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Former refugee from South Sudan to address Brussels education gathering

UNHCR-supported initiative aims to provide 100 scholarships a year to enable refugee and internally displaced students to attend UWC colleges worldwide.

By Helen Womack | 27 September 2017



The United World Colleges (UWC) has extended access to education for refugees. © UWC

A former refugee from South Sudan will be the keynote speaker at a presentation in Brussels on Friday of an initiative by [United World Colleges](#) (UWC) to extend access to education for refugees.

The [UWC Refugee Initiative](#), supported by UNHCR, aims to provide 100 scholarships a year to enable refugee and internally displaced students to attend one of 17 UWC colleges worldwide teaching the International Baccalaureate. UNHCR is supporting UWC by providing authoritative guidance on refugee policy, technical advice and helping to promote the scholarship program among refugee communities and relevant stakeholders. With its mandate to protect refugees, UNHCR considers it a priority that refugees are included in national education systems and have access to education at all levels, including secondary education.

Fewer than one percent of refugees attend university.

Lack of access to education is a major issue affecting young refugees. Of the 17.2 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, half are children. A recent [UNHCR report](#) on refugee education showed that over 3.5 million refugee children aged 5 to 17 were unable to attend school in the last academic year. Obstacles increase as children grow. While 84 percent of adolescents globally attend secondary school, the figure falls to 22 percent for refugees. And fewer than one percent of refugees attend university, compared to 34 percent globally. The education of these young refugees is crucial to the peaceful and sustainable development of the countries that have welcomed them, and to their homes when they are able to return. Yet compared to other children and adolescents around the world, the gap in opportunity for refugees is growing ever wider. UWC was founded in 1962 with a mission to make education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future. Today, UWC

has 17 schools on four continents. UWC's students are selected by 159 national committees worldwide on the basis of potential only and independent of socio-economic means. Currently, UWC is able to grant around 30 scholarships under the UWC Refugee Initiative per academic year but wants to increase the available funds to cover at least 100 scholarships. Among others, refugees from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Colombia, Yemen or Afghanistan will benefit from the UWC Refugee Initiative.

"We believe in the power of civic leadership. And we believe that education can be the force developing and encouraging young leaders." said UWC in a statement. "With the UWC Refugee Initiative, we want to make our contribution to strengthening emerging young leaders from refugee communities. We will provide them with scholarships to receive a world-class secondary education together with other students from all walks of life. We will equip them with the attitudes and skills needed to be able to contribute to the peaceful future of their communities and regions."



The UWC Refugee Initiative, supported by UNHCR, aims to provide 100 scholarships a year to enable refugee and internally displaced students to attend one of 17 UWC colleges worldwide teaching the International Baccalaureate. © UWC

UNHCR said cooperation with UWC was an example of the type of new partnerships needed to advance a comprehensive response and achieve better protection and long-lasting solutions for refugees. This echoes the global call of the New York Declaration for Refugee and Migrants to expand complementary pathways of admission for refugees to third countries and thus widen the options available for those with few prospects of attaining a durable solution, and is paramount for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure quality and protective education for refugee children and young people everywhere.

“Education is key to build anyone’s future.”

“Leaving their home country behind to find safety, refugees have lost the possibility to lead a normal life, stability and hope. Education is key to build anyone’s future. More so for refugees whom we would rob of their future, if we fail to provide adequate education services,” said Michel Gabaudan, UNHCR’s Regional Representative for Western Europe based in Brussels.

Like others, refugees and IDPs are people with skills, talents and aspirations. Educated refugees and IDPs can become self-reliant and provide leadership in displacement, and in rebuilding communities recovering from conflict, promoting gender equality, peaceful coexistence, and broader community development, including in areas of return and in host countries.

Among the speakers at the Brussels meeting will be Joseph Nakuwa, an alumnus of UWC, who co-founded the South Sudan Young Leaders’ Forum. Through this forum, the South Sudan diaspora are able to deliberate the problems afflicting their homeland and discuss ways to turn the country from conflict to peace and development. Other refugees attending the event included one Syrian refugee who is currently studying at the UWC college in Germany and two others refugees from South Sudan and Ethiopia currently studying at the UWC college in Italy.

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