

Angelina Jolie and UK call for support to protect education for refugee children

Angelina Jolie will join Baroness Sugg, the UK's Special Envoy for Girls' Education, to ensure refugee children are not forgotten in the global coronavirus recovery, at a high-level virtual event on refugee education today (Monday 13 July 2020).

Baroness Sugg will announce £5.3 million of new UK aid to support the salaries of more than 5,500 teachers in 10 of the world's poorest refugee-hosting countries, including Chad, South Sudan and Yemen.

She will urge the international community to protect the futures of the world's most vulnerable children both during and after the coronavirus pandemic.

Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy for the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, is expected to say:

"For millions of children and youth, schools are a lifeline of opportunity as well as a shield. Classrooms offer protection – or at least a reprieve – from violence, exploitation and other difficult circumstances."

"Without urgent practical assistance, some of the children left without schooling worldwide due to the coronavirus may never set foot in a classroom again. We must find ways to try to ensure access to continuity of education for young people across the world.

"Ensuring education for refugee children is something we can make happen, if we all come together."

Ensuring that children are not affected long-term by the interruption to their education during coronavirus is a priority in the UK and around the world. As the pandemic puts developing countries under increasing economic stress and limited resources are diverted to the health sector, there is a risk children will go uneducated as teachers go unpaid.

Without action, millions of children may be left without a school to attend in the aftermath of coronavirus, potentially undermining education systems in fragile and developing countries for a generation.

Baroness Sugg, the UK Special Envoy for Girls' Education, will say:

"Education must be prioritised in the global recovery from coronavirus. This epidemic is not just a health crisis, it is an education crisis, especially for refugee children. Without school and an education they will be unable to rebuild their lives and achieve their full potential.

“Supporting every child’s right to 12 years of quality education is one of the best investments the UK can make to end the cycle of displacement, poverty and conflict, as we recover from coronavirus. We urge our partners to match our ambition.”

The UK support announced today will help at least 300,000 vulnerable refugee children to continue their education.

In addition to today’s announcement, the UK has previously announced £15 million of crisis funding from the aid budget to UNICEF and £5 million to Education Cannot Wait, for handwashing supplies, remote lessons and protection services to support the world’s most vulnerable children during the pandemic.

Bahati Ernestine Hategekimana, a Rwandan-born refugee living in Kenya and currently studying to be a nurse on a UNHCR scholarship, will say at today’s roundtable:

“I am part of the 3% of refugee youth who have access to tertiary education. As a refugee, I needed a skill that would give me control and would put me in a position to be useful and helpful in case there is need, whether it be another war or a pandemic like we have now.

“I see a lot of refugee youth like myself who have been empowered through education to contribute to the response on COVID-19.”

Before coronavirus, 260 million children were out of school worldwide. Now, 1.5 billion children in over 150 countries are out of school.

For every additional year a child goes to school, their future earnings can increase by 20%. Unleashing that potential, by protecting education through the crisis, will be essential to preventing the collapse of economies in the poorest countries deepening a global recession, making it harder for all of us to bounce back.

- The £5.3 million of UK aid announced today will allow UNHCR to make direct payments to 5,669 teachers in 10 refugee-hosting countries for 7 months where urgent support is needed. The countries are: Chad, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Yemen.
- Of the world’s 26 million refugees, around half are under the age of 18. Even before COVID-19 struck, refugee children were twice as likely to be out of school than other children, with fewer than 1 in 4 refugee children enrolled in secondary education.
- Today’s event, a high-level round-table on education for refugees during and after the coronavirus, will be co-hosted by the UK and Canada, alongside UNHCR and UNESCO. It will give a platform to refugee students, states hosting refugees, and key development organisations, to prompt action to give refugee children the education they deserve.
- Karina Gould, Canadian Minister of International Development; Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO; Yasmine Sherif, Director, Education Cannot Wait; Ag Mohamed Aly Ahmed, community teacher and mobiliser and refugee

living in Burkina Faso; H.E. Pauline Nalova Lyonga, Minister of Secondary Education, Cameroon; H. E. Shafqat Mahmood, Federal Minister of Education and Professional Training, Pakistan; Professor George Magoha, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Science and Technology, Kenya; Nayla Fahed, Malala Fund Education Champion, Lebanon; and Andrew Dunnett, Group Director SDGs, Sustainable Business & Foundations, Vodafone, are also due to attend.

- During the course of the pandemic, teachers have come up with innovative ways to continue lessons. In refugee camps in eastern Chad for example, teachers are giving students work which is left outside their homes each week. Once completed, the work is then collected by parents' groups and after a 48-hour period, to stop the risk of infection spreading, given to teachers to mark. The work is then returned to children.
- Educating vulnerable children helps protect all of us against future pandemics. Educated children are more likely to understand and act on health advice, such as handwashing. When a girl can read, her child is 50% more likely to live past the age of five. Her child is also 50% more likely to be immunised, as she is more likely to understand the benefits of vaccination.
- School closures increase the risk of child labour, neglect and abuse. During the West Africa Ebola epidemic, the closure of schools exposed vulnerable teenage girls to sexual exploitation and violence. In Sierra Leone, cases of teenage pregnancy more than doubled.
- The Malala Fund estimates that when classrooms reopen, half of all refugee girls will not return to school. For countries where less than 10% of refugee girls are enrolled in secondary schools, the Malala Fund predicts the impact of COVID-19 could remove girls from the classroom entirely.