

Overcoming Language Barriers

Contributed by [HIAS](#)

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Many refugees find themselves in multiple countries before they find a permanent place to begin rebuilding their lives. If they do not speak the language in those countries, refugees face even greater challenges finding employment, and everyday tasks like filling out forms or trying to purchase food can feel nearly impossible. Children confront language barriers in school. The language of instruction may be the language of the child's host country – the country to which s/he flees – or it may be the language of their original homeland. This can differ from country to country. One refugee child followed by the Migration Policy Institute experienced a Tanzanian curriculum in English and Swahili during primary school, a Burundian curriculum officially in French and Kirundi but taught in English and Kiswahili during the beginning of secondary school, and a Congolese curriculum taught in French at the end of secondary school. This exposure to multiple languages ultimately can lead to the academic mastery of none. Despite these obstacles, many refugees are beating the odds. In the Harran and Akcakale camps near the border of Syria, 70-year-old women are teaching themselves how to read and thereby inspiring the younger women in the camp to learn new skills in order to sustain themselves. Adam Sakhr, a Sudanese refugee who faced execution due to his political and religious views, used the difficulties he experienced when he first arrived in France to create an app called Nowall. When newly arrived refugees text the app, they can receive translation via their mobile phone in the form of a text message, phone call, or face to face meeting with a volunteer interpreter, depending on their need.