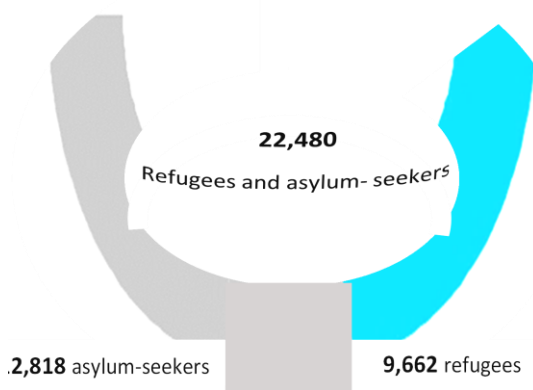


## Disabled Refugees Included and Visible in Education: A British Academy funded project

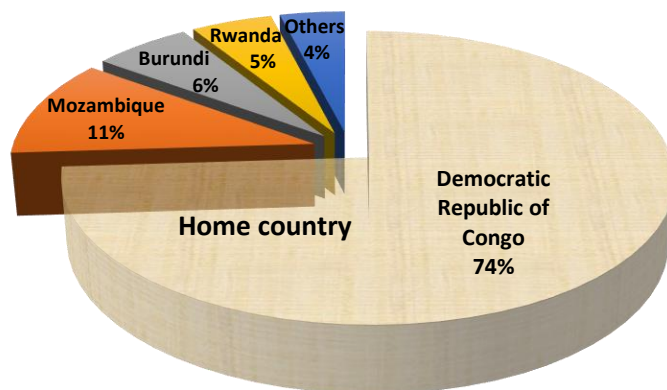


Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Loreen’s family resettled in Tongogara Refugee camp in 2011. Although she has low vision, Loreen (now 17) got easy access to ECD and primary school, and is now in secondary school at Form 3 level. The school offers inclusive education where she studies with other refugees and host communities’ children, both disabled and non-disabled. However, there are no adequate assistive technologies to meet her specific needs. Loreen says, “I made good friends in ECD who accepted me as I am and would always look out for me and assist. I am not able to see what is written by the teacher on the board so I rely on copying notes from my friends. Thankfully, the school authorities organise for me to receive examination papers in huge font so that I can see.” Loreen aspires to become a designer of “driverless cars”. At the same time, she is worried about being run over by the car she designs since she is unable to see clearly. Loreen’s parents acknowledge the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that provides funding for fees, levies and uniforms for refugee children in the camp up to secondary school but then asks “What will happen next to realise Loreen’s career dreams without the necessary affordances?”

### Key facts and figures



**Zimbabwe Refugee Population**



**Zimbabwe Refugee Population by Country of Origin**

Source: UNHCR (February 2022) <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/Zimbabwe%20-%20operational%20update%20-%20February%202022.pdf>

**This study undertook** an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of educational inclusion and exclusion of refugee students with disabilities in Zimbabwe. We partnered with six advisors from the NGO sector to interview 46 education officials, refugee camp officials, teachers, NGOs, refugee children with disabilities and parents of refugee children with disabilities.

**Our key findings** indicated that the refugee student population included those with disabilities such as cognition and mobility. We found no policies specifically targeted to the education of refugee children with disabilities in Zimbabwe besides the legal frameworks that address disability in general. Although most refugee children with disabilities were in school, those who were not in school cited lack of access to special schools. Transition into education for refugees with disabilities was easy from early childhood through to primary and secondary education. However, such transitions became limited from secondary school into higher and tertiary as well as technical and vocational education. Some parents lack awareness and understanding of the potential of their children with disabilities to the extent that they exclude them from learning opportunities

Factors enabling the inclusion of refugee children with disabilities include:

- a curriculum inclusive of both academic and vocational aspects;
- synergies between home and school, parent and teacher, refugee and host (Zimbabwean) community as well as the disabled and non-disabled peers

These factors were more likely to be evident at ECD and primary school levels, rather than secondary school level.

Challenges to educational access, participation and achievement related to:

- limited resources (human, material, financial and assistive technologies) required by refugee children with disabilities.
- Inadequate teacher education that equips teachers to teach children with disabilities in mainstream classes.
- The Centralised Assessment System (involving assessment of all students requiring placement in the school system by one remedial tutor at the provincial level) was prohibitive to timely placement of students with disabilities.

**We recommend** that in order for the Government of Zimbabwe to improve the educational access, participation and achievement of refugee learners with disabilities:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education makes specific reference to refugee children with disabilities in all relevant policies.
- The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare lobbies for the provision of adequate funding and resources to support refugee children with disabilities; The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education provide adequate funding and resources to support refugee children with disabilities.
- The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education reviews curricula in training institutions to ensure that teachers have the competencies necessary to teach all children.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education fosters healthy synergies between schools and the community at large as well as between those with and without disabilities.
- The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education facilitates transitions and pathways into education and through education.

**What some of our respondents told us:**

*“Accessibility goes beyond provision of a wheel chair and should also address intellectual and visual impairment challenges” (NGO).*

*“The absence of e-learning gadgets in Tongogara refugee camp has had a knock-down effect on access to teaching and learning materials in the advent of COVID-19, lockdown and WHO requirements which have been stipulated by government.” (EO).*

*“Some parents look down upon their disabled children and think that they are useless. Some go to the extent of not acquiring a birth certificate for a child with a disability whilst some do not value the education of a child with a disability.” (EO).*

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