

31 December 2019



The Youth Ambassadors on their field visit to UNHCR FO Solwezi in December 2019.

CONTEXT

The urban refugee population in Lusaka includes a total of 4,067 children of primary and secondary school age, out of which, 48.4 per cent are girls. As the country implements an encampment policy, residence permits to stay in Lusaka is only granted for exceptional reasons, including medical reasons, employment or studies. While there is no requirement for a study permit at primary school level, access to secondary and tertiary education requires a permit.

According to a recent Harvard study on the health and well-being of refugee youth in Lusaka, many refugee youth reportedly face discrimination and verbal and physical violence in school. Nationality and refugee status are overwhelmingly cited as the grounds for discrimination. Both for refugees with URPs and those without, the main reasons of discrimination are nationality (80.0 percent and 84.3 percent) and refugee status (28.0 percent and 26.0 percent). Both groups reported that this discrimination emanated from other pupils. Several participants in the study reported changing their names at school to sound more “Zambian” and avoid bullying and harassment from other pupils. There is not sufficient baseline data to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the situation of girls at school but it can be expected that sexual harassment, discrimination and high drop-out rates are prevalent.

Currently, Zambia does not have an official policy addressing discrimination in schools, therefore there are no interventions on various forms of bullying and xenophobia which impact the safety of public and learning spaces. Also, the root causes and impact of discrimination in school, especially against refugees and girls remain underestimated.

THE HUMANITARIAN YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROJECT

The project, which was a pilot initiated by UNHCR Zambia, was rolled out in universities in Lusaka in September 2019. The initiative targeted 20 youth in their first or second year of university studies. The objective of the project is to empower refugee and host community children and youth to act as ambassadors for change and give them the tools to raise awareness about refugees and related topics, such as human rights, child protection and SGBV/SEA. The “Humanitarian Ambassadors” will be encouraged to actively promote positive attitudes and behaviour embracing cultural diversity, gender equality and prevention of discrimination and xenophobia based on legal status.

Following an introductory programme of activities, they will be expected to raise awareness on issues that affect refugee and Zambian youth’s access to quality education, inclusion and safe learning environments. They are also expected to mobilize refugee and Zambian youth in humanitarian work, be a role model in combatting xenophobia and discrimination, explore strategies to create linkages between communities, service providers and duty bearers and, in accordance with UNHCR’s guidelines on use of social media, share the experiences of the humanitarian ambassadors on Facebook, blogs, Twitter and in other media.

ROLL OUT OF THE PROJECT IN ZAMBIA

Following a rigorous application procedure, UNHCR selected 20 students of both Zambian and refugee backgrounds to participate in the project. A workplan was designed with initial briefings on the work and mandate of UNHCR, the state of the refugees in the world, the refugee protection framework in Zambia, trainings on communication and advocacy, a study visit to a refugee settlement and other activities. The students will be expected to do briefings on refugee matters to fellow students and participate in activities and events promoting refugee rights. At the end of the three-month project, the Ambassadors will receive a certificate of participation.

The programme will be rolled out in primary and secondary schools in Zambia during the latter part of 2020.