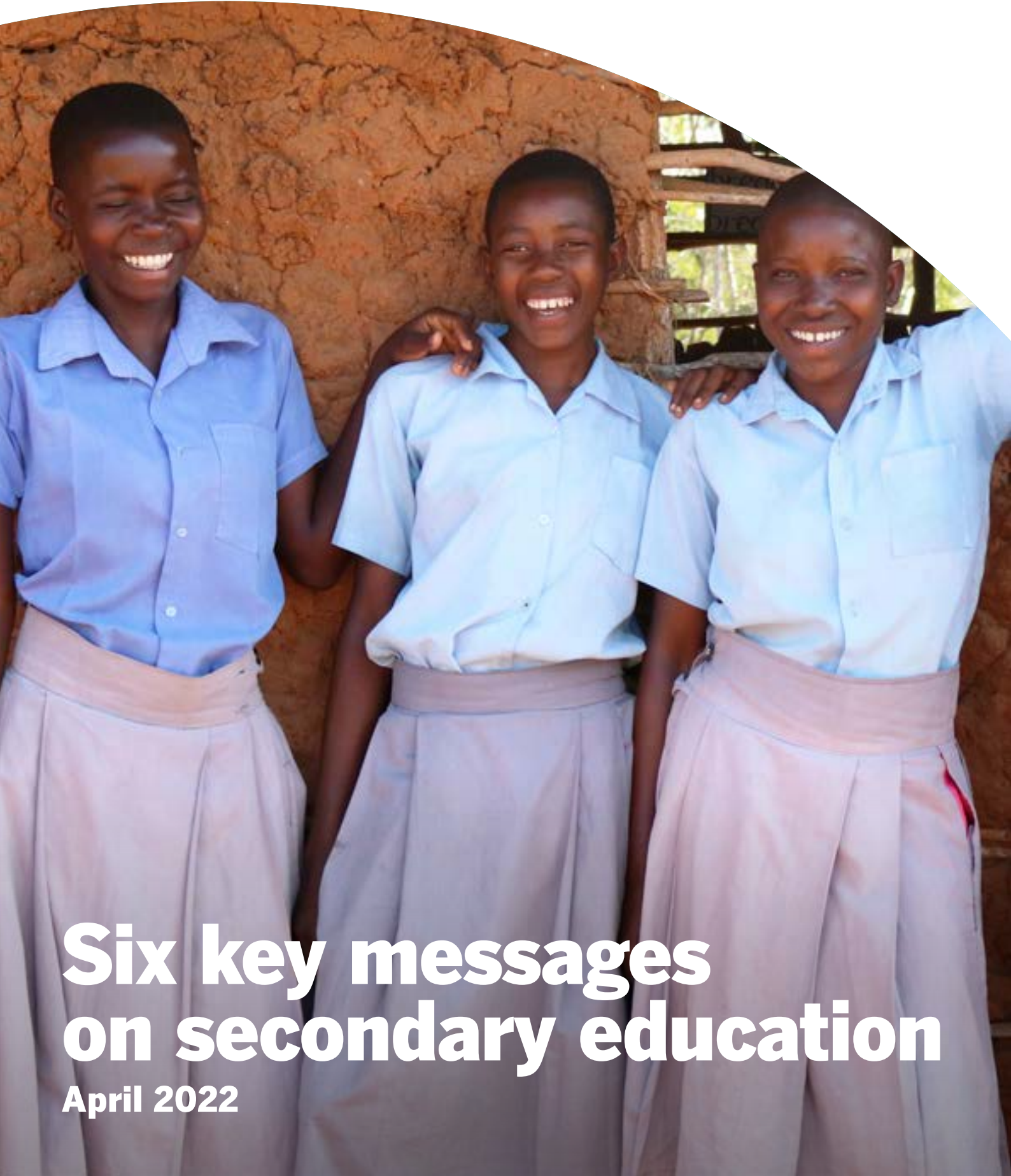




**Secondary
Education
Working
Group**



Six key messages on secondary education

April 2022



Six key messages on secondary education



With each passing year, the likelihood of young people in a crisis-affected context progressing to the next academic grade drops sharply. Young people in conflict-affected countries are 30% less likely to complete primary school and half as likely to complete lower-secondary school (UNESCO, 2018). The sharpest drop in enrolment is in the transition from primary to secondary education (UNHCR, 2019). Secondary education is the gateway to further education, personal and social development, and better employment and productive work opportunities. This drop is a crushing blow to a young person's right to a brighter future. Young people will tell you that education remains the most powerful investment in their future. For displaced and marginalized young people, education builds their capacity

to contribute positively to both their individual and their community's sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures will see many marginalized young people experience increased inequality and some may never continue their formal education once schools reopen (Bakrania et al., 2020).

This is especially true for adolescent girls, who are at heightened risk of dropping out. An estimated 20 million secondary school-aged girls may never return to school (Malala Fund, 2020), and one in two refugee girls at the secondary level are at risk of dropping out as a result of this pandemic¹ (Nyamweya, 2020). This figure is even higher for adolescent girls where enrolment has traditionally been much lower to begin with (2020).

What is the challenge for equitable access to secondary education for crisis affected young people?

For crisis-affected and marginalized young people longing for a secondary education, the barriers are complex, multiple, and well known (UNICEF, 2020). These barriers include the gap in qualified teachers to meet the demand for secondary education. Displaced young people may also lack the required documents to enrol in school or their existing studies may not be recognized in a new country, host community, or upon their return home (see for example, Rodriguez-Gómez, 2019). Young people fleeing conflict may have experienced stress or witnessed attacks on their school and peers. In conflict and crisis-affected contexts, young people may face

¹ In 10 countries where there is quality gender disaggregated data available (Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Turkey and Uganda)



discrimination and their movement might be restricted (Alsharabati & Lahoud, 2016; Pells et al., 2016). Additionally, they may be taught in a language they do not understand.

Offering more technical subjects, developing teaching expertise and providing the materials required for quality secondary education are costly and demand significant investment. With insufficient financing for secondary education, many States struggle to meet budgetary targets. Curricula and education policies with a limited focus on life-skills, resiliency, mental health and psychosocial support curtail young people's ability to learn. It is no surprise then that marginalized young people—girls and young people with disabilities—often remain invisible in national plans. As girls transition from primary education, they face gendered barriers to accessing and completing

their secondary education. These barriers range from cultural, to legal, to socio-economic (UNHCR, 2018).

Beyond the learning environment, there are many other complex and interconnected reasons why young people do not attend secondary school. They can be personal, familial, cultural, economic and safety related. To enrol and retain young people in secondary education, we need a holistic approach that works with communities, ministries, and, most importantly, young people themselves.

What do we want to achieve?

The vision of the Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG) is a world in which all crisis-affected young people have equitable access to quality, inclusive, and relevant secondary education, which they can complete in safety. We are advocating for solutions

Young people in conflict-affected countries are 30% less likely to complete primary school and half as likely to complete lower-secondary school

for crisis-affected and marginalized young people² that promote inclusion and gender-responsive approaches in national education systems across the education cycle, from ECD through secondary and into tertiary education. Equity requires special attention to the needs of adolescent girls and the challenges they face in accessing and completing secondary education. Young people have a right to education meaning we have a collective duty to prioritize learning, to strengthen protection measures, and to ensure the wellbeing of young people today.

² This includes young mothers, pregnant adolescents, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.



Six Key Messages

1 **All young people in crisis-affected contexts should have the opportunity to access secondary education and have their right to education fulfilled.**

All young people have the right to be protected, supported and educated. With education providing integral support and protection, those denied access to it miss out on vital services beyond opportunities for learning. Currently only 34 percent of refugees have access to secondary education (UNHCR, 2021b). This must change.

We ask all countries to provide unfettered access to secondary education to all young people, including refugees, on an equal basis. Policies that currently restrict young mothers as well as pregnant and married adolescent girls from accessing education must be revised to ensure their continuity of learning. Countries should ensure

national education plans are gender-responsive and crisis-sensitive. They must include all young people by accommodating them with flexible enrolment requirements. Countries must also include the needs and voices of displaced young people –including adolescent girls and other marginalized groups–in education sector planning and preparedness. Education systems need to be flexible and respond to the learning and post-education needs of young people with an eye to future skills, life skills and linkages to demand-driven training.

To enrol and retain young people in secondary education, we need a holistic approach that works with communities, ministries, and, most importantly, young people themselves.

Governments have committed to inclusive approaches across the full cycle of education. An inclusive education system respects the diverse needs, abilities, and capacities of all young people. It is free from all forms of discrimination, provides relevant and sufficient learning materials, and directly addresses the challenges holding the most marginalized students back from accessing and completing their education. Without ensuring access to inclusive secondary education, the international community will fail to honor its human rights obligations and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG4 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. It will also fall short of targets on eradicating poverty, promoting decent work and reducing inequality.



Ejloby Rami Dey Roy

ADOLESCENT GIRLS FACE MULTIPLE BARRIERS TO EDUCATION IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE, IN 2030

1 in 3

girls in crisis-affected countries will have completed secondary school;

1 in 5

girls will not be able to read a simple sentence

2 Secondary education is life changing for adolescent girls

Adolescent girls want us to listen to their voices. They are aware of the benefits of education but face myriad obstacles to enrolment and retention. There are multiple, key transitions in their lives, not simply from primary to secondary school, but also into adolescence and adulthood. If trends of exclusion continue into 2030 only:

- 1 in 3 girls in crisis-affected countries will have completed secondary school (Plan International, 2019)
- 1 in 5 girls in crisis-affected countries will not be able to read a simple sentence (2019); and
- girls in crisis-affected countries will receive on average just 8.5 years of education in their lifetime (2019).

For girls to attend and remain in education, education systems must be safe and free from all forms of violence, including gender-based violence (GBV). Secondary education also provides a critical entry point for girls to access health services, including mental health support and sexual and reproductive health. There is a great deal of evidence highlighting the importance of secondary education and the benefits for individuals and for

broader communities in the immediate and in the longer term if girls access and complete secondary education (Malala Fund, 2019). Modelling based on current research suggest that child marriage would fall by 64 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia if all girls completed secondary education (Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). For each additional school year women's earnings could increase by around 12 percent (World Bank, 2014). Secondary education is a lifeline for crisis-affected adolescent girls.

We ask that countries address the reality of crises and protracted displacement and create the policy and planning conditions that enable adolescent girls, young women, and mothers to safely access and complete education that is certified by national-systems. A good starting point is to listen to and involve adolescent girls in key conversations, planning about them. Girls are best placed to advise

Countries should ensure national education plans are gender responsive and crisis-sensitive. They must include all young people by accommodating them with flexible enrolment requirements.

on the issues and decisions that impact them directly, for example, how to get to and from school safely. Providing safe spaces where adolescent girls can fully participate in decisions about their education and make their voices heard is critical. Through meaningful and responsible consultation with girls and young women throughout the policy and programme cycle, states can more effectively ensure girl-friendly school and learning environments. These environments must include improved hygiene infrastructure, whole school approaches to prevent and respond to school related gender-based violence, and gender-responsive teaching practices and materials.

3 Secondary education needs dedicated financing

Providing secondary education is expensive. Between 2015–2030, twelve years of universal fee-free primary and secondary education is estimated to cost a global average of US\$340 billion a year³ (Malala Fund, 2015). The burden remains on the poorest countries with costs estimated to be on average around 6.5 percent of their GDP (2015). Globally, one quarter of all countries spend less than 4% of GDP and less than 15% of their budget on education (UNESCO, 2019). Yet, the 2008 financial crash showed that governments do continue to prioritize education and will do so again. Suspending debt repayments has also provided much-needed relief for countries struggling with the rising cost of borrowing to meet their educational needs.

We ask that national governments adopt the principle of 'progressive

³ This figure includes a year of pre-primary education.



universalism' in their budgetary allocations. This means increasing overall spending for education but targeting the increase towards the most marginalized learners, using gender-responsive budgeting. To support marginalized young people, governments need to address barriers that cause adolescents to drop out, ensuring transparent, sustained, multi-year funding for secondary education. To allow families to pay education-related costs, households need to have access to lawful work and scholarship programmes need to be scaled up. Investments are needed in ongoing teacher professional development to support holistic, learner-centred teaching approaches that build the psychosocial wellbeing that underpins strong academic learning outcomes. To create an inclusive learning environment for young people with a disability, decisions with financial implications are needed at the policy level in terms of school accessibility, support staff, communication with communities, and providing a flexible curriculum.

We ask that donor countries restate and meet their commitments to allocate 0.7 percent of gross national income to aid and devote at least 15 percent of that to education. This funding should be earmarked for primary and secondary education. Donor countries must be united in the aim to provide up to 12 years of basic education and include gender equity as a "principal" (currently 50.73% for DAC countries) or "significant" objective (currently 43.47% for DAC countries).

4 Reopening schools is an opportunity to design a more inclusive and equitable education system

The scale and length of the school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented. The pandemic has created the largest disruption to education in history (UNESCO, 2020). The risk is that prolonged school closures could further entrench inequalities in access to learning and that marginalized young people never return to school. The SEWG asserts that COVID-19-related school closures should not further exacerbate educational inequalities, which discriminate based on gender, poverty, disability, ethnicity, religion, language or geographic location.



USAID / Bobby Neptune

Regardless of a country's capacity to provide appropriate and continued access to curriculum-based learning during crises and school closures, several education systems are now cautiously preparing for schools to reopen. This process poses many challenges for education authorities, and careful planning is essential to ensure that school re-openings are gender-responsive and inclusive. With careful planning, authorities have many unique opportunities to bring the most marginalized young people into education systems with these reopenings.

A supportive policy environment is critical for girls to re-enter education following any crisis. In planning for the resumption of school, government, and school-level stakeholders, including teacher representatives, should identify and remove any policies that may discriminate against girls, including not allowing pregnant girls to enrol. Now more than ever, adolescent boys, who are disproportionately affected by the need to generate income and find work (UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, 2020), also face increased opportunity costs as a distinct challenge to re-entering secondary school.

SECONDARY EDUCATION NEEDS DEDICATED FINANCING

1 in 4

countries spend less than 4% of GDP and less than 15% of their budget on education

Less than
4%

of humanitarian assistance from donor countries is allocated to education

Donor countries must restate and meet their commitments to allocate

0.7%

of gross national income to aid and devote at least

15%

of that to education. This funding should be earmarked for primary and secondary education.



We ask that States ensure their planning provides inclusive and flexible alternative learning solutions, including distance or blended learning, that offer equivalent and certified competencies that will reach the most marginalized and limit inequalities in the education system and address gender disparities in access to digital learning. This includes working to provide free or low-cost mobile internet access. Where digital solutions to distance learning and the internet are accessible and equitable, States should strive to ensure that all young people are trained with the necessary digital skills, including ways to stay safe online. Where this is not immediately possible, new- and low-tech alternatives have emerged as promising practices to provide continuity of learning through the pandemic (UNHCR, 2021a). These good practices should be continued and become part of the new normal.

5 **The quality of the system depends upon great teachers**

Teachers and school principals are at the heart of quality education. To create a solid, safe and successful learning environment, skilled and motivated teachers, instructing in languages young people can understand are vital. If teachers are untrained, poorly paid or unpaid, and not adequately supported and supervised the quality of learning suffers.

We ask that countries adopt a whole-system approach focusing on the introduction of flexible teaching methods, responding to different learning needs and training teachers to use gender-responsive, learner-centred teaching approaches that build the psychosocial wellbeing that underpins strong academic learning outcomes. Pre- and in-service teacher education and training must be reoriented to support holistic skills development in line with the curriculum. Information technology and digital literacy training and capacity are critical for teachers at secondary level. Investments must also be made to increase the number of women entering the teaching profession at secondary level and to ensure on-going support. Gender-responsive recruitment, targeting and support, alongside teacher codes of conduct that promote inclusive, gender-responsive norms and standards at



Plan International

work are vital (UNGEI et al., 2021). Having more female teachers in higher grades will create a more enabling environment for adolescent girls' retention in secondary education. Having more female principals and women in leadership positions provides the opportunity to change teachers' attitudes and classroom practices that foster gender- and disability-inclusive learning environments. We must invest in teachers and teaching.

6 **Quality secondary education equips young people with future skills**

Holistic learning is more than just literacy and numeracy. It also emphasizes the role of education to promote social-emotional well-being, gender equality, environmental literacy, stewardship and climate resilience, creativity, critical thinking, conflict resolution and community building. These skills are vital for all young

people (OECD, 2021), but particularly so for those living in settings disrupted by conflict or disasters.

Young people must feel safe in order to learn and flourish. It is also clear that attending school is not enough. Learning must occur in order to fully reap the benefits of education. The Learning Adjusted Years of Schooling measure by the World Bank combines the quality and quantity of schooling and showed that students who had completed similar numbers of school years had vastly different outcomes on standardized tests (Filmer et al., 2018).

We ask that all girls and boys enrolled in formal education gain foundational skills (literacy, numeracy, digital skills) and transferable skills up to and including the secondary level. Education plans should show clear linkages between education providers and employment or productive work, with a focus on future skills, including green skills, that are now in demand. Young people also need skills to be leaders, advocates and change makers. This can be achieved by rolling out innovative pedagogies that include climate change education and encourage active learning, play and teamwork, through gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive curriculum promoting equality and inclusion, citizenship, cooperation and peacebuilding, critical thinking and decision-making.

National education plans must provide inclusive and flexible alternative learning solutions, including distance or blended learning, that offer equivalent certified competencies that will reach the most marginalized, limit inequalities in the education system and address gender disparities.

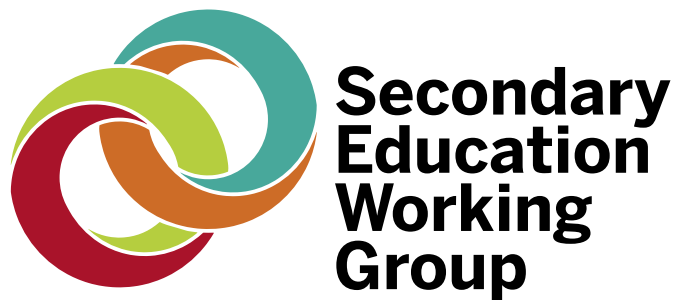


A note on terminology:

1. For the purposes of this document, the SEWG has considered the UNESCO [definition](#) on secondary education; “*The Organization promotes secondary education for all that includes a balance of academic disciplines, practical and social skills and civic responsibility and which provides an effective preparation for continuing education as well as for the world of work.*”
2. The SEWG uses “young people” to incorporate children, adolescents and youth referencing the [IASC Guidelines for Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#).
3. The SEWG uses the INEE [definition](#) on gender-responsive; “*Gender responsive is a state of recognition and reaction to gender inequality in implementing activities, policies, and programs. A program, policy, or activity that is gender responsive addresses gender-based barriers, respects gender differences, enables structures, systems, and methodologies to be sensitive to gender, ensures gender parity is a wider strategy to advance gender equality and evolves to close gaps and eradicate gender-based discrimination.*”

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Published by:
Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG)
c/o United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Geneva – Switzerland

Available at: inee.org/collections/secondary-education

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Suggested citation: Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG) (2022). Six Key Messages on Secondary Education. Geneva. SEWG c/o United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees