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UCT joins global coalition to expand higher education access for refugees

In response to the urgent need for improved higher education programmes and support services for refugees and their communities, the University of Cape Town (UCT) is among several leading universities from three continents who launched the Global University Academy (GUA) to develop a universal higher education model. Universities based in Africa, Europe, and North America formed the GUA following a workshop hosted by the University of Oslo in June 2024.

In line with UCT's [Vision 2030](#) of unleashing human potential to create a fair and just society, the GUA embodies the university's commitment to transforming lives within Africa and contributing to global solutions.

UCT's acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Emerita Professor Linda Ronnie, said universities have a critical role to play in addressing the disparities in societies across the globe and in ensuring access to education for the most marginalised and vulnerable. She said UCT was proud to be associated with this initiative.

"This partnership affirms UCT's belief in the power of education to uplift communities and drive social change. Our participation in the GUA is a testament to our commitment to Africa and the world, which aligns with our Vision 2030. Through education, we aim to create a fairer, more just society for all, especially those facing the harshest challenges," she said.

With just over 7% of the world's fast-growing refugee population having some access to higher education resources, the GUA was created to help support the United Nations Refugee Agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) goal of increasing refugee access to higher education to 15% by 2030. The GUA will act as a network of mutual support in response to immediate refugee crises, while developing long-term resources for refugees and individuals affected by displacement in multiple contexts, to support their right to self-fulfilment.

Through this initiative, UCT and its GUA partners will develop a robust framework for foundation and bachelor's degree programmes. These programmes will be co-created with local communities and universities, ensuring they are locally embedded, globally recognised,

and of the highest academic standards. Long-term financial support and partnerships with local organisations will further ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

As Africa's leading university, UCT's involvement in the GUA underscores its aspiration to make an impact not only on the continent but globally. UCT's participation aligns perfectly with the university's vision to lead in the transformation of higher education and contribute to addressing the most pressing challenges.

Over the next 18 months, GUA partners will focus on developing mutual recognition of courses across universities, ensuring that programmes are relevant, accessible and capable of providing refugees with the qualifications they need to thrive. The GUA will also work closely with refugee-led organisations, refugee learners, and other stakeholders to co-create solutions that genuinely meet the needs of displaced people.

This initiative is backed by key global organisations, including the Norwegian Refugee Council and UNHCR, with additional support from the Grieg Foundation. Together, these partners are committed to reshaping higher education for displaced individuals and creating a future where refugees can pursue their academic dreams and build meaningful lives.

UCT's leadership in this initiative reflects its broader mission to expand the boundaries of education and foster a more inclusive, just society. As the GUA grows, UCT will remain at the forefront, championing global partnerships that can change lives in Africa and beyond.

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