that we continue to work on reforming and funding education programs for refugees.

Current Situation

A Need For Action

The quality of education available for refugees varies greatly, and refugee students are often at a disadvantage. Refugees living in camps and around the world are truly in a unique situation when it comes to the type of education they receive and the environment in which they receive it - oftentimes, students are taught in schools that do not conduct classes in a language they have studied before, and are coming in on very different levels of previous exposure from subject to subject. Additionally, difficulty with social adaptation and potential economic hardships at home can make it very hard to succeed academically. Because the challenges that refugee students face vary so greatly from individual to individual, this issue is one that's quite difficult to address.

Today's statistics confirm that advancing educational opportunities for displaced persons is incredibly relevant. Recent UNHCR reports show between 36.4 and 42.5 million refugees around the world, and these people are hosted in a variety of countries. The nations recognized to be hosting the most refugees currently are: Sudan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Poland, Chad, Pakistan, Uganda, Germany, Turkey, and Iran. Countries from which the highest number of people were reported to have fled over the years are Venezuela, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, DR Congo, and Somalia. Refugees accounted for in these cases are escaping a variety of critical conditions in their homelands, including violent conflicts and oppressive regimes.

Several recent UN resolutions have focused on the issue of education for refugees. The Security Council Resolution 2601, which was passed in 2021, is careful to note concerns around "the alarming number of children denied their right to education", for both displaced persons and those living in conflict zones. The HRC Resolution A/HRC/53/L.10, passed in 2023, highlights the reaffirmation of children's right to education, as well as an understanding of the disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee students. The General Assembly's Resolution A/RES/71/177, adopted in 2016 based on a SOCHUM report, addresses the large and growing number of refugee children, and the UNHCR Refugee Education 2030 Strategy, of 2019, created a more direct strategic framework aiming for the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems.

Despite these efforts, however, the 2025 Education Report by the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, notes that in more than 70 refugee-hosting countries that were analyzed, the average gross enrolment rates (GER) for refugees stood at 42% for pre-primary students, 67% for primary, 37% for secondary, and 9% for tertiary. This stands in great contrast to the global numbers, where 91% of students receive a primary education, with 84% who receive secondary education. Overall, of the 7.1 million refugee children of school age, 3.7 million - more than half - do not go to school. Those who were able to often saw lower passing rates.

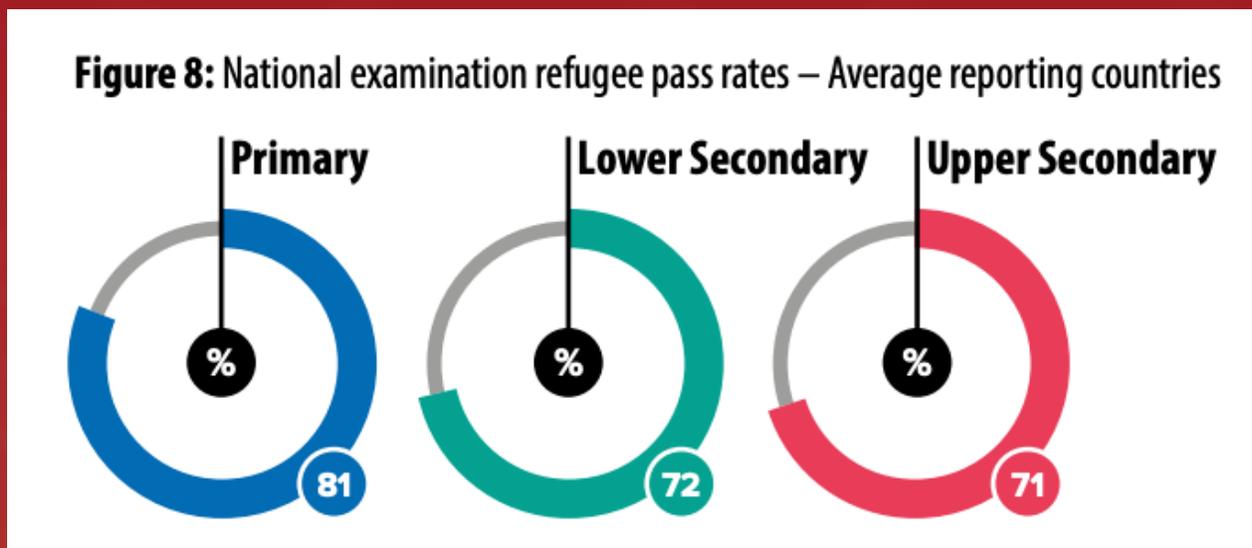


Figure 1: National examination refugee pass rates - average from reporting countries.

Additionally, the report emphasized that humanitarian and development aid have made the provision of access to education for young refugees much more difficult, and undone some of the progress that had been made within recent years. A 2025 report by the UN noted that due to funding cuts, education services are being scaled back, forcing schools to close. In Bangladesh camps hosting Rohingya refugees, 230,000 children are at risk of losing access to education - and reduction of financial support is forcing refugee families across the world to keep children from school in order to help at home.

Education Within Refugee Camps

Refugee camps, which host millions of displaced individuals across Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, are consistently demonstrating poorer educational outcomes and lower enrollment rates than the global averages. In 2018, secondary education enrollment was measured at 24% in camps, in contrast to the worldwide average of 84%. Primary school enrollment rates, while somewhat higher, were also below global norms - only 63% of refugee children were noted to have attended primary school, a number that averages around 90% globally, with differences between girls and boys. (UNHCR).

The UNHCR also found shocking statistics in Camp Kakuma, one of the world's largest refugee camps serving over 300,000 individuals. Kakuma saw a sharp drop in enrollment from primary to secondary – a phenomenon that affects children from the host community as well as refugees. There are only seven secondary schools in the region, compared to 26 primaries. Even those who pass primary examinations with flying colours can find they have reached the end of their school careers.”

This case illustrates a situation reflected in many refugee camps globally, and indeed, Camp Kakuma is one of the most established among them, so this statement is somewhat jarring. These numbers indicate that even basic education, let alone progression beyond this, is highly competitive and often limited by a lack of infrastructure and inefficiencies in programs. Even students who perform well academically often find that they're unable to continue their education due to the absence of available school placements, and this greatly changes the options they're presented with throughout their lives.

In addition to insufficient infrastructure, refugee camp schools face chronic shortages of teachers, especially those who are properly trained, teaching materials, and financial resources. Many of the schools in camps overwhelmingly employ refugee teachers, and many of these teachers have only been given education at the secondary level themselves and possess very limited formal teacher training, which often means they aren't able to perform to the best of their ability as educators and provide students with second-rate educations. While these teachers play a crucial role in sustaining education access, as they are often the only people able to fill those positions, the lack of professional development they're offered and the unstandardized levels of certification among teachers contribute to very inconsistent teaching quality across camps.

Pedagogical practices in refugee camp schools further exacerbate learning gaps. Ethnographic studies conducted in refugee camp schools show that classrooms are dominated by teacher-centered instruction, where learning is primarily based on memorization and passive listening. In many cases, students lack access to textbooks, with ratios as extreme as one book per ten students. An excerpt from a study published in the *Journal on Education in Emergencies* noted the following:

“The teacher spent most of the class time reading aloud from the textbook about Kabaka Wanga. The pupils listened attentively; however, with a ratio of one book to ten pupils, only a few were able to follow along.”

While the schools in some camps are relatively well established, they often lack funding and resources, which can bring disparities in the quality of conventional education received by those in the camp. Inadequate educational materials, like

textbooks, are common and make it very difficult for students to keep up with learning. The combination of these conditions severely limits student engagement, critical thinking, and practical skill development. This learning environment is particularly problematic for refugee students, as this group often experiences interrupted schooling, trauma, and language barriers, all of which inflate the complications of their ability to engage in academics.

Certain case studies also help us understand the tensions that can arise between refugee camps and the governments of the countries in which they are located. In Bangladesh, restrictions were in place, meaning Rohingya refugee children living in the Bazar refugee camps were barred from following the Bangladeshi national curriculum, and could not take classes at Bangladeshi schools, as the government was taking a stance assuming that all Rohingyas should return to Myanmar sometime in the near future. However, as these children grew older, it meant they would no longer be able to return to Myanmar to take national-level exams. In November 2021, the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot was launched by UNICEF and sought to ensure these children could receive education based on the Myanmar national curriculum, and help prepare them for their return. The program faced many problems, though, when only a month after the launch of the Myanmar Curriculum, the Bangladesh government began shutting down these schools, claiming that the Rohingya had no formal permission from the government to operate these schools. Even when ways were found to provide education for these refugees, a language barrier created many challenges in learning, as only certain languages of textbooks were allowed in the camps.

Refugees in Host Countries and Asylum Systems

In addition to refugee camps, which represent one dimension of the crisis, a significant proportion of refugees live in urban host communities or apply for asylum within developed and middle-income countries. While these refugees have greater access to the national education systems of the countries in which they reside, they encounter a different set of challenges, and engaging with the systems that already exist is hard without the right support for assimilation.

Legal and bureaucratic barriers often prevent refugee children from enrolling in public schools. In many countries, barriers, including a lack of documentation, uncertain legal status, and language requirements, exclude refugee students from formal education. Even when enrollment is possible, refugees often struggle with the differences in curriculum from their home countries, and discrimination and social isolation within schools. Additionally, limited language proficiency is common and leads to difficulty with comprehension of academic lessons even once students can speak and understand a new language well enough to attend school.

Different programs exist to address these issues, but these vary from country to country and are sometimes vague, making it hard to adequately respond. Germany has implemented initiatives such as the Integra Programme and the Welcome Programme: Students Helping Refugees, which have successfully integrated more than 30,000 refugees into its higher education system. These programs offer preparatory language courses, academic bridging programs, and mentorship opportunities that help refugees transition into universities and vocational institutions.

In the United States, the federal government supports integration through programs such as the Refugee School Impact Program, which provides grants to school districts to support refugee students and their families. This form of funding helps schools determine the best ways to use funding in their respective situations, and these funds go towards academic support, language services, mental health resources, and parental engagement.

In Sudan, schools within White Nile State have reopened as of 2026 and enroll refugees from South Sudan and internally displaced Sudanese, in addition to children from the local community. This was done through funding from the PROSPECTS Partnership, which has worked to bring together UNHCR, IFC, ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank and seeks to help refugees in the eight countries for whom this is a pressing concern.

Various programs in countries can be used as a model for future options to consider for other areas, or on a larger scale. Throughout research for this topic, it will be important to consider what aspects of programs make them function well and where inefficiencies and problems are created, to work towards a more standardized and cohesive template that can be implemented at large.

Further Discrepancies

Among refugees of student age, there are even further discrepancies seen in some groups when it comes to the topic of education. Women

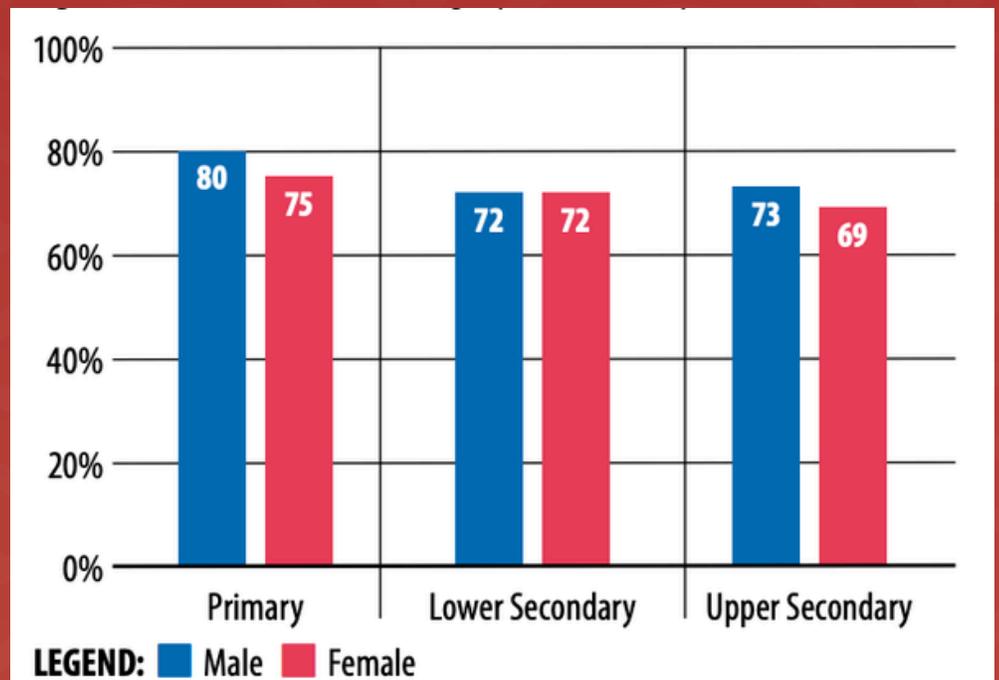


Figure 2: National examination refugee pass rates - comparison of averages from reporting countries
UNHCR 2025 Report - The Unbreakable Promise: Resilience and Resolve in Refugee Education

However, because girls are more often withheld from school systems, many problems emerge. Globally, for every ten refugee boys who are enrolled in secondary school, there are only about seven refugee girls. This gap signifies deeper issues - because girls are in higher levels of school less often, their earnings later on tend to be significantly less than those of boys. According to UNESCO research, one additional year of school can increase a girl's earnings by up to a fifth, meaning that this is an issue with substantial potential for additional impacts. Additionally, further research by UN agencies determines that if all girls completed primary school, child marriage would fall by 14 per cent, and if all girls finished secondary school, this statistic would plummet by an outstanding 64 per cent. Child marriage is widely recognized as a violation of basic human rights, and can have detrimental effects on mental health, cause social isolation, and even lead to severe health risks.

There are several reasons for the differences in enrollment by gender, but a major factor is that tasks which typically fall more heavily on girls, such as collecting water or fuel, taking care of younger siblings or older relatives, and carrying out household chores are all things that can be done at this age and it is much more costly for families to keep their daughters in school than to have them doing these things at home.

Another group to note is disabled refugees. Countries hosting the greatest number of refugees often are unable to adequately cater to displaced children, let alone those with disabilities. For these people, accessing school can be incredibly difficult, with limited mobility and often extra expenses. Once in school, these students often require additional and special care, which many schools, whether in camps or in host countries, are unable to provide, as they're often already underfunded and stretched thin for resources. However, disabled refugees make up a significant portion of the larger group - the UNHCR estimates this number to be around 30%, as many refugees have been disabled as a result of the conflict they fled from. The often long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that persons with disabilities deal with greatly hinder their ability to participate in what are fairly non-flexible education systems, especially when these factors interact with various other existing barriers. (Kaur et al., 2023)

Root Causes

At the center of the complexities around this issue and crucial in working to address it are several underlying factors. One of the main reasons for the drastic differences in rates of students enrolled in primary education and in secondary education, for instance, is the cost. Secondary education costs much more than primary, as subject learning at the secondary level is much more advanced. In addition to the demand for more qualified teachers, many subjects at this level require significantly better facilities and often more learning materials.

In addition, costs can be even greater. When students are at this age, they are much more capable and thus their time becomes more valuable - taking care of family members or doing work and household chores are often prioritized over education, something that is necessary for many families, but then greatly inhibits children later on in life.

For refugees in new countries, or who are stationed in camps but must attend schools outside, longer distances to and from the school gates make reaching school more costly and, depending on the stability of the region, sometimes even dangerous, should students have to pass through areas of conflict or crime. Many asylum-seekers are low-income and often live on the outskirts of school districts, making it hard to get to class.

Finally, poor quality teaching and supervision can be highly demotivating for students. This, combined with the other environmental factors and pressures that are common among refugee students at this age, leads to very high dropout rates.

Future work will require many structural changes, and plans for continuous and reliable funding are essential to new programs. When it comes to camps, new and standardized systems might be considered to help make education reform more efficient. Within host nations, it will be essential to consider how to best support assimilation processes and ensure that refugees have legal access to participation in national education systems.

Whatever the methods may be, with an understanding of the deep implications of flaws within education systems for refugees, it becomes obvious that reforms will be necessary to uphold and provide the basic right to education.

Questions to consider:

1. Where are current programs inefficient, and what makes them unsuccessful or unsustainable? What programs were more effective, and why?
2. How can international actors ensure long-term stability for solutions?
3. How can immediate goals be sought without creating dependency or undermining local capacities?
4. Given pressures with funding due to cuts to humanitarian aid, how can these programs be adequately funded?
5. How do social and cultural issues play into the broader topic of refugee students, and how can these factors be addressed?
6. How can more marginalized groups be included in these considerations?
7. Within refugee camps, how can existing resources and workforces be best directed to improve education quality?

Additional Resources:

[https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2601\(2021\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2601(2021))

https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/HRC_Resolution_Right%20to%20Education_A-HRC-53-L.10_2023_EN.pdf

<https://docs.un.org/en/a/res/71/177>

<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/refugee-education-report-2025.pdf>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45419536>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/five-takeaways-from-unhcrs-2025-education-report/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/secondary-education-lost-futures/>

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-education-milestone-rohingya-refugee-children-myanmar-curriculum-pilot>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26156857>

<https://doi.org/10.1177/10591478241243382>

<https://refugees.org/the-double-minority-challenge-faced-by-immigrants-and-refugees-with-disabilities/>



General Assemblies
Topic Guide

2

Topic
Two



Addressing Refugees' Economic Barriers and Limited Opportunities in the Work Force



Introduction

In the fastest growing cities in the world, car-centric planning, lack of investment in public transportation, and unstable metropolitan governance have resulted in transportation systems that inadequately serve urban populations, resulting in air pollution, congestion, and unequal access to mobility: all of which create strain on urban systems and exacerbate cycles of social and economic inequality. As these pressures persist, the region must critically reconsider how states can develop sustainable and resilient transportation systems that minimize environmental damage while promoting access to mobility.

Topic History

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that “[e]veryone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”.

When it comes to cases of refugees, the question of assimilation and recuperation has long been understood to be closely tied to employment. Work opportunities and steady income are especially supportive to refugees, for whom it provides a method to regain stability, maintain a regular schedule, fund basic needs including food and housing, and allow for social interactions - factors which are essential for a refugee's physical and mental health.

Historically, however, the relationship between employment opportunities and refugees has primarily been exploitative. In many instances, if refugees are offered work opportunities, it's positions that are disposable, inconvenient, or dangerous, and have low pay. This “cheap labor” was often provided more regularly for refugees when unskilled labor was needed to fuel rapid industrialization - typically in neocolonial settings. Throughout the interwar period, for example, the League of Nations developed its refugee office into a kind of funnel, sending numbers of Armenians, Assyrians, and Russians to work in plantations, mines, and factories across the colonial sphere – seeking to connect private companies with menial workers. Even in the early United Nations, the first experiments with relief in Palestine included the repurposing of displaced Palestinians as foot soldiers in the mass, American-sponsored industrialization of the Middle East. (Watenpaugh).

During a time of exclusionary immigration regimes during the post-WWI era, the Nansen Passport was introduced by the UNHCR as a form of identification and a travel permit that allowed holders to travel to other countries for work - however, this method, introduced in 1922 and discontinued in 1942, ensured refugees would only be allowed as ‘guest-workers’, who were always subject to expulsion if labor conditions were to change. (Armpounioti and Stovall, 2024).

Additionally, whether or not refugees will be ‘useful’ to countries' economies plays a big role in their freedom of movement and what opportunities become available to them. At certain times, refugees are turned away for fear that they would disrupt labor markets. An example of this is in Thailand deportations of refugees during the late 1990s, when Asia was facing a financial crisis and poor labor market. (World Bank, 2024). In other cases, however, refugees are celebrated and welcomed for providing economic support and are considered a positive influx into the workforce.

Aside from periods during industrialization, refugees applying for status in countries can be more likely to receive placements if they are considered experienced and could contribute to local economies. These “qualified” refugees, who are expected to meet a large number of stringent documentary requirements, make up a small number. When it comes to being permitted to seek a home in the United States, for example, refugees have a chance of less than 1%. (Bier, Cato Institute, 2023). Despite this, there are many countries that empirically seem to benefit greatly from refugees, especially economically. In 1994, when Tanzania saw a large influx of refugees from Rwanda, there was a net economic benefit due to money entering the local economy. (Ansoms et al., 2005).

Refugee rights protections often provide support, even if indirectly, to means of employment - legal frameworks such as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration have helped provide broader definitions of what it means to be a refugee, and helped standardize and specify regional laws regarding refugee rights. Additional important documents to consider include the 1951 Refugee Convention and corresponding 1967 Protocol, the 2016 New York Declaration, and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees. These prohibit discrimination and, by more carefully defining refugees, can provide legal status that can make employment possible.

Despite these factors, employment for refugees remains a major concern, and this group sees disproportionate ratios of employment, both in and outside of refugee camps. A 2012 study comparing refugees in the US labor market to immigrants found that refugees were twice as likely as immigrants to be unemployed (Jamil et al., 2012). Furthermore, the often more menial work offered to refugees exists in an exploitative way that does not promote assimilation and long-term self-sufficiency.

Current Situation

Currently, refugees face significant inconsistencies worldwide when it comes to the types of employment available to them, and differences have large implications for the level of stability, safety, and success they are able to achieve throughout their lives.

The UNHCR's 2023 Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Report indicates that only 45 percent of refugees live in countries with unrestricted access to formal employment, including wage-earning jobs and self-employment. This is a number that has been growing over the past few years, with recent changes towards refugee inclusion as a result of pledges made at recent Global Refugee Forums, annual conferences which began in 2023. Nepal, Mauritania, Kenya, and Brazil are recent countries to pledge towards reducing restrictions to employment for refugees and ensuring displaced persons have legal work opportunities.

However, despite these positive changes, the same UNHCR survey finds that work rights are significantly restricted in countries that host 55 percent of refugees, meaning that in practice, over half of refugees face legal barriers in addition to the barriers that already exist for refugees by default, including major factors such as language impediments, limited social networks, differences in formal work training/education experiences, and many more factors that are often met by people living in new and unfamiliar places.

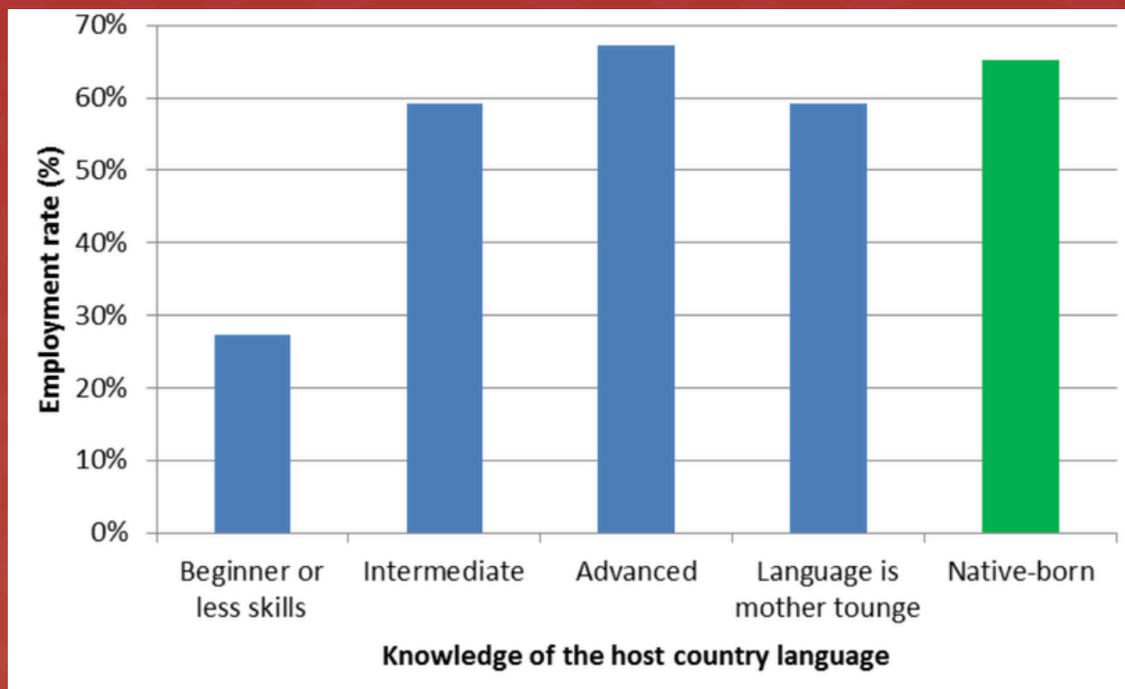


Figure 3: Employment rates of refugees in Europe by level of knowledge of the host country language.

Tanay et. al, "How are Refugees Faring on the Labour Market in Europe", 2016.

Additionally, even in countries where work is readily available, the options available to refugees are often positions that are low-paying, have limited mobility, or in other ways make it difficult for refugees to rebuild their lives to the fullest extent. Within the agricultural sector, for example, work is highly informal, and often sees a lack of regulation, leading to unsafe or unfavorable conditions, and without as many advocacy options for refugee workers, making it hard to speak up against harsh working conditions, unfair treatment by local coworkers, or even discrimination or assault. Agricultural work is also largely seasonal, making it unlikely to provide stable incomes for new arrivals (The World Bank, 2024).

Regional Policies:

Asia:

Overall, Asia - including East, South, and Southeast regions- has continually seen the lowest rankings of de jure worker rights for refugees (Center for Global Development, 2022). Despite being one of the more prominent countries that hosts refugees, Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, or its 1967 Protocol. In Bangladesh, formal employment is illegal for Rohingya displaced persons, and Japan technically grants rights to refugees - but in recent decades, very few have been awarded refugee status, so de facto opportunities are quite limited (CSIS, 2023). Malaysia does not have a legislative framework to protect refugees, and is also among India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka as Asian countries that are all non-signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Janmyr, Forced Migration Review, 2021).

Refugees who are employed in Asia tend to work in industries including and related to agriculture, fishing, cleaning, construction, and some manufacturing jobs (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs, 2019). In Bangladesh, economic opportunities are strictly limited to incentives for refugee volunteers who assist with humanitarian operations within camps (Asylum Access, 2022).

Europe:

Within Europe, especially in higher-income countries, refugees who find employment tend to work in manufacturing or specific service industries, such as health care. This is particularly noted in the United Kingdom, where central government control over the financing and staffing policy of the British National Health Service (NHS) means that the supply and demand of healthcare labor are heavily influenced by government policy - and thus can be easily tied to refugee programs. Additionally, the hospitality industry globally is characterized by a great reliance on workers who are willing to work irregular hours based on fluctuating demand. Without other options, this becomes a pathway for many. Similar fields follow these same trends - refugees and migrants in Europe have a history working in the food processing industry, mainly because this workforce is often eager to work, productive, and seen by many companies and groups as a cheaper source of

labor. This can vary slightly country to country, though - in France, a 2023 UNHCR survey found that refugees were active in 17 different industries, though many of these included various service activities, commerce, manufacturing, and construction.

In recent years, many countries within Europe have been moving toward greater restrictions regarding refugee legislation, especially through limiting access, such as the 2026-2027 Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan proposed by the European Commission. Despite these, however, refugee policy has been incredibly lenient to Ukrainian refugees (Ginn, 2023). Ukrainian refugees enjoy many freedoms, including rights to employment and key services under a Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) issued by the EU - a move that allowed many common restrictions to be waived. This move has been celebrated by many human rights advocates, and policy analysts have pointed to the TPD as a model of success, as quick responses that allowed integration on many levels meant for a relatively smooth transition, all things considered. Despite this, there is criticism surrounding the fact that not all refugees are given this treatment, and that these freedoms were, in this way, quite selective (Luyten, 2024).

Africa:

Throughout Africa, agriculture, fishing, mining, domestic work, health care, cleaning, retail trade, and construction tend to be the largest employers of refugees and other migrants - showing a slightly wider variety of industries, but still along similar trends.

In Kenya, many refugees at Camp Kakuma find formal jobs in Kakuma town that are primarily based on the local economy - in positions such as car drivers, duka employees, barbers, and house cleaners. (IFC, 2018). Uganda has some of the most progressive refugee laws globally, having adopted a multi-part framework that focuses both on promoting refugee security and incorporating lasting collaborations with host communities (Tent, 2019). The Central African Economic and Monetary Community, a group which includes Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo tend to see similar situations regarding refugee employment, though there remains some small difference in policies. Cameroon's 2005 refugee law ensures refugees the same worker protections as Cameroonian nationals and allows for freedom of movement and choice of residence within the country, similar to the rights of nationals. Chad's Constitution ensures that foreigners legally admitted to Chad's territory enjoy the same rights and freedoms as citizens, and a 2020 law ensures that people holding a provisional ID card are entitled to "the same fundamental human rights, including circulation, residence, access to public services and social assistance, health care, education, professional training, justice,

and religious Freedom.” (The World Bank, 2024). The actual implementation of these laws, however, is not always consistent, leaving room for future work. Within Cameroon, for instance, refugees from the Central African Republic often have easier access to the rights and services to which all are entitled, in comparison to Nigerian refugees, some of whom face forced return. These discrepancies relate to other areas as well – differences in the level of recognition that UNHCR-issued IDs receive by employers vary, and can limit work opportunities for some, depending on the understanding of employing companies (CNDHL 2009).

Middle East:

The Middle East also makes up a large portion of States which offer less protection and support for refugees. Many States in this area are not party or signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which tends to be the base framework for refugee rights. Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and most States in the Gulf region are non-signatories, and within the region, only Iran, Israel, Egypt, and Yemen are.

In Iraq, working permits are required for refugees in order to work, and these permits are very difficult for refugees to obtain (Al Tamimi & Company, 2023). These permits are typically applied for by the employer on behalf of the foreign employees, and require the employer to take many responsibilities, for situations including travel to the home country and even disposal of the body should the employee pass away while abroad (Al-Humairi, Taher, n.d.). In Jordan, many refugees are Palestinians from Syria, and Ex-Gazan Palestinian refugees. These refugees are eligible for five-year Jordanian passports, and holders have little trouble with employment regulations; however, many of these refugees do not have this privilege and are required to apply for work permits. Additionally, employers can only approve work permits if it has been adequately demonstrated that there are no Jordanians with the skills or experience to perform the job, and that the refugee is therefore needed (NRC, 2023).

Latin America:

Overall, refugee employment laws and refugee protections in general tend to be very strong and progressive throughout Latin America. Despite this, however, many of these are not well-enforced, and refugees’ de facto rights are not commonly observed. Many believe this is due to legal changes pushed by a leftist political ideology, which led executives to consider symbolic human and migrant rights arguments that enabled legislative change, while not considering how effective implementation could occur. This weak enforcement, or sometimes lack of recognition altogether, leads to discrepancies in what rights refugees observe across Latin America (Hammoud-Gallego and Freier, 2023).

The R4V's 2024 analysis of Venezuelan refugees in Latin American and Caribbean countries estimates that among the 6.7 million total, 82% of these refugees are

working informal and irregular jobs, and that many of these also come with unfair wages. In large part due to these labor situations, 42% are unable to provide enough food for their families, and 23% live in overcrowded, unsanitary, or uncomfortable conditions (R4V, 2024).

Previous Implementation & Challenges

Aside from the aforementioned areas, refugees' rights and economic opportunities have, in many ways, been improving. This is an issue that has continually been drawing attention of governments and international organizations, and a big reason for this is that it's one for which investments and spending can be directly beneficial to the host country, in economic ways, in addition to humanitarian reasons.

A 2016 Tent report found that for every euro spent on refugees, the European economy would grow by more than 1.84 euros within five years - nearly doubling this value. While this was prior to the large influx of Ukrainian refugees, this is something that has been seen over time in other areas as well, and estimates can be made for the future as well.

With a huge influx of refugees fleeing instability in Syria, Lebanon has been experiencing large changes in population. A 2016 OECD report found that 25% of Lebanon's population were refugees, due mainly to the recent increases, but despite this, the World Bank found that Lebanon grew by 1.8% in that same year, 2016, in spite of the nearby conflict limiting tourism.

In Uganda, studies found that even going so far as to provide land to refugees had benefits, by creating income spillovers to the local economy, thus working to boost income, consumption, and self-reliance of the host communities, in addition to the refugees it immediately assisted. This greatly positive effect was observed within a 15-mile radius of the land (Zhu et al., 2023).

Noting these benefits, many programs exist that seek to support refugees in career development and finding employment. Ben & Jerry's, a U.S. ice cream company, launched the UP Collective in 2017, along with The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN). This program sought to provide refugees with mentoring, entrepreneurship training, and part-time employment, which worked in tandem to provide immediate opportunities for refugees in addition to opening doors to options down the road for participants. As of 2024, the program has graduated a noteworthy 593 refugees, with a commitment to graduate 1,000 people by 2033 (Ben & Jerry's website).

Programs like this exist in several other countries - both privatized and through governmental programs. The Refugee Response Programme in Turkey works to help train refugees and invest in longer-term skills development, as well as supporting the creation of formal jobs for refugees - employing more than 23,000

refugees (ILO, 2021).

In considering ways to increase refugee employment in the private sector, the following framework has been recommended by The World Bank in their 2024 Refugee Employment Policy and Research Paper

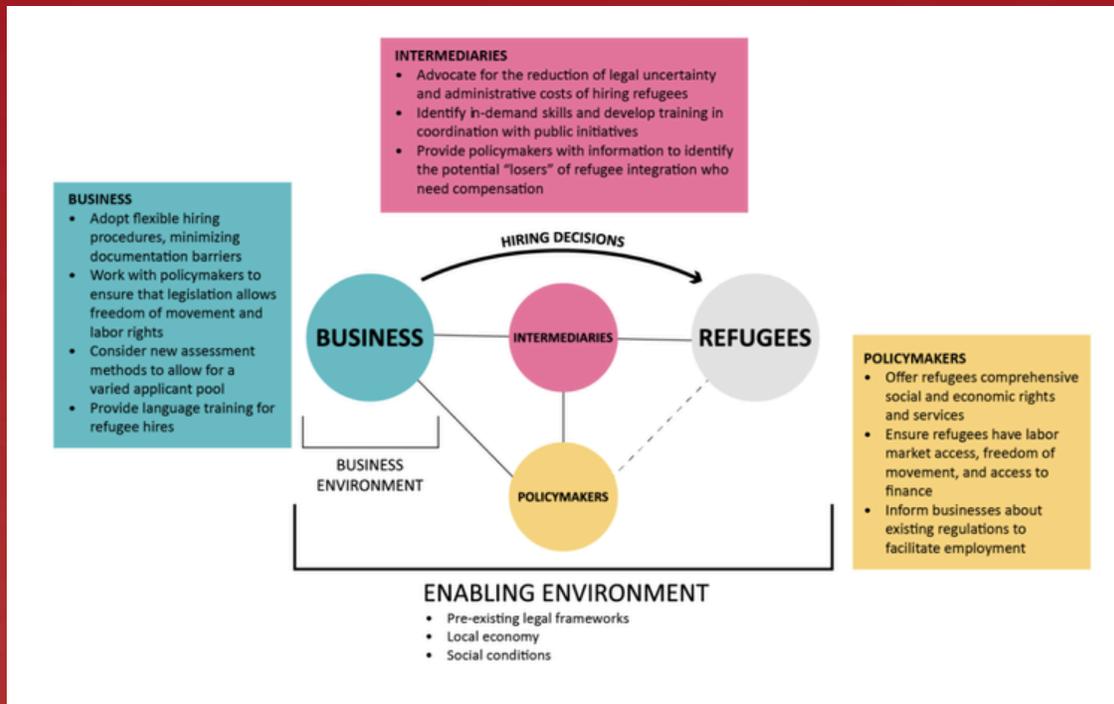


Figure 4: Framework for advancing refugee employment in the private sector. World Bank - Refugee Employment, 2024.

Training has a big impact on both the opportunities for refugees and the benefits that employers can receive from the relationship. Refugees tend to be highly motivated, and if undergoing skill development programs, can often be very adept at applying to schools, boosting local economies, and strengthening the workforce. Additionally, advocacy for more equitable hiring policies can encourage corporate participation in refugee employment.

Additional Considerations:

It is important to note several areas of distinction when discussing the issue of employment, particularly among refugees.

Firstly, there are large variations in the situations of refugees based in camps and refugees based in host countries. While in camps, refugees have different types of positions available to them - a 2018 study by the IFC found that refugees in camps typically got jobs through NGOs working in humanitarian aid positions - common jobs included things like teacher, translator, 'community mobilizer', and guard (IFC, 2018). Many of these had salaries and tended to be more stable than positions for refugees outside of the camps. Additionally, many of these jobs were skilled and required training. These positions, however, are directly affected by

cuts to aid that are typically reserved for humanitarian agencies to assist in refugee camps, and thus are facing issues currently.

Aside from variation with refugees' locations, other factors can discriminate when it comes to employment. Overall, employment rates for female refugees also tended to be substantially lower than male refugees in the same regions.

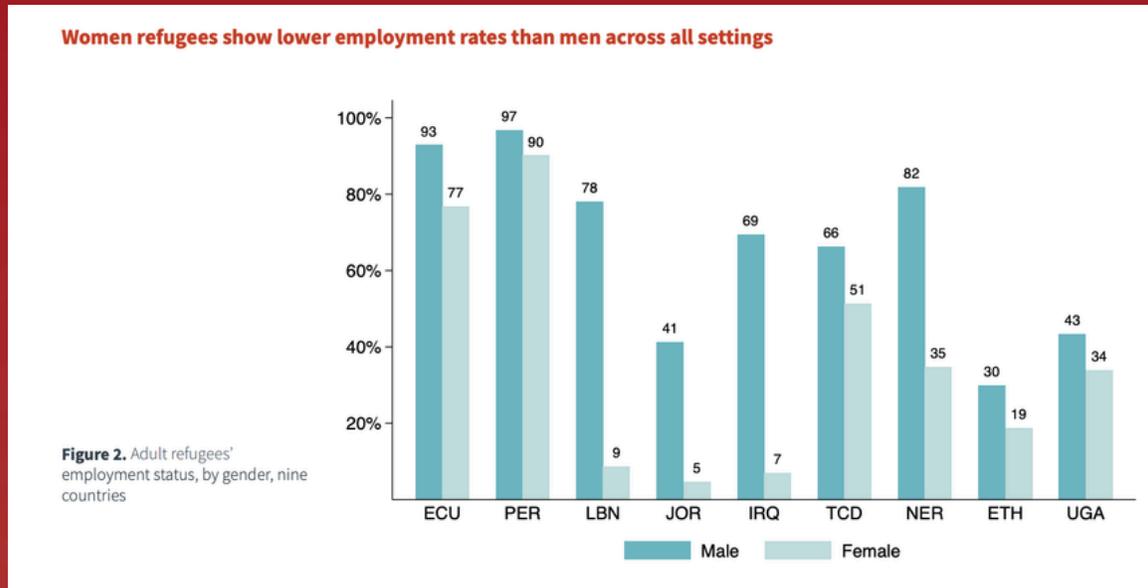


Figure 5: Female refugees displayed lower levels of employment regardless of country, though some countries saw wider gaps than others. RMNA, 2024.

Finally, social receptivity is a big factor in how successful refugees are in finding jobs, and they also benefit greatly as a result of steady employment. Processes of searching for, obtaining, and maintaining jobs are strongly affected by how much they are welcomed into the host community. This can be influenced greatly by a number of traits, but some of the most effective are the level of cultural similarity, shared history, and language difference. A prominent example of this is how well Ukrainians were received by Europe, which many argue is due in part to the common cultural understandings, existing personal networks, and similar languages that exist in neighboring countries that hosted Ukrainians, such as Poland. It's widely noted that Ukrainians were significantly better integrated than groups of refugees that arrived from countries further away, or more different.

In a related sense, many refugees abroad face discrimination and xenophobia during their job search, typically surrounding their ethnicity, religious beliefs, accents, and appearance. An example of this can be seen in Latin America - a 2020 Gallup poll showed that 69% of Colombians held a negative view of Venezuelan refugees, and that a significant number even blamed Venezuelans for increased crime, despite evidence proving that this was not the case.

Steady employment has an instrumental effect on a refugee's ability to reconstruct

their lives. Importantly, it is also the main way refugees interact with their new communities and contribute to social orders. While improvements in the proportions of refugees who have access to employment have been made in recent years, there is also a lot that remains to be considered for the future, especially in certain regions, and in overcoming funding shortages in camps. For these reasons, it is an important focus now - because jobs and income play an important role not just in providing immediate support for refugees, but also ensuring displaced persons have the opportunities they need to become self-sufficient, and find long-term stability.

Questions to consider:

1. With regards to employment laws for refugees, what are the most productive and beneficial policies, and where can these be better implemented?
2. What roles should private companies vs government organizations play in addressing this issue? How might they work in tandem?
3. How can discriminatory practices be mitigated in hiring practices, especially in countries with varying social norms?
4. How is a refugee's economic situation tied to other factors affecting their ability to assimilate?
5. What lasting systems can be considered for providing stable options within camps?
6. How can individual refugees be supported, while not taking away from local employees and economies?
7. How might support for refugees be implemented in ways that are economically beneficial for States?

Additional Resources:

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/refugees-and-question-labor-historical-view>

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/51e229cb3b4abfa22db1d93b5354c496-0570062024/original/Refugee-Employment-PS4R-Study.pdf>

<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/about/global-refugee-forum-progress-review/global-refugee-forum-progress-review-2025>

<https://www.fmreview.org/>

<https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/33/2/188/6448830>

<https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Refugee-ent-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.r4v.info/en/rmna2024>

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/51e229cb3b4abfa22db1d93b5354c496-0570062024/original/Refugee-Employment-PS4R-Study.pdf>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4347467/>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12312929/>

https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TENT_FPI-Refugees-as-Employees-Report.pdf

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/019791837901300102>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0894845308316292>

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/51e229cb3b4abfa22db1d93b5354c496-0570062024/original/Refugee-Employment-PS4R-Study.pdf>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2379945>

https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/JDC-Quarterly-Digest_January-2023.pdf



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