

Making Sure All Refugee Children Have Access to Inclusive Education: A Global Perspective with New South Wales (NSW), Australia, as a Case Study

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Abstract

This policy brief examines the imperative of ensuring inclusive education for refugee children, with a focus on New South Wales (NSW), Australia, as a case study. Drawing from the principles of liberal egalitarianism and international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the brief underscores the rights of refugee children to access quality education without discrimination. It delves into the current context and policies governing inclusive education in NSW, emphasizing the need for protection from harm, access, inclusivity, and educational quality. Stakeholder perspectives, including educators, policymakers, and refugee communities, are analyzed, highlighting diverse viewpoints and challenges. The brief proposes solutions encompassing innovative educational practices, policy reforms, community engagement, teacher training, mentorship, and access to technology. Anticipated outcomes include improved educational outcomes, reduced dropout rates, enhanced cultural sensitivity, and increased community involvement. The findings resonate globally, emphasizing the universal importance of equitable education for refugee children.

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Refugee Children, New South Wales, Australia, Liberal Egalitarianism, Policy Brief, Stakeholder Perspectives, Educational Quality, Equity, Community Engagement

1. Introduction

International attention has been drawn to the education of refugee children. The

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants pinpoints education as a critical element of the international refugee response (UNHCR, 2023). Therefore, it's critical to guarantee that all refugee children have access to inclusive education. According to the Liberal Egalitarianism paradigm, all children, even those who have fled their homes, should have equal access to educational opportunities and rights. With New South Wales (NSW), Australia, as a major case study, this briefing will feature a thorough discussion of the role of liberal egalitarianism and the obstacles and possibilities encountered by refugee children in establishing an inclusive education. By using a case study method, we are able to learn from the setting of New South Wales while realizing that it only encapsulates a portion of a larger global problem. We examine the present situation of refugee children's education in NSW, stressing the difficulties and potential in light of more significant global issues. Also, the article highlights the imperative need to ensure that all refugee children have access to inclusive education, emphasizing the global significance of this issue. Drawing from the perspective of liberal egalitarianism, it discusses the challenges and possibilities encountered by refugee children, using New South Wales (NSW), Australia, as a case study.

2. Context: The Current Situation and Existing Policy for Inclusive Education of Refugee Children

Refugee children, forcibly displaced from their home countries due to conflict, persecution, or natural disasters, face myriad challenges that significantly impact their well-being and development. Often finding shelter in refugee camps or settlements, they endure overcrowded conditions, limited access to basic services, and disrupted education, exacerbating their vulnerability to exploitation and mental health issues. Separated from family members and grappling with language and cultural barriers in their host countries, they navigate complex legal systems and uncertain futures. Despite these adversities, refugee children demonstrate resilience and potential, highlighting the importance of tailored support, protection, and opportunities to ensure their inclusion and empowerment in their new communities. In Australia's New South Wales (NSW), the education of refugee children is a complex problem that calls for a thorough comprehension of the reality right now and the laws in place. Over the past decade of conservative government in Australia, the visa system has become more complicated, now with more than 80 visa types and subclasses that relate to newly arrived persons who have arrived in Australia as a result of trauma or displacement. The visa type attributed to individuals and families has implications for services and provisions made available (Woods, 2009). Due to problems with the visa and status system, many refugee children are unable to receive a reasonable education as refugees. Their identity is only part of the problem. In addition, the right to education, non-discrimination, protection from harm, accessibility and inclusivity, educational quality, implementation mechanisms, and the important liberal egalitarianism viewpoint are all covered in-depth in this section.

The Right to Education

Unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents are a vulnerable group: they live not only in a relatively difficult situation as minor refugees staying in another country, but also face other risks due to the absence of their parents, such as traumatic experiences, exploitation or abuse (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). Education is a basis of personal development, community empowerment, and social progress. According to international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have an unequivocal right to access quality education regardless of their background or status. This right also works for refugee children residing in NSW, compelling us to ensure that they can pursue their education without discrimination.

Non-Discrimination

The Right to Education is based on the idea of non-discrimination. For example, under s 18 of the Discrimination Act, an educational authority must not discriminate against a person with respect to admission to educational institutions (ACT Human Rights Commission, 2023). New South Wales must provide equitable educational opportunities for refugee children without any kind of discrimination. To promote a fair and inclusive educational environment, discrimination must be eliminated, regardless of whether it is based on race, nationality, language ability, or refugee status.

Protection from Harm

Refugee children's educational experiences are frequently entwined with their need for protection from numerous types of damage, including socioeconomic, psychological, and physical difficulties. To guarantee that refugee children are safeguarded while pursuing their education, effective policies must address these risks and offer the appropriate safeguards.

Access and Inclusivity

A top priority is making sure that refugee children have access to schooling. All children and young people in Australia have the right to an inclusive education, but a lack of understanding of what this means, combined with frequent misuse of the term, can stop this from becoming a reality (Children and Young People with Disability Australia, 2020). For these kids to enroll, attend, and participate effectively in school, policies must remove obstacles and offer routes. The Right to Education's central concept of inclusivity advocates for educational institutions to be modified to accommodate the various needs of refugee children and make them feel welcomed and supported.

Quality of Education

Access alone is insufficient; policies must also ensure that high-quality education is delivered and that it provides refugee children with the abilities and information they will need in the future. A dedication to high-quality education calls for strict standards, qualified instructors, and well-equipped classrooms.

Implementation Mechanisms

The ideals of the right to education, non-discrimination, protection from harm, accessibility and inclusivity, and quality of education must be put into practice through clear and efficient processes. Strong implementation methods, cooperation amongst education stakeholders, and monitoring procedures are essential for these programs to be effective.

Introduction to the Liberal Egalitarianism Perspective

Equal opportunity, non-discrimination, and individual rights are essential, according to the Liberal Egalitarianism perspective, a paradigm that guides the creation of educational systems. Educational provision is morally special because while other goods may be important for our ability to pursue and realize life plans, educational provision is fundamental for a capacity to recognize and have material choices amongst available opportunities to begin with (Martin, 2015). This viewpoint, which is based on the values of justice and equality, guides the development of policies that seek to close educational gaps and guarantee that all children, including those who have fled persecution, have an equal opportunity to succeed in the educational system. In this regard, the promotion of inclusive education for all children in NSW is motivated by the liberal egalitarianism viewpoint.

The background information provided in this part serves as the basis for understanding the current educational environment for refugee children in NSW, the guiding principles of current policies, and the contribution of the liberal egalitarianism approach to the development of inclusive education policy.

The Legal Systems for Inclusive Education in New South Wales

In New South Wales (NSW), Australia, several legal systems contribute to providing inclusive education for refugee children. Firstly, the Australian legal framework ensures that all children, including refugee children, have the right to access quality education without discrimination, as enshrined in international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, the NSW Department of Education operates within a legal framework that emphasizes equity, non-discrimination, and the provision of inclusive education for all students, including those from refugee backgrounds. Specific legislation, such as Australia's Anti-discrimination Law, it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a number of protected attributes including age, disability, race, sex, intersex status, gender identity and sexual orientation in certain areas of public life, including education and employment (Australia's Anti-Discrimination Law|Attorney-General's Department, 1975). Moreover, policies and guidelines developed by the NSW government outline procedures for supporting the educational needs of refugee children, including language support programs, trauma-informed teaching practices, and mechanisms for addressing socio-economic and psychological challenges. Through these legal systems and policy frameworks, NSW strives to ensure that refugee children have equal access to education and are provided with the necessary support to thrive academically and socially within the school system.

3. Significance in Relation to Different Units of Inclusive Education for All Refugee Children

The policy brief, which aims to provide inclusive education for all refugee children in New South Wales (NSW), is broken up into separate sections that examine different crucial facets of this complicated problem. These divisions work together to create a thorough and strategic approach to addressing the possibilities and difficulties in ensuring that refugee children have fair access to education. Each unit's importance is highlighted by the contribution it makes to our overarching objective of inclusive education. Before starting this policy trip, let's quickly examine the relevance of these units.

Unit 1: Education Actors

Numerous stakeholders have a big impact on how New South Wales' (NSW's) dynamic educational system shapes the educational trajectories of immigrant kids. Education institutions, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the resilient refugee populations themselves are all included in this diverse stakeholder group. Schools, guided by the principles of liberal egalitarianism, play a critical and indispensable role in maintaining connection and engagement with students and families, especially during periods of uncertainty and community unease (Standards, 2023). In order to guarantee that every kid, regardless of their origin or circumstances, has an equal chance to receive inclusive education, the government authorities, motivated by a dedication to liberal egalitarian principles, establish an essential legislative framework and devote precious resources. In accordance with liberal egalitarian values, non-governmental groups provide devoted assistance and ardent advocacy, while the resiliency and high ambitions of refugee populations serve as the cornerstone of steadfast resolve. Recognizing the complex and dynamic interactions between these important players is crucial because ensuring that refugee children have fair access to inclusive education requires their combined efforts, which are firmly anchored in liberal egalitarianism.

Unit 2: Equity along Various Lines Identified

Addressing "Equity along Various Lines Identified" in refugee children's education is of paramount importance as it upholds fundamental principles of fairness, inclusivity, and human rights. Ensuring that every child, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, language proficiency, or refugee status, has equal access to quality education aligns with the principles of social justice and human rights. Such equity initiatives aim to break down barriers, eliminate discrimination, and provide the necessary resources to help refugee children succeed academically, ultimately improving their educational outcomes and future prospects. Importantly, these efforts have a global impact, setting a precedent for equitable access to education in refugee contexts worldwide. Moreover, promoting equity in education fosters social cohesion within communities, fostering greater acceptance and understanding among diverse groups and benefiting society as a whole.

Unit 3: Funding

Funding for refugee education holds immense importance. Adequate funding ensures equal access to quality education for refugee children, bridging regional resource disparities. It directly impacts educational quality by enabling trained teachers, updated materials, and suitable infrastructure. Funding supports tailored services for special needs, addressing language barriers and trauma-related challenges. By reducing educational disparities, it ensures equitable opportunities for refugee children. Moreover, it fosters social inclusion through extracurricular activities, cultural awareness, and community engagement. Investment in refugee education yields long-term benefits, enabling self-reliance and reducing societal costs. However, at least within the Australian context, refugee students are largely invisible in Australian funding policy (Keddie, 2012), and many schools lack the resources necessary to meet their diverse needs (Pugh et al., 2012). All the more reason to pay attention to the role of funding in refugee education. Reasonable allocation of funding is a very important part of improving the quality of education.

4. Various Factors and Views

The inclusive education landscape for refugee children in New South Wales (NSW) is shaped by a multitude of factors and perspectives from various stakeholders, each contributing to a complex tapestry of views and challenges. Education stakeholders, including educators, school administrators, and representatives from educational institutions, have diverse viewpoints on how to best facilitate inclusive education. While many champion the principles of equal access and support for refugee children, there may be differences in approaches and resources allocated to achieve these goals.

State and federal policymakers each bring a unique viewpoint to the table. Their opinions have an impact on how policies are created and put into practice that affect the education of refugee children. Different objectives among policymakers, such as financial restraints, may have an impact on how resources and support services are distributed to refugee students.

Teachers who interact frequently and closely with refugee children provide helpful insights into the difficulties and possibilities that arise in the classroom. Overall, all teachers expressed different levels of difficulties in resourcing and differences in their efforts to overcome them (Karsli-Calamak & Kilinc, 2021). Depending on their backgrounds, methods of instruction, and the particular requirements of their pupils, their opinions might change. While some may concentrate on more extensive systemic improvements, certain educators may stress the value of customized support.

Communities of refugees themselves are essential participants in this discussion. Their experiences, goals, and worries about their children's education impact their attitudes. Refugee families may come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and their perspectives on the inclusiveness of the educa-

tional system may be influenced by these variations.

It is essential to emphasize areas of agreement and disagreement among various stakeholders in order to comprehend the complexity of the problem. While there may be widespread agreement on the value of inclusive education, it is important to recognize that different points of view exist about the best ways to allocate resources and implement policies. This comprehensive knowledge will guide the creation of procedures and policies that more effectively meet the various needs of refugee children in NSW.

5. Possibilities and Anticipated Outcomes or Solutions

It is crucial to investigate a variety of options and potential solutions in order to provide inclusive education for all refugee children in New South Wales (NSW). We can address the various issues encountered by refugee kids and strive toward a more equitable and inclusive education by taking into account creative approaches, legislative reforms, and community involvement. Here are several crucial paths to reaching this objective:

- **Innovative Educational Practices:** Adopting cutting-edge teaching and learning strategies that meet the various requirements of refugee children is one option. This involves the creation of curricular materials that are both culturally aware and inclusive, specialist language assistance programs, and mentorship programs that link refugee kids with their classmates and instructors.
- **Policy Changes:** It is possible for policymakers to have a substantial impact on how refugee children get their education. It is crucial to look at making policy reforms that put equal treatment and non-discrimination first. To achieve this, admission standards may need to be changed to provide equal access, money for specific schools with high refugee populations may need to be provided, and guidelines for teachers to build inclusive classrooms may need to be developed.
- **Community Engagement:** A key to success is including the communities of refugees in the educational process. Partnerships with local leaders and organizations may help close linguistic and cultural barriers, deliver crucial support services, and promote a sense of belonging among refugee students and their families.
- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** It is essential to provide educators with the information and abilities needed to handle the particular needs of refugee kids. More successful classroom procedures can result from providing professional development opportunities that concentrate on cultural competency, trauma-informed teaching, and linguistic support.
- **Mentorship and Peer Support:** By implementing mentoring programs in schools, schools may help refugee children adapt to the educational system more smoothly by offering peer support and assistance. Peer mentoring can aid refugee students in making new friends and adjusting to their new academic environment.
- **Access to Technology:** In a world that is becoming more and more digital,

ensuring access to technology and online resources is crucial. Giving refugee kids computers or tablets with internet access can help them with homework assignments, research, and remote learning, which can help close the achievement gap.

These solutions are anticipated to have a positive impact on refugee children's educational outcomes, dropout rates, language competency, cultural sensitivity among instructors, and community engagement in education. In the end, the goal of these initiatives is to provide a learning environment where refugee children may flourish intellectually, socially, and emotionally, notwithstanding their background or situation.

6. Conclusion

This policy brief on providing inclusive education for refugee children in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, concludes by offering a thorough examination of the potential and difficulties in this crucial area. This policy brief has outlined the steps needed to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system for refugee children by carefully examining the responsibilities performed by education actors, equity concerns, financial sources, and theoretical factors. Importantly, the implications of the findings resonate with the larger global refugee education scene and are not limited to NSW.

Education for refugees is a worldwide issue that cuts beyond geographical lines and needs a coordinated solution. The takeaways from the NSW case study are relevant to all societies because they emphasize the value of creating inclusive learning settings that place an emphasis on equity, equal access, and the realization of individual rights. Liberal egalitarianism offers a universal paradigm for resolving inequality and advancing social justice in education. These ideas have led to the investigation.

It is essential that the global world learns from the investigation of inclusive education in NSW as we move to the future. Nations may cooperate to make sure that refugee children worldwide have the chance to receive high-quality education by implementing policies and practices built on liberal equality. By dedicating themselves to this purpose, educators may help create a society in which every kid, no matter what their circumstances or background, has the opportunity to develop and realize their potential through education.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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