

## Refugee Advocacy and Higher Education Access: Virtual Student Convening

*Friday, Feb. 5, 2021 (5-6:30 pm ET)*

### Concept Note

#### **Background:**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are nearly 80 million displaced people around the world. Approximately 40% of this population are under 18 years old (UNHCR, 2020). Access to educational opportunities will be critical for improving the quality of life for many members of displaced populations. Although access to quality schooling is a human right, a marginal 3% of refugee youth attend a university or college (UNHCR, 2021). The international community has set a target of increasing global refugee higher education enrollment to 15% by 2030 (known as the [“15by30”](#) goal). The Global Compact on Refugees encourages academic institutions to take an active role in achieving this target.

Students can play leadership roles in facilitating refugee access to higher education by mobilizing campus resources. It is anticipated that refugee higher education access will become more salient in the United States as the new administration advances its commitment toward increasing refugee admission capacity to 125,000 from the 2020 refugee admissions cap of 15,000 set in place by the previous administration (Amos, 2020). In the next fiscal year, 32% of resettled refugees will be college-aged (Moore & Ullon, 2021). One of the challenges will be around ensuring higher education is accessible and welcoming to refugees into U.S. society. A promising signal comes from the new administration’s expressed interest in [expanding refugee access to student visas](#).

#### **Purpose and Goals:**

This meeting, co-hosted by the University Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants (UARRM), Student Voices for Refugees (SVR), the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Rutgers Global, seeks to engage U.S. college students to welcome newcomer peers on their campuses. The meeting will be an opportunity for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to learn about trends in refugee mobility and higher education access. Students will be introduced to ways they can get involved as advocates for increasing educational opportunities for refugees living in and outside of the U.S.

Through this event, we aim to create a sense of urgency around this issue and illustrate the benefits of sustainable education provision for forcibly displaced students and society at large. Participants will learn how university and college campuses can better serve as effective vehicles for student action to promote these benefits. We hope to open up a space for student leaders from all backgrounds to learn from and share their perspectives with higher education leaders.

#### **Objectives:**

- Energize a large cohort of students - both those already engaged and those interested in the issues - for broader engagement in refugee higher education advocacy.

- Move toward a collective vision for U.S. students, faculty, and university leaders to work together on refugee advocacy issues.
- Galvanize support from a broad ally base, targeting U.S. college students, to involve them in a public education campaign focused on creating more accessible, welcoming campuses for forcibly displaced students.

## References:

Amos, D. (2020, November 11). Biden plans to reopen America to refugees after Trump slashed admissions. *NPR*.

[https://www.npr.org/2020/11/11/933500132/biden-plans-to-reopen-america-to-refugees-after-trump-slashed-admissions?fbclid=IwAR05CjK-NKZhKjyY4b8KRX95L\\_8GCinImREcmPI4xLKSP63Ui0CNml\\_hBbQ](https://www.npr.org/2020/11/11/933500132/biden-plans-to-reopen-america-to-refugees-after-trump-slashed-admissions?fbclid=IwAR05CjK-NKZhKjyY4b8KRX95L_8GCinImREcmPI4xLKSP63Ui0CNml_hBbQ)

Moore, E., & Ullom, K. (2021, January 16). Biden plans to raise the U.S. refugee cap – is HE ready? *University World News*.

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210112133302632>

Statement from Joe Biden on World Refugee Day.

<https://joebiden.com/2020/06/20/my-statement-on-world-refugee-day/>

UNHCR. (2021). Tertiary education.

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/tertiary-education.html#:~:text=UNHCR%20and%20partners%20have%20committed,year%202030%E2%80%94the%2015by30%20target>

UNHCR. (2020). Global trends: Forced displacement in 2019.

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