

Education remains an impossible a dream for many refugees and migrants

The older refugee and migrant children get, the less likely it is that they will get a quality education: less than a quarter of the world's refugees make it to secondary school, and just one per cent progress to higher education. Even for migrants who settle in wealthy, developed host countries, accessing university is an uphill struggle.

For many young migrants in the UK, even those who have the legal right to remain in a new country, the idea of going to university is almost an impossible dream: not only are they charged "overseas student" fees, which can be around double those of "home" students but, until recently, they were denied access to student loans, which puts up another barrier to entry.

However, a ray of hope has been provided by Chrisann Jarrett, herself a young migrant. Whilst still a teenager, Chrisann set up Let Us Learn, a campaign for equal and fair treatment for young migrants. In an interview with UN News, Chrisann explained how a 2015 court victory against the UK Government has made a big difference to many young UK-based students born abroad.



UN News/Conor Lennon

Chrisann Jarrett, founder of Let Us Learn, a UK-based initiative to help young migrants access higher education.

"We recognized that over 2,000 students were being stopped from going to university because of their immigration status. So, despite being lawfully resident in the country, they were being told that they couldn't move forward with their education aspirations. In 2015, the Supreme Court agreed that this was discriminatory, and we managed to influence government policy, which

means that hundreds, if not thousands of young migrants are able to access a student loan and go to university, which previously wasn't the case."

Ms Jarrett said that the campaign was a cause worth fighting for, allowing potential talent, that would otherwise have been overlooked, to develop for the benefit of the migrants, and the countries in which they live.

Education cannot wait

Migration has become one of the central themes of political discourse and media coverage in the UK and other European countries over recent years, making it easy to forget that 92 per cent of young refugees are hosted in developing countries. These states have scant resources to ensure that they get an adequate education, and need support in order to be able to include refugee children in their school systems. This is why [Education Cannot Wait](#), the first global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises, was set up in 2016. Hosted by the [UN Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#), Education Cannot Wait brings together public and private partners to mobilize the funding needed to deploy immediate and sustainable programmes tailor-made to the educational needs of children affected by conflict.

One such examples is in Ethiopia's refugee-hosting regions of Gambella and Benishangal-Gumuz, which received a \$15 million grant from the fund, to pay for new schools and teachers. Most of the children there fled from violence in South Sudan, and schools can play a significant role in helping them to find stability and support.



UNICEF Ethiopia/2018/Mersha

Children in Makod Primary and Secondary School in Tierkidi Refugee Camp, Gambella Region, Ethiopia.

The investment by the Fund has paid for the construction of three new secondary schools, 84 classrooms in four primary schools, and classroom

furniture such as desks, chairs and chalkboards. It also supports teacher training through diploma programmes, as well as teaching and learning materials. It is hoped that the grant will lead to some 12,000 children benefiting from an improved quality of education.

But more than half of all school-age refugees are not getting any education: that equates to some four million young people unlikely to realize their economic and intellectual potential. The UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)) estimates that the number of young refugees receiving no schooling rose by around 500,000 in just 12 months between 2017 and 2018. The agency expects hundreds of thousands more refugee children to join these statistics, unless urgent investment is made.

The ‘horror’ of children devoid of hope

In February, [Gordon Brown](#), former UK Prime Minister and [UN Special Envoy for Global Education](#), warned that the world needs to wake up to “the horror of so many children devoid of hope,” and gave as an example the situation for children at the Maria refugee camp in Greece, where “no formal education is on offer to any of the hundreds of children who are there,” and where two young boys attempted suicide. “At that age, their lives should be full of hope and excitement at every new dawn – but instead young people are so devoid of hope, that they attempted to take their own lives”.

“Young people are so devoid of hope, that they attempted to take their own lives” Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education

Speaking at the UN’s [International Dialogue on Migration](#) later that month, António Vitorino, Director-General of the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#), said that “Too often, young migrants are denied access to training opportunities – vocational as well as academic – or access to all parts of the labour market in countries of destination.” Many young migrants, he said, experience discrimination that “reduces their prospects for growth, as well as their self-esteem. This is a dangerous cycle that we must avoid: unduly limiting the potential of a generation who encapsulate a diverse experience and skills.”