

Refugee Education Financing: Key Facts and Findings

Insights into the Financing of Refugee Education
in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

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Abstract

This paper, along with its accompanying data, provides the first comprehensive analysis on financing for refugee education in low- and middle-income countries. By compiling and scrutinizing data on host government financing, foreign aid contributions, and philanthropic giving, a consolidated and quantified overview of all major sources of financing for refugee education in low- and middle-income countries is produced. This data is then analyzed to reveal key

trends and patterns in refugee education financing, existing financing gaps, and potential biases in financing allocations. These findings are explored in the 10 facts and findings outlined in this paper, and summarized in Box 1 below. It is hoped that this dataset and analysis will help to improve the understanding of financing for refugee education in low- and middle-income countries and inform future discussion and debate on refugee education financing.

This paper is a product of the Poverty and Equity Global Practice. It is part of a larger effort by the World Bank to provide open access to its research and make a contribution to development policy discussions around the world. Policy Research Working Papers are also posted on the Web at <http://www.worldbank.org/prwp>. The author may be contacted at rhopper1@worldbank.org.

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Box 1: Key facts and findings on refugee education

1. Refugees are overwhelmingly hosted in low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs).
2. Africa and the Middle East have historically hosted the most refugees, but new and increasing crises are dramatically altering the geography of displacement.
3. Refugee enrollment rates are markedly lower than host country enrollment rates in most LICs and MICs, but not everywhere.
4. Host country governments are unable to finance inclusive refugee education in the majority of large host LICs and MICs.
5. Philanthropic financing does not finance inclusive refugee education in LICs and MICs.
6. Official development assistance (ODA) for refugee education is dominated by development finance, in marked contrast to all other ODA for refugee situations.
7. Over 80 percent of ODA for refugee education comes from just 5 donor countries.
8. ODA allocations for refugee education are distributed unevenly across income groups and regions.
9. ODA for refugee education is skewed toward specific countries, with financing exceeding the costs of inclusive refugee education in some countries.
10. ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs is primarily allocated to Syrian refugees.

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Introduction

Data on financing for refugee education is notoriously elusive. The fragility and instability of refugee situations, combined with a lack of disaggregation in donor and government reporting, make tracking refugee financing, particularly at scale, extremely challenging. As a result, efforts to quantify this information have been partial to date, leading to a lack of detailed analysis of financing for refugee situations.

This paper, and its accompanying dataset, overcome this deficit by producing the first comprehensive dataset and paper on financing for refugee education in low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs). By collating and analyzing publicly available data, surveying key refugee education donors, and working closely with host country governments and international organizations, all major sources of financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs are collated and quantified for the first time. This paper then analyzes this data to produce 10 key facts and findings on refugee education financing for LICs and MICs.

Literature Review

Difficulties in tracking donor and host government financing to refugee situations have led to a dearth of publications on refugee education financing. As emphasized by Marcus et al. (2023), a “lack of disaggregation in global aid reporting systems by source, sector (subsectors), or type of crisis (e.g., internal displacement, refugee) limits analysis of funding on refugee inclusion [while] data on domestic expenditure in major refugee-hosting countries are often unavailable internationally”, hindering understanding and analysis (Marcus et al., 2023). These data challenges extend to the philanthropy sector, another significant source of refugee education financing, with many major foundations and funds electing not to publish their financing allocations, either by sector, country, or region (OECD, 2021; ECW, 2019).

The lack of information on refugee education financing in LICs and MICs has created a scarcity of literature in this area. Yet data on financing for refugee situations has improved dramatically in recent years. Most notably, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) surveyed Development Assistance Committee members, participants, observers and partners on their financing for refugee situations in 2018, 2020 and 2023 (OECD, 2021, 2023). The second, and final, of these surveys asked donors to disaggregate their financing for refugee situations by sector, representing the first time that data on sector-level ODA for refugee situations had been collected at scale, allowing the OECD to produce the first sector-specific estimates of ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs (Hesemann et al., 2023). Hesemann et al. (2023) found education to be the third largest sector recipient of ODA for refugee situations in 2021, receiving US\$ 2.3 billion, or 8% of total ODA for refugee situations in LICs and MICs. While this estimate is imperfect, and is improved upon in this paper’s analysis, Hesemann et al.’s work (2023) contributed significantly to improving transparency and the quality of data and analysis on financing for refugee situations.

Much like ODA for refugee education, information on host government financing for refugee situations in LICs and MICs is scarce. Financing data on refugee education is neither publicly, nor internally, available for many LIC and MIC governments, with budget allocations seldom

disaggregated by refugee status. As such, reports exploring host country financing for refugee education are scarce, with only a handful of countries publishing data on financing for refugee education (e.g. Colombia) (Burde et al., 2022).

Literature on philanthropic financing for refugee education is also limited. In 2019, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), a global fund for education in emergencies, produced the most recent and comprehensive estimate of philanthropic financing for ‘education in emergencies’ (EiE) to date. ECW estimated the philanthropic sector’s financing of refugee education by using the grant-aggregator *Candid* and examining individual foundations’ online grant databases where available (ECW, 2019). Due to a lack of publicly available data on philanthropic financing, the organization used its relationships with major grant makers to establish financing estimates for all major philanthropic financers. ECW reported that the philanthropic sector provided US\$ 294.5 million to EiE between 2008-2016, averaging US\$ 33 million a year over this period, or 5.4 percent of total foundation grant making to countries in emergencies (ECW, 2019). Since this publication, no similar studies have been conducted or planned by ECW or any other organization, leading to a dearth of literature on philanthropic financing for refugee education.

Methodology

As outlined above, the challenges involved in tracking and disaggregating financing for refugee situations have led to a lack of publicly available data and literature on global financing for refugee education. This paper, and its accompanying dataset, help to fill this gap through collecting, collating, and scrutinizing both primary and secondary data to produce the first comprehensive dataset and analysis of refugee education financing to low- and middle-income countries. The sources of this data, and the methods used to collect them, are discussed in detail below.

Refugee population, enrollment, and costing data

The costs of refugee education used in this paper and its accompanying dataset refer to the costs of *inclusive* education provision: i.e. the cost of educating refugees through the national education system of their current host countries. The costs of pre-primary, primary and secondary education are estimated using the methodology outlined in *The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education – 2023 Update* (World Bank & UNHCR, 2023), which focused on the fiscal costs of education.

All refugee population numbers used in this paper are taken from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) *Refugee Population Statistics Database* (UNHCR, n.d.). ‘Refugee’ is defined in this paper as those categorized by the UNHCR as either ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, or ‘other people in need of international protection’. The UNHCR presents demographic data by age categories only. In order to estimate the school-age refugee population in each host country, this paper and its accompanying dataset assume that all refugees aged 5-11 years are uniformly distributed across one year of pre-primary education and six years of primary education, and that refugees aged 12-17 years represent the standard

secondary school-age population in each host country.¹ These population estimates are then combined with refugee gross enrollment rates (GERs), compiled by UNHCR (2023c), to estimate the refugee population accessing education in each country. Host country GERs are taken from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, which provides national GERs for primary and secondary education only (UNESCO, n.d.).

Financing data

The financing data presented in this paper is based on official, publicly available data where possible. To improve the quality of data on financing for refugee education, the authors have provided more detailed estimates on all major sources of education financing through either collecting new primary data or re-examining existing data to produce more accurate financing information. The methods used to produce these estimates are explained below.

(i) Bilateral and multilateral ODA for refugee education

The analysis of ODA presented in this paper is based on data from the OECD's 2023 *Ad hoc Survey on Development Finance for Refugee Situations in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, 2020-21*.² Unlike its predecessors, the 2020-21 refugee financing survey captured ODA by area/sector, making it possible to estimate ODA for refugee education for the first time. However, the OECD's classification only allows financing to be categorized into one area/sector, limiting the accuracy of its sector level analysis. As such, this paper presents new estimates for refugee education financing for all LICs and MICs by reviewing the descriptors in each line of ODA to ensure that all financing for education purposes are categorized as such. For example, in several instances financing was classified in the OECD dataset as 'emergency response', but was used entirely for education purposes, and as such should be incorporated into refugee education financing estimates. To ensure that all education financing was captured in this paper and the accompanying dataset, 'education identifiers'³ were used to detect potential misallocations. Each potential misallocation was then reviewed in detail, with only financing allocated entirely for education purposes categorized as 'education' financing.⁴

It should be noted that the OECD's dataset records development finance for refugee *situations* in LICs and MICs. It thus provides estimates of DAC members' and non-DAC providers' ODA contributions to both refugees and host communities in the refugee-hosting recipient countries. As such the ODA recorded in this dataset is likely to inflate financing for refugee

¹ For countries where data on refugee populations by age were not available, it was assumed that the number of primary and secondary school-age refugees in these countries were equal to 19 percent and 13 percent, respectively, of the total refugee populations of these countries, in line with the averages in all other LICs and MICs.

² This survey, issued in March 2023, captures the financing data of 43 bilateral donors (31 DAC countries and 12 non-DAC countries), 6 multilateral development banks and 14 UN agencies (core contributions) for the financial year 2020-21. Recipients of official assistance are recorded as the first implementing partner only to avoid duplication.

³ The 'education identifier' searched the 'Short description', 'Project title', 'Purpose name' and 'Sector name' variables of the OECD dataset for the key words 'education', 'school', 'teach', and 'classroom'. If any of these key words were identified, then each allocation's descriptives were reviewed to determine whether financing was for refugee education, with only financing that was allocated entirely for education purposes included as such. Categories of spending captured include direct expenditure on education provision, such as teacher salaries and textbooks, as well as indirect sources of financing for education, such as School Feeding Programmes and Cash Transfers for Education.

⁴ A lack of comprehensive information on education financing by level of education prevented more detailed analysis, with all ODA for refugee education analyzed in this paper with no disaggregation by education level possible.

education as some ODA allocation to refugee situations will benefit both hosts and refugees alike. Furthermore, while ODA financing provides annual financing estimates, some financing will be capital expenditures with long term benefits. As such, the benefits of ODA allocations may be realized over many years, but categorized as financing in just one year.

(ii) Host country government financing of refugee education

To mitigate the lack of publicly available information on host government financing for refugee education, primary data collection was conducted for this report. This was achieved through extensive engagement with government, non-government, and international organizations working in the 25 largest refugee hosting LICs and MICs. These efforts yielded estimates on host government financing for refugee education in 20 of the largest 25 hosting countries, which combined hosted 77 percent of all school-age refugees in LICs and MICs in 2021. Given the deficiencies in the recording of such information at country level, as outlined in the methodology, assumptions were required to estimate host government financing for the majority of estimates produced. To ensure the validity of these estimates, officials from international organizations, host country governments, and/or non-government organizations (NGOs) either verified or worked with the authors to produce this studies estimates.

Given that refugee education financing was not tracked by the majority of governments examined, there is little commonality in the methods used to estimate host government financing for refugee education by country. Rather, approaches were adapted depending on data availability.

(iii) Philanthropic financing of refugee education

The philanthropic financing data used in this paper is based on three separate sources: the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), the grant aggregator database *Candid*, and a survey of International Education Funders Group (IEFG) members conducted for this paper. The OECD's CRS forms the basis of the accompanying dataset's philanthropic financing data. This information is then supplemented by additional project data recorded in the grant aggregator database *Candid*, and primary data collected through the September 2023 World Bank and IEFG survey of IEFG members on refugee education (IEFG and World Bank, 2023). These data were then triangulated to produce estimates of the philanthropic sector's financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs. While this paper uses the latest available information to estimate philanthropic financing for refugee education, given the lack of transparency in this sector, these figures are likely to underestimate the extent of philanthropic financing for refugee education.

Key facts and findings on refugee education

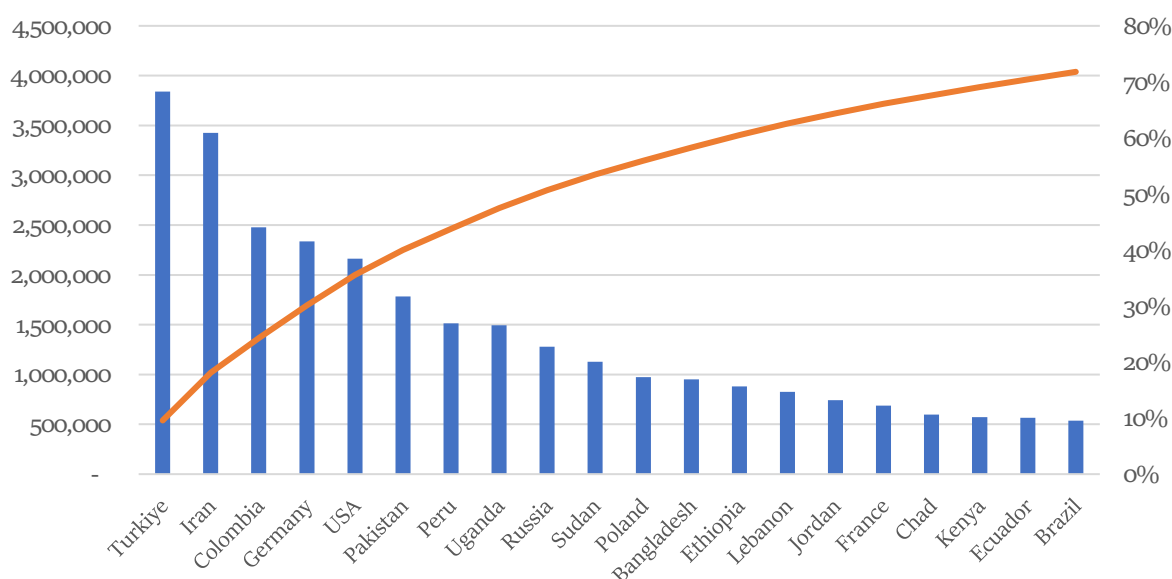
The remainder of this paper presents ten key facts on refugee education financing in LICs and MICs. This analysis is based on this paper’s accompanying dataset on *Financing for refugee education in low- and middle-income countries* (REFD, 2024), and supplemented with additional sources where relevant.

Key fact 1: Refugees are overwhelmingly hosted in LICs and MICs

Over the last decade, the number of people facing forced displacement due to conflict, violence and/or persecution has increased threefold, from 33.7 million in 2012 to 107.8 million people by the end of 2022⁵ (UNHCR, 2023). Of those displaced, 40.1 million are classed as refugees, asylum seekers, or other persons in need of international protection.

Figure A shows the number of refugees⁶ in the 20 largest host countries as of end-2022. The bars show each countries’ total refugee population, while the line captures the cumulative total of refugees hosted in these countries as a proportion of the global refugee population. Figure A shows that a relatively small number of countries host the majority of the world’s refugees, and that low- and middle-income countries host a disproportionately large share of this population (70 percent of refugees globally), with only 4 of the top 20 host countries high income countries (HICs) in 2022.⁷

Figure A: Distribution of refugees globally, 2022



Source: UNHCR (2023)

Of the 107.8 million recorded as forcibly displaced as of end-2022, an estimated 43.3 million (40 percent) were children below the age of 18. Figure B shows the proportion of school-age

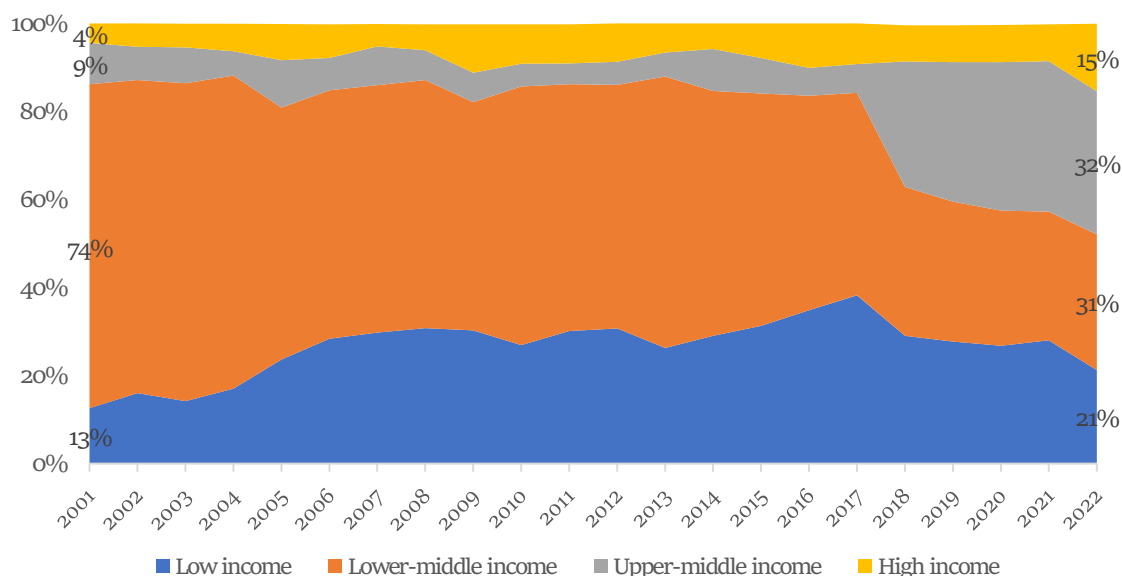
⁵ In 2023, an additional 5.9 million refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA, 2023).

⁶ As outlined previously, ‘Refugee’ is defined by this report and its accompanying dataset as those categorized by the UNHCR as either ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, or ‘other people in need of international protection’ (UNHCR, 2023).

⁷ Income classifications made in accordance with World Bank country-level classifications.

refugee children in low-, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries; while Figure C shows the absolute number of school-age refugees in each income group. As these figures show, the number of school-age refugees in upper-middle income countries (UMICs) has increased dramatically in recent years, both in relative and absolute terms. In fact, between 2017 and 2022, the number of school-age refugees in UMICs increased tenfold, as crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and the República Bolivariana de Venezuela saw millions flee to neighboring UMICs, such as Türkiye and Colombia.

Figure B: Proportion of school-age refugees (5-17 years old) by host country income classification⁸



Source: UNHCR (2023)

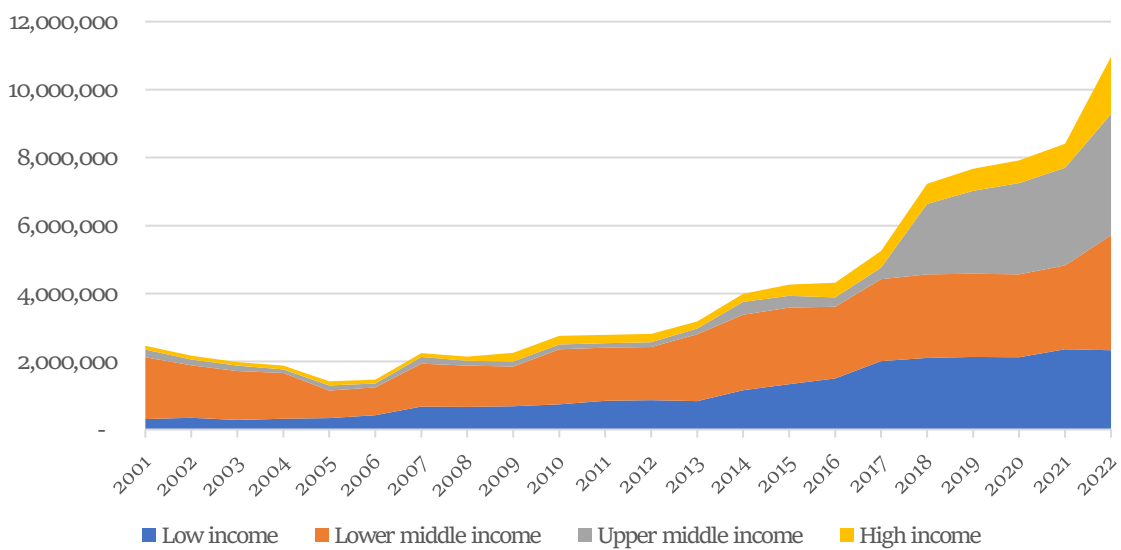
As shown in Figure B, the proportion of school-age refugees hosted in LICs and lower-middle income countries (LMICs) has been falling in recent years. However, both income groups have seen a steady increase in the absolute numbers of school-age refugees within their countries. In fact, the total number of school-age refugees hosted by LICs tripled between 2010 and 2022, with year-on-year increases reported for 16 of the last 20 years. Similarly, the number of school-age refugees in LMICs doubled in the last ten years, and has tripled since 2009, as shown in Figure C, indicating that refugee numbers are increasing in all income categories.

This section shows refugee numbers as of end-2022. It thus does not capture the significant displacements witnessed in 2023, with displacements from the República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti, Afghanistan and other countries likely to significantly increase the number of refugees globally in 2023.

Figure C: Absolute number of school-age refugees (5-17 years old) by host country income classification⁹

⁸ Some hosting countries recorded incomplete demographic data. For countries where data on school-age populations were incomplete, it was assumed that 19% of the total refugee population was aged 5-11 and 13% was ages 12-17. These proportions represent the average populations in those countries with complete demographic data.

⁹ This graph shows all school-age populations protected under the UNHCR mandate. This does not include Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate.



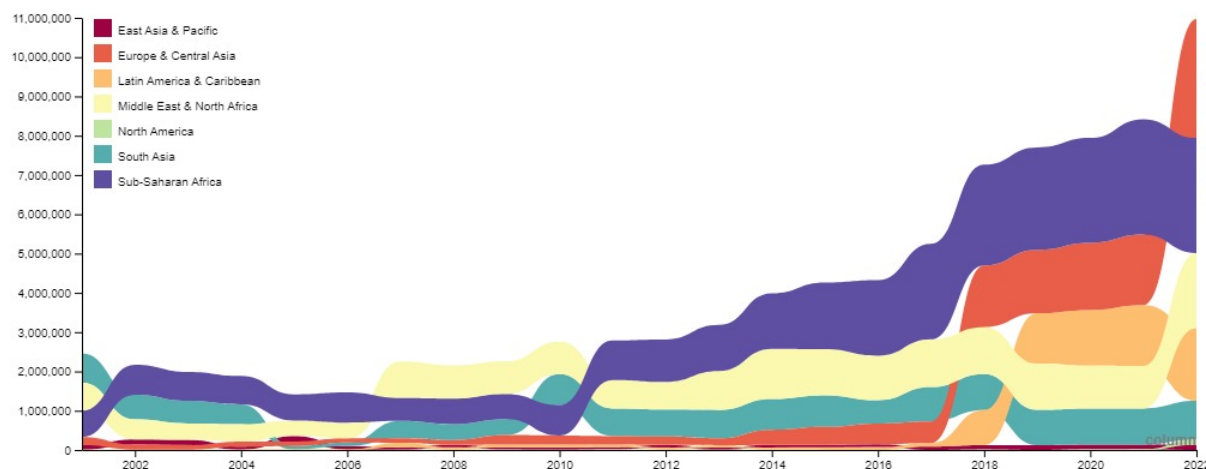
Source: UNHCR (2023)

Key fact 2: Africa and the Middle East have historically hosted the most refugees, but new and increasing crises are dramatically altering the geography of displacement and the location of refugees

Historically, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have hosted the largest proportions of school-age refugees, as shown in Figure D. In 2017, 70 percent of the global school-age refugee population came from, and were hosted, in these two regions. However, recent conflicts have seen a surge in refugees hosted in countries and regions with previously low refugee populations.

Figure D shows the absolute number of school-age refugees by region from 2001 to 2021 (UNHCR, 2023). The position of each region dictates their significance, with the most populace regions positioned at the top of the graph. As this figure shows, SSA hosted the highest number of school-age refugees for 15 of the last 20 years. However, since 2017, there has been a significant jump in the proportion of school-age refugees hosted in both Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with the number of school-age refugees increasing more than fivefold in ECA between 2017 and 2022, and more than 20-fold in LAC over the same period. In fact, school-age refugees in LAC rose from fewer than 100,000 in 2017 to over 1.85 million as of end-2022, driven largely by forced displacement from the República Bolivariana de Venezuela. This shows not only an increase in global displacement – with the number of school-age refugee children tripling in the last 10 years – but an increase in the spread of global displacement, with more countries than ever hosting vast numbers of refugees.

Figure D: School-age refugee population (age 5-17) by host region (2001-2022)¹⁰



Source: UNHCR (2023)

Key fact 3: Refugee enrollment rates are markedly lower than host country enrollment rates in LICs and MICs, but not everywhere

Refugees are at a noticeable disadvantage when it comes to education access, with average enrollment rates lower for refugees across all income groups and levels of education.

Data on refugee gross enrollment rates (GERs) are available for 70 hosting countries worldwide for the academic year 2021/22. This data shows the average refugee GERs¹¹ are 65 percent at the primary level, 41 percent at the secondary level, and 7 percent at the tertiary level, compared to 2021/22 global GERs of 101 percent, 77 percent and 40 percent for primary, secondary and tertiary education, respectively (UNHCR, 2023c, World Bank, 2023a).¹²

Figure E below compares the average primary and secondary GERs for both refugee and host populations in LICs and MICs. As this graph shows, refugee primary and secondary GERs were lower on average than host country GERs¹³ for all income groups and levels of education. However, as discussed below, these averages mask national differences, with GERs higher among refugees in some, typically low-income, countries.

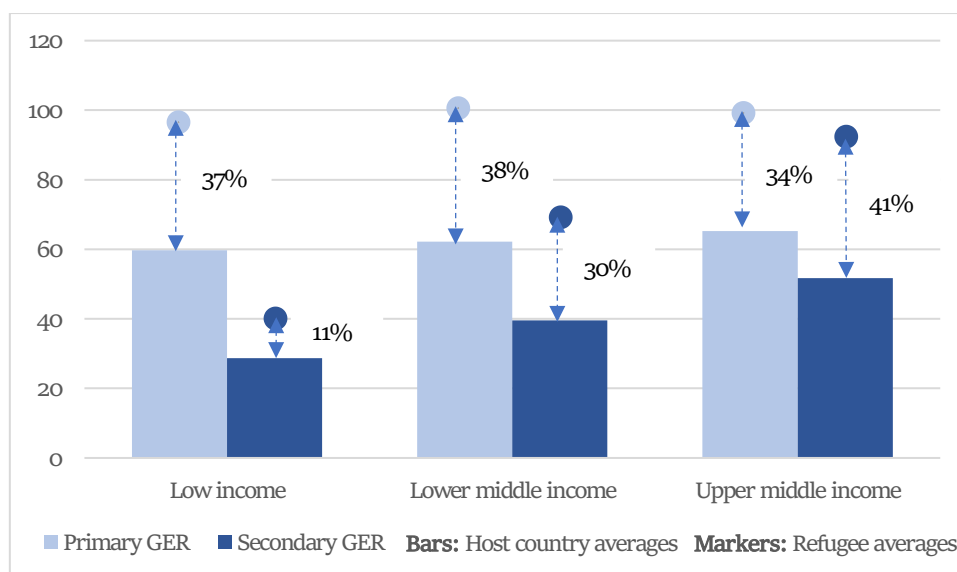
Figure E: Gross Enrollment Rates by income level, refugees and host country averages, academic year 2020/21

¹⁰ For countries where data on school-age populations were incomplete, it was assumed that 19% of the total refugee population was aged 5-11 and 13% was ages 12-17. These proportions represent the average populations in those countries with complete demographic data. The regions shown in this figure refer to East Asia & Pacific (EAP), Europe & Central Asia (ECA), Latin America & Caribbean (LAC), Middle East & North Africa (MENA), North America (NA), South Asia (SA), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

¹¹ Total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year.

¹² Gross enrollment rates can exceed 100 percent as a result of over-age students repeating grades.

¹³ Host country GERs were only available at the national level. As hosting communities typically reside in border regions or in more deprived areas, host communities are likely to have lower GERs than the national levels shown.



Source: UNHCR (2023c); UIS (n.d.)

Direct comparisons between refugee and host country GERs are possible for 58 refugee situations worldwide. These comparisons reveal that refugee GERs are higher than host country GERs in 15 countries, with 14 of these countries LICs or MICs. In fact, 33 percent of LICs for which comparable GER data is available (seven out of 21 countries) had lower levels of education access among the host population compared to the refugee population. For some LICs, lower national enrollment rates were due to national fragility/conflict affecting the host population’s access to education, as was the case in Syria, Burundi and the Central African Republic. For other LICs, high GERs among both refugee and host populations mean that differences between the population are slight and that both experience high levels of education access, as was the case in Nepal and The Gambia. While for the majority of LMICs, higher rates of refugee enrollment were often due to teacher and/or classroom shortages in host country education systems, which affected host community education in Angola and Tanzania. For those UMICs and HIC where refugee GERs surpassed national GERs, refugee numbers are typically very low, with school-age refugee populations often in the tens or low hundreds, making comparisons between host and refugee GERs unreliable. As such, while refugee GERs are higher in some countries, these differences are typically small or the result of extreme circumstances, such as state fragility or significant constraints to state education.

Among those countries that provided gender disaggregated data, average enrollment rates were similar for both boys and girls at primary and secondary level. The average GER for refugees at primary level was 63 percent for males and 61 percent for females, compared to GERs of 36 percent and 35 percent for males and females at secondary level, respectively (UNHCR, 2023c). While average GERs appear to indicate gender parity, large gender disparities persist in some countries. Most notably, GERs are far higher for boys than girls in Gabon, Ethiopia and Kenya by 22, 13 and 12 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, GERs are higher among the female refugee population in Senegal, the Philippines, and Iraq, by 17, 8

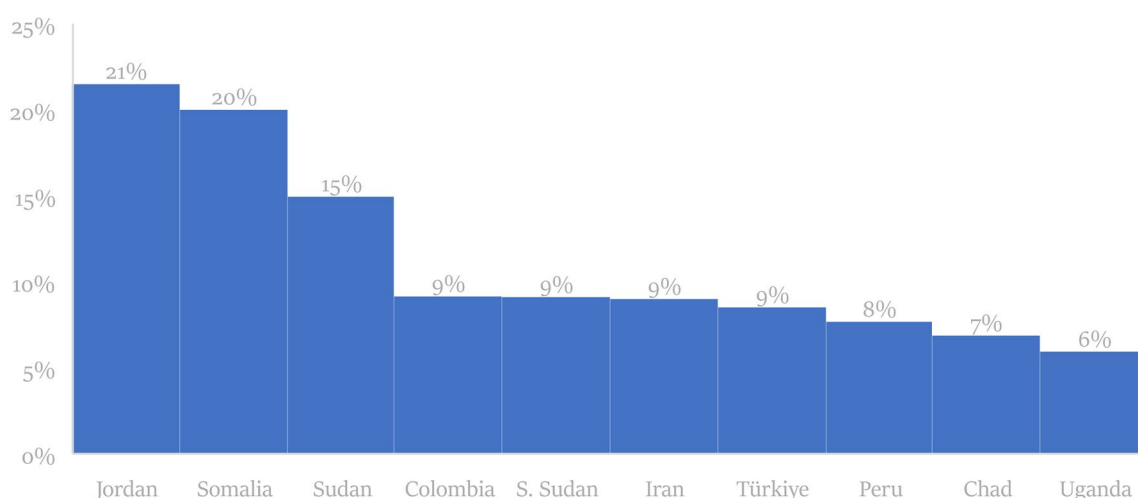
and 5 percentage points, respectively¹⁴ (UNHCR, 2023c). While disparities in access to education by gender persist in some refugee communities, there is no clear relationship between those countries that have higher rates of gender parity and those that do not.

Key fact 4: Host country governments are unable to finance inclusive refugee education in the majority of large LICs and MICs

Almost all host country governments in LICs and MICs grant refugees the right to education alongside national children. However, only a few are able to operationalize these commitments due to overstretched public education systems and/or limited fiscal space.

This section uses analysis conducted by Silva (2023)¹⁵ to estimate the hypothetical fiscal costs of providing inclusive education to all school-age refugees in LICs and MICs. This analysis shows that the average cost of inclusive refugee education was 2.4 percent of host country public education expenditure in 2021, with average costs by income level 3.7 percent, 2.1 percent and 1.6 percent in LICs, LMICs and UMICs, respectively. While these average may seem modest and imply that host countries can accommodate refugees with minimal external assistance, they mask large variations between countries and do not account for deficits in education that already exist in these countries.

Figure F: Ratio of the costs of inclusive refugee education to host country education expenditure in 10 LICs and MICs¹⁶



Source: Silva (2023)

As Figure F shows, for several of the largest refugee hosting LICs and MICs, the costs of inclusive refugee education comprise a significant proportion of their education budgets and are arguably too significant to be met by government alone. However, for many other host

¹⁴ Refugee GER for primary education by males and females, respectively: Gabon 100% and 78%, Kenya 77% and 65%, Ethiopia 57% and 44%, Senegal 36% and 53%, Philippines 68% and 72%, Iraq 73% and 78% (UNHCR, 2023c).

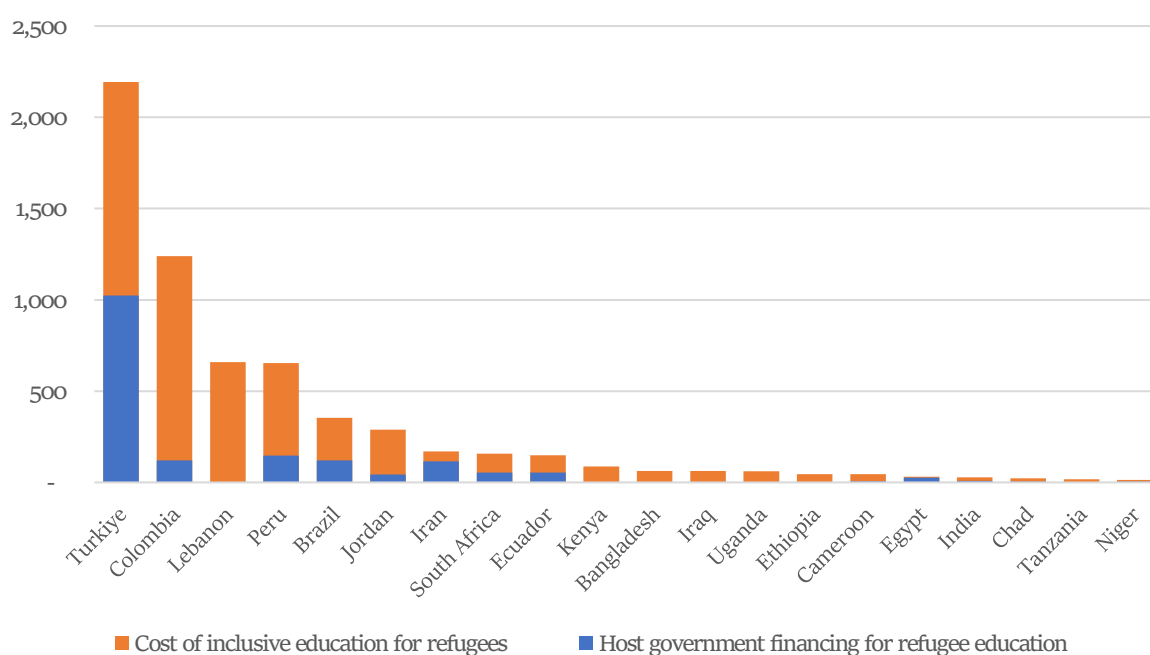
¹⁵ The costing methodology used by Silva (2023) adds a coefficient to each countries' unit costs of education to account for the additional and distinct educational needs of refugees that are likely to inflate the cost of education to this group (Silva, 2023).

¹⁶ Data on several major refugee hosting countries in LICs and MICs, such as Lebanon, were not available; while cost data for the Islamic Republic of Iran were taken from 2022. All costs are hypotheticals and are generated using the methodology outlined in Silva (2023).

countries, the costs of providing inclusive refugee education are small in comparison to their education budgets. In fact, for 42 of the 65 LICs and MICs for which data is available, the annual cost of educating refugees was less than 1 percent of public education expenditure in 2021. Of these 42 countries, several host small refugee populations that could feasibly be financed by host governments; however, for many of these countries, low national GERs and/or limited fiscal resources limit their capacity to finance refugee education. This is most notably the case in LICs, where the average primary education completion rate was just 67 percent in 2021, and where rising debt and low revenues constrain education spending and limit the resources available for refugee education (World Bank, n.d.; Mawejje, 2023).

Given these constraints, it is not surprising that for many LICs and MICs, government financing for refugee education is dwarfed by the cost of refugee education. Estimates of host government financing for refugee education are available for 20 of the 25 largest refugee hosting LICs and MICs in 2021¹⁷. Figure G below compares these financing estimates with the costs of inclusive refugee education in these countries. On average host government financing for refugee education contributed 23 percent of the costs of inclusive refugee education among the 20 countries for which data is available, ranging from zero percent in Bangladesh, Iraq, Lebanon and Tanzania, to 84 percent in the Arab Republic of Egypt. Combined, these 20 countries hosted 73 percent of all school-age refugees in LICs and MICs in 2021 and provided an estimated US\$ 1.75 billion of finance for refugee education, less than a quarter of the cost of inclusive refugee education in these countries. Given the analysis presented in this section, it is clear that if the education needs of refugees hosted in LICs and MICs are to be met, significant external assistance will be required.

Figure G: The costs of inclusive refugee education and host government financing in 20 of the 25 largest LIC and MIC hosting countries, 2021¹⁷ (US\$ million)



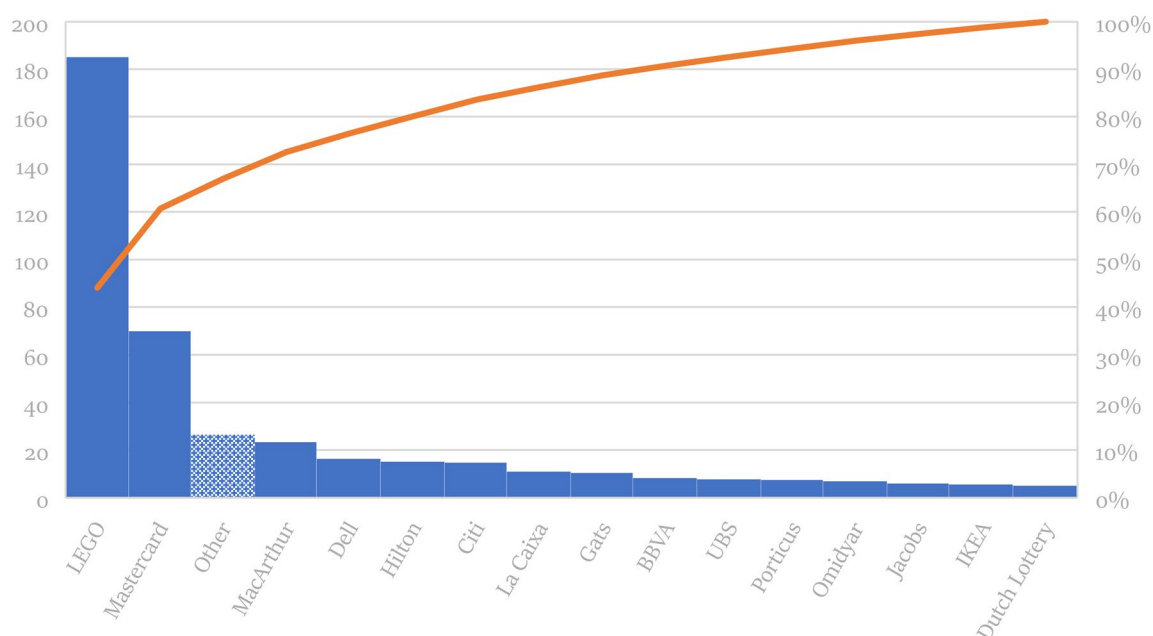
¹⁷ Insufficient information prevented financing estimates for the remaining five countries.

Source: REFD (2024)

Key fact 5: Philanthropic financing does not finance inclusive refugee education in LICs and MICs

Philanthropic giving for refugee situations is dominated by a small number of large philanthropic organizations (ECW, 2019; Root, 2019). In 2021, philanthropic financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs was estimated to be US\$ 789 million in 2021, with US\$ 491 million financing basic education provision (i.e. pre-primary, primary and secondary education). As shown in Figure H, the majority of financing for basic education (94%) came from just a handful of large philanthropic organizations.

Figure H: Philanthropic financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs, 2021 (US\$ millions)



Source: REFD (2024)

Philanthropic giving for basic refugee education accounted for around nine percent of total refugee education financing in 2021, a significant contribution. However, the overwhelming majority of philanthropic sector financing for refugee education was allocated to third sector organizations. In fact, an estimated 74 percent of philanthropic financing for refugee education in LIC and MICs went to non-government and civil society organizations, followed by 23 percent to international organizations, and 3 percent to research institutions, with none of the philanthropic organizations consulted for this paper financing host governments to deliver refugee education. As such, while the philanthropic sector is a major financier of refugee education, this support is overwhelmingly allocated to non-governmental and civil society organizations and the financing of parallel, off-budget education systems.

As noted in the methodology section of this paper, the lack of transparency on philanthropic financing has led to a dearth of available information on the sector's refugee education. While efforts were made to mitigate for this lack of information through primary data collection, the

data used in this section is inevitably incomplete, and as such the conclusions drawn are subject to limitations.

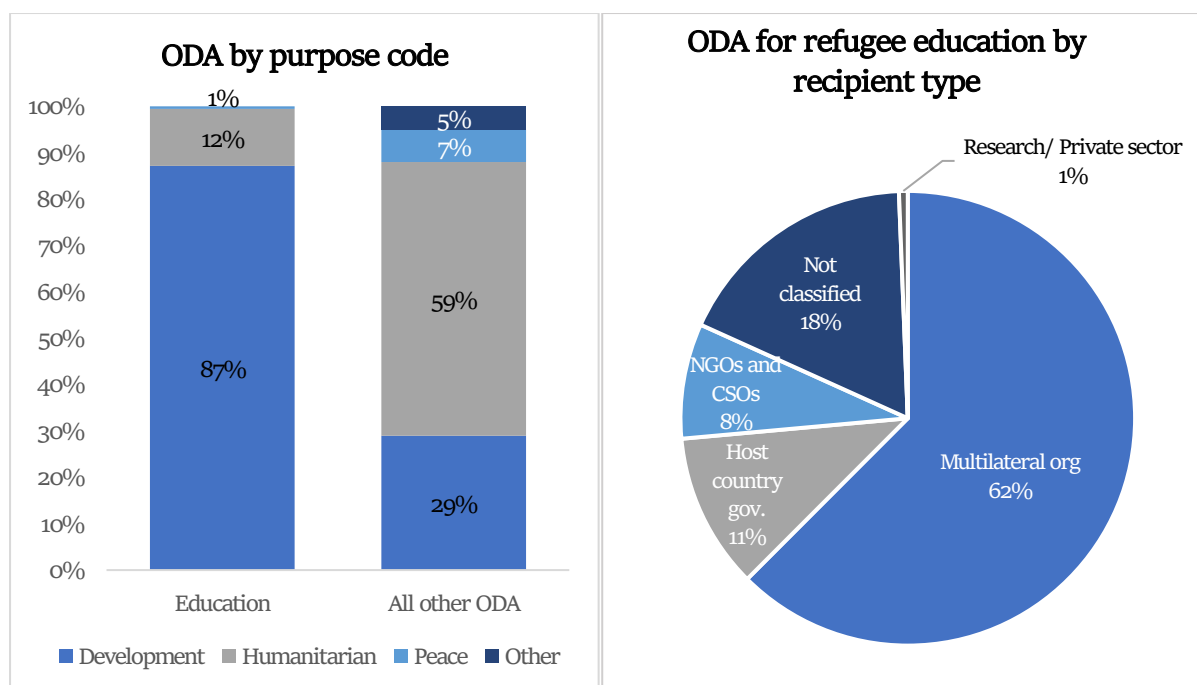
Key point 6: ODA for refugee education is dominated by development finance, in marked contrast to all other ODA for refugee situations

ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs is overwhelmingly delivered as ‘development’ aid, as shown in Figure I. This is in marked contrast to all other ODA for refugee situations, which is dominated by humanitarian financing (Hesemann et al., 2023).

The OECD classifies ODA into three main categories: ‘development aid’, which focuses on promoting long-term economic and social development in recipient countries; ‘humanitarian aid’, designed to provide emergency relief and address immediate and urgent needs; and ‘peace aid’, which is directed at peace building and preventing, resolving, and recovering from conflicts (OECD, n.d.).

65 percent of all ODA for refugee situations (excluding education) is delivered as ‘humanitarian’ and ‘peace’ aid, with just 29 percent delivered as ‘development’ aid. By comparison, ‘humanitarian’ and ‘peace’ aid constitute just 13 percent of ODA for refugee education, with ‘development’ aid comprising 87 percent of all ODA for refugee education. Education financing to refugee situations is thus dominated by ‘development’ aid in stark contrast to all other forms of ODA for refugee situations, as shown in Figure I.

Figure I: ODA classifications disaggregated by ‘ODA for refugee education’ and ‘other ODA for refugee situations’



Source: REFD (2024)

Despite financing for refugee education being dominated by ‘development’ aid, only 11 percent of education aid for refugee situations in LICs and MICs went directly to host country governments in 2021, as shown in Figure I, compared to 17 percent of all donor financing for

refugee situations. While this difference may seem small, given that the proportion of ‘development’ financing for refugee education is three times larger than in all other sectors, this variance is substantial. It means that for every US\$ 10 of ODA spent on refugee education, only US\$ 1 goes directly to host governments and thus directly to funding inclusive education. This is somewhat surprising given there is a broad consensus on the importance of inclusive refugee education and by extension the need to “prioritise financing that supports and incentivises the inclusion of refugee... children in national systems” (GRF & UNHCR, 2019).

While this data does not present the full picture, as only the ‘first implementing partner’ is captured in this data¹⁸ and host country governments can receive financing from initial aid recipients, it still demonstrates that far less financing goes directly to host governments for refugee education in comparison to all other sectors despite education aid being dominated by ‘development’ as opposed to ‘humanitarian’ objectives.

Key fact 7: Over 80 percent of ODA for refugee education comes from just 5 donor countries

The five largest providers of ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs (excluding UN core contributions) account for just over 80 percent of total ODA for the sector. They include the European Union Institutions (US\$ 541 million), Germany (US\$ 382 million), the United States (US\$ 205 million), the United Kingdom (US\$ 113 million), and Canada (US\$ 107 million). All five of these funders are bilateral donors; however, the sixth largest provider of financing for refugee education in 2021 was the World Bank. Multilateral development bank financing provided US\$ 95 million for refugee education in 2021, circa 8 percent of all ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs,¹⁹ with the World Bank accounting for almost two-thirds of this contribution.

Table 1 shows the distribution of ODA for refugee education by organization type and region, with core contributions by UN and other organizations excluded from the analysis. This table shows that multilateral donors allocated the majority of their financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs to European countries, with most of this assistance going to Türkiye. Bilateral aid, on the other hand, was more evenly spread geographically, with the MENA region, followed by SSA and Europe, receiving the majority of bilateral financing.

The limited number of key donors for refugee education highlights the fragility of responsibility sharing arrangements in this area, as well as the influence these donors have on the terms, conditions, and destinations of this financing. If any of these key donors decide to re-allocate or cut this financing, then the implications for refugee education could be significant.

Table 1: Donor allocations to refugee education in LICs and MICs, by donor type and region (US\$ millions 2021)

Type	SSA	EAP	EUR	LAC	MENA	SCA	UNSPEC
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¹⁸ For instance, the proportion of education funds allocated to multilateral agencies (62 percent of total ODA for refugee education) could finance inclusive education if passed onto host country governments.

¹⁹ Excluding the use of core contributions by UN or other organizations, in line with OECD accounting (Hesemann et al., 2023).

Multilateral	48 7%	3 0%	493 72%	46 7%	77 11%	11 2%	2 0%
Bilateral	224 22%	1 0%	172 17%	22 2%	415 41%	35 3%	135 13%

Source: REFD (2024)

Core contributions by UN and other international organizations (IO) are excluded from the above analysis, yet the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)²⁰ is a major financier of refugee education for Palestinians in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 2021, the organization allocated US\$ 944 million of its core resources for refugee education to the MENA region (REFD, 2024). When UN and other IO's core contributions are included in financing allocations for refugee education, the MENA region receives the highest volume of donor financing, with 55 percent of all ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs going to the region, followed by 25 percent to ECA, 10 percent to SSA, 3 percent to LAC, 2 percent to SCA and over 5 percent unspecified.

Key Fact 8: ODA allocations for refugee education are distributed unevenly across income groups and regions

In 2021, LICs hosted 29 percent of school-age refugees in LICs and MICs, yet received just 11 percent of ODA allocated for refugee education in LICs and MICs. By comparison, UMICs received 54 percent of ODA for refugee education, while hosting 33 percent of school-age refugees in LICs and MICs (see Table 2). While ODA allocations do not correspond to the number of school-age refugees hosted by each income group, this financing is somewhat proportional to the costs of educating refugees in these income categories.

Comparing the proportion of ODA financing with the proportion of costs of inclusive refugee education shows that ODA allocations broadly align with average costs in each income group, with UMICs receiving a greater share of ODA in line with their greater costs (see Table 2, columns 4 and 5). This does not indicate these allocations are progressive. Rather, this analysis implies that a country's income level does not have a significant impact on the ODA it receives for refugee education, when arguably LICs should receive more ODA given their limited fiscal capacity and typically over-stretched education systems.

Table 2: Distribution of school-age refugee children and ODA for refugee education received by host country income-category

Income Group	ODA for education (US\$ Millions)	Share of school-age refugees in LICs & MICs	Share of costs of refugee education	Share of ODA for refugee education
Low income	296.2	29%	3%	11%
Lower middle income	714	37%	25%	27%
Upper middle income	1,433	33%	72%	54%
Unspecified	187	-	-	7%

²⁰ UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with state and regional governments providing 94 percent of all contributions in 2021. Financing for core contributions cannot be disaggregated by sector. However, the largest financiers of the UNRWA's programs budget in 2021 were the United States, Germany, European Union, Sweden and Japan, which combined made up 70 percent of the total program budget (UNRWA, 2022).

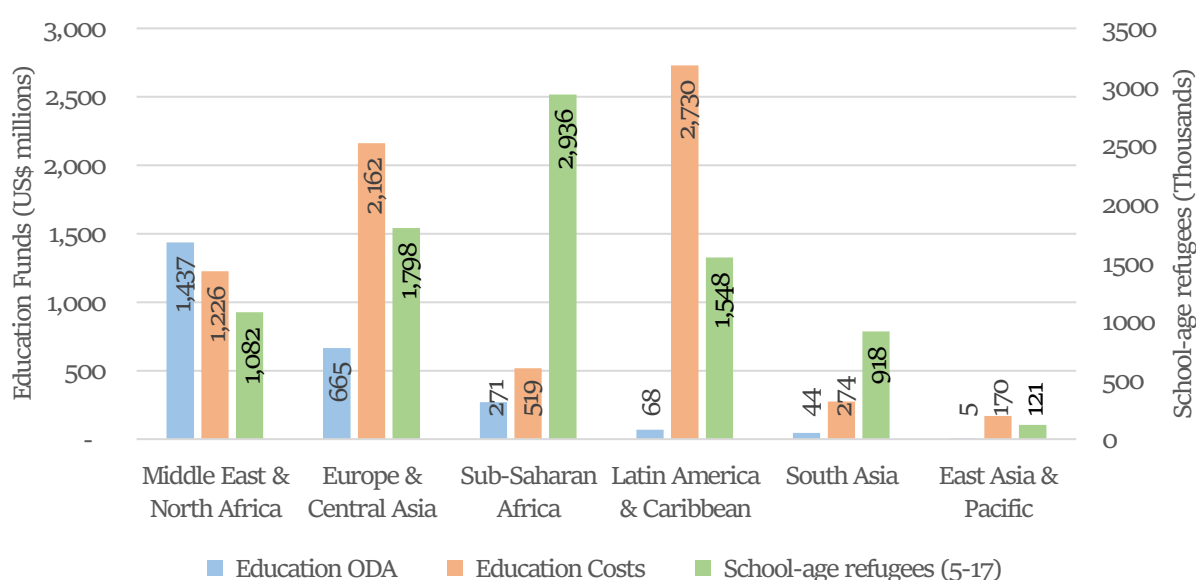
Low and middle income	2,630	100%	100%	100%
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Source: REFD (2024)

As shown in Figure J, in 2021 over half of ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs was allocated to countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, with all other regions receiving far less financing despite their significant refugee populations.

In the Middle East and North Africa, ODA for refugee education surpassed the fiscal costs of inclusive education for refugees by 17 percent in 2021.²¹ By contrast, less than 3 percent of the costs of inclusive refugee education in Latin America and the Caribbean were financed by ODA for refugee education, with Latin America and the Caribbean the most underfunded region in 2021. Significant disparities also exist in Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Central Asia, and South Asia, where approximately 50, 30 and 16 percent (respectively) of the costs of inclusive refugee education were financed by ODA in 2021, with donors more likely to finance refugee education in the Middle East and North Africa over any other region.

Figure J: Allocation of ODA for refugee education, costs of inclusive education, and school-age refugees (5-17), by region



Source: REFD (2024)

Key Fact 9: ODA for refugee education is skewed toward specific countries, with donor financing far exceeding costs in some countries

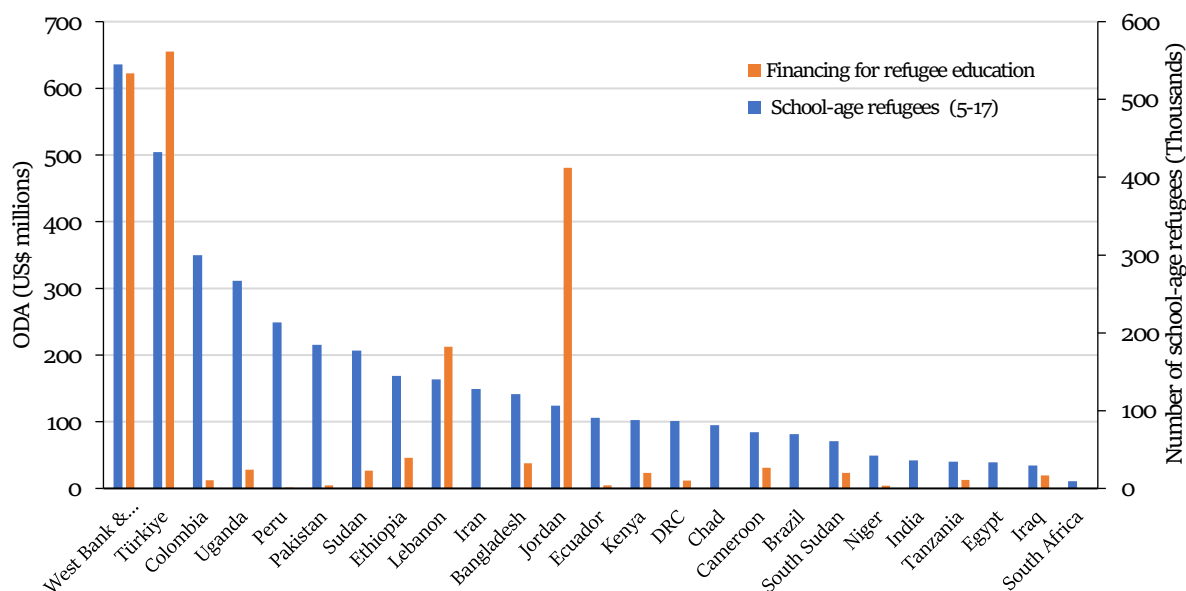
Sixty-nine LICs and MICs were recipients of ODA for refugee and host community education in 2021,²² with additional ODA allocated to a host of regional and international organizations. Figure K shows the number of school-age refugees in each country and the sum of ODA for refugee education for the 25 largest refugee hosting LICs and MICs. As this Figure shows, there

²¹ The fiscal costs used in this analysis are the estimated costs of delivering education to all refugees through national education systems. The provision of education through parallel systems is likely to face higher costs.

²² The OECD (2023) dataset records the first implementing partner only, and so the final destination of aid delivered to multilateral organizations by donors is unknown.

are vast differences in ODA allocations by country/area. In fact, four of the largest recipients of ODA for refugee education (Türkiye, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza, and Jordan) received 75% of all ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs, despite hosting just 29% of the total school-age refugee population in LICs and MICs (REFD, 2024; UNHCR, 2023).²³

Figure K: ODA for refugee education relative to school-age refugee population (5-17), 2021



Source: REFD (2024)

In Figure L, the costs of inclusive refugee education are compared with ODA for refugee education for the 25 largest refugee hosting LICs and MICs to determine the proportion of inclusive refugee education costs met by ODA.²⁴ This analysis shows that in three LICs and MICs – Jordan, South Sudan and Ethiopia – ODA for refugee education exceeds or meets the resources required to finance inclusive refugee education in the country, while in all other countries a financing deficit exists. Financing exceeded costs by the greatest margin in Jordan (by 71%), followed by South Sudan (13 percent), and Ethiopia (4 percent). In South Sudan and Ethiopia, the relatively low costs of inclusive education in these countries meant that only modest ODA allocations were required to meet the costs of inclusive education. The relatively higher costs of education in Jordan meant that significant financial resources were required to meet the costs of inclusive refugee education in the country.

As Figure L shows, many large host LICs and MICs received only a fraction of the costs of inclusive refugee education as ODA, with 11 of the largest 25 host countries receiving less than 5 percent of the costs required to finance inclusive refugee education as ODA.²⁵ This gulf in ODA is most pronounced in Brazil, Mexico, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chad and Peru, which

²³ This population includes all school-age refugees in LICs and MICs in 2021 under UNHCR mandate and the 545,000 children enrolled in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees schools in 2021 (UNRWA, n.d.).

²⁴ Specifically, ODA for refugee education (per school-age refugee) is subtracted from the cost of providing inclusive education (per school-age refugee) to estimate the financing gap in each country and the proportion of refugee education costs met by ODA.

²⁵ Calculated using ODA specifically for education in refugee situations only.

all received less than US\$ 3 per school-age refugee in ODA.²⁶ Most notable among this group is Chad, which in 2021 received just over US\$ 2 per school-age refugee²⁷ despite being the 10th poorest country in the world and hosting an estimated 200,000 school-age refugees (REFD, 2024).

Figure L: Financing gap for inclusive refugee education in the 25 largest refugee host LICs and MICs, 2021²⁸

Country of Asylum	Education Financing per school-age refugee (5-17) (US\$)	Cost of education per school age (5-17) refugee (US\$)	Financing gap (US\$)	Proportion of cost met by ODA
Jordan	1,901	1,114	787	171%
Lebanon	613	1,861	1,249	33%
Turkiye	532	1,711	1,180	31%
Iraq	240	737	497	33%
South Sudan	166	147	19	113%
Cameroon	159	237	78	67%
Tanzania	154	199	44	78%
Ethiopia	129	125	5	104%
Bangladesh	118	190	72	62%
Kenya	116	407	290	29%
Sudan	62	207	144	30%
DRC	52	56	4	93%
Uganda	42	89	47	47%
Niger	32	106	74	31%
Ecuador	26	789	763	3%
Colombia	21	2,083	2,062	1%
South Africa	17	2,094	2,077	1%
Pakistan	9	363	355	2%
Egypt	7	401	394	2%
India	3	406	402	1%
Peru	3	1,578	1,576	0%
Chad	2	110	107	2%
Iran	2	691	689	0%
Mexico	0	1,923	1,923	0%
Brazil	0	2,548	2,548	0%

Source: REFD (2024)

Key Fact 10: ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs is primarily allocated to Syrian refugees

Further disaggregation of ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs reveals that not only is financing skewed towards specific countries, but towards one specific crisis.

Figure M uses country of origin data for each of the 25 largest refugee hosting countries to create an estimate of financing for refugee education by crisis.²⁹ This analysis shows that ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs is heavily skewed towards countries hosting Syrian

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

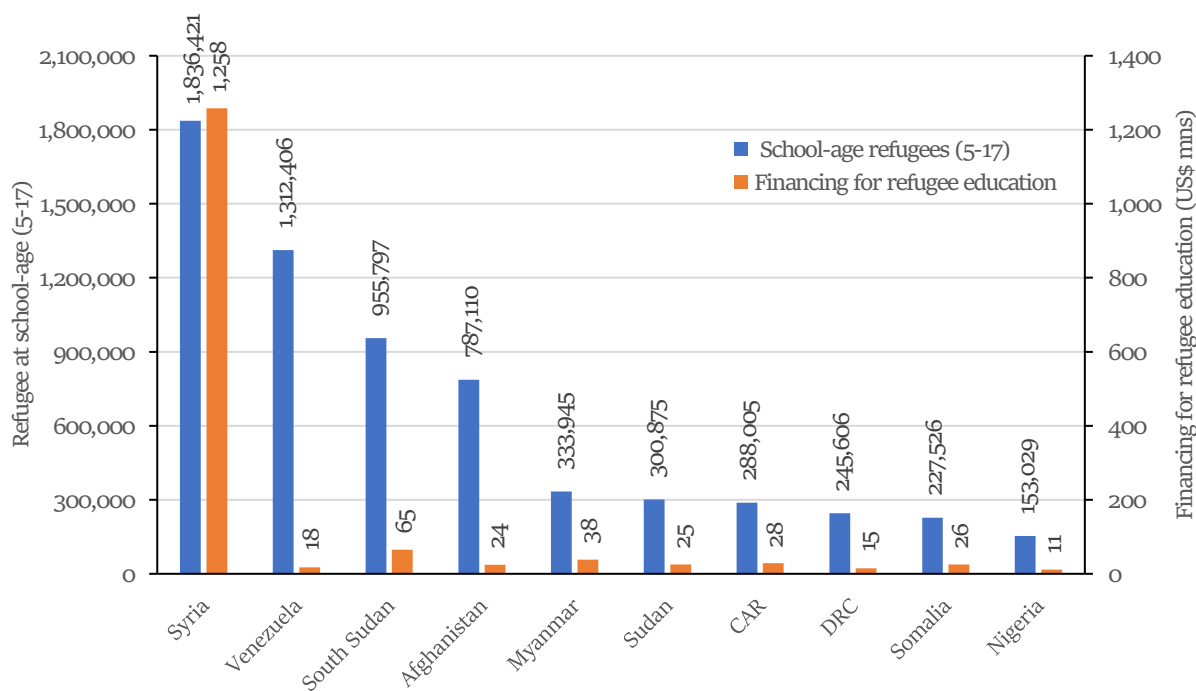
²⁸ Cost data on refugee education financing is taken from Silva (2023) and refers to the costs of education for refugee children via the host country's national education system.

²⁹ This calculation assumes that all the refugees in the country receive the same proportion of ODA for education.

refugees. The proportion of school-age Syrian refugees hosted in LICs and MICs is equivalent to 25 percent of the total school-age refugee population; yet the countries' hosting these refugees received approximately 75 percent of ODA for refugee education in 2021 (REFD, 2024).

These differences in ODA allocation cannot be accounted for by the costs of education in these host countries, with the average cost of inclusive education in countries hosting Venezuelan refugees (e.g. Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil) exceeding the average cost of inclusive education for the major host countries of Syrian refugees (Türkiye, Jordan, and Lebanon). Furthermore, education ODA for refugee situations does not correspond to the costs of education in the majority of countries, as shown in Figure L. It is thus clear from this analysis that there is a distinct preference among donors to finance education for Syrian refugees at the expense of other nationalities/crises, with Venezuelans displaced abroad receiving noticeably less ODA for refugee education in comparison to other nationalities/crises.

Figure M: School-age refugee population and financing by country of origin, 2021



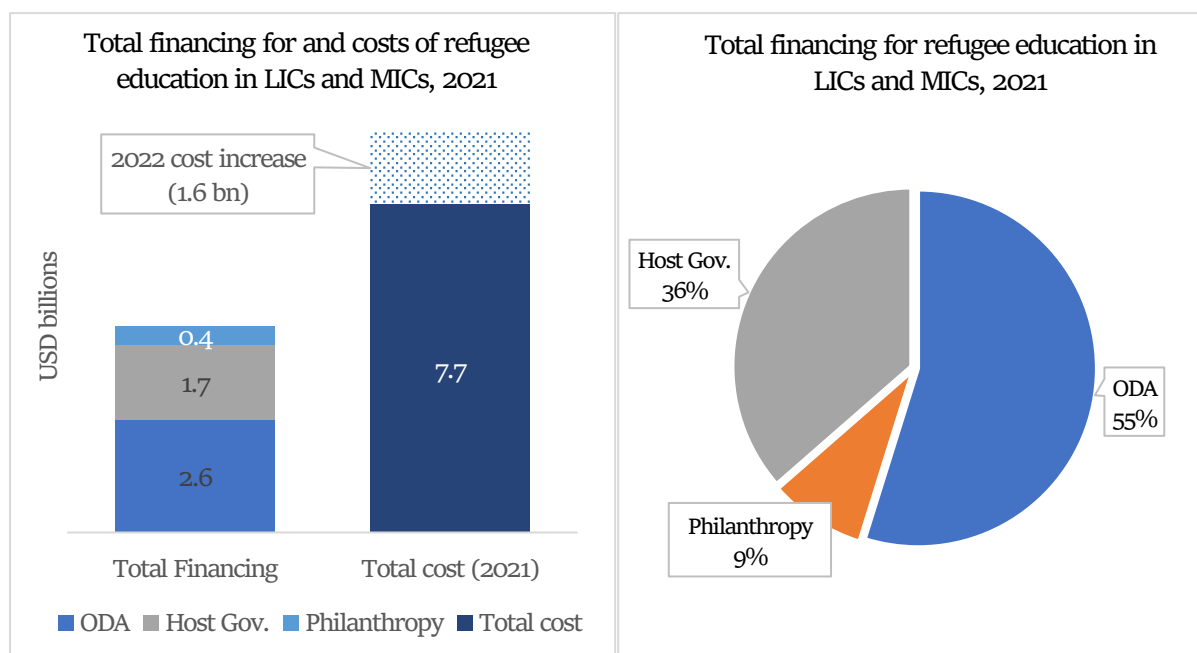
Source: REFD (2024)

Conclusion and Recommendations

As is clear from the information and analysis presented in this paper, financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs is not sufficient to meet the education needs of these countries' refugees. As Figure N shows, almost US\$ 3 billion of additional financing was required to finance inclusive refugee education in LICs and MICs in 2021. This represents the financing gap if all refugees were educated through national systems. However, with many refugees currently educated through costlier parallel systems, the finances required for all refugees in LICs and MICs to access education are likely to be far higher.

This gap in financing is particularly concerning given the rate at which the number of school-age refugees has been increasing in recent years. While financing data is only available for 2021, the total cost of providing inclusive education to all school-age refugees in LICs and MICs was estimated to be US\$ 9.3 billion in 2022 (Silva, 2023). This represents a US\$ 1.6 billion increase in cost on the previous year, driven almost entirely by growing refugee displacement.

Figure N: Total costs and financing for refugee education in LICs and MICs, 2021 ,



Source: REFD (2024)

For many LICs and MICs, government financing for refugee education is dwarfed by the cost of refugee education. Over-stretched education systems and/or significant fiscal constraints limit state capacity to finance refugee education in many host countries. As shown in Figure N, philanthropic financing for basic refugee education in LICs and MICs contributed approximately 8 percent of total financing for refugee education in 2021. However, as discussed in Key fact 5, the majority of philanthropic financing was delivered to non-government and civil-society organizations, and did not finance inclusive refugee education. While philanthropic organizations should be encouraged to finance inclusive education, it is clear that significantly more resources, beyond those delivered by the philanthropic sector, are required to meet the current financing gap. With ODA for refugee education representing 10 percent of aid to refugee situations in LICs and MICs, and less than 1 percent of all ODA in 2021, increasing ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs is feasible. However, ODA for refugee education can arguably be improved to ensure a more efficient use of limited donor resources and improve refugee education outcomes in LICs and MICs.

While donor allocations to refugee education reflect a range of political and practical considerations, the analysis presented in this paper clearly demonstrates that ODA for refugee education targets specific countries. An estimated 75 percent of all ODA for refugee education in 2021 went to Syrian refugees residing in just four countries, while several other host

countries received negligible financial support despite having significant refugee education needs.

As long as refugee education is not fully funded, the international community has to make uncomfortable choices around how ODA is allocated. However, for ODA for refugee education to be used most effectively, it is essential to refrain from earmarking allocations. ODA for refugee education was earmarked more than any other sector in 2021, with 95 percent of ODA for refugee education in LICs and MICs earmarked at the regional or country level, leaving just 5 percent of ODA ‘unspecified’ by donors.³⁰ Reducing the proportion of earmarked ODA can help improve the efficiency of ODA allocations and better meet the education needs of refugees.

³⁰ By comparison, ‘unspecified’ aid (i.e. aid not allocated to a specific country) constituted 21 percent of overall bilateral aid for refugee situations in LICs and MICs in 2021.

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