

A school set up by asylum seekers and refugees in the West Java town Cisarua, Indonesia, is an initiative that Australian and Indonesian governments should model and support.

In August 2014, refugees from Afghanistan in transit in Indonesia established the [Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre](#) (CRLC) to provide education for their children.

Asylum seekers and refugees children in Indonesia, one of the key transit states for refugees waiting to be resettled in Australia and other countries, have no access to regular schooling during the long wait for resettlement.

The school in Cisarua has received no official funding from any government body. It relies on donations from civil society in Indonesia and Australia to continue its work.

Life in transit

Recent [UNHCR figures](#) show Indonesia is hosting more than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers. It is conservatively estimated that more than 2,000 are [unaccompanied minors](#).

The [average waiting period](#) from registration to the first interview with the UNHCR is between eight and 20 months on average. Only once a person is found to be a refugee will the search for a resettlement place begin. During this time, asylum seekers and refugees are also denied the right to work.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Asylum seekers are tolerated by the government but never accepted. People found to be refugees have no prospect of permanent resettlement in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, children in Australia's offshore detention centres for asylum seekers face [challenges at local schools](#) and [long-term risks of mental and physical harm](#).

Education for refugees

The issue of education of refugees children has recently been put into the international spotlight by education activist Malala Yousafzai. The Nobel laureate [sought US\\$1.4 billion to provide education for Syrian child refugees](#).

In Australia, a loose coalition of teachers has also been protesting under the hashtag #EducationNotDetention and #TeachersForRefugees on the back of the [High Court ruling on the legality of offshore detention](#).

Even before these campaigns, asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia had already been working to create an environment where their children could receive an education.

The Cisarua school provides education for 80 students. It has also restored a sense of purpose and dignity to refugees who are living a vulnerable and precarious life in transit.

CRLC has 14 permanent teaching staff comprised entirely of refugees and revolving volunteers from around the world.

The students follow a classic curriculum that includes maths, English, art and science. They also learn about healthy living, mutual respect and equality.

The school provides activities for adults too. In the evening, adults can take English classes. The school also started a local football league for men and women to keep people physically active.

Refugees participate in football matches with local Indonesians. The school regularly hosts international visitors. All guests participate in the classrooms and stay with the teaching staff.

Using social media, the school has formed global partnerships and disseminates first-hand experiences of what life is like for people seeking asylum.

School's impact on refugees

The impact the centre has had on its students is undeniable. Nine-year-old Fatima Karimi says:

I do remember the day when I first heard about the school. My home was close to the school and my mother told me I will also go to school soon. On the first day I made two friends. Now I have many friends and some of them are my best friends. Since I came to the school I feel really good. After school hours sometimes I go to my friends' houses and play with them. It was something I was missing since we fled from our country.

The school has also brought solace to adult refugees who volunteer as teachers. One of the young teachers, who was asked to fill a vacancy left by a leading teacher who was resettled in Australia, says:

When I am teaching the kids, I forget that we are living a difficult life as refugees. Being a refugee, I never thought that I will ever be able to be a teacher, to meet different people and gain invaluable experience.

Recently, [a Pozible crowd-funding campaign](#) that set out to raise A\$25,000 raised enough to ensure the school's continued operations for the next three years.

While governments continue to [spend billions of dollars](#) to prevent asylum seeker coming by boat from transit countries, it seems that a much more wise investment would be on programs such as this.

Refugee-run school in Indonesia a model for governments to emulate

Written by The Conversation USA

The school makes life in transit more bearable for asylum seekers. Aside from the educational benefit for children and the sense of purpose in refugees, facilitating refugees to run schools for their children may reduce the push factors that drive them to risk their lives on a perilous journey by boat.

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