



**Jesuit Refugee Service
-Europe-
Service Jésuite des
Réfugiés**

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News Release – World Refugee Day – June 20th 2003

**JRS asks EU Member States to
do more for education of young refugees**

Young people – ‘bridge builders’

Page 1 of 2

On World Refugee Day 2003, JRS Europe wishes to highlight the plight of the many young people worldwide who are trapped in a refugee situation and whose lives are so often on hold due to circumstances beyond their control.

Almost half the world's refugees are children or young people. Today we want to pay tribute to their courage, to their determination and to their resilience. In refugee camps worldwide, sometimes in appalling situations and after suffering severe trauma, young refugees continue to show creativity as well as a real desire to learn, to live, to contribute to society.

Education is a key opportunity for young refugees. It can unlock their potential and make possible a different future. But in camp situations, it is usually only possible up to primary level. Also, many young refugees have had their studies interrupted and may never get a chance to resume them. This represents generations of wasted opportunity.

Here in Europe young refugees often lead the way in integration into the new society. They have to learn new languages, they have to recover from trauma; yet they are often the ones who help their parents and who spearhead integration. We urge EU governments to ensure that refugee children are given all the help they need in this important adjustment. And we also urge that children of asylum seekers have access to the education system right from when they

JRS Europe is a network of 20 offices working in Europe with and for refugees and displaced people. It is part of the JRS international network and a project of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials.

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‘Serving Forgotten Refugees’

arrive in the country. The fact that governments are struggling with the issue of mixed flows – refugees arriving together with economic migrants – means that even children may be treated with suspicion. Yet, where children are concerned, we should be generous, positive and accepting.

JRS Europe urges European governments to reach out in a special way to refugee youth through its development programmes:

‘If you contrast the opportunities available here in Europe to our children’ said JRS Europe Director John Dardis ‘and the opportunities which young refugees have in camps in Africa and Asia, you realise the responsibility we have here to share some of what we enjoy and to give a future to at least some of those children and young people. The EU already makes a significant contribution to refugee education programmes but on this day we urge the EU to think even more deeply about how to further contribute to refugee education.’

In a new European initiative, JRS is also reaching out to explain about refugees to young people in Europe and to combat the rise in anti refugee sentiment:

‘In 2004, in Europe, we hope to launch a special project aimed at educating young people in schools about the refugee situation’ said JRS Europe director John Dardis. ‘We hope to put young Europeans in touch with young refugees in other parts of the world and build a sense of solidarity. Young people are the future, the best bridge builders. They are the ones who can show us tolerance, compassion and a better way forward.’

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