

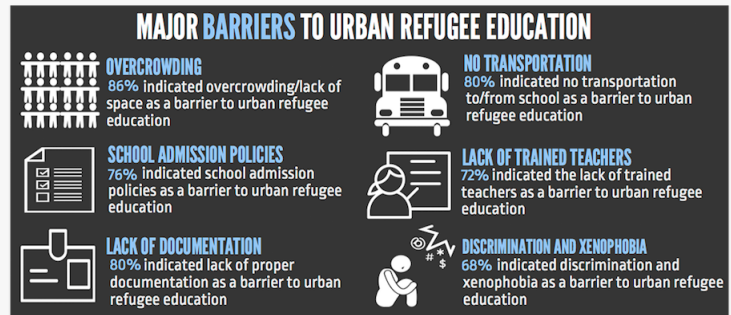
Urban Refugee Children Face Extra Hurdles in Attending School: Teachers College Study

As a majority of the world's displaced people settle in urban areas, TC researchers recommend ways to improve access to education for urban refugees

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, March 7, 2017

/EINPresswire.com/ -- The increasing urbanization of the world's refugees presents unique obstacles to refugee children attempting to attend local schools, despite their right to do so, according to the first-ever global study of [urban refugee education](#), released today by [Teachers College, Columbia University](#). The report exposes a gap

between policy and practice when it comes to ensuring access of displaced children to educational services in urban settings.



The Teachers College study found overcrowding of schools and lack of transportation as the major obstacles to urban refugee children attending school

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Most countries allow urban refugees to go to school, but national and local governments lack the capacity to monitor quality and make information about policies available at the local level.”

study

An executive summary and the full policy report, “Urban Refugee Education: Strengthening Policies and Practices for Access, Quality, and Inclusion,” are available at TC.edu/URE2017.

The world community must uphold its collective responsibility to help children and youth who have fled regions affected by armed conflict, go to and stay in school,” said Mary Mendenhall, the Assistant Professor of Practice in the International and Comparative Education program at Teachers College who led the study. “By ignoring this responsibility, we risk losing yet another generation of children to illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, and the need to turn toward

desperate and extreme solutions to meet their basic needs.”

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the forcible displacement of individuals and families from their homes has grown at an unprecedented rate in the past two decades, reaching more than 65 million in 2016—a number not seen since right after World War II. Of that number, 60 percent are spread across urban areas rather than clustered in camps, UNHCR figures show.

“The emblematic image of refugees living in camps is no longer the norm,” write Mendenhall and study co-authors at Teachers College, S. Garnett Russell, Assistant Professor of International and Comparative Education; and Elizabeth Buckner, Visiting Assistant Professor of International and

Comparative Education. They surveyed 190 respondents working for UN agencies, and international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in 16 countries across the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. They did additional, in-depth case studies in Nairobi, Kenya; Beirut, Lebanon; and Quito, Ecuador, interviewing more than 90 respondents.

Refugees have a right to attend school in their host communities, according to the United Nations Refugee Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But the researchers found that the trend toward living independently, dispersed and embedded across dense metropolitan areas, makes child refugees vulnerable to the same problems faced by urban poor and marginalized children in attending school, including overcrowded local schools, lack of learning resources and trained teachers, and lack of proximity and safe transportation to and from school.

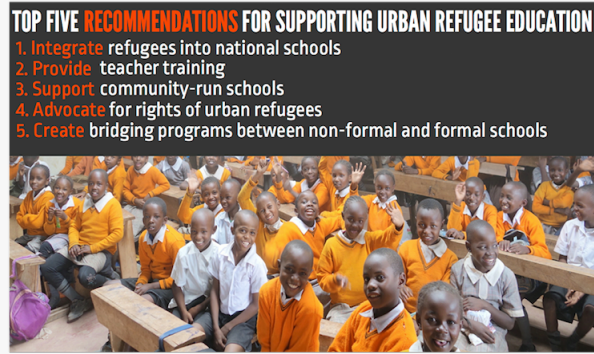
Among 65 million displaced adults and children, 21 million refugees who have crossed national borders have additional challenges. In addition to language barriers, urban refugees from other countries “often live in vulnerable situations and are subject to violence, discrimination, xenophobia, exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, and forced repatriation to their home countries”—any one of which could make it difficult to attend school, the report says.

According to the UNHCR, about half of all refugees are under 18 years old, including large numbers of unaccompanied minors. Half of all elementary school-age refugee children, and 22 percent of secondary-school-age children, have access to school, while only one percent of all refugees have access to higher education.

And because global conflicts are lasting longer, the average duration of displacement for refugees now exceeds 20 years, suggesting that entire generations of refugee children will grow to adulthood without education or skills to support themselves, the authors note.

They found that, while the majority of the countries they studied “have relatively inclusive national policies that allow urban refugees to go to school, national and local governments lack the capacity to monitor educational quality and make information about policies available at the local level.” In addition, autonomy of local education and government authorities allows for “nonexistent, unclear or contradictory policies” at the local level, as well as “shifting and volatile policy environments, and misalignment between and across government offices.”

To improve access to education by displaced children in urban environments, the authors recommend better coordination between local, national and international organizations involved in educating



The Teachers College report recommends five steps for improving refugee education



The Teachers College report represents the first-ever study of global refugees and education

refugee children, and fully integrating and including refugee students into local and national schools. Education programs that benefit both the refugee and host communities will encourage host communities to be more welcoming of refugee students, the report says.

In addition to increasing access to formal schooling, the authors write that “civil society organizations need to support the provision of non-formal education programs to fill the needs and gaps not met by government schools,” such as “psychological and social issues, skills development, language support, combatting discrimination and xenophobia, and academic support for lost years of schooling.”

The study was funded by the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

Visit TC.edu/URE2017 for additional resources on urban refugee education. An executive summary of the report is available at TC.edu/URE2017/summary, and the full policy report at TC.edu/URE2017/report.

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