

# 'It's her turn,' says UN agency, issuing global call to close critical gap in refugee girls' education

By secondary-level education, refugee girls are only half as likely as their male peers to enrol in school – even though they make up half of the school-age refugee population, according to a new study released Wednesday by the United Nations refugee agency.

“It is time for the international community to recognize the injustice of denying refugee girls and women an education,” said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

“These findings are a [global wake-up call](#), and I urge all to join us in demanding: ‘It’s her turn,’” he added.

Access to education is a fundamental human right. Yet, for millions of women and girls among the world’s growing refugee population, it remains an aspiration – not a reality.

While all refugee children have more difficulty attending school than their non-refugee peers, refugee girls face even tougher challenges to find – and keep – a place in the classroom.

Moreover, as they get older, refugee girls face more marginalization and the gender gap in secondary schools grows wider.

UNHCR’s [report](#) reveals that social and cultural conventions often result in the prioritization of boys over girls to attend school. Poor facilities, such as a lack of appropriate toilets and menstrual supplies, can also block their access. Adding to the challenge, book costs, uniforms and distance can be prohibitive for refugee families.

“Finding solutions to the challenges refugee girls face as they strive to go to school requires action right across the board – from national education ministries to teacher training institutions, in communities and classrooms,” stressed Mr. Grandi.

“There are formidable barriers to overcome,” he continued. “We are calling for an international effort to turn the tide.”

UNHCR’s report highlights effective, deliverable actions and policies to help more refugee girls get a quality education.

If refugee adults are able to work and support their families, they are more likely to let their children stay in school.

No girl should miss school because the journey there is too far or too

dangerous – refugee girls need protection from harassment, sexual assault and kidnapping.

More female teachers from within host and refugee communities must be recruited to promote best practice.

The report notes that for refugee girls, a quality education reduces vulnerability to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Additionally, if all women received a primary level education, child deaths from diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia would fall.

Moreover, the further girls progress in school, the more they develop leadership skills, entrepreneurship, self-reliance and resilience.

“If we continue to neglect refugee girls’ education, it is evident that the consequences will be felt for generations,” said Mr. Grandi.

“It is time to make refugee girls’ education a priority,” he concluded.

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## **UN chief urges completion of planned aid delivery to Douma in Syria’s east Ghouta**

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on all parties to the conflict in Syria to allow a humanitarian convoy to complete the delivery of supplies to Douma in eastern Ghouta planned for Thursday.

The latest convoy by the UN and its partners could not complete the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to 27,500 people in Douma because of insecurity in the besieged enclave of eastern Ghouta, where the fighting reportedly killed more than 100 people on Monday alone.

“Nearly half of the food carried on the convoy could therefore not be delivered. Moreover, a part of the medical and health supplies to be included for delivery was removed by the Syrian authorities,” said UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a [statement](#) issued Tuesday, noting that the last time an inter-agency convoy reached eastern Ghouta this year was 14 February.

“The Secretary-General reminds all parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times and of the basic responsibility to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian organisations, personnel, facilities and other relief assets,” Mr. Dujarric added.

Eastern Ghouta, located near the capital, Damascus, has been under heavy bombardment, with more than 400,000 people experiencing shortages of food, fuel, medicines and drinking water.

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## **Security Council condemns attack on education workers in Central African Republic**

The United Nations Security Council on Tuesday denounced an attack against education workers that killed six, including one UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) consultant, who were traveling in the north-western prefecture of the Central African Republic (CAR).

In a [statement](#) issued to the press, the 15-member body "condemned in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly attack" on 25 February by unknown assailants.

The other five victims were two officials of the country's Ministry of Education, and three members of Bangui Sans Frontières, a UNICEF partner.

The statement said that Council members were "appalled" that the victims were targeted while traveling to provide training for community teachers who were to start teaching in temporary learning spaces set up by UNICEF and partners for 2,000 crisis-affected children in Markounda.

The Council reiterated the urgent and imperative need to hold accountable all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses and international humanitarian law violations, irrespective of their status or political affiliation, and demanded that all armed groups lay down their arms and engage constructively in the peace process immediately and unconditionally.

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## **'Protect the momentum' and seize opportunities offered by latest inter-Korean talks, urges UN chief**

Welcoming the progress in the latest talks between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, the United Nations Secretary-

General has highlighted the need to utilize the opportunities it offers to find a peaceful path forward.

“The Secretary-General is encouraged by the advances made during the latest inter-Korean talks, particularly the agreement to hold a summit meeting soon, to further reduce military tensions, and to discuss denuclearization in future talks with all relevant parties,” read a [statement](#) attributable [Secretary-General António Guterres](#)’ spokesperson.

“He stresses the need to protect the momentum and seize the opportunities available to find a peaceful path forward.”

The statement also noted that the latest developments are further steps forward in laying the foundation for the resumption of sincere dialogue, leading to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to further assist in this process with the governments concerned,” it added.

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## [Victims of Syrian conflict ‘denied any meaningful justice,’ says UN-mandated panel](#)

Drawing from over 500 interviews, the latest report from of the [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#) – established by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate and record all violations of international law since March 2011 – documents deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and protected objects, starvation, unlawful internment, and the use of chemical weapons.

“It is beyond comprehension that, despite this extensive range of violations, [Syrian victims and survivors continue to be denied any meaningful justice](#),” said Commission Chair Paulo Pinheiro.

“Remedies which go beyond calls for criminal justice and address, for example, the situation of tens of thousands of detainees or account for those who have been disappeared or abducted must be given greater attention.”

Looking into the period between July 2017 and January 2018, including the military campaigns against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, the current [report](#) also revealed that while these offensives appear to have successfully dislodged the terrorist groups, the military success has come at an “extremely” high cost to civilians.

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Concerning eastern Ghouta, where the siege is entering its fifth year, the report highlighted an increasingly cynical means and methods of warfare, that have led to the worst documented cases of severe acute malnutrition over the course of the Syrian conflict, stated the report.

The siege continues to be marked by indiscriminate attacks affecting civilian and protected objects, the use of chemical weapons and cluster munitions, starvation, and the routine denial of medical evacuations, added the Commission, noting also that terrorist or armed groups within the enclave continued to indiscriminately shell Damascus city, resulting in the deaths and severe injuries to civilians.

Elsewhere across Syria, places of worship, civil defence centres, homes, medical facilities, markets, bakeries, and schools continue to be regularly attacked with impunity by warring parties.

In one particularly harmful attack which took place on 13 November, the Commission of Inquiry found that the Russian Air Force carried out airstrikes on a densely populated civilian area in Atareb (Aleppo), killing at least 84 people and injuring another 150.

“The use of unguided bombs, including blast weapons, in a densely civilian populated area may amount to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in death and injury to civilians,” stated the report.

Underscoring the need for the international community to take a broader view of accountability, the Commission of Inquiry urged practical and urgent steps to ensure victims’ needs for justice and accountability are met both immediately and in the longer term.

Recommendations also included the immediate release of children, women, the elderly, and disabled, and access by independent monitors to all places of detention, including those established by armed groups.

Noting that there can be no justification for punishing a whole population through starvation, indiscriminate bombardment, and denial of medical and humanitarian relief, Commissioner Hanny Megally, said: “This whole conflict has been characterized by a total disregard for the rules of war.”

“All parties must immediately lift all sieges, allow humanitarian access, and stop using strategies that primarily target civilians,” he added.

In addition to Mr. Pinheiro (Chair) and Mr. Megally, the Commission of Inquiry also comprises Karen Koning AbuZayd. Its current report is scheduled to be discussed next week during an interactive dialogue at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council.



UNICEF/UN0162763/Khabieh

A vehicle from the UN-SARC convoy drives past destroyed buildings in eastern Ghouta, Syria.

## **Monday's aid convoy cut short due to escalating violence – UN relief wing**

Meanwhile, the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) reported that Monday's joint UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) [humanitarian convoy](#) was forced to cut short its delivery due to escalating violence and insecurity on the ground.

[“After nearly nine hours inside, the decision was made to leave for security reasons and to avoid jeopardizing the safety of humanitarian teams on the ground,”](#) Jens Laerke, a spokesperson for the Office, told the media at a regular news briefing in Geneva on Tuesday.

“As a result, 14 of the 46 trucks in the convoy were not able to fully offload critical humanitarian supplies. Of the 14, four were partially offloaded,” he added.

At the same briefing, Tarik Jašareviæ, a spokesperson for the UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), said that close to [8 tonnes of medical supplies were delivered](#) as part of the convoy.

He, however, added that during the obligatory routine inspection conducted by Syrian national authorities before the convoy departed, around 70 per cent of the supplies in the WHO shipment were rejected, including all trauma and surgical supplies, dialysis sessions and insulin.

According to WHO, considering the critical situation inside Duma, the rejected items will be re-submitted for the next convoy.

“WHO has long spoken out against the removal or rejection of lifesaving

treatments and medical items from aid convoys by national authorities,” said the UN health agency’s spokesperson, noting that that when health items are rejected or removed from UN convoys, that information is reported to the Syrian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health; the Security Council; the International Syrian Support Group’s (ISSG) Humanitarian Task Force; and relief partners.

“The health supplies provided by WHO [...] are selected after extensive consultations with health partners working in these areas and are desperately needed to save lives and reduce suffering,” highlighted Mr. Jašareviæ.