

FAQ regarding UNHCR-Refugee Higher Education Program (RHEP) **(For candidates with sufficient language skills for pursuing a degree in English)**

Refugees have high potential to grow as competent personnel for the hosting community, and education is essential in preparing young refugees to rebuild their lives and to enable them to contribute their skills and knowledge to their new environment. The UNHCR Refugee Higher Education Program(RHEP) purports to provide the basis of self-reliance for those who reside in Japan and are unable to enjoy sufficient rights and benefits because of their backgrounds as refugees and language barriers.

Here are some frequently asked questions that may provide more information relevant to you, as a refugee, institution that is interested in participating in the Program, or refugee supporting organizations:

Q1. What is the Refugee Higher Education Program?

The UNHCR-Refugee Higher Education Program (RHEP) is implemented by UNHCR Representation in Japan and RHEP Alliance, in partnership with fifteen universities in Japan, to grant scholarships to people with refugee background who live in Japan, to receive a higher education offered by the partner universities. Currently, many refugees in Japan have no option but to forgo the idea of pursuing higher education, primarily for socio-economic reasons. Accordingly, the employment opportunities for those refugees are severely limited compared to others who have completed some form of higher education. This Program would provide essential opportunities for refugees to study and gain qualifications that would go a long way towards empowering them to make contributions to both the host community as well as the community of their country of origin.

Q2. Which universities may I apply to?

As of July 2026, the Program has established partnerships with the following universities:

Undergraduate Courses

Kwansei Gakuin University	3 positions (Japanese Degree Program: 2 positions; English Degree Program: 1 position)
Tsuda College	1 position (Female candidate only, Japanese Degree Program)
Soka University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Sophia University	1 position (Japanese or English Degree Program)
Meiji Gakuin University	1 position (Japanese or English Degree Program)

University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo

	1 position (Female candidate only, Japanese Degree Program)
Kansai University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Hiroshima City University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Teikyo University	2 positions (Japanese Degree Program)
Tenri University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Yamanashi Gakuin University	2 positions (Japanese Degree Program: 1 position; English Degree Program: 1 position)
Kanagawa University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Kyoto Koka University • Kyoto Koka College	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)
Ryukoku University	1 position (Japanese Degree Program)

Post Graduate Courses (Master and/or Doctor Degree Courses)

Waseda University	2 positions (Japanese or English Degree Program)
Soka University	1 position (English Degree Program)
Teikyo University	2 positions* (Japanese or English Degree Program)
*Maximum 1 student each in the Graduate School of Economics and Graduate School of Science and Engineering	
Sophia University	1 position (Japanese or English Degree Program)
University of the Sacred Heart	1 position (Japanese Degree Program, the slot is shared with undergraduate course)
Kansai University	1 position** (Japanese or English Degree Program)
** 1 position would be allocated to a candidate applying to PhD program who successfully completed a Master's degree at Kansai University with the present program (with recommendation from Kansai University) and wishes to continue his/her study immediately after.	
Kwansei Gakuin University	2 positions (Japanese or English Degree Program)
Ryukoku University	1 position (Japanese or English Degree Program)

Q3. May I apply to more than one university?

A candidate is permitted to indicate more than one university of his or her choice at the time of the application for the Program. However, if a candidate is selected for the Program, he/she would be recommended to one university by the Program. Additionally, it is not possible for a candidate to apply to both Japanese and English Degree Programs because the examinations are set on the same time of a same date.

Q4. I am not confident that my Japanese ability is sufficient enough to understand Japanese courses at university. Is it possible for me to graduate only by taking English courses?

Both at undergraduate and graduate levels, English courses are offered at the following universities: Kwansei Gakuin University; Sophia University; Meiji Gakuin University; Waseda University Soka University; Teikyo University; Yamanashi Gakuin University; Kansai University; and Ryukoku University. If a candidate wishes to complete a degree which can be achieved by taking English courses, he/she should consider these universities.

For a list of faculties and departments offering English degree programs, please refer to "List of Faculties" on the website below and select "English degree program."

https://rhepalliance.org/en_about

Q5. What are the eligibility criteria for the Program?

To be eligible for the Program, all of the following requirements must be satisfied.

A candidate must :

- be a refugee with a recognized status by the Japanese authorities, or a person in a refugee-like situation with a residency permit;
- have either successfully completed or is scheduled to complete by March of the admission year, a twelve-year course of formal education in Japan or another country, or is deemed by the university to have an education level equivalent to that of the average person who has completed such formal education;
- have no other means of support for university studies;
- understand that the objective of the Program is for the selected candidate to commit to their studies diligently, and agree to maintain a satisfactory academic performance in their chosen undergraduate study course (the course duration will be a maximum of four years for undergraduate program, two years for master's program, and three years for Doctor's program).
- have English language skills sufficient for pursuing a degree in English; and
- meet other criteria for applicants as stipulated by the university.

A candidate for the graduate course must :

- have either successfully completed or is scheduled to complete by March of the admission year, an undergraduate course of formal education for Master program/a Master's course of formal education for PhD program in Japan or another country, or is deemed by the university to have an education level equivalent to that of the average person who has completed such formal education;
- have sufficient academic capacity to pursue studies at either Master or Doctorate course,

that is in addition to the qualifications above.

Q6. Is there an age limit to the Program? Is a working adult eligible?

There is no age limit to the Program, thus, a working adult is eligible. Refugees of various age range have graduated from the Program.

Q7. I came to Japan as a refugee but I am a naturalized Japanese citizen now. Am I eligible to the Program?

The purpose of the Program is to provide educational opportunities for refugees who are not eligible for other general scholarship programs which mostly target Japanese and foreign exchange students. As such, the Program is applicable only to those who do not possess Japanese nationality.

Q8. My parent is a refugee. Am I, as a child of a refugee, eligible for the Program?

A child of a refugee is eligible for the Program. Such a candidate will be asked in the interview what circumstances he/she faces with regard to social or financial difficulty due to his or her family background. Additionally, the candidate will be required to submit a supporting document issued by a local authority which proves his/her family background, such as his or her parent's certificate of local residency (jyuminhyo)/certificate of resident registration.

Q9. I am currently applying for refugee status in Japan. Am I eligible for the Program?

No, a candidate must be a legally recognized refugee or in a refugee-like situation, meaning a person in need of international protection with a residency permit granted by the Japanese authorities. This is because the purpose of the Program is to support refugees residing in Japan.

Q10. I completed previous education in my country of origin, but I am unable to prove the fact because of the impossibility to obtain supporting documentation. What can I do?

It is understood that there may be candidates who are unable to submit the required documentation because he/she fled the country of origin without personal belongings. According to an official circular issued in 1982 from the Ministry of Education to universities, "a convention refugee who faces difficulties in getting documentations on the academic background can submit a letter explaining his/her academic background in place of such certificate ...". This position of the government is used as a base by the current partner universities for considering the eligibility of the refugees. In light of the circular, RHEP Secretariat and the university can, together, assess if the claimed academic background of the candidate is appropriate for pursuing higher education.

Q11. How does the selection process proceed?

The general selection process is as follows, but please make sure to refer to the website of the program because details may change every year:

- English website: https://rhepalliance.org/en_home
- Japanese website: <https://rhepalliance.org/>

Selection Process:

- 1) Applications Opens July
- 2) Application period July to August
- 3) Application deadline August
- 4) Basis of selection screening, written examination, and Interview
 - a. Document screening:
Application period: July to August (all the documents should be postmarked by the deadline).
 - b. Written examination for those applying to the program in Japanese:
Date: End of August (tentative)
Venue: Online
Contents: written exam and essay for those applying to the program in Japanese; no additional exam for those applying to the program in English (scores of the external exams (TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, etc.) would be considered).
 - c. Interview:
Date: End of August or Beginning of September (tentative)
Venue: Online

Note: aside from the above mentioned procedures, potential candidates are requested to take exams that are offered by public institutions such as the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) which has its own schedule for different examinations.

Q12. How is the selection concluded?

Decisions as to the candidates to be recommended by UNHCR Representation in Japan and RHEP Allianceto the universities will be made by a selection committee consisting of members such as representatives from educational institutions, and representatives from language education institutions. The final decision will be made by the relevant partner university.

Q13. What is covered in the scholarship?

The decisions as to whether the scholarship should be granted or not, and the amount of the scholarship will be grounded on the relevant university's regulations. As a general rule, a refugee recommended by the Program must complete all courses and examinations required by the relevant university within four years (two years for master's program, three years for Doctor's program) in order to graduate. Tuition and other fees that are usually incurred by students shall be covered by the relevant university in place of the refugee student who satisfies the conditions above. The universities provide additional livelihood support every month on its discretion (amount and conditions differ per university). Please note that in principle it does not offer housing expenses such as student dormitory fee. For further details, please consult the university once you receive the offer. If you wish to know more before and/or during the application to RHEP, please contact the RHEP secretariat.

Q14. How many refugees have been granted the scholarships by the Program?

From 2007 to April 2026, about 130 refugees have received higher education, and about 80 have graduated.

Q15. What are the prospects for the refugees after their graduation?

Graduates have chosen various paths, including employment in private companies, proceeding to graduate schools, and becoming entrepreneurs. Refugee students are also provided with internship Programs and similar opportunities by major companies and other institutions. Through these opportunities, the refugees can access the job markets and expand their marketability in Japan.

Q16. Is there any support system following entrance into university?

Some of the partner universities offer students-run tutoring or mentoring systems to refugee students, and there are refugees who are in fact supported by these systems. In addition to the above, since 2014, the Program started organize regular follow up meeting, which is mandatory for the students to attend. Group/individual counseling assistance to the refugee students are provided through RHEP Counsellor and RHEP Supporter.

Q17. Can I apply for this program concurrently with other scholarships?

While it is permissible to apply for this program concurrently with other scholarship programs, if the candidate is selected for recommendation to a university as an RHEP student or granted admission by the university, the candidate shall prioritize this outcome above all others.

References

Selection Criteria:

- Definition of a Refugee for RHEP: A candidate is a refugee or is in a refugee-like situation, meaning a person in need of international protection with a residency permit granted by the Japanese authorities.
- The candidate has no financial means to fund his/her own higher education: The candidate must submit documents indicating the income of all family members who contribute to the household finances, including the candidate's father, mother, any siblings who live with the family and contribute to the household income, and the candidate themselves (e.g. tax-income certificate, statement of earnings). This should be based on earnings from the year before application. The candidate should indicate the amount of financial support he/she receives from persons under a duty to support, such as relatives (allowance etc.), and if relevant, the amount of scholarship, fellowship, private support, livelihood protection and/or social security payments being received.
- Admission Requirements for undergraduate schools: The candidate must have completed at least 12 years of primary and secondary education or an equivalent level of education. He/she must demonstrate the level of competence for the high standard of academic performance required to complete the undergraduate course.
- Admission Requirements for Graduate Schools: The candidate must have completed university level education. He/she must demonstrate the level of competence for the high standard of academic performance required to complete the postgraduate course. Candidate also is required have a well-established research plans.
- Japanese Language Proficiency: In general, a foreign student who wishes to pursue higher education in Japanese is required to obtain the first level certificate of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (the "JLPT"). Refugee students applying through this program shall take an examination equivalent to the JLPT N1 level, which is developed and administered for the purpose of this program by a Japanese language school in cooperation with the UNHCR Representation in Japan.
- English Language Proficiency: In general, a refugee student who wishes to pursue higher education in English language through RHEP is required to have English language skills

to the equivalent of TOEFL iBT 80/IELTS 6.0.

- **Basic Academic Proficiency:** A candidate must have sufficient academic proficiency in order to complete an undergraduate degree. In general, a foreign student who wishes to pursue higher education in Japan is required to prove that he/she has basic academic skills required for Japanese universities. The candidate for undergraduate courses must take the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (“EJU”) conducted by Japan Student Services Organization and submit his/her scores. In cases where a candidate has previously received education in Japan, requirements differ per university.