

LEARNING BY FOUNDING

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES

Spotlight
Series

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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN REFUGEE CAMPS

The millions of inhabitants of refugee camps are often seen as people with zero options. And the young generation especially has next to no chance to get higher education and decent work. But entrepreneurship education can change that. Not mainly for profit – but for a chance.

THE ISSUE AT STAKE

MORE THAN 20 MILLION REFUGEES in the world are under the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They live in refugee camps outside their home countries, often for years. And more than half of them are children and young adults.¹

They have a good chance to survive – that's what the global community cares for, with UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) at the front line. Both organizations are representing the joint efforts of the global community to leave no one behind. They have been awarded with three Nobel Peace Prizes for their tireless work: the WFP in 2020, and the UNHCR twice, in 1954 and 1981.²

But the millions of refugees that are cared for by these organizations have very limited perspectives. It is often completely unclear if and when they might be able to return to their homes – if there is anything

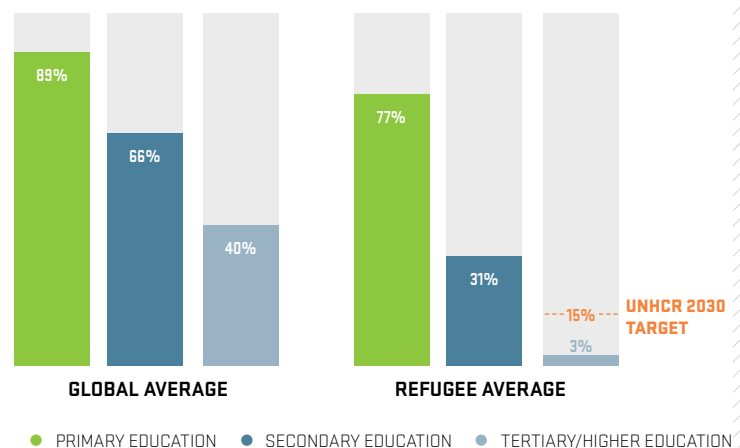
left of them. And it is often complicated to build up lasting relations with the host country, as Alexander Betts, professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs at Oxford University, points out: “Refugees generally face different institutional constraints compared to citizens, in areas that may include the right to work, business registration, the enforcement of contracts and property rights. This shapes the terms on which they enter markets, including the labor market.”³

EDUCATION – A SCARCE RESOURCE

Those constraints also affect the phase of life before you even can enter the labor market: youth. Secondary education, formation, vocational training – whatever could prepare young people for their working life is a very scarce resource in refugee camps. This higher education gap is a striking difference →

The higher education gap

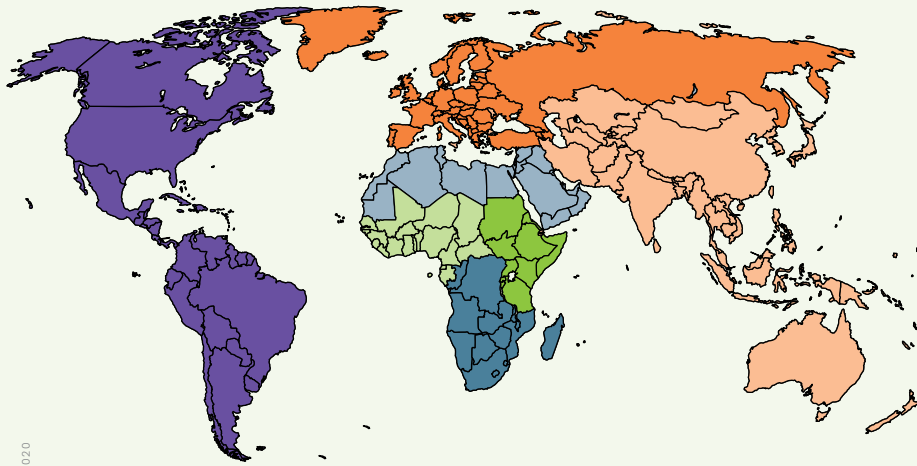
Of the approximately 10 million refugee children and youth under UNHCR care in 2020, some 7.1 million were of school age. Their access to education was limited, with 3.4 million unable to attend school. At primary level, 77% of refugee children were enrolled. More displaced children were enrolled in secondary school than ever before, with enrolment up 2% but still low at 31%. Just 3% of refugees at student age were in higher education.⁴ The UNHCR target for 2030 is getting to 15% enrollment – “an ambitious but achievable goal” that would bring about half a million young refugee women and men into academic life.⁵



REFUGEES AROUND THE WORLD

UNHCR Regions

● EAST & HORN OF AFRICA ● SOUTH AFRICA ● MENA ● WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA ● EUROPE ● ASIA ● AMERICAS



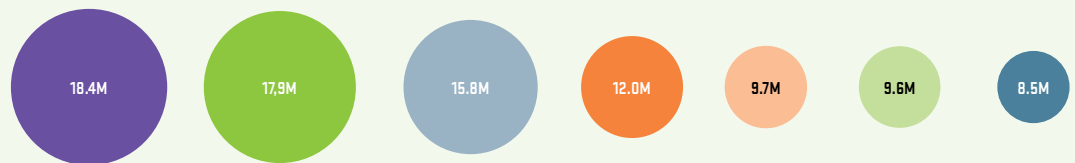
REFUGEES
TOTAL: 20.7M

ASYLUM
SEEKERS
TOTAL: 4.1M

INTERNALLY DIS-
PLACED PEOPLE
TOTAL: 48.6M

OTHER "PEOPLE
OF CONCERN"
TOTAL: 18.5M

OVERALL
"PEOPLE OF CONCERN"
TOTAL: 91.9M



to the efforts spent on primary education. Schools for children between 6 and 12 years are fairly common. Some 77 per cent of the children of this age group in refugee camps attend a primary school – this is still far below the global average of 89 per cent, but, given the often very fragile context, a very high number. Primary school facilities are often among the first infrastructures built in a refugee camp.

As soon as the children reach the age for secondary schools, the picture changes drastically. More than two-thirds of the children in the age group from 12 to 17 years do not attend any school at all and do not get any kind of training or preparation for the labor market. The most important years for the development of talents, potentials, and personality just pass idly by.

TIME - AND TRASH - AS SOLE RESOURCES

With no resources to do or learn anything, but lots and lots of spare time, what can those young people do? "Entrepreneurship," is the answer of Etienne Salborn. His Uganda-based "Social Innovation Academy" (SINA) specializes in starting grassroot innovation projects

for young people who have no or close to no resources – in self-organized learning spaces, where disadvantaged youth unleash their potential for positive change as social entrepreneurs.⁶

The first step in creating these learning spaces is a kind of SINA signature move: The participants have to collect empty plastic bottles, fill them with sand or mud and stack them, like bricks, to build a small house. And *voilà!* With time and trash as their sole resources, the youngsters have created their own club house.

Such bottle-houses have marked the starting-point for social entrepreneurship programs in refugee camps in Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Salborn says.⁷ In 2018, his program in the Bidi Bidi refugee camp in Uganda even won the UNHCR Innovation Award, impressing the jury "with the way it empowers young refugees in Uganda to take charge and change the trajectory of their lives."⁸ And it also impresses the target group: For this year's program at Bidi Bidi, SINA got 600 applications for just 20 places. A social entrepreneur himself, →



Wall of bottles in a Ugandan refugee camp

the German-Ugandan Salborn wants to expand the SINA model to locations in Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana and Cape Verde.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP GOES SOCIAL

Though entrepreneurial activities are common in many refugee camps, they are mostly not social enterprises, but small or micro-businesses. “In practice, most refugee entrepreneurship is small-scale necessity entrepreneurship,” says forced migration expert Alexander Betts.⁹ The entrepreneurs do not form a camp elite, but are struggling and poor like the other inhabitants.

Often, these entrepreneurs do not start from scratch, but from their own biography. Someone who had a restaurant in their life before flight, tries to start any kind of catering business; the former owner of a sweet shop searches for a niche to something do with fruit or sugar. The joint efforts of family, friends and neighbors can be a vital source →

How to learn Entrepreneurship

Starting your own start-up is not something you learn at school. There's no curriculum for it, and it would make little sense to learn for an “entrepreneurship exam.” Founding needs learning by doing. In the start-up universe, failure is seen as one of the best ways to learn entrepreneurship. But in the ultra-low-resource environment of refugee camps, people simply can't afford to lose. So how can you learn when failure is not an option? Technology comes to the rescue: You don't need to have your product ready to start – you can do a crowdfunding campaign to collect subscriptions. You don't need to rent a shop to sell – you can set up a webshop for free. Or, just like in the older days, you can talk to prospective clients. If some of them want to buy your product, go ahead: You have achieved your “proof of concept.” If not, try the next iteration. You have learned an entrepreneurship lesson, just by spending time, not money.

of labor and moral support.¹⁰ Especially in camps with a high percentage of urban refugees, the business activity can be quite high: The Za'atari camp in Jordan, for example, mostly inhabited by refugees from the South Syrian town of Daraa, quickly developed its own market street, which was nicknamed "Champs Elysees."¹¹

As valuable as those business activities can be for the families involved, they are less of an opportunity for the younger generation, as they are organised along traditional business models and hierarchies. They try to set up businesses like they used to be in the life before the camp. The young generation by contrast had no earlier business that they can try to replicate; they need an option right now, for the first time in their lives.

This is where social innovation and social entrepreneurship can enter the picture. Trying to find something new, and trying to make creative use of the few resources that are available at a refugee camp, is a thrill at least, and a start-up at best.

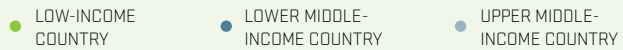
FROM SOLVING PROBLEMS TO CREATING JOBS

One of the most used starting-points for getting into business is trash. It is everywhere – a problem that needs to be solved – and it is free, or at least cheap to collect. In 2016, the NGO Changemakers Lab started a recycling project called Give Trash a Chance on the Greek island of Lesbos. Beyond just cleaning a refugee camp and its neighborhood, the target was to create a network and learning environment for young entrepreneurs on the island, both refugees and locals.¹² And at the Bidi Bidi camp in Uganda, one of Etienne Salborn's SINA projects has grown into a plastic recycling start-up with 15 employees that even pays camp residents for collecting plastic trash. Other projects that have become traditional for-profit enterprises include the production of a natural mosquito repellent cream or of organic clay masks.¹³

For Salborn, making profit is not the only way to measure entrepreneurial success. A venture that fights traumatic experiences via organising poetry workshops doesn't need to be profitable to be successful. And a for-profit business of refugees can also be a social enterprise. A similar approach is used by the Norwegian economist Sonia Ahmadi in her studies about entrepreneurial education in refugee camps: "The type of entrepreneurship education program should be designed around the social and cultural context of the refugees." If this approach is followed, profit

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE...

... to provide all refugee children with 12 years of school education in the countries where they actually reside? Less than US\$ 5 billion per year, according to an estimation of the annual cost by UNHCR and World Bank.

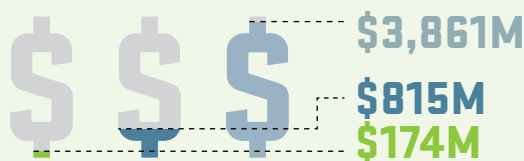


SCHOOL-AGE REFUGEES

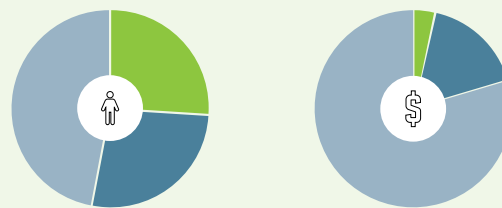


TOTAL COSTS

in US\$ Million



TOTAL SHARES



SOURCE: UNHCR/WORLD BANK, THE GLOBAL COST OF INCLUSIVE REFUGEE EDUCATION, 2021, P.35

can also be social, claims Ahmadi. "Successful adaptation of entrepreneurship can lead to the sustainable creation of new ventures and contributes to the creation of economic, financial, social, and environmental values."¹⁴

THE QUESTION OF SCALABILITY

Successful businesses can sometimes conquer the world with breathtaking speed. But even successful entrepreneurial approaches in the context of refugee camps can be hard to scale: each camp and each situation is different – and it is perfectly understandable that the camp management is often reluctant to promote entrepreneurial education. Their job is and should be saving lives, not developing businesses.

But still, building something new and useful from scratch is one of the best ways for young people with no chance of higher education to discover and develop their potential and get a chance to find their place in life. Framing entrepreneurial activities as low-resource education – as learning by founding – can be a great way to scale chances for young people who right now have none at all.

REFUGEE ENTERPRISES

Three case studies

Entrepreneurship is no panacea, neither for each situation nor for each person. But in many camps and cases, entrepreneurial activities are part of programs to improve the livelihood of refugees and their families.



The Case of Za'atari



 **80,000**  **2012**

This camp in Northern Jordan opened in 2012 and houses about 80,000 Syrian refugees. Strong international attention leads to a high number of projects by NGOs and International organizations. **Projects for job creation or entrepreneurship always should "support socioeconomic development in host communities that will benefit both the host and refugee populations."** (UNCTAD)¹⁵

One example: a nine-month business development program that reached out to 650 Syrian refugees and Jordanian women of the host community in Mafraq to generate employability and entrepreneurship solutions.

The Case of Uganda



 **1,500,000**

With 1.5 million refugees from different neighboring countries, Uganda is one of the world's most important host countries for refugees. One of the many programs to improve the lives of refugees is direct cash assistance to more than 1,500 survivors of gender-based violence. **Each woman received US\$46 a month for eight months, in addition to a cellular phone and financial literacy training.** Many of them used at least some of the cash to start their own business.¹⁶

The Case of Kakuma



 **160,000**  **1992**

Established 30 years ago, this camp in Northern Kenya has provided refuge for displaced people from South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan. With about 160,000 inhabitants and 2,000 businesses, the camp **has developed a close social and economic interdependence with the neighboring town of Kakuma – with refugees hiring, trading, and working with town residents and vice versa.** To date, more than one-quarter of the income of camp inhabitants is generated via salaries and business income.¹⁷



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

🕒 **Learning by founding:** Spending time and effort on a social enterprise that improves their lives gives youth and young adults a chance to discover and develop their own potential, especially in resource-poor environments that have no secondary education. For this, administrative openness is more important than funding.

🌉 **Social innovations as bridges:** Refugee camps and host communities have complex, often conflictual relations in a shared space. Innovative solutions to improve the livelihood of the shared environment can bridge the gap between different populations.

📍 **Share and scale best practice.** Map out and support platforms for sharing knowledge and best practice in order to facilitate the adoption of successful social innovations from elsewhere.¹⁸

🎪 **Make innovation an event.** Support showcase events that provide a space to experience refugee enterprises and introduce novel products and services. Support co-working sessions, hackathons and start-up weekends with refugees alongside students and experts to test and accelerate business ideas.¹⁹



ABOUT FII INSTITUTE

➔ **THE FUTURE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE (FII) INSTITUTE** is a new global non-profit foundation with an investment arm and one agenda: Impact on Humanity.

Global, inclusive and committed to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles, we foster great minds from around the world and turn ideas into real-world solutions in five critical areas: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics, Education, Healthcare and Sustainability. We are in the right place at the right time: when decision-makers, investors and an engaged generation of youth come together in aspiration, energized and ready for change.

We harness that energy into three pillars: THINK, XCHANGE, ACT. Our THINK pillar empowers the world's brightest minds to identify technological solutions to the most pressing

issues facing humanity. Our XCHANGE pillar builds inclusive platforms for international dialogue, knowledge-sharing and partnership. Our ACT pillar curates and invests directly in the technologies of the future to secure sustainable real-world solutions. Join us to own, co-create and actualize a brighter, more sustainable future for humanity. ←



Contact

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