

HOW TO WELCOME REFUGEES INTO YOUR SCHOOL

Supporting
YOUNG CHAMPIONS



Stand up, speak out, and extend a hand to your refugee schoolmates

Starting at a new school is scary, especially for students who have been forced to flee their home and community. If you see a refugee struggling to fit in at your school, even a small effort can make a big difference to make them feel welcome! This toolkit lays out some ways to help your refugee schoolmates integrate into your school.



I. CREATE A BUDDY SYSTEM AT YOUR SCHOOL

01

Identify newly arrived refugees

Do you know a refugee student who has recently arrived at your school? Identify refugees in your school and community on your own, or by reaching out to teachers or department heads. Some refugees might not feel comfortable about sharing their identity. Make sure to be discreet about it and respect that.

02

Find students who would like to help

Ask your friends and classmates if they would be interested in guiding their refugee peers through their first few weeks of school. Promote the buddy system on social media and motivate students to participate. Create a sign-up sheet for students eager to partner with a refugee student.

03

Create a buddy system – be a buddy!

Buddies can be assigned randomly or according to age, interests or area of study. This can be done through hosting a gathering, like a pizza party, where refugee students can meet their assigned buddy as well as other students at your school.

Make sure that fellow students understand the responsibilities and the required time commitment. You can recommend that students meet at least twice a semester to check in with one another!

Buddies may help new refugee students with:

- Locating campus resources like the health centre, library, or international students office;
- Identifying specific issues that refugee students are facing, and help bring them up to the school or university's administration;
- Administrative affairs, like finding the right office to hand in documents or navigating course registration; and
- Being a friend! Your new buddy is adjusting to a new place. Make sure to be patient and kind.

II. IDENTIFY OBSTACLES TO REFUGEE EDUCATION IN YOUR SCHOOL

Only 3% of refugees have access to higher education. There are various issues, big and small, that might prevent refugees from attending your school or university, or from fully enjoying their education once they are enrolled.

01

Listen to refugee students

- Talk to refugees your age in your community as well as to refugees within your school. What obstacles are they facing to access education?
- By listening to them, you might discover things you have not thought about. Maybe the issue is the cost of education, the distance to get to school, or a lack of connectivity to apply online?

02

Identify solutions

- Process what you have heard and develop some ideas to fix the issues.
- For example, if the issue is cost, could tuition fees be waived for refugees, or could scholarships be put in place? Read our guide on how to advocate for scholarships.

03

Talk to decision-makers

- Who at your school or university can help address the issues that you have identified?
- Compile and present the research and the potential solutions you have identified.

With regard to refugees, States are expected to:

- *Provide free compulsory primary education;*
- *Make secondary and higher education accessible;*
- *Offer the national curriculum to all, and induce refugees in the national higher education system with the same access as non-refugee students.*
- *Support refugees by providing bridging and transition programmes to overcome language barriers and lost years of education;*
- *Allow refugees to enroll and sit for national exams*
- *Support verification of refugee documents and qualification for prior learning*

EXAMPLES:

Overcoming obstacles to refugee education

(1) In Uganda, a local NGO partnered with UNHCR to offer 102 bikes to refugee students so they could get to school more easily.

(2) During the pandemic, some universities moved their enrollment systems online, inadvertently preventing some students from entering their refugee ID numbers, which had not been an issue with paper forms. Such bugs can have big consequences, but can easily be fixed if reported on time.



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Example of buddy system

In Antwerp, Belgium, Bente paired up with Wasil, a refugee from Afghanistan. Bente helped Wasil integrate into the community by taking part in several activities, like sports, together. They became good friends, which made it easier for Wasil to integrate into the community. You can discover more buddy stories [here](#).



III. CREATE A PEER TUTORING PROGRAMME AT YOUR SCHOOL

Many refugees face language barriers and academic obstacles when they arrive in a new country. You can tutor a refugee or even create a peer tutoring programme, where students who are strong in specific subjects – such as Maths, Literature or History – could volunteer to tutor refugee peers.

01

Identify interested tutors & refugee students

Create an online form in which you clearly explain the objectives of the peer tutoring programme. In the form, ask potential tutors and refugee students for their names, contact information, subjects they would like to teach or study, and their hours of availability.

02

Outreach

Get the word out! Create a flyer with a link or QR code to your form, and share it across your school. You can create a social media account dedicated to this programme. You can also ask your teachers to promote your tutoring programme in their classes.

03

Pair tutors with refugee students

Using the information you have gathered through your online forms, pair student tutors with refugee students based on their needs and hours of availability. Facilitate an introduction between the two students via email or an in-person meeting and they can take it from there!

04

Assess your impact

Time to get feedback! Meet with students and tutors regularly to ensure that refugees are getting the help they need and inquire further about ways to improve the programme. Make sure to make the needed changes in the next programme!

HOW TO INTEGRATE REFUGEES INTO YOUR SCHOOL

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Refugee Storytellers Collective

The [Refugee Storytellers Collective](#) is a group of refugees who share their stories and perspectives. They aim to raise awareness and strengthen support for refugee resettlement and asylum. Photo © Refugee Storytellers Collective



IV. ORGANIZE EVENTS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AT YOUR SCHOOL

You can organize events to bring people together and make refugees feel part of the broader school community. It could be a storytelling event, a series of performances (music, dance, etc.), a sport tournament, or a food festival to share each other's cultures. Consult our guide on how to organize events to help you plan.

V. INTEGRATE MATERIAL ABOUT REFUGEES IN YOUR EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM

01

Research

Does your school offer courses on refugees or forced displacement? Why not try put together course material or even a full syllabus that broadly covers all major aspects of displacement? You can use this [teaching toolkit](#) created by UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as this [guidebook](#), for a place to start!

02

Outline ideas for a session/syllabus

Make sure you cover all major aspects of displacement, such as refugee law, waves of displacement throughout history, current crises and obstacles faced by refugees today. Include a diverse range of learning material including articles and historical documents, but also videos and quizzes.

02

Reach out to a teacher or department head

It's time to present your ideas to professors or administrators! Meet with them, ask for feedback and make your case. Explain why learning about refugees is important and present the research you have done! Hopefully they can help make it a reality.

03

Invite students to enroll in the course

- Once the class or session has been created, encourage students to enroll or attend.
- Most importantly, don't forget to celebrate your success. Creating educational material is no easy feat!

Thank you for your interest in supporting refugees! Contact youth@unhcr.org if you have any questions!