

# *Vision for the Education of Refugee and Displaced Learners:*

## **A Manifesto**

### *Introduction*

As part of the **Together for Learning** campaign, the Refugee Education Council, hosted by World Vision Canada, was created in consultation with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group. Made up of youth, teachers, parents, and community leaders with experience in forcible displacement, the council will ensure that solutions and approaches are shaped by lived experience and knowledge.

Refugee education is vital not only to build skills and confidence among displaced persons, but to promote successful independence and integration in host communities. However, the voices of those who are most impacted by global education decisions have been historically excluded. We hope that this manifesto will amplify the demands of Canada's Refugee Education Council members in order to strengthen the global commitments to addressing the growing displacement crisis.

### *Manifesto*

We believe in a world where all children have access to quality education and lifelong learning. This vision is underpinned by our five core themes of inclusion, mental health and psychosocial support, digital learning, gender equality, and accountability.

## *Inclusion*

Education must be **informed by and accessible to** refugee and displaced youth across different backgrounds.

### **We believe:**

- Refugee and displaced youth need to be included at all levels of global decision making related to education.
- Refugee and displaced youth must have access to quality education regardless of their ability, legal status, gender, psychosocial needs, marital status, sexual orientation, caretaker role, or any other discriminating factor. This includes integrating youth with differing needs into schools and ensuring they have the proper accommodations needed to participate fully.
- All legal barriers that prevent refugee and displaced youth from accessing education should be removed. This includes ensuring qualifications are portable and can transfer with children and youth who relocate.
- Community inclusion initiatives are critical to help integrate refugee and displaced peoples into society and overcome stigmatization.
- Inclusive curricula that teach gender equality, inclusion, peace, and are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of refugee and displaced youth, especially the most marginalized, are critical to strengthen the quality of education for all learners.
- Refugee educators should be able to have their teaching qualifications recognized to enable them to teach learners in the host country.

- The international community must develop laws or legal instruments to ensure the right to education integration in all host countries.

- While shift scheduling is sometimes necessary, all shifts must be of equal quality in teaching, staffing, materials, etc., and include a mix of refugee and host students. This may include additional resourcing of schools willing to accommodate refugee students on par with nationals to incentivize teachers and reduce financial discrimination.

## *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support*

Refugee and displaced learners are highly vulnerable to factors that can lead to trauma and mental health issues. Mental well-being is vital to students' capacity to access and fully participate in quality learning yet mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) remains one of the most neglected areas of health and education systems with large gaps in data about the mental health needs of refugee and displaced youth, ongoing stigmatization, and few sustained interventions that consider MHPSS as part of approaches to improving access to education.

### **We believe:**

- Mental health and psychosocial support must be included as part of any approach or program aimed at improving access to quality education for children, especially girls and boys who have been forcibly displaced.

- It is essential to destigmatize mental health issues and encourage open, safe, and supportive dialogue that promotes mental well-being and reduces experiences of isolation for refugee and displaced learners and teachers.
- Schools should be equipped with trained counselors and all educators and staff should receive training on how to identify trauma, respond to students' mental health needs, and address prejudices based on country of origin to create safe learning spaces for all.

## *Digital Learning*

Digital learning is central to refugee education. Technology is key to closing the digital divide economically, geographically, and generationally, specifically in the context of unstable situations and where host country schools are at capacity.

### **We believe:**

- Technology has the potential to engage hard-to-reach students, break down language barriers, improve engagement, enable knowledge sharing, facilitate personalized learning, and help displaced youth feel connected to diasporic communities.
- Refugee children should have the ability to access digital educational resources that will allow them to enhance their skills, increase employment opportunities, and develop global connections. This requires reliable infrastructure that ensures the participation of remote communities in digital learning.

- Education opportunities need to be offered in both online and offline formats to reach more students and make learning accessible to different contexts and learning styles. Online delivery should be recognized and accredited on par with offline delivery options, and digital learning should be integrated throughout the curriculum beginning with primary.
- Cultivating strong partnerships with education experts and ethical technology companies is critical to providing technology to the hardest to reach, and ensuring teachers are trained in the use of educational technologies.
- Technology should be aligned to national curricula and education systems to have the most impact. Technology should be leveraged to boost school readiness and increase literacy rates at primary and secondary level.

## *Gender Equality*

Refugee and displaced girls continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing quality learning opportunities, despite the impressive commitments made at Charlevoix towards girls' education.

### **We believe:**

- Gender equality should be implemented into all class curricula and teacher training. It is essential to challenge gender stereotypes and norms to achieve true equality.
- Education and awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights must be provided in school and in the community to overcome misconceptions about pregnancy and STDs, and help keep more girls and young women in school.

- Short, medium, and long-term solutions must be devised to create safer spaces for girls and LGBTQI+ youth going to school. These solutions should focus on reducing gender-based violence, bullying, early marriage, pregnancy, and stigmatization, while also and promoting mental health, higher emotional intelligence and cultural understanding of gender equality and LGTBQI+ inclusivity, including among the broader community. Governments should ensure legal protections for LGBTQI+ people and outlaw child marriage and spousal abuse, so that there is a legal backstop for advocacy work.

- All schools should provide the basic facilities and tools needed to ensure that students are not excluded from school on the basis of their biological sex. This includes increasing access to washrooms, childcare, mental health support, contraception, and menstrual hygiene products on-site, and to safe spaces for online learning opportunities off-site.

- Educating parents and community leaders is critical to updating cultural beliefs about the value of girls' education, women's rights, and the dangers of sex work, early marriage, and child labour.

- Cash support to families can help them afford to keep their girl children in school. These supports should be combined with additional measures including gender equality training and secured personal identification numbers to ensure its proper use.

## *Accountability*

Governments and organizations working in global education have a duty to remain

accountable to the refugee and displaced learners that are impacted by their decision making. This includes adequately funding and implementing projects that:

- Are informed by and/or collect and leverage data disaggregated by social identity factors (sex, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion) on education needs, including mental health needs, of refugee and displaced youth.

- Are led or, at minimum, informed by women, youth, and/or refugee and displaced networks and organizations.

- Are responsive to and inclusive of the expressed needs of refugee and displaced youth across experiences, especially for those in rural communities and the most marginalized.

- Provide access to academic guidance counseling at secondary level for post-secondary opportunities and promote access to universal higher education and training.

- Assist refugee and displaced learners in their transition from learning to working. Poor transitions and lack of post-education employment with dignified salaries can discourage refugee and displaced youth from completing a full cycle of education. Education and employment should be planned in tandem to increase self-reliance and full participation in society.

- Are sustainable to enable long-term capacity for education systems to meet the needs of refugee and displaced learners.

- Have explicitly planned to minimize or eliminate corruption, especially corruption related to the siphoning of funds earmarked for refugee education initiatives by government and implementing entities.

# The Time To Act *Is Now.*

We call upon donor governments, education ministers, multilateral and non-governmental organizations, private sector partners, and everyday citizens to do their part to prioritize the education of refugee and displaced girls and boys. More specifically:

**We call on donor countries**, including the Government of Canada, to prioritize education in emergencies through responsive, sustainable, and transparent solutions that are informed by refugee and displaced youth. This includes:

- i) creating new or adapting existing international assistance policies to ensure that development frameworks include approaches to mental health and psychosocial support and actively confront systemic and individual exclusion across areas of focus,
- ii) establishing a permanent, paid advisory position or committee made up of refugee and displaced youth to inform decision-making in education at the government level,

- iii) reaching and maintaining an investment of at least 15% of Official Development Assistance towards education, and

- iv) clear and transparent reporting on funding distributions and their impact, which can be easily accessed by the public.

**We call on education ministers in host countries** to implement curricula that are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of all learners, including refugee and displaced youth and especially for those most marginalized. In particular, we call on ministers to create new or revise existing curricula that:

- i) teach inclusion, tolerance, and peace at early grades,
- ii) promote learning about gender equality and provide age-appropriate information on sexual reproductive rights and health in classrooms,

iii) help all students transition into host country curricula, including offering language courses, disability accommodations, catch-up and accelerated courses to enable learners to rejoin age-appropriate classrooms,

iv) include cross-cultural competencies to facilitate integration with national peers, and

v) are regularly assessed and improved upon to ensure that curricula remain responsive to the specific learning needs of the refugee and displaced students in their communities.

**We call on civil society organizations and multilateral entities** to engage in community-driven knowledge-sharing that breaks down silos and creates space for greater collective capacity. In particular, we call upon organizations to:

i) establish a permanent position at all levels of their governance structure reserved for a forcibly displaced young leader,

ii) work with partners to collect, leverage, and maintain data disaggregated by social identity factors (e.g. gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity) on refugee and displaced youth experiences, and specifically, on mental health needs, and

iii) ensure transparent reporting in funding allocation and impact that can be easily and publicly accessed.

**We specifically call on Education Cannot Wait** to create a working group composed of education ministers from host countries, teachers in emergency contexts, refugee and displaced youth leaders, and mental health and psychosocial support professionals to support ministers in the development of context-specific, inclusive, and responsive curricula.

**We call on private sector organizations** to collaborate with global actors in education and leverage their resources towards improving access to quality learning for the world's most marginalized youth. This includes:

i) reaching and maintaining an investment of at least 10% of profits towards the global education crisis,

ii) working with education ministers in host countries to deliver post-secondary scholarships, internships, and post-education job opportunities directed towards refugee and displaced youth, and

iii) bridging digital divides through cash and in-kind resources that improve internet connectivity in host communities, especially rural communities and refugee camps, and increase access to digital literacy, online learning platforms, and devices for students and teachers in host communities.

**We call on everyday citizens across host and donor countries** to commit to not leaving refugee and displaced people behind. This includes:

- i) encouraging local governments to prioritize and invest in closing the widening gaps in global education,
- ii) learning and sharing information by and about the experiences of refugee and displaced learners to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and break stigma, and
- iii) proactively championing the inclusion and integration of refugee and displaced youth in schools, communities, and/or workplaces.

We call on all stakeholders to enact tangible steps in place towards the implementation of these actions by the end of the Together for Learning campaign in 2023.

**We believe that everybody has a responsibility to help reduce disparities to address the devastating global education crisis, which grows more severe each year.**

**We, the members of the Refugee Education Council,** have composed this Manifesto to **speak with one voice on the urgency of these issues to refugee education.** We hope the anthology that follows will illuminate our stories and inspire change.

**Signed:**

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