

## Factsheet

## COMPLEMENTARY REFUGEE PATHWAYS: EDUCATION PATHWAYS

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*Education schemes for displaced people (including refugees) can provide qualified students an additional and complementary way to safely enter or stay in another country.*

### What are education pathways for refugees?

With only a limited number of resettlement places worldwide, many refugees spend years, even decades, living lives in limbo, unable to return home yet unable to rebuild their lives where they are. This has a particularly devastating impact on [refugees' education](#) – 3.7 million children are currently not in school, and only 3% of refugees currently have access to higher education.

Education pathways can address this problem by enabling refugees residing in countries where they have sought protection – usually neighbouring or nearby their country of origin – to safely move to third countries for the purpose of resuming their education. These pathways can offer an additional way for displaced people to safely cross international borders, alongside national asylum procedures and humanitarian resettlement programs.

Education pathways are usually facilitated by third-country universities, NGOs, governments and/or the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. While some education pathways provide refugees with permanent residence in the third country, thus ensuring a durable [solution](#) to their displacement, others are temporary.

These are one of several '[complementary pathways](#)' for refugees, providing protection and solutions for refugees and promoting international responsibility-sharing among States in refugee protection.

### Who can access refugee education pathways?

Each education pathway has its own set of criteria to determine who can access the program, but generally refugees are required to meet:

1. Eligibility criteria set by the organisation facilitating the program;
2. Academic selection criteria set by the host university or other education institution;  
and
3. Eligibility criteria set by the host government for a relevant visa.

Many current education pathways have been set up in response to large-scale displacement from the Syrian crisis. These pathways have differing annual intakes (between two and 50 applicants accepted per year). Specific criteria may relate to an applicant's age, whether they have dependents, their proficiency in the chosen area of study, and relevant language skills. Some education pathways require applicants to be formally recognised as refugees by UNHCR, while others do not.

## **Types of education pathways**

Some education pathways facilitate refugees' access to regular education-related migration channels already in place in the destination country. For example, the Japan International Christian University Foundation's (JICUF) [Syrian Scholars Initiative](#) supports refugees to enter Japan using regular student visas. Other education pathways are established specifically with refugees in mind. For example, World University Service of Canada's (WUSC) [Student Refugee Program](#) is a custom-designed migration pathway that sits within Canada's broader private-sponsorship program.

## **Examples of education pathways for refugees**

- **[WUSC Student Refugee Program, Canada](#)**

Canada's Student Refugee Program is one of the most successful education pathways, beginning in 1978 and providing alternative pathways for approximately 2,000 refugees to date. The WUSC model enables students and staff to provide sponsorship support to refugees through Canada's Private Refugee Sponsorship Program. WUSC's program does not provide a 'scholarship' per se, though tuition fee reductions or waivers are often provided as 'in kind' support within the sponsorship framework and refugee students are supported by local WUSC groups around the country. Each year, WUSC reaches out to the many participating university student bodies to determine how many applicants the students can support financially and socially in the coming year. Refugees accepted into WUSC's program are provided with permanent residence on arrival.

- **[Habesha Project, Mexico](#)**

The [Habesha Project](#) brings Syrian students from refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq to study at one of a number of participating Mexican universities. The program relies in volunteers and private donations and has received some assistance from UNHCR and WUSC.

- **[Global Platform for Syrian Students, Portugal](#)**

Portugal's Global Platform for Syrian Students brings Syrian refugees to Portugal to study at one of a consortium of universities. Refugees enter Portugal using regular student visas. Following their studies, they have the option to transfer to a work permit or apply for asylum if they wish to remain in Portugal.

- [JICUF Syrian Students Initiative, Japan](#)

JICUF enables two Syrian students residing in Turkey to study at the International Christian University in Japan each year. The program provides full coverage for students' expenses, including housing, tuition, healthcare, visa application and travel from Turkey. Refugees enter Japan using regular student visas. They are provided with Japanese language tuition during the program and the option to apply for a work permit if they secure a job following graduation.

### **Does Australia provide education pathways to refugees?**

No, Australia does not currently provide education pathways to refugees. There are currently discussions about [how Australia can develop an education pathway](#), including alongside a broader sponsorship program.

### **What are the benefits and challenges of education pathways for refugees?**

The [benefits of education pathways](#) for refugees differ for each scheme, but generally include:

- access to education;
- access to legal status, including [permanent residency](#) in some cases, and assistance with obtaining necessary travel documents;
- financial support to assist with living costs, language lessons, travel arrangements and counselling, if required; and
- access to employment during and after study is completed.

Some of the challenges associated with education pathways include:

- the [huge number of applicants for the few places](#) available within existing programs;
- sometimes limited settlement support when compared with resettlement, which may mean students spend more time working than studying (if allowed by the destination country);
- lack of support to enter the job market after studies are completed (either in the destination country or elsewhere);
- temporary status for some programs, leaving refugees vulnerable to return if they cannot secure additional visas; and
- difficulty in obtaining documents to attest to education level (e.g. diplomas).

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