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DOCUMENTATION FOR EDUCATION: ADDRESSING DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR DISPLACED CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO ACCESS EDUCATION

VERSION 2, MARCH 2021 EDITION

INTRODUCTION

Education is not only a human right, it allows young people to develop the skills and confidence to secure other human rights and a life they have reason to value. The right to education is enshrined in various international human rights treaties.¹ The main attributes of the right to education include:

- ➔ Universal access to primary education free and compulsory for all;
- ➔ Accessibility to secondary education in its different forms as well as technical and vocational education which should be made generally available;
- ➔ Capacity- based access to higher education.²

¹ Specific dimensions of the right to education are covered in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), articles 28-30; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), article 10; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990), articles 12, 30 and 45; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), article 24.

² UNESCO. 2008. [The Right to Education Leaflet](#).



Yet, globally, 75 million children and adolescents (6-17 years) who live in, or come from conflict-affected areas, are out of school.³ Only 61% of all school-age refugee children are in primary education, and 23% in secondary. A mere 1% of refugees have access higher education.⁴ There is no global data on out of school children in IDP settings, but estimates are similarly high.

Although great strides have been made in increasing school enrolment across the globe, children and young people affected by crisis still face a range of barriers. One of those barriers is the authorities' common requirement to present documents to access education.⁵ This affects not only enrolment but also access to examinations, impacting progression through education cycles.

For the purpose of this brief, "documentation" refers to an official document that proves or supports something (e.g. identity, residence status, education), issued or sanctioned by a legitimate state authority. Documents are often a product of administrative processes that state authorities require from individuals to give validity or recognition to various life situations (e.g. a child was born, somebody is a national of a given country, a young person has passed an exam.) Without that recognition – which is evidenced by the situation being recorded in official registries and by a document issued to the individual – access to rights and services may be restricted.

The following categories of documents may be required to access education:

- ❶ Civil documents provide proof of a vital event, such as birth, marriage or death.
- ❷ Identification documents provide proof of an individual's identity. In some countries, specific documents serve that purpose. In others, documents used for other purposes are also valid identification documents. For example, a refugee card proves that the holder has refugee status, and may also serve as proof of identity.
- ❸ Residency documents prove that somebody is legally residing in a territory. For example, Syrian refugees need a residency permit to reside legally in Lebanon, as legislation does not recognise refugee status. In certain countries, enrolment requires residence on the territory covered by the school, which students may have to prove.
- ❹ Proof of prior learning documents are issued by accredited institutions to certify/prove that learners have achieved certain learning outcomes. For example, a certificate of having passed examinations.

These categories are indicative. Document types, their purpose and the authority that issues them vary across countries. Certain documents can (un)officially serve different purposes.

Education authorities may require that children and youth present one or more documents to enrol in school or sit for exams. Hence, the lack of access to documents affects their ability to access and progress through education in many countries. This challenge is likely to be more acute in situations of conflict and displacement where people have lost or left behind key documents and/or state institutions responsible for issuing documentation are inaccessible across borders, destroyed, malfunctioning or discriminate against specific groups.

³ UNESCO. 2018. [Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, not Walls](#). Paris, UNESCO.

⁴ UNHCR. 2018. [Turn the tide: Refugee education in crisis](#). Geneva, UNHCR.

⁵ UNHCR. 2015. [Out of School Children in Refugee Settings](#). Education: Issue Brief 2. Geneva.



Addressing documentation barriers to education is in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to ensure inclusive, quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning for all, and SDG 16, which aims to provide access to justice, including legal identity, for all.

In conflict and displacement settings, children and youth, and their families, will likely need information on documentation requirements to access education, and expert assistance to obtain these documents. Education actors have a responsibility to ensure that learners in their programmes have the best possible support to obtain the documentation necessary – especially proof of prior learning – to enrol and transition through the education system and into work.

Legal protection actors with expertise on the rules and institutions that govern access to civil, identification and residency documents can work alongside education colleagues to ensure that the lack of such documents does not become a barrier for learners.

NRC'S EXPERIENCE WITH DOCUMENTATION FOR EDUCATION

Leveraging the expertise and experience of NRC's Education and Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) staff in 23 countries, this Briefing Note shows how the lack of access to documentation is a barrier to education for displaced children and youth. Consultations, including a survey, country reports and discussions with Education and ICLA staff, focused on the types of documentation children, youth and their parents need to enrol at different levels of education and to complete exams. This Briefing Note gathers mini-case studies that show the range and complexity of documentation challenges across different contexts and for different levels of education, and also provides ideas for Education-ICLA collaboration to address documentation as a barrier to education.

Key findings:

- Lack of access to documents is a significant barrier to access education for children and young people in displacement contexts.
- Although standard documentation requirements are common across contexts, countries report that documentation issues depend on the context and population groups. The most often required documents include birth certificates, identity and residency documents. In most cases, education specific documents, such as proof of prior learning, are also required.
- 80% of the consulted countries indicate that proof of prior learning is required. Displaced children/youth face difficulties in accessing proof of prior learning because it was lost during flight or because it is issued from their place of origin and they cannot return to obtain it.
- Documentation requirements increase with age and as a child progresses through the education cycle. Younger children typically depend on their parents' documentation, while older children can be affected by the transition to obtaining their own documents.
- Admission requirements become more demanding at the post-primary stage where proof of prior learning is often needed, and a combination of identity and residency documents is required for examinations. Higher education admission requirements are typically the most challenging to meet for displaced youth.
- There is a clear distinction in documentation requirements between refugees (non-nationals) and IDPs (nationals). Refugees or persons outside their country of origin face more stringent documentation requirements (including to show that they are legally staying in the host country).
- Given the contextual differences across countries, there is a need for legal expertise and a knowledge of administrative systems to fully understand which documents are required to support access to education at different levels. Likewise, education expertise is required to address challenges with proof of prior learning. To identify documentation bottlenecks and develop joint programming to support access to education, Education-ICLA collaboration is required.



UNDERSTANDING DOCUMENTATION FOR EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Primary Education (6-11 years)

Across countries, the three main documents needed to enrol displaced children in primary education are birth certificates, their parents' national ID cards and refugee registration cards.

Lebanon – legal stay documentation impacts access to schools in different ways: In Lebanon, either a family booklet and/or a birth certificate is required for enrolment in primary school. School certificates for two previous scholastic years are also required, otherwise a placement test will be administered. Not having a valid residency can be an obstacle, but it is not an absolute requirement for enrolment. However, the lack of a valid residence can limit freedom of movement and therefore limit access to schools. To obtain exam certificates, a child's legal stay is not required anymore, although practices are not consistent across Lebanon. It is still challenging for refugees turning 15 to obtain residency – compulsory at that age – as they normally do not have access to obtaining a Syrian national ID which is required to regularise their residency.

Syria – civil and education documents required to enrol and fulfil education cycles: In Syria, civil documentation is required to enrol in formal education and register for national exams. To register a Syrian child for school, the parent or legal guardian must submit several documents including a copy of the family booklet and the parents' ID cards. Due to the conflict, many children, especially in areas outside government control, do not have access to civil documents. While some school administrators are sensitive to the challenges posed by the ongoing conflict and will allow children without documentation to register, others take a more rigid approach. All students are eligible for national certificates as long as they study the official curriculum and pass the formal exams, which are offered at the end of grades 9 and 12. The Ministry of Education and partners developed various remedial and accelerated courses to assist students whose schooling has been interrupted due to the conflict. However, these courses are not certified, so the student only receives credit if (s)he takes and passes the official national exams. Different documentation requirements exist for regular students and students of free education (who have spent a number of years out of school studying independently) who wish to register for exams. These include academic certificates as well as civil documents including a copy of the ID card and the family booklet.

Iran – alleviating documentation requirements but obstacles remain: The Supreme Leader issued a decree in 2015 enabling every Afghan child of school age to enrol in Iranian schools regardless of their legal status. (This was first applied to formal schools, but was later also used by NRC to help access non-formal education such as accelerated education programmes.) Afghans in Iran can be holders of the Amayesh card (recognised de facto as refugees by UNHCR), valid visa holders or undocumented. Children without an Amayesh card or a visa could apply for a document commonly known as the blue card, which allows them to enrol in public school. Despite the decree, refugees and regularised migrants are required to present their Amayesh cards, passport and/or valid visa, which indicates that there are still additional requirements to enrol in schools. Furthermore, some of the children who have not had any kind of education prior to the decree are now over the appropriate age for their grade level. Iranian and Afghan children two year older than the standard enrolment age cannot enrol in primary and secondary schools. Therefore, undocumented children who could not attend school before the 2015 decree cannot access formal education.

Secondary Education (Lower secondary: 12-14; Upper Secondary: 15-17 years)

Across countries, the three main documents needed to enrol displaced children in secondary education are the same as for primary education – birth certificates, national ID cards and refugee cards. In addition, proof of prior learning, typically a primary level completion certificate, is required. The country examples below provide a picture of the complexity of the issues facing displaced and returnee children in different contexts.

Central African Republic – documents are needed to pass exams and obtain certificates: In the Central African Republic, children can access primary education without a birth certificate as the government has removed this requirement in response to low birth registration rates. Yet, without a birth certificate, students cannot sit for the primary school exam for the certificat d'études fondamentales 1.



Students may be able to enrol for (lower or upper) secondary education without a birth certificate, or obtain the primary school diploma if their grades are high enough. This is because primary and secondary schools are often in the same building or district and school records are easily transferred. However, students without birth certificates cannot sit for public exams and are not able to obtain their diploma (brevet d'études fondamentales 2)6.

Syria – documents needed to access government-controlled areas for exams: In Syria, secondary education consists of grades 10 through 12, and is offered at general secondary schools or technical/vocational schools. It is free but not compulsory. The age of admission is 16. Students in general or vocational/technical/religious secondary schools must sit for a national exam at the end of grade 12, and those who pass are awarded a General Secondary Certificate. Students who fail the exam may retake the exam until they pass. Students who pass but want to improve their grades can retake the exam one additional time7. However, students are only able to take exams in areas under government control. This means that children in non-government-controlled areas need to travel to sit for exams. This requires civil and identification documents to pass through check-points, which many children, especially in areas outside government control, do not have.

Somaliland – returning refugees lack documentation: In Somaliland, access to education does not require Somali citizenship. Still, to access secondary education, young people need a valid birth certificate, national identification card, and/or refugee card. Those who meet the entry requirements can enrol regardless of nationality or refugee status, if they can prove their nationality. Many returnee children born during displacement lack a valid national identification card or birth certificate, though. Persons of Somali origin without documentation can still access education under limited circumstances, but this alternative is inadequate considering the number of returnees without documentation.

Students seeking to enrol in secondary school must present an original copy of their primary completion certificate. Returnee children without a certificate must pass the Somaliland National Examination Board entrance exam to be allowed to enrol into secondary school.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) & Higher Education (HE)

Across countries, the main three documents required for displaced youth to enrol in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and/or higher education (HE) are again birth certificates, national ID cards and refugee cards. However, NRC's experience demonstrates that displaced youth are in the most difficult situation to access education as documentation requirements become more demanding with age and level of education. Some countries allow access for recognised refugees or for certain foreigners, but conditions vary across countries and are often at the discretion of the education facility. This is also the stage where it is more likely that recognised proof of prior learning is necessary.

For youth, national ID cards play a stronger role in access to further education. This is likely to be their own national ID cards, whereas for children's access to primary and secondary education, it is assumed that the requirement for national ID cards is for their parents, until they reach the age for national ID in their context.

Iran – 'undocumented' Afghans cannot take university entrance exam: Afghan youth cannot access TVET directly, their registration must take place through an agency (e.g. an INGO or UNHCR). Another obstacle is that undocumented Afghan youth cannot register at university. Even if they hold an Amayesh card, they must replace it with a passport in order to obtain a student visa, which is a precondition to register. Also, Afghans must pay higher tuition fees as they are considered foreign students. All these requirements make it impossible for Afghans to access higher education.

Lebanon – legal stay affects ability to get exam certificates and enter university: Obtaining exam certificates is only possible when legal stay is proven. However, while Syrian refugees become responsible for regularising legal stay at age 15, they do not have access to obtaining a Syrian national ID. Exam certificates are required to enrol in university.



ICLA AND EDUCATION: WORKING TOGETHER TO RESOLVE DOCUMENTATION FOR EDUCATION BARRIERS

The country consultation shows that the documents that ICLA programmes are primarily engaging with (birth certificates, national ID cards and refugee cards) are also key documents for access to education. This demonstrates a clear point of convergence between ICLA and Education programmes. The consultation also shows that the scale and complexity of documentation for education requirements warrants more robust and systematic coordination between the two programmes, and tailored programmatic responses.

Key questions	Suggested interventions
DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What documents are required to access education (enrolment and examinations) at each level of education? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct joint ICLA-Education mapping of documentation requirements at each level of education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At what age are youth required to have their own ID documents rather than being allowed to use their parents'? (often 14-15 years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted interventions to assist families with 14-year olds to obtain the necessary documentation to access the next level of education or to pass exams.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forecasting the obstacles youth will face when they enter the market/workplace, what types of documentation are needed to open a bank account, access microfinance opportunities or establish a business? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct joint ICLA-Education mapping of documentation requirements for youth exiting youth education programmes.
PATHWAYS TO OBTAIN DOCUMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the processes to obtain the various documents needed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICLA to identify processes to obtain relevant identity and civil documentation; Education to identify processes to obtain proof of prior learning.
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do NRC staff and/or partners require better understanding of civil documentation for education requirements and processes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct training on documentation for education for ICLA and Education staff and relevant partners.
ACCESS TO INFORMATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do displaced families have accurate information on documentation requirements for different levels of education? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICLA teams to include the documents that are required for education when reviewing family or individual documentation needs. Joint ICLA-Education outreach activities to inform families of documentation for education requirements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are schools aware of and correctly implementing national policy on documentation requirements for displaced children and youth? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint ICLA-Education outreach activities to inform schools of documentation for education requirements; reporting of schools discriminating against displaced persons to local education authorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do displaced families require support to obtain the necessary documents? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and refer families requiring support to obtain documents to either ICLA or Education depending on the type of documentation needed.
ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which stakeholders could be targeted to ensure accurate information on documentation requirements, or advocate for waiver or equivalency options when required documentation is difficult to obtain? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation analysis can contribute to national and local level advocacy (with MOE, Education Cluster, universities, schools, etc.) to promote solutions to documentation requirements.
FUNDING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there opportunities to seek funding for integrated programming around access to education? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the information from this guidance to leverage funding for joint programme interventions to address documentation for education



EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMME COLLABORATION:

Jordan: The Government of Jordan committed to enrol Syrian refugees regardless of their registration status with the Ministry of Interior. Still, in 2018, Syrian refugees reported that schools in several governorates refused to register children because they did not have a Ministry of Interior card. NRC's ICLA and Education teams' research showed that there was a contradiction between the stated government policy and the instructions given to school principals. NRC raised the issue with the education donor working group, the Ministry of Education and eventually the Ministry of Interior. Finally, the Ministry of Education prepared a letter to the Directorates of Education to confirm the correct policy. NRC is following up with families who have reported enrolment problems and with the schools where NRC operates to make sure that the policy is being implemented.

South Sudan: Cooperation between ICLA and Education has taken place on the provision of legal assistance to learners who want to sit for the grade 8 exams, and to YEP participants. We will extend cooperation through providing information about how to acquire national ID cards to relevant education beneficiaries, and to those who are interested in receiving legal assistance by the ICLA programme.

Afghanistan: The issue of requiring transfer documents for returnee students from Pakistan and Iran was raised by ICLA staff members, then taken up by the Education team in the relevant working groups. Finally, steps were taken by the Ministry of Education to allow three months to obtain the documents or to take an exam.

Colombia: Children of families with special protection needs are referred to ICLA colleagues (when the programme is available) for follow-up. The information that the education programme gathers through the "census" is useful to identify legal requirements of families that can be addressed by the ICLA programme.

RESOURCES

- NRC Jordan [video](#) on civil documentation.
- NRC. [Access to Tazkera and other civil documentation in Afghanistan.](#)
- NRC. 2016. [A Future in the Balance: Syria.](#)
- NRC. 2016. [A Future in the Balance: Lebanon.](#)
- NRC. 2018. [Legal Identity and Education in Central African Republic.](#) (FR and EN).
- UNHCR [Framework for the Protection of Children.](#)
- NRC. 2019. [Barriers from Birth: Undocumented children in Iraq condemned to a life in the Margins.](#)
- NRC. 2018. [A gender analysis to a right to nationality in Myanmar.](#)



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This is a joint Education – ICLA Briefing Note

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