



Refugee Education Japan



From Displacement to Opportunity

Expanding Access to Higher Education
for Refugees in Japan and Beyond

10-Year Report 2016-2025

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About This Report

The Japan ICU Foundation (JICUF) is committed to expanding access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds. Central to the Foundation's work is the development of education pathways — safe and structured avenues through which displaced youth can move from a first country of asylum to a third country through educational opportunities. These pathways provide not only access to higher education, but also protection, stability, and the foundation for meaningful, long-term careers.

This report traces how the Foundation became engaged in refugee higher education and examines the evolution of its programs over the past decade.

For the purposes of this report, the term “refugees” is used broadly to refer to people with refugee backgrounds, including but not limited to individuals who have been formally recognized as refugees.

March 2026

Executive Summary

The Japan ICU Foundation (JICUF) is a non-profit organization founded in New York in 1949. Its purpose was to raise funds to build a university committed to Christian ideals, academic freedom and peace in the devastation of post-WWII Japan. Over the decades, JICUF has supported the growth of **International Christian University (ICU)** into one of Japan's leading liberal arts institutions. That founding mission — educating global citizens committed to peace and human dignity—now shapes JICUF's work to expand access to higher education for refugees.

JICUF's engagement in refugee higher education began in 2016 with the conception of the **Syrian Scholars Initiative (SSI)**, Japan's first privately funded university sponsorship program for refugee students. Launched in partnership with ICU and the Japan Association for Refugees (JAR), SSI recruited displaced Syrian students directly from Turkey and supported them through degree completion at ICU. Between 2018 and 2022, seven students were admitted — one more than initially planned — despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. SSI ultimately spanned nine years from initial recruitment to the graduation of the final cohort.

Beyond its direct impact on students' lives, SSI proved influential at a global level. It demonstrated that higher education could function as a complementary pathway for refugee protection in Asia, a region where such pathways had been limited. The initiative attracted the attention of the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, leading to JICUF's participation in international policy discussions and its role as a founding member of the **Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways**.

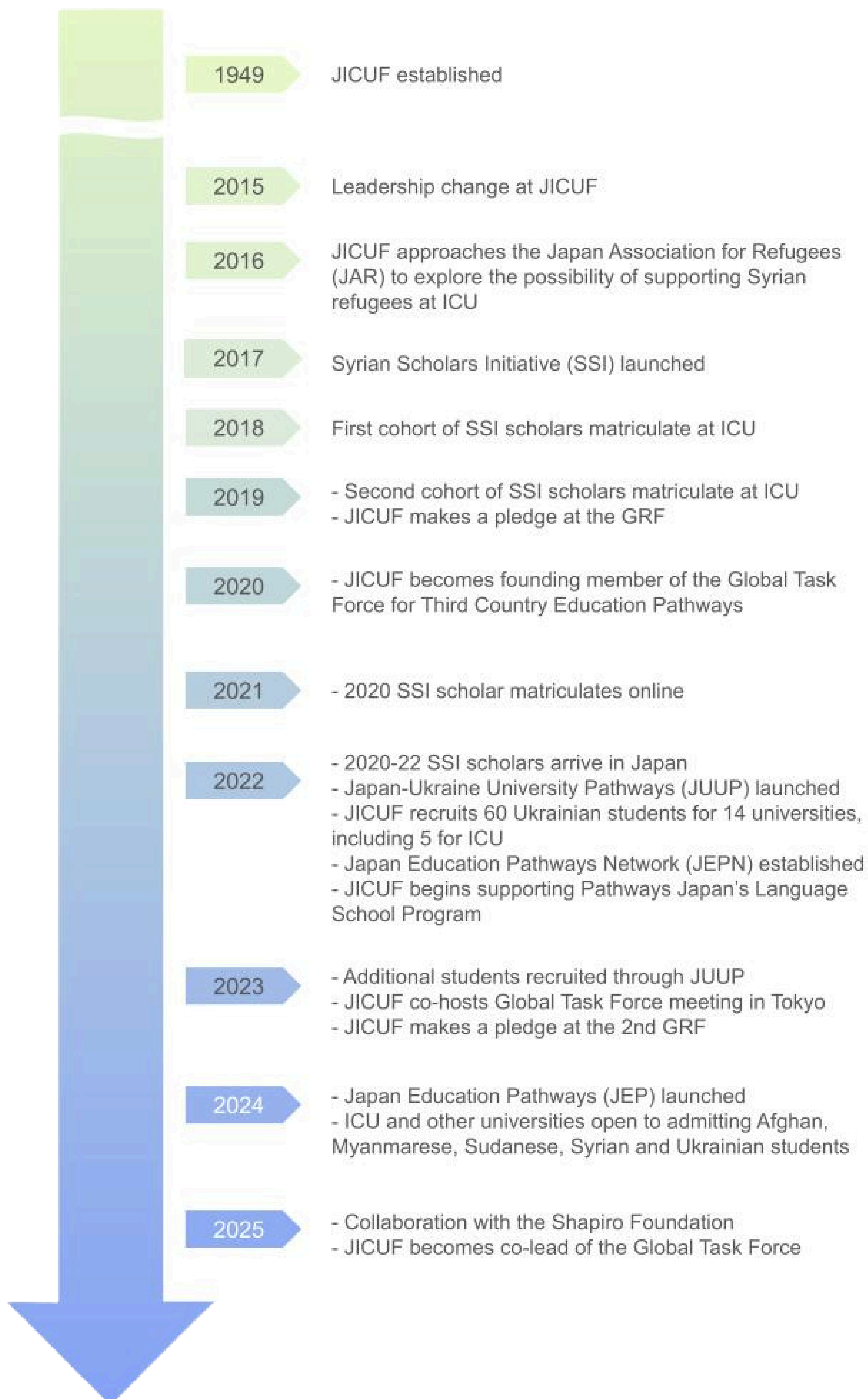
JICUF's work expanded significantly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In partnership with ICU and Pathways Japan (PJ), JICUF launched the **Japan-Ukraine University Pathways (JUUP)** program within weeks of the invasion. JUUP rapidly grew into a nationwide, inter-university initiative, recruiting 60 Ukrainian students for 14 universities in its first year and more in subsequent cycles. This unprecedented collaboration among Japanese universities led JICUF to establish the **Japan Education Pathways Network (JEPN)**, a platform for sharing best practices, addressing common challenges, and advocating for refugee education.

Recognizing the central role of language acquisition in student success, JICUF has also invested in Pathways Japan's **Japanese Language School Pathways (JLSP)** program, supporting refugee access to intensive Japanese language education as a foundation for higher education and employment. As of December 2025, more than 150 students from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine have been recruited through the program.

Today, JICUF's refugee education work is consolidated under the **Refugee Education Japan** initiative. As of March 2026, the Foundation administers the **Japan Education Pathways (JEP)** program, supports language-school-to-university pipelines, co-leads the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, and serves as secretariat for JEPN. Through advocacy, partnerships, and program innovation, JICUF works to address persistent barriers to refugee higher education, including funding constraints, rigid admissions requirements, and the need for psychosocial and employment support.

JICUF's experience demonstrates that welcoming refugee students is not an act of charity, but an investment in academic excellence, global understanding, and shared human dignity. Refugee students bring resilience, motivation, and cross-cultural insight that enrich university communities and strengthen societies. As displacement continues worldwide, JICUF remains committed to expanding sustainable education pathways and working with partners in Japan, Asia, and beyond to ensure that talent and potential are not lost to conflict.

Timeline



2026

Introduction

The Japan ICU Foundation (JICUF) is committed to expanding access to higher education for students with refugee backgrounds. At the first **Global Refugee Forum** in 2019 and again at the second Forum in 2023, JICUF pledged to work toward increasing the number of refugee students enrolled in Japanese higher education institutions. This commitment is rooted in the Foundation's origins during one of the darkest periods in U.S.–Japan relations and in its enduring belief in the power of education to change the world for the better.

Background

JICUF was founded in New York in 1949, when Christian educators in Japan and the United States came together to establish a university in Japan dedicated to peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of a devastating war. JICUF coordinated fundraising efforts in the US, while parallel efforts were undertaken in Japan. **International Christian University (ICU)** was established in 1949 and the first students enrolled in 1953 after the Japanese government authorized ICU as an incorporated educational institution. Over the past seven decades, ICU has developed into a leading liberal arts institution, with alumni thriving in all corners of the world.

JICUF and ICU share a core mission: to nurture global citizens who contribute to humankind with a firm commitment to peace. Since the first entering class, all students have signed a pledge affirming the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is this shared focus on peace and human rights that eventually led JICUF to consider supporting refugee students.

The Syrian Civil War

JICUF reached a turning point in 2015 under new leadership and staff. As the Foundation's endowment grew, the team gained the flexibility to launch new initiatives aligned with JICUF's mission. One idea began to take shape in 2016, at the height of the Syrian Civil War: what if JICUF created a scholarship program for displaced Syrian students to study at ICU?

At the time, more than five million Syrians had been displaced, most living in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.¹ Many young people lacked access to basic education, let alone higher education. Given the shared origins and values of JICUF and ICU, it seemed only natural for the two institutions to work together to offer educational opportunities to some of the world's most vulnerable youth.

JICUF staff reached out to the **Japan Association for Refugees (JAR)**, a leading refugee protection NGO in Japan, to explore the idea. Coincidentally, JAR had just launched a pilot program to admit six Syrian students to Japanese language schools and welcomed the opportunity to partner with a university on scholarships for higher education.

¹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017, June) Global Report 2016.
<https://web.archive.archive.unhcr.org/+/>
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2016/pdf/Book_GR_2016_ENGLISH_complete.pdf

Syrian Scholars Initiative



Information session in Gaziantep, Turkey
(March 2018)

In early 2017, JICUF and JAR proposed the **Syrian Scholars Initiative (SSI)** to ICU. After extensive deliberation, the three organizations signed a memorandum of understanding in June 2017 to recruit a total of six displaced Syrian students over four years beginning in 2018 and to support them throughout their studies at ICU.

The students were to be recruited from Turkey, which hosted by far the largest number of Syrian refugees. JICUF and ICU agreed to share the financial burden, with the former covering roughly two thirds of the cost.

JICUF conducted outreach in collaboration with JAR and its partner organizations in Istanbul and Gaziantep.² In April 2017, JICUF and JAR staff traveled together to Istanbul, Gaziantep, Adana, Mersin, Sanliurfa and Ankara, each with sizable refugee populations, to introduce SSI along with JAR's language school program. Additional online information sessions were held from New York.

In the first year, two male students were selected from a pool of 87 applicants. They arrived in Tokyo in July 2018, completed a five-week intensive Japanese language program on the ICU campus, and matriculated in September. In 2018 and 2019, three additional students were recruited using similar methods. The student selected in 2019 was the first and only female participant in the program.

The program faced an unexpected challenge in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to a stop. The 2019 scholar could not travel to Japan and ultimately began her studies online in spring 2021 after a six-month delay. While working for an NGO in Gaziantep during the day, she attended ICU classes online in the early morning hours.

Recruitment continued during the pandemic, and another student was selected for fall 2021 admission. Japan's border closures delayed his arrival until spring 2022, when he entered Japan alongside the student who had studied online.

The final SSI student matriculated in fall 2022. In total, seven students — rather than the originally planned six — were recruited over five years instead of four. From initial recruitment in 2017 to the graduation of the final student in 2026, SSI will have spanned nine years.



SSI 2020 scholar Sara Jari with ICU students
(March 2022)

² Education Without Borders (MIDAD) in Istanbul and White Hats Organization in Gaziantep

SSI and the Global Community of Refugee Protection

SSI was initially conceived as a means to support disadvantaged students while diversifying ICU's student body. What JICUF did not expect was that SSI would become the first privately funded university sponsorship program for refugee students not only in Japan, but in all of Asia. Through SSI, ICU became the first Japanese university to establish a program with private funding that recruited refugee students directly from a first country of asylum and supported them throughout their studies.³

SSI opened an avenue for refugee students to enter Japan on student visas, pursue higher education, graduate with bachelor's degrees and seek employment. As with any academic program, there was a risk that some students might not complete their studies or secure employment after graduation. However, JICUF was reassured by the Japanese government's commitment to non-refoulement for Syrian nationals, which ensured that students would be permitted to remain in Japan under humanitarian status regardless of their academic or employment outcomes.

The global policy context reinforced the relevance of SSI. In September 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, followed by **the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)** in December 2018. The GCR emphasized the importance of expanding access to higher education for refugees⁴ and explicitly called on states to create pathways through scholarships and student visas, including through partnerships with academic institutions.⁵

Against this backdrop, SSI attracted the attention of the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, which identified the program as a “complementary education pathway.” These pathways enable refugees to move from a first country of asylum to a third country through education, complementing traditional government resettlement programs. UNHCR viewed SSI as a potential model for institutions across the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in a context where regional engagement in refugee protection had historically been limited.



JICUF President Paul Hastings (second from right) presents at a meeting hosted by the Institute of International Education in Vietnam (September 2019)

As a result of UNHCR's interest, JICUF staff were invited to present SSI at multiple international conferences in 2019, engaging with representatives from governments, NGOs, higher education institutions, and international organizations. That year culminated in **the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF)** in Geneva in December, which brought together thousands of participants from around the world to discuss responsibility-sharing for refugee protection.

³ The Refugee Higher Education Program, established in 2006 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Japan Office, targeted the limited pool of government-recognized refugees at the time and was not open to refugees outside Japan. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)'s Japanese Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees (JISR) was launched almost simultaneously with SSI, but was government-led and publicly funded.

⁴ Article 82 of the NY Declaration states “We will also promote tertiary education, skills training and vocational education. In conflict and crisis situations, higher education serves as a powerful driver for change, shelters and protects a critical group of young men and women by maintaining their hopes for the future, fosters inclusion and non-discrimination and acts as a catalyst for the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict countries.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017, June) *Global Report 2016*. <https://web.archive.archive.unhcr.org/+/>
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2016/pdf/Book_GR_2016_ENGLISH_complete.pdf

⁵ UNHCR (2018) Global Compact on Refugees, Paragraph 95, Section 3.3. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017, June) *Global Report 2016*. <https://web.archive.archive.unhcr.org/+/>
https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2016/pdf/Book_GR_2016_ENGLISH_complete.pdf

As part of the GRF, member states and organizations were asked to make pledges. JICUF pledged to continue supporting refugee students at ICU through 2025 and to convene regular symposia in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region to share best practices related to education pathways. Professor Osamu Arakaki, the SSI faculty facilitator at ICU, attended the GRF on behalf of both ICU and JICUF.

In 2020, JICUF was invited to join the **Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways**, convened by UNHCR to expand education as a complementary pathway for refugee admission. JICUF became one of 11 founding members, alongside entities such as the Government of Portugal, the Institute of International Education, World University Service of Canada (WUSC), the European Commission, Open Society Foundations, and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Task Force met virtually to advance strategies aimed at increasing global refugee participation in higher education from 1 percent in 2019 to 15 percent by 2030,⁶ while aligning with the **Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030**,⁷ as the next phase of **The Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021)** on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways.⁸

With the global pandemic making in-person engagement temporarily impossible, JICUF launched a series of online discussions to connect practitioners and institutions advancing refugee higher education across Asia and beyond.⁹

Advocacy in Japan

Even before the first **Global Refugee Forum in 2019** and the formation of the Global Task Force, JICUF had begun reaching out to universities beyond ICU to share its experience with SSI and invite them to jointly recruit refugee students. The Syrian crisis showed no sign of abating, and the displaced population continued to grow.

Furthermore, there were other conflicts in the world that were creating their own “lost generations.” Through the first year of student recruitment for SSI, JICUF saw that there was a surprisingly large number of Syrian youths who were desperate to access higher education, many of whom had a genuine interest in Japan through exposure to Japanese pop culture such as anime, manga and games. With hundreds of universities in Japan, JICUF hoped to inspire at least a few institutions to join forces.

In December 2018, JICUF co-hosted a conference titled *Supporting Refugees in Higher Education: Japanese Models and Next Steps* with UNHCR Japan and JAR at the International House of Japan in Tokyo. The two-day event brought together stakeholders from the Japanese government, NGOs, universities and students to examine existing refugee education programs. Sessions featured **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)’s Japanese Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees (JISR)**, UNHCR Japan’s **Refugee Higher Education Program (RHEP)**, SSI, and student support mechanisms.

⁶ UNHCR (2019) Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/education-2030-strategy-refugee-education>

⁷ UNHCR (2022, June) Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Third%20Country%20Solutions%20for%20Refugees%20-%20Roadmap%202030.pdf>

⁸ UNHCR (2019, June) The Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/three-year-strategy-resettlement-and-complementary-pathways>

⁹ JICUF formed a steering committee with five UNHCR officials and four representatives of civil organizations across the Asia Pacific to design four sessions over four months. It offered a valuable opportunity for like-minded actors to connect and discuss future collaborations when the world was closed off.

A follow-up conference was held at ICU in April 2019, again co-hosted with UNHCR Japan and JAR. The event focused on expanding access for refugee students arriving directly from outside Japan and drew more than 60 participants from universities, NGOs, foundations, government agencies, and international organizations.

In addition to these conferences, JAR and Professor Arakaki at ICU made concerted efforts to reach out to other universities to join SSI. Despite these efforts, universities remained hesitant to commit to admitting refugee students, even when receptive to dialogue. This challenge would persist until a global crisis catalyzed change.



The meeting at I-House in December 2018

Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 stunned the world and was followed by an outpouring of support for displaced Ukrainians across the globe. On March 1, JICUF President Paul Hastings contacted ICU to propose admitting Ukrainian students, and the following day Japan's Prime Minister announced that the country would accept Ukrainian evacuees.¹⁰

Following a rapid needs assessment, JICUF, ICU, and the nonprofit **Pathways Japan (PJ)**¹¹ launched the **Japan-Ukraine University Pathways (JUUP)** program. JUUP offered full scholarships to five Ukrainian students at ICU, initially admitting them as auditors since it was the middle of the academic year, with the option to transition into degree programs later. Applications opened on March 22, less than a month after the invasion, and five students were selected from approximately 70 applicants within a month. All finalists had some prior experience studying Japanese.

The students gathered in Warsaw in early May to apply for visas and arrived on the ICU campus on May 20. An online press conference held by JICUF and ICU on March 23 received coverage from major Japanese media outlets, including NHK, Kyodo News, and the Asahi Shimbun.

¹⁰ ウクライナ避難民「日本に受け入れ進める」首相表明：ポーランド首相と電話協議。(2022年3月2日) 日本経済新聞
<https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA02AVW0S2A300C2000000/>

¹¹ In July 2021, JAR had spun off a new organization to focus on education pathways, namely programs that brought refugee youths through educational opportunities to Japan. The new organization, Pathways Japan, is led by Norimasa Orii, who was in charge of SSI and the language school program at JAR.

As JUUP gained visibility, PJ and ICU began receiving inquiries from other universities interested in admitting Ukrainian students but lacking experience in refugee support. In response, JICUF and PJ hosted an online information session for 30 institutions, emphasizing the importance of long-term commitment and protection.

Sophia University was the first to commit. In May, Sophia opened its application and selected ten students from the pool of applicants who initially applied to ICU. By early June, 16 additional universities joined the program. They entrusted JICUF and PJ with recruiting at least two Ukrainian students each, with some universities offering five or more scholarships.

When applications opened on June 10, nearly 300 students applied from Ukraine and neighboring countries. In total, JICUF and PJ recruited 60 students for 14 universities in the first year. Some institutions which required high Japanese proficiency could not be matched with students in the initial year, but were able to recruit students in subsequent years.

Between 2023 and 2024, JICUF and PJ managed three additional JUUP recruitment rounds, admitting 25 more students. A detailed account of JUUP's first year appears in the JICUF 2022 Impact Report.¹²



*The five students who were admitted to ICU
(Photo by Daiki Murakoshi)*



*Reception for JUUP students, university representatives, and sponsors hosted by
the U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel
Tokyo | December 8, 2022*

¹² https://www.jicuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/JICUF_Annual-Report_Final-2.pdf

Japan Education Pathways Network (JEPN)

The scale of collaboration catalyzed by JUUP led JICUF and PJ to create the **Japan Education Pathways Network (JEPN)**. Established in 2022, JEPN brought together JUUP member universities, institutions admitting students independently, prospective partners, foundations, and NGOs. The network's purpose is to share best practices, address shared challenges, and advocate collectively for expanded refugee education pathways.

JEPN's first meeting took place in September 2022. Subsequent meetings have included discussions on recruitment strategies, student support, mental health services, and legal status. The network has also organized student reunions and conferences that bring together refugee and Japanese students for dialogue, community-building, and mutual learning.

As of January 2026, JEPN comprises 25 member institutions. Representatives from the Immigration Services Agency and the Ministry of Education regularly attend meetings and provide briefings on relevant policies. JICUF continues to serve as part of the JEPN secretariat, offering coordination and technical support alongside PJ.

Supporting Language School Pathways

JICUF's decision to support PJ's **Japanese Language School Pathways (JLSP)** program grew directly from lessons learned through SSI. ICU is renowned for its bilingual education and all international students go through intensive Japanese language training. Prior Japanese knowledge is not required, but SSI offered online Japanese lessons for a few months before students traveled to Japan, and covered the cost of a five-week summer Japanese language program held on the ICU campus.

However, even with such support, many of the students found the Japanese Language Program at ICU challenging, and failed to pass the N2 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) after completing the program. The N2 certificate is widely considered the minimum requirement to find employment in Japan.

Recognizing that language proficiency is foundational to academic success, social integration, and employment, JICUF began supporting the language school program originally launched by JAR and later transitioned to PJ. Since 2022, JICUF has provided funding to cover programmatic expenses and has assisted with candidate screening.

JLSP initially recruited students from Syria, later expanding to Afghanistan in 2021 and Ukraine in 2022, with plans to broaden eligibility further.

As of December 2025, more than 150 students have been recruited through the program, creating a robust pipeline to higher education and employment.

Currently, JICUF not only provides funding, but also helps screen candidates.



Afghan language school students just after arrival in Tokyo in March 2025 (Photo by Pathways Japan)

Advocacy in Asia and Beyond

As a founding member of the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, JICUF has played an active role in advancing education pathways globally. Following the reopening of borders after the pandemic, the Task Force began holding annual in-person meetings. The first convened at Sciences Po in Paris in June 2022, and JICUF and PJ co-hosted the second in Tokyo in May 2023, with Sophia University providing the venue.

In December 2023, JICUF and PJ submitted a joint pledge at the second Global Refugee Forum, committing to continued recruitment of refugee students and regional convenings in Asia and the Pacific.

Between 2024 and 2025, JICUF co-organized multiple regional events in Manila, Tokyo, and Chiang Mai, bringing together governments, universities, NGOs, and refugee students to share practices and expand education pathways across the region.



Asia-Pacific Region Complementary Education Pathways Community of Practice Meeting

Manila, Philippines | February 12–13, 2024

Participants at the regional community of practice meeting

Skills-Based Pathways for Refugees: Challenges and Solutions for Long-Term Integration

Tokyo, Japan | November 20–21, 2024

Embassy of Canada to Japan
Group discussions during the Tokyo workshop
Photo: Yosuke Kobayashi



Series of Meetings in Collaboration with Wilfrid Laurier University

1. Roundtable on Education Pathways for Burmese and Rohingya Refugees in Japan
2. Supporting Students from Conflict Zones Through Higher Education in Canada
3. Unified Action for Global Change: Empowering Student-Led Solutions for the Human Right to Education

Tokyo, Japan | April 24–26, 2025

The University of Tokyo and International Christian University
Student participants at the event at ICU
Photo: Yu Goto

Preparing Displaced Students from Burma for Education (Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways Community of Practice Meeting)

Chiang Mai, Thailand | June 12–13, 2025

Payap University
JICUF Vice President Aki Takada with participants from the Philippines, Ireland and Singapore



Transition to Japan Education Pathways (JEP) and a New Challenge

The institutions that joined JUUP initially only committed to admitting Ukrainian students. This was no surprise given the Japanese government's declaration of support for Ukrainian evacuees, and the surge of public sympathy towards Ukraine. However, JICUF and PJ intended from the outset to expand eligibility to refugee students of other nationalities. Some partner institutions agreed to this, and the program was officially renamed **Japan Education Pathways (JEP)** in 2024. In spring 2025, five universities recruited 12 students from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine. A second application followed in fall 2025.

Despite this progress, not all universities that admitted Ukrainian students in 2022 and 2023 have been open to recruiting additional students. For some, it was a one-time initiative. Others are interested in admitting more, but are unable to do so until the students they have taken graduate, due to financial and administrative constraints. Even if all participating institutions admitted refugee students every year, demand would still exceed capacity.

PJ's Japanese Language School Pathways program plans to increase the number of new students almost five-fold in the next five years, and there will be an even greater need for university scholarships. The question is how to raise awareness among the higher education community in Japan not only about the needs of refugee students, but also the benefits of admitting them.

Refugee Education Japan



In April 2024, JICUF consolidated its refugee higher education work under the **Refugee Education Japan** initiative and launched a dedicated website. As education pathways became a central pillar of the Foundation's mission, Refugee Education Japan provided a unified platform for programs, partnerships, and advocacy. URL: reedjapan.org

Looking Forward

As of March 2026, JICUF remains deeply engaged in advancing education pathways for refugees. The Foundation administers JEP, supports Language School Pathways, co-leads the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, serves as JEPN secretariat, and collaborates with institutions across Asia and beyond.

Persistent barriers remain, including funding constraints, limited awareness of refugee students' contributions, rigid admissions requirements, and the need for psychosocial and employment support. JICUF has made efforts to address these challenges, but there is still much work to be done.

To ease the financial burden on host institutions, JICUF applied for funding from the Shapiro Foundation. With their generous support, JICUF will provide stipends for refugee students admitted to new host institutions beginning in 2027. JICUF also received a grant from the United States-Japan Foundation in 2025 to support more Afghan students. The Foundation is also exploring the idea of setting up forgivable student loans. Other creative ways to finance education pathways need to be sought to ensure sustainability.

To supplement the psychosocial support provided by universities, JICUF has implemented several initiatives at ICU to monitor the students' mental health and promote community-building. A JICUF staff checks in with refugee students once a month in an informal setting. The Foundation also partnered with a physical education instructor in 2025 to take a group of 25 students - half Japanese and half refugee students - on a three-day camping trip. A survey conducted after the event revealed that both Japanese and refugee students found the interaction not only educational but deeply inspiring.

Employment support is primarily provided by Pathways Japan through job-hunting seminars, business Japanese courses, mentorship programs, and corporate networking events. Some students are directed to seek support from other organizations, such as Welgee, that specialize in connecting refugees with employment opportunities.

Advocacy for less rigid admissions procedures can be difficult because some university administrators equate applying flexibility to lowering academic standards. It is necessary to shed light on the realities of displacement: many youths are unable to attend accredited schools, take Western standardized tests, or obtain multiple original copies of academic credentials through no fault of their own. The lack of formal certifications does not mean that they are less eligible. Globally, many educational professionals understand this, and there are movements to create alternative profiles for qualifications, such as the UNESCO Qualifications Passport¹³ and Amala Education's Global Secondary Diploma.¹⁴

Lastly, and most importantly, JICUF will continue to amplify the value refugee students bring to universities. Universities are places where young people acquire knowledge, practice critical thinking, and build foundations for contributing to society. Having peers from diverse backgrounds on campus creates powerful synergies in learning. By engaging with people who have different experiences, values, and perspectives, students deepen their understanding of the world and of themselves. Refugee students who dare to dream of traveling thousands of miles to receive higher education, leaving their loved ones and familiar environments behind, are often incredible human beings. Their motivation to learn, resilience in the face of adversity, and wisdom gained from traversing multiple cultures bring immeasurable value to university communities. Welcoming them is not charity. It is an immense privilege.



*Ukrainian students who completed their masters degrees at ICU in March 2025
(Photo by Yosuke Kobayashi)*

¹³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/qualifications-passport>

¹⁴ <https://www.amalaeducation.org/diploma-programme>

Report Design



Suad Osman was born in Donetsk, Ukraine and comes from a Ukrainian-Lebanese background. She arrived in Japan in 2022 through the Japanese Language School Pathways program following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In Ukraine, she studied Advertising and Public Relations at the National Aviation University in Kyiv.

After arriving in Japan, she studied Japanese at ABK College of Japanese Language in Tokyo, and later IT and digital design at Japan Electronics College. In 2025, she began pursuing an MBA at Shizenkan University. In the past two years, she has been managing communications at the nonprofit organization Paruyon which supports foreign women living in Japan.