William Mude and Sally Baker

POSSIBILITIES OF EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS TO REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

A Personal Journey from Kakuma Refugee Camp to Australia

Forced Migration Studies

Collection Editors

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&

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Abstract

This book recounts the experiences of childhood in armed conflict settings in the Sudan, now known as South Sudan. It discusses the displacements and disruptions caused by war, including the necessity to flee and seek refuge in exile. The book focuses on the interruptions to early education and the challenges of accessing education in a refugee context. It explores the difficulties that refugees face in attaining education and the role of complementary educational pathways that allow them to pursue higher education. The book begins by examining how complementary education pathways provide vital opportunities for refugee students to complete higher education. It then recounts William's journey as a child in his village before and during the war, which led to his fleeing to a refugee camp in Uganda with his grandmother. William shares a narrative of challenges, but also highlights resilience in the face of adversity. He discusses his experience of relocating to Canada to pursue higher education through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC). The book addresses the challenges that he faced in finding employment as a student and the financial hardships he encountered. William later moved to Australia to complete a master's degree and subsequently earned a PhD. He started a family and actively contributed to his community, just like other people who have not experienced armed conflict. Throughout the book, recurring themes of hardship, resilience, and a sincere commitment to education and societal contribution are emphasised.

Key words

Refugees, Education, Resilience, Displacement, Conflict, Forced Migration, Community

Acknowledgements

William

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout this incredible journey of writing this book. To my family, your unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been my greatest motivation. I am incredibly thankful to my wife, who has taken on the role of putting our four beautiful children to bed while I write this book. I am also grateful to Sally, my mentor, who challenged me to think critically and pushed me to write my part. Your guidance has been instrumental in shaping this work. To the readers of this book, thank you for your enthusiasm and interest in refugee education; your passion and desire fuel the writing of this book, a story which wouldn't have been told. This book is dedicated to all of you, and I hope it resonates with your hearts as much as it does with mine.

Sally

I want to thank my ever-patient family for giving me the time and space to co-write this book; thanks to my lovely and super-tolerant husband, Shane, and special gratitude to sweet Micah, who had to share me on a holiday in Japan with this manuscript. I also want to thank the ever-excellent Tim McLennan for his editorial support. And I want to thank my friends and colleagues on the Global Task Force for Third Country Education Pathways,

and my Australian partners-in-crime with the Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (RSSP), Professor Bronwyn Parry, and Steph Cousins. It's been a wild rollercoaster of hope, disappointments, and furious activity on the RSSP while writing this book, and it's truly excellent to submit this manuscript while preparing to select our first 20 students!

Contents

Glossary of abbreviations

JRS   Jesuit Refugee Services

SRP   Student Refugee Program

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WUSC   World University Service of Canada

U of T   University of Toronto

List of figures

Preface

In a world marked by conflict and displacement, the stories of refugees often remain untold. The journey from crisis to opportunity can be obscured by the overwhelming statistics of suffering and loss. It is within this context that ***Possibilities of Educational Pathways to Refugee Resettlement*** emerges—a poignant narrative that personalises the experience of displacement through the lens of education and resilience.

This book is not just a story of survival; it is a testament to the transformative power of education in the lives of those who have been forced to flee their homes. William's journey from refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya to his successful education in Canada and Australia encapsulates the struggles and triumphs faced by countless refugees. His experiences reflect a broader narrative—a story shared by many who seek solace, stability, and a future amid uncertainty.

As we navigate the themes of hardship, resilience, and community contribution, we invite readers to recognise the unique potential of refugees to enrich societies. Education is a critical component of this potential. It can serve as a bridge from displacement to empowerment, enabling individuals to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to their new communities.

This book is dedicated not only to those who have experienced the traumatic realities of conflict but also to those who support and advocate for their right to education and a brighter future.

It serves as a call to action, urging policymakers, educators, and communities to embrace and enhance complementary educational pathways that can lead refugees toward successful resettlement.

Through the intertwining stories of William, we hope to spark compassion, inspire change, and transform the narrative surrounding refugees. It is our sincere hope that this book resonates with your heart and ignites a collective commitment to support the resilience of refugees striving for education and a better life.

We thank you for joining us on this journey, and we trust that you will find inspiration and insight within these pages.

William Mude

Sally Baker

Learning objectives

By the end of this book, readers should be able to:

- Define who is a refugee, and what instruments, rights, and processes determine that status.
- Distinguish between state resettlement programs and complementary pathways.
- Identify a range of complementary pathways that are being developed to help create more durable solutions for refugees.
- Articulate the opportunities and challenges that are associated with complementary education pathways.

1
The need for complementary education pathways for the growing numbers of refugees

Introduction

This book highlights the promise that education can offer to people who, through no fault of their own, are displaced by the threat of violence, persecution, or instability caused by armed conflicts. Education is a major and often unrealised source of security, capacity-building, future nation-rebuilding, and – most importantly – hope. Having access to schooling is a significant social determinant of health, and a key to unlocking opportunities. Having the possibility of accessing tertiary education, possibly with the chance of moving to another country, is a significant "pull factor" (World University Service Canada, 2024, *in personal communication*) for investment in education, both as a development aid strategy, and for families living in displacement contexts in which education is hard to come by.

Our intention in this book is to tell a story – specifically, William's story – about how being a refugee from Sudan and accessing a higher education "complementary pathway" to Canada, radically transformed his life and his future opportunities, which led to him saving thousands of lives as the only epidemiologist during COVID-19 in Northern Queensland (Australia). William's autobiography is a story of great sadness, violence, and seemingly insurmountable challenges, but also a love of learning and teaching, persistence, and community development, all underpinned by the emancipatory possibility of education.

Therefore, in this book, we offer a critical reflection on William's experience of seeking a safe and settled future through education. Our intention for you, the reader, is to be inspired to learn more and perhaps get involved in a refugee education program near you. While we write from an "Australia perspective", as both of us are based in Australia, we take a global perspective on the topic of refugee education and complementary resettlement pathways

An "unprecedented crisis": The global context of forced migration and displacement

This book is written at a time of unprecedented displacement and a growing number of crises. While migration is a consistent human characteristic, forced migration refers to the movement of people "who have been displaced by environmental disasters, conflict, famine, or large-scale development projects" (UNHCR, 2016, n.p.), and is therefore distinguishable from economic or voluntary migration.

In 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people has reached an unbelievable 120 million, and almost 40 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2024a). This does not mean that the remaining 80 million internally displaced persons do not want to seek refuge; instead, it reflects the scale of the challenge, and the complexity of assessing people's claims for protection.

Who is a refugee?

According to the definition set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention (hitherto referred to as "the Convention"), a refugee is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (United Nations General Assembly, 1951, p. 153). As of now, 149 countries have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, but 45 countries are not signatories to the Convention. This Convention establishes the rights of refugees and the legal obligations of states to protect them. Each country that has signed the Convention is bound to protect refugees on its territory and maintain the standards set out in international refugee law. In terms of providing education, for example, states that are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention are responsible for providing equitable access to education for refugees, ensuring non-discrimination, and the integration of refugee students into national educational systems. They must also protect the rights of refugee children, offer necessary support services, and collaborate with organisations to allocate resources effectively for quality education.

Who is an asylum seeker?

Seeking asylum is a human right enshrined in the Convention, and in international refugee law. An asylum seeker is someone who has sought refuge and who has lodged, or intends to lodge, an application for protection, but who hasn't been assessed or legally recognised yet as a refugee.

Who is responsible for assisting refugees?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the global organisation that partners with states and other stakeholders, with the task of "saving lives, protecting rights, and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people" (UNHCR, n.d.-a). The UNHCR was created and established by statute by the UN General Assembly in 1950 (UNHCR, n.d.-a). In addition to providing global advocacy, assistance, and monitoring to displaced peoples, the UNHCR also works to find solutions for refugees to move out of what can be protracted and lengthy displacement contexts.

What are protection needs?

Protection needs refer to a person's need for access to the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Convention. The Convention includes established processes for determining whether a person is a refugee (according to the definition). Signatory states must meet the tenets of international refugee law, including ensuring that refugees can access a country to seek protection, and adhering to the principle of non-refoulement (or forcible return).

What is a country of asylum?

A country of asylum is a nation that grants refuge to people who are fleeing persecution, conflict, or violence in their home countries. Asylum provides individuals with protection against being returned to a place where they may face serious threats to their safety or freedom. The process typically involves an application for asylum, where individuals must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. At the time of writing, there are active violent conflicts in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Gaza, while the impacts of climate change, and a heating world, are also wreaking havoc and forcing people to move to seek safety. According to a report, these crises are, in turn, placing severe strain on the neighbouring countries to these conflicts, which include Uganda and Ethiopia in Africa; Turkey and Lebanon in the Middle East; and Pakistan and Iran in Asia (UNHCR, 2024a). In the same report, the UNHCR speculates that 75 per cent of refugees (approximately 30 million) live in states neighbouring these countries, and the majority of these states are low- and middle-income countries. With the size of the global displaced community, these numbers mean that neighbouring countries need to divert scarce resources from their citizens, all of which can build resentment and negativity towards asylum seekers and refugees. Further, the challenges of so many people seeking asylum, especially in countries that are not signatories to the Convention, mean that many people seeking asylum live in insecure conditions and with limited legal rights, and even in some countries that are signatories to the Convention, refugees

are excluded from services, such as healthcare, education, and employment.

The remaining 22 per cent of refugees live in camps or temporary shelters. Camps are established to meet the basic needs of people as they flee, including food and water, shelter, and medical treatment (UNHCR, 2024b). In longer-term contexts, camps may develop the infrastructure to deliver education and work opportunities. In protracted conflict situations, generations of refugees may live in camps. One of the oldest refugee camps, Kakuma in Kenya, is the camp from which William applied to study in Canada (see Chapter 3).

Responding to the increasing scale of displacement

Violent conflict and natural disasters are, sadly, an increasing feature of contemporary life. The impacts of climate change have also created predictable regional instability, which will also create forced migration as people's homes become unliveable. Awareness of displacement and refugee issues has also gained attention, in ways that raise awareness of the need to do more, but also in ways that demonise and fuel divisive rhetoric and discourse.

Since the war in Syria escalated in 2012, there has been a concurrent oppositional narrative playing out in the media. On the one hand, the far-right, populist politics of the decade – which saw Trump first elected in the USA, and Britain's departure from the European Union – relied heavily on anti-immigration rhetoric. The divisive messages that were used by right-wing politicians

described "swarms" of refugees and other dehumanising words or imagery that portray an infestation or a flooding. On the other hand, the enhanced visibility of crises through the distribution of stories, videos, and images via social media has also helped to raise awareness of refugees and forced displacement. The media frenzy and heightened awareness of forced migration because of the Syrian "refugee crisis" peaked in 2015 with the global publication of the image of the body of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Kurdish refugee who had drowned off the coast of Turkey. The sight of his body, which had washed up on a Turkish beach, seemed to shock the world into renewed action.

There were many, varied responses to the "crisis", at different levels of government and institutional governance. At the global level, a leaders' summit was hosted in New York to encourage more coordinated action and global responsibility sharing for refugees. Over 50 leaders attended and pledged an additional $4.5 billion of assistance (United Nations, 2016). Other levels of response echoed this urgency, with resettlement states like Australia creating additional humanitarian intakes specifically for Syrians. Similar patterns are observable with Afghans following the fall of Kabul in 2021. Likewise, institutions with a connection to immigration, like universities, were also able to practically assist by offering pathways and programs to facilitate access to higher education (see below).

While reactive, such responses to "new" crises can help to meaningfully shift the dial with regard to raising awareness of the global humanitarian situation, as well as increasing ongoing durable solutions. This renewed engagement was followed in December 2018 by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR;

UNGA, 2018), which aimed to create "more predictable and equi-table responsibility-sharing" between states (UNHCR, 2024c). This affirmation established new coordination and forums to sustain expanded responsibility-sharing. Embedded within the GCR is the commitment to host a Global Refugee Forum (GRF) every four years to check progress and renew pledges. The first GRF was held in December 2019, and a second was held in 2023.

The pledges shared in both GRFs have created momentum for creative modes of working with states, agencies, host commu-nities, private sectors, higher education institutions, and refu-gees themselves. Recent analysis shows an increasing trend in commitments to both complementary pathways (new modes of protection/solutions to migration pathways to safe third countries), as well as the apparatus and logics that are needed to facilitate more movement of refugees, such as travel docu-ments, recognition of prior learning, pre-departure language development (and flexibility with language proficiency testing tools), and access to education.

Refugee education: What's the global state of the need?

Education is widely known to be a source of capacity-building, personal development, and hope for people who are forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2024d). And yet, access to education in dis-placement contexts is enduringly difficult for asylum-seekers and refugees, especially for those living in countries of asylum that are not signatories to the Convention. There is, globally, a blocked pipeline for educational opportunities; around two-thirds of ref-ugee children have access to primary education, and this drops

to just over a third for secondary education. While there is variability at state levels, these figures have long remained stubbornly stable, although there were several state-based pledges on opening access to education at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (Global Compact on Refugees, 2024).

Issues with access to education are myriad, not least the challenges of studying when focused on survival, as well as being excluded from national education systems, adapting to new systems and languages, and a lack of teachers, and other resources in displacement contexts. While there have been increased national commitments to educational issues on the global stage, the uptake by individual states remains variable.

Schooling provision in countries of asylum

Access to schooling for refugees is highly variable. As the UNHCR clearly outlines, challenges arise from the high numbers of refugees being hosted in the least developed countries that struggle to provide good-quality, free/affordable education to their own citizens. In low-resourced states/education systems, providing education to unexpected new arrivals can be burdensome; as the UNHCR (2023a, p. 5) describes, these countries

> need predictable, multi-year support from global and regional financial institutions, high-income states, and the private sector – money, technology, expertise, training – creating a broader base of support. We cannot expect overstretched countries with scarce resources to take the task on by themselves.

The UNHCR estimates that in 2023/24, 51 per cent of refugee children are not able to access education. As we wrote above,

access rates for refugees accessing primary education (65%) are much higher than for pre-primary (38%) and secondary (41%) education (UNHCR, 2023a).

However, access rates vary significantly, depending on the country of asylum, and by gender. For example, primary education access rates are almost 100 per cent in Angola and Gabon, compared with around 40 to 45 per cent in Senegal and Cameroon. Within these four countries, gender gaps exist: Angola has a 10-percentage-point difference between girls and boys (93% and 103%, respectively); Gabon has a much wider gap (22% points); likewise, Cameroon has an 11-percentage-point difference (41% to 52%), Conversely, in Senegal, the trend is reversed, with 53 per cent of girls accessing primary education, compared to 36 per cent of boys. With high schooling, there has been a recent increase in access – from 37% to 41% – but, similar to primary education, there are regional differences. For example, in Türkiye, enrolments have grown from 27 to over 60 per cent; however, there have been downward trends in other major asylum countries, such as Pakistan (from 5% to 3%) and Colombia (from 30% to 22%; all UNHCR, 2024d).

Tertiary education access for refugees

With higher education access there has been some relative success, with access climbing from 1 per cent in 2016 to 7 per cent in recent UNHCR reports (2023a; 2024d). While this increase is heartening, it is likely due to shifts in methodology and reflects higher education qualifications, as opposed to enrolments. The educational background of people who are displaced in more recent conflicts is likely to have contributed to the sharp increase

from 1 per cent to 6 per cent; for example, it is estimated that Syrian refugees include over 2,000 academics and over 100,000 university graduates who had a tertiary-level education prior to fleeing (Cara, 2019), which reflects the massification of the higher education sector, and increased participation in university education before the war (Tozan, 2023), and likewise for many Ukrainian refugees. However, as Sarah Dryden-Peterson commented back in 2010, there are widespread inequities in who gains access to higher education, with disproportionate rates of access among group of higher socio-economic status. This remains a concern 14 years later.

Tertiary education access is impeded by the many state- and institutional-level barriers that block enrolment, in both countries of asylum and resettlement contexts. In addition to lacking legal migration pathways to education, other admissions challenges include missing documentation, insufficient evidence of prior study, unrecognised qualifications, as well as language and academic literacy proficiency. Other more tacit challenges include a lack of available and verifiable information, navigation of systems, and inflexible program rules. This creates many issues, as summarised by Pherali and Moghi (2021, p. 2161):

> *Depriving young refugees of opportunities to access HE can potentially fuel frustrations, negate their potential to be self-reliant and potentially risk stability in host communities, with wider consequences of debilitating effects on their aspirations to rebuild their country of origin if/when they decide to or can return. Hence, the opportunity cost of neglecting tertiary education in contexts of mass displacement is high politically, socially and economically.*

The importance of access to higher education opportunities cannot be understated, especially at a time of growing displacement.

15/30: A mandate for a greater focus on opening access to higher education to refugees

In response to the dire situation of only one per cent of refugees having access to higher education, in 2019 the UNHCR launched its "15/30 campaign", with an ambition for raising the rate of refugee participation in higher education to 15 per cent by 2030 (UNHCR, 2023b). The UNHCR outlines five areas of focus to help achieve this target (see the 15 by 30 Roadmap with recommended actions) focus on advocacy with different state actors and educational institutions and are underpinned by a need for international aid and development funding in education in countries of asylum. It stresses the need for access to digital technology.

Increasing participation in country-of-asylum higher education

For the first pillar, the advocacy is focused on the country where refugees are temporarily and/or precariously living and involves advocacy at the state level to legally permit access to tertiary education.

Scholarships in countries of asylum

For the second pillar, the UNHCR provides "DAFI" scholarships for displaced people to cover the costs of studying in their country of asylum, and so the focus is on getting educational institutions to accept refugees.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The third pillar focuses on opening access to training opportunities to enhance refugees' employability and livelihood prospects in countries of asylum, as well as opening opportunities for labour mobility pathways. A key protective factor for such programs is the enhancement of educational provision that supports both refugees and citizens; for example, Ethiopia pledged to provide "quality and accredited training to 20,000 host community members and refugees on an equitable basis" through the Qualifications and Employment Perspectives (QEP) for Refugees and Host Communities in Ethiopia Programme, which is funded by the German government (Tamrat, 2022).

Connected Learning

The fourth pillar focuses on opening access to tertiary education programs through accredited distance learning, allowing refugees to take courses in situ, rather than requiring students to move for study or physically attend campus. The focus for this pillar is on leveraging access directly with higher education institutions.

Complementary education pathways

The fifth pillar focuses on facilitating access to international education opportunities in third countries, often using international student visas for a legal pathway. In some of these countries, there are pathways to claiming asylum after or during the completing the program of study; in other countries, the completion of a program of study may require refugee to move or secure another pathway to durable legal status through postgraduate study or labour mobility.

What are durable solutions for refugees?

The UNHCR has traditionally worked towards finding one of three main avenues for resolving refugees' state of legal displacement: voluntary return (to their own country when it is safe to do so), local integration (in the country of asylum), and resettlement to a host country. However, as this book will explain, there is a new option: migrating through complementary pathways.

Safe return

The idea of safe and voluntary return is one of the three tenets of the UNHCR's work. When it is safe to return, people who have been forced to flee often return home – albeit often after a long period living away. The UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) facilitate repatriation, and work "to ensure any returns are voluntary, safe, and dignified" (UNHCR, 2024e).

Local integration

The idea of local integration involves ongoing advocacy with host countries to provide access to the local systems and services that are offered to other residents and citizens. This is often a "complex and gradual process" (UNHCR, 2024f), but is estimated to have led to over 1 million refugees receiving citizenship and permanent residence status from a country of asylum over the last decade.

Resettlement

The third prong of UNHCR's work is to support the movement of refugees to voluntarily move to one of 23 countries