

Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network

Academics make key contributions to the protection of displaced people through research and teaching on forced displacement and providing support to displaced students and scholars. Their understanding of the implications of forced movement and how they instruct the next generation of professionals to think about the issues profoundly affects refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless communities.

The Global Compact on Refugees specifies that “a global academic network on refugee, other forced displacement, and statelessness issues will be established, involving universities, academic alliances, and research institutions, together with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders.” (paragraph 43). Launched at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (GAIN) facilitates specific deliverables in research, teaching and support to displaced students and scholars.

How academics make a difference to asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people?

Research

Research helps scholars, displaced people, policy-makers, and civil society develop a greater understanding of the implications of forced movement and think together on appropriate and effective practice concerning forced displacement. GAIN promotes research in support of the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees: i) ease the pressures on host countries; ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; iii) expand access to third-country solutions; iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Teaching

Situations of armed conflict and displacement affect the lives of millions of people globally. Refugees regularly make headlines, and the internet is bustling with information on the topic. Explaining the situation of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless people and how international law regulates the conduct of hostilities is a critical contribution of academics. GAIN promotes teaching on forced displacement that advances knowledge sharing on key refugee, forced displacement and statelessness issues and equips the next generation of professionals with the theory and practical skills needed for meaningful protection.



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Ghana. UNHCR DAFI scholar receives nursing degree, 2020.

Support to displaced students and scholars

Education is a basic human right enshrined in the [1951 Refugee Convention](#). It gives displaced people the knowledge and skills to live productive, fulfilling and independent lives. However, the gap between refugees and their peers is still wide at tertiary level. GAIN encourages academic institutions to extend scholarships and overcome the structural barriers for displaced students to access tertiary education as well as opportunities for displaced scholars to return to academic work in their country of asylum.



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 Jordan, 2020. Refugee pharmacist provides vital COVID-19 support to her community. “The DAFI scholarship was a spark for change in my life. It has provided me with endless opportunities and given me the motivation to succeed.”

What’s next for GAIN and its support to refugee issues?

Eighty-five per cent of the world’s refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries. GAIN seeks to augment the visibility of research, teaching and good practices from these contexts globally. Additionally, most refugee-hosting countries have the majority of youth populations, so GAIN has a specific emphasis on promoting that emerging scholars connect to global networks and discussions promoting south-south and south-north dialogue.

Refugees themselves are key contributors to the GCR but often face structural burdens to engagement. GAIN will seek to highlight contributions made by persons with the first-hand experience of displacement in its work.

The multi-faceted objectives of the Global Compact Refugees necessitate contributions from experts in many different fields. To advance burden and responsibility sharing, GAIN partners with universities, academic alliances, research institutions and individual academics from various disciplines. GAIN also seeks to ensure that academic contributions are shared in an accessible manner with policymakers and civil society actors.

GAIN in Action

The Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chairs (De Mello Chairs) were set up in 2004 by UNHCR to promote academic activities related to refugees and displaced persons in Brazil. As of 2019, the network of Chairs is made up of 22 universities across Brazil, which focus their work on three branches: teaching, research, and community outreach.

Rising to the pandemic challenges, many De Mello Chairs went beyond their regular teaching on international refugee, human rights and humanitarian law, Portuguese language learning and outreach programmes in 2020. De Mello Chairs championed connectivity for refugee students for distance learning, and nearly 2000 people received food baskets from a programme established by one of the university chairs. Other professors engaged with public defenders to advocate for refugee inclusion in federal emergency assistance aid.

The De Mello Chair programme was shared for the Global Refugee Forum as a good practice that addresses key elements of academic contributions to burden and responsibility outlined in the GCR. In 2020, GAIN established a working group of stakeholders interested in adapting and applying this model in their context, creating a shared learning environment and collaborative space for interested universities and UNHCR country offices. Current De Mello chairs have shared valuable insights and lessons learned with peer institutions in Europe and Asia through this group.



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 Chairs discuss with peers how to adapt the programme in Europe and Asia in 2020.