



# Minimum Standards for Complementary Education Pathways

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## I. Introduction

“Complementary pathways for admission are avenues for refugees to relocate from a State in which they have sought protection (host country) to a third country (receiving country). Also called *Third Country Solutions*, they encompass a full range of pathways such as resettlement, labor opportunities, and education. Education complementary pathways include private, community, or institution-based scholarship, apprenticeships and traineeship programs.”

(UNHCR)

At the end of 2019, there were an estimated 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons across the globe, including 26 million refugees, with 85% of the world’s refugees living in developing countries, often in protracted situations.<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR, only 4.5% of refugee resettlement needs were met in 2019, despite the growing need for durable solutions for refugees. Increasing complementary pathways through third country education programmes is a tangible way for states and the international higher education community to provide safe pathways and durable solutions to refugee students while demonstrating solidarity with those countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

Compiled by the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, this document outlines minimum standards for third country education opportunities which lead to a durable solution for individuals who meet the refugee definition<sup>2</sup>, including those who do not have legal refugee status but are in need of international protection.<sup>3</sup> The minimum standards outlined in this document are rights- and evidence-based; they are also intended to be comprehensive having been adapted from a number of sector-level documents, as well as those created and upheld by UNHCR.<sup>4</sup>

Third country education pathways for admission are primarily via, but not limited to, tertiary education programmes. Thus, this document is intended for use by states, higher education institutions, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders that offer, plan to offer, support, or advocate for third country pathways through higher education and who wish to ensure their programmes meet the minimum standards for protection, transparency, and support to refugee students. These minimum standards are essential to third country education pathways, though certain adaptation might be necessary at the level of implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. 2020. Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020  
<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5ee200e37/unhcr-global-trends-2019.html>

<sup>2</sup> See: UNHCR USA. What is a Refugee:  
<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html>

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, the term “refugee” will be used to cover all displaced individuals to which this document refers.

<sup>4</sup> See [Higher Education Considerations for Syrian Students Complementary Pathways of Admission Doubling our Impact Refugee Education 2030](#)

The minimum standards are not meant to serve as a comprehensive guide to creating new education pathways programmes. The Task Force acknowledges the need for a holistic and detailed document focused on creating tertiary education pathways for refugee students, and a detailed toolkit on designing and implementing new programmes will be made available separately.

The minimum standards outlined in this document are not meant to be fulfilled by a single actor and implementation of comprehensive education pathways often requires collaboration between a variety of actors, including but not limited to government entities, higher education institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders from the public and private sector.

## II. Key Terms

The following terms are commonly used by practitioners designing, implementing, and supporting education pathways for refugee students (in alphabetic order).

### Country of Asylum (Current Host Country)

The country in which a refugee or asylum seeker arrives after being forced to flee his/her home country, and he/she is deemed to have found protection from persecution and refoulement.

### Durable Solution

Durable solutions offer long term protection, including through legal status, protection from refoulement and access to rights, and an appropriate long-term solution for refugees to become self-reliant.

### Informed Consent

The student's confirmation of voluntary participation in an education pathway after having been informed about all aspects of the programme and possible consequences of them joining the programme in question.

### Person in Need of International Protection

A person in need of international protection is someone who is outside their own country and unable to return home because they would be at risk there, and their country is unable or unwilling to protect them. Risks that give rise to a need for international protection classically include those of persecution, threats to life, freedom or physical integrity arising from armed conflict, serious public disorder, or different situations of violence.

### Refoulement

The forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they face a well-founded fear of persecution.

### Refugee

The [1951 Refugee Convention](#) Article 1A defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

### Third Country (Receiving Country)

A country that admits refugees and other persons in need of international protection that is not the country of origin or current country of asylum.

### Third Country Scholarships

A third country scholarship entails travel outside of the country of asylum (current host country) to access a higher education programme.

## **III. Minimum Standards**

### **1. Protection & Safeguarding**

*Programmes commit to:*

- Offering opportunities to students in receiving countries that ensure equal access to legal rights (freedom from discrimination, exploitation and exposure of identity without consent);
- Confirming students are in possession of or can apply for official travel documents, and providing assistance to obtain required visas, or; facilitating issuance of relevant documents from receiving country for students without official travel documents to allow for their movement;
- Obtaining informed consent about consequences that departure from the country of asylum may have on future re-entry or possible indefinite family separation;
- Facilitating student travel from host country to receiving country;
- Providing clear and transparent guidance to students on legal status options in the receiving country during and after the study programme period;
- Supporting protection against refoulement at all stages of the programme, by:
  - directing students to the appropriate institutions or legal counsel to receive guidance on how to apply for asylum in third country, family reunification, or return to initial country of asylum;
  - facilitating access to legal assistance and resources in the third country, as needed;
  - planning for continuity of legal status in the event of illness, injury, academic failure, or withdrawal from the programme;
- Communicating with relevant government entities and/or UNHCR about safeguarding legal status post-studies, if applicable.

### **2. Application & Admission to Education Pathway Programmes**

*Programmes commit to:*

- Designing a non-discriminatory, open and transparent application process with clear eligibility and admissions requirements;
- Ensuring accessibility of application for all students;
- Promoting opportunities through channels that are known by and accessible to refugees;
- Providing reasonable support to applicants throughout the application stage;
- Securing admission of selected students to a higher education institution in receiving country.

### **3. Funding**

*Programmes commit to:*

- Providing or securing funding to cover all application-related costs e.g., the development of an accessible online and/or paper application;
- Providing or securing funding to cover programme-related visa and travel costs;
- Providing or securing funding to cover the full cost of the study programme (certificate, degree, or other qualification) through full or partial scholarships, tuition waivers or other funding models;
- Providing or securing subsistence costs, including health insurance, living expenses, local transportation, and accommodation.

*In the occasion that students have access to resources, these could be used to cover some or all of the above-mentioned costs.*

### **4. Integration & Psychosocial Support**

*Programmes commit to:*

- Facilitating necessary language training at no cost, including where language of instruction is not the primary language of the third country;
- Ensuring that refugee students have access to university or provider services, support, and activities such as career placement, social organisations, internships, extracurricular activities, etc.;
- Providing and/or facilitating access to academic and psychosocial support, where necessary, to encourage student retention and success;
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation strategy to collect data for programme analysis at relevant stages, e.g. pre- and post-arrival, post-completion, etc.

## **IV. Further Recommendations**

The minimum standards outlined under items 1-4 are considered inherent to durable third country education pathways for refugee students. The Task Force recognizes that in many cases, additional measures and considerations are necessary to build comprehensive education pathways that respond to the needs of refugee students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

While not considered minimum standards, the Task Force encourages programmes to take some or all of the Task Force's further recommendations into consideration when designing and implementing third country education pathways whenever possible. The below list is by no means exhaustive and additional considerations may apply depending on the individual circumstances and nature of each programme.

### **1. Programme Design**

*Programmes are encouraged to:*

- Include refugees or individuals with refugee/asylee background in the design and implementation (e.g., application design, outreach, screening, pre-departure preparation, academic and career support, administration, etc.);
- Offer academic preparatory programmes, including language training as needed.

## **2. Application & Admission to Education Pathway Programmes**

*Programmes are encouraged to:*

- Maintain flexible admissions criteria and procedures in relation to acceptable proof of language proficiency, recognition of previously taken credits, incomplete transcripts, etc.;
- Coordinate with relevant stakeholders such as credential evaluators, providers of language and standardised tests, etc. to facilitate admissions.

## **3. Integration & Psychosocial Support**

*Programmes are encouraged to:*

- Host pre-departure and post-arrival orientation sessions to facilitate integration;
- Facilitate the creation of local support networks e.g. through student groups on campus and/or by building a network of students with refugee backgrounds on campus;
- Identify a designated point of contact on campus and/or administering organization for the duration of study who can follow academic progress, identify risks, and direct students to those who can provide specific support, including counseling for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), etc.;
- Facilitate visits with nuclear family members when possible.

## **4. Path to Employment**

*Programmes are encouraged to:*

- Support students in career advising, possibly with the involvement of the local community and alumni;
- Facilitate internship and/or on campus employment opportunities during the study programme to better prepare students for employment opportunities post-graduation;
- Offer support and counselling in pathways toward legal stay for employment.

*These Minimum Standards may be amended, modified, or repealed by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the entire Task Force at any meeting of the Task Force at which a quorum is present.*