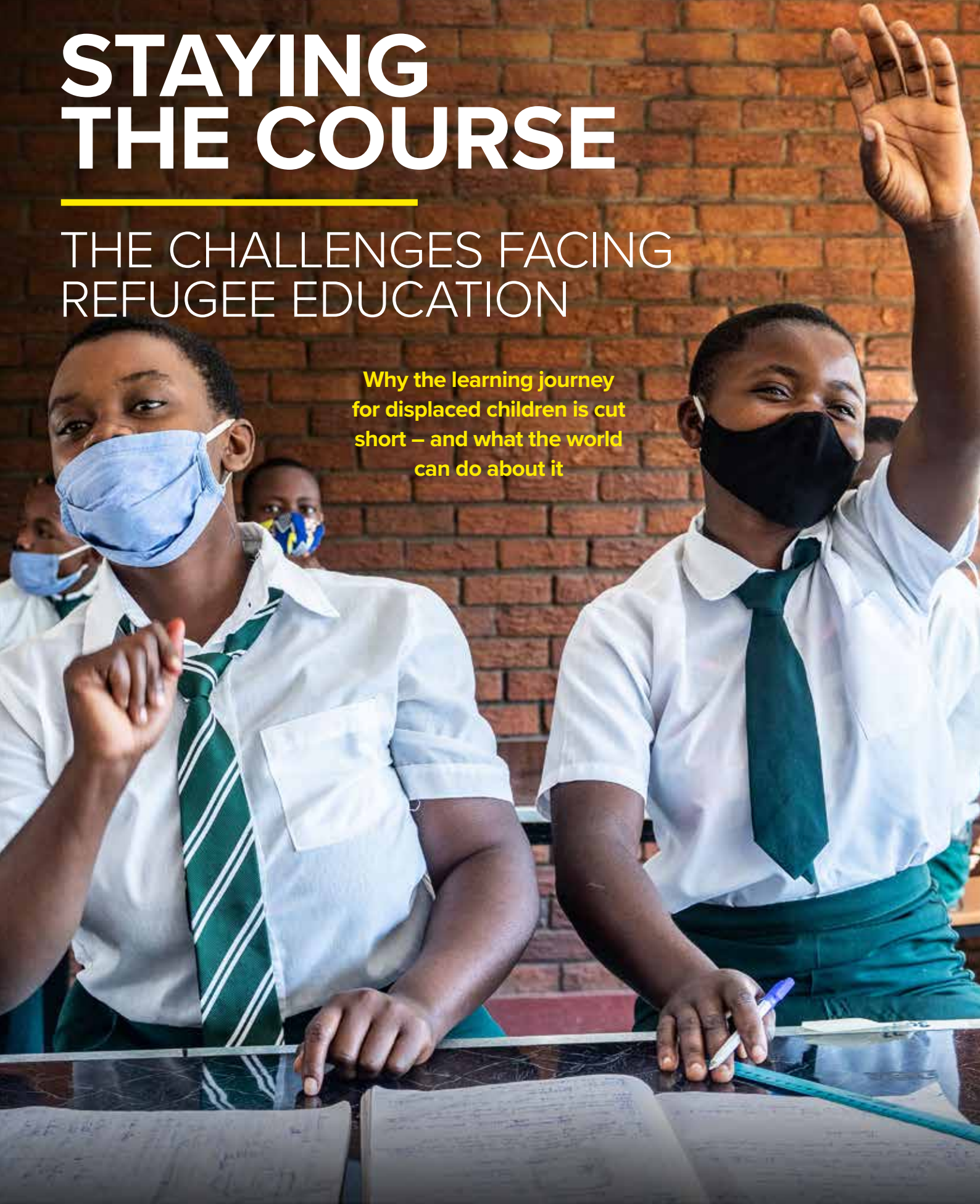


STAYING THE COURSE

THE CHALLENGES FACING REFUGEE EDUCATION

Why the learning journey
for displaced children is cut
short – and what the world
can do about it



METHODOLOGY

This year's UNHCR Education Report focuses in particular on secondary education – the crucial yet critically under-resourced stage for refugees towards greater independence and improved prospects in life.

Each year, our methodology for the Education Report is improved, though this by itself can cause some fluctuations in the statistics. Last year, for instance, we reported data for 12 countries that host around half of the global refugee population. This year, the number of countries reporting data on refugee education has risen to more than 40, providing a fuller picture than in years past. The total refugee population for reporting countries was 12.65 million, which constitutes more than half of the combined refugee population and Venezuelans displaced abroad under UNHCR's mandate.

Data has been collected through UNHCR regional bureaux and country operations. The data presented is representative of the academic year 2019-2020; however, for 2020, country operations have been asked to report on data prior to March 2020, when most school closures began as a result of the pandemic. As such, enrolment statistics do not account for the impact of the pandemic on access to school.

Figures are for gross enrolment rates, which encompass all learners at a given level of education, irrespective of age (meaning that overage learners are also represented in the statistics). As a result, statistics for some countries add up to more than 100 per cent.

Net enrolment rates represent the number of learners who are of the appropriate age group for a given level of education, providing a more accurate picture, but these statistics are much harder to collect. In this report, figures for out-of-school children are presented based on a simple comparison between the school-age population and those known to be enrolled.¹

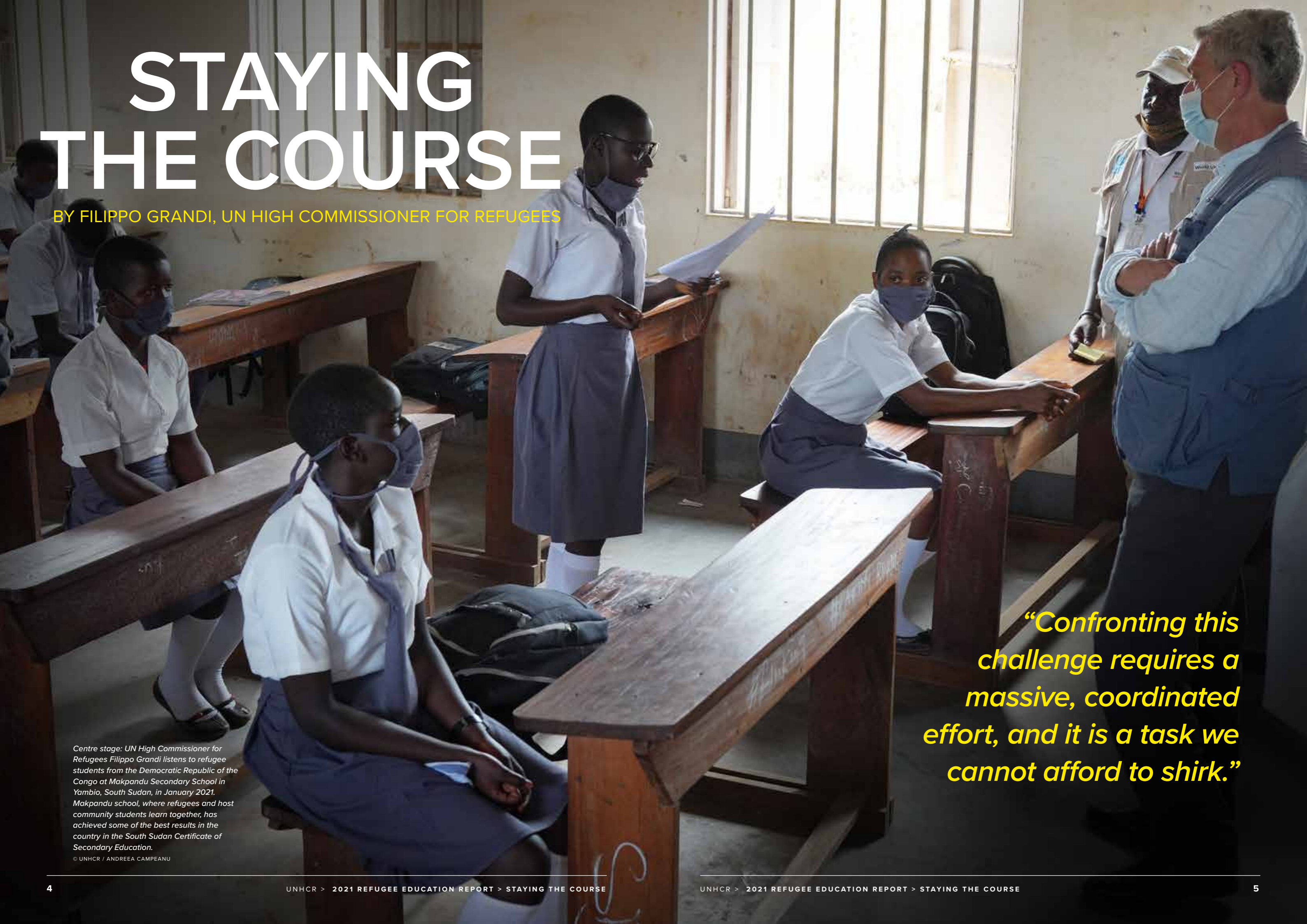
¹ Calculating the number of out-of-school children is at present a matter of subtracting gross enrolment figures from the school-age population provided by country operations. As such, it fails to capture the five dimensions of exclusion typically used to generate out-of-school figures (UNICEF & UNESCO-UIS, 2015). Achieving a more accurate representation of situations faced by out-of-school children is one of our key targets in the coming years.

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STAYING THE COURSE

BY FILIPPO GRANDI, UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES



“Confronting this challenge requires a massive, coordinated effort, and it is a task we cannot afford to shirk.”

Centre stage: UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi listens to refugee students from the Democratic Republic of the Congo at Makpandu Secondary School in Yambio, South Sudan, in January 2021. Makpandu school, where refugees and host community students learn together, has achieved some of the best results in the country in the South Sudan Certificate of Secondary Education.

© UNHCR / ANDREEA CAMPEANU

UNHCR estimates that from 2018 to 2020, an average of **between 290,000 and 340,000 children** were born into a refugee life per year.

Children account for **30 per cent** of the world's population, but **42 per cent** of all forcibly displaced people.

Enrolling 300,000 additional children each year requires 6,000 classrooms and the recruitment of **10,000 additional teachers** (based on a ratio of 50 pupils per classroom and 30 pupils per teacher).

From 2018 to 2020, [almost a million children were born as refugees](#). Right from the start, those youngsters face spending their childhoods, even their entire lives, outside the country they should call home.

The impact of COVID-19 on their lives will be profound. UNESCO estimates that more than 1.5 billion learners have been affected by the closure of their school or university since the start of the pandemic.

For sure, this unprecedented disruption to education affects all children. But for young refugees, already facing significant obstacles to a place in the classroom, it could dash all hopes of getting the schooling they need.

At all levels, refugee enrolment is lower than that of non-refugees. As refugee children get older, however, the picture rapidly worsens and those at secondary level are at greatest risk of being left behind.

At primary level, UNHCR data suggests that 68 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in school. By contrast, the gross enrolment for refugees plummets at secondary level, averaging just 34 per cent. While there are wide regional differences, in some countries the secondary enrolment rate for refugees is in single digits.

That is why the focus of UNHCR's 2021 Education Report is on secondary education, as we highlight the demand, the benefits and the gaps in provision and opportunity.

For refugee adolescents, the pressures to drop out of school and support their families can be intense – pressures only made worse by the pandemic's economic devastation. The risk of boys and girls being subjected to child labour, including its more exploitative forms, is acute.

Yet without a secondary education, young people who should be embracing an important phase of growth, development and opportunity, instead face huge risks. Denying them a secondary education is like removing an entire section of a bridge that leads to their futures – the bridge to better financial prospects, greater independence and improved health outcomes.

It is also the bridge to higher education. UNHCR and partners have set an ambitious target of 15 per cent for refugee enrolment at this level by 2030 – our 15by30 campaign. The good news is that the most recent enrolment level for higher education is at 5 per cent, up from 3 per cent year-on-year and 1 per cent only a few years ago.

That progress, and all other educational advances for refugees, is nevertheless under grave threat due to COVID-19. While it remains too early to know its full impact, the damage is likely to be terrible. Estimates from UNHCR offices in 37 countries indicate that refugee learners lost an average of 142 days of school up to March 2021 because of closures of schools, universities and other institutions – an enormous deficit to recover.

It's true that many students and teachers have adapted, and fast. Online resources are endless, and over the past few months we have seen technology and digital learning make rapid advances.

Yet inequality is present in the virtual world, too. Digital learning is more achievable if you have an internet connection, a suitable device, the money to afford such things and somewhere quiet to listen and learn.

For thousands of refugee learners who live in unconnected regions, who do not have access to digital devices (or must share them with others), and who live in crowded conditions, such resources are unrealistic.

Confronting this challenge requires a massive, coordinated effort, and it is a task we cannot afford to shirk.

For all children and youth, especially the most vulnerable, we need a worldwide “back-to-school” campaign. For refugees in particular, states must ensure that they are part of national educational systems and planning, including catch-up programmes.

Where resources are stretched – bearing in mind that 27 per cent of refugees are located in the world's least developed countries – host states need international support to build capacity at secondary level: more schools, appropriate learning materials, teacher training for specialised subjects, separate facilities for teenage girls, and more.

And we need to close the digital divide, with better and more affordable connectivity as well as low-tech or no-tech educational platforms. These are all clear action points that will have demonstrable results.

The pandemic has given many of us a taste of what for refugees is daily reality: isolation, restrictions on movement, economic uncertainty, the sudden denial of basic services... hundreds of thousands of children are born into this life year after year.

We are losing ground in the effort to ensure full, quality education for all. But with coordinated action, we can make up for lost time and then reach our ultimate target: to give all children and youth, including refugees, the education they deserve.

Knuckling down: An Afghan refugee girl gets to grips with her studies in the city of Pakdasht, south-east of the Iranian capital, Tehran.
© UNHCR / ZAHRA NAZARI

CHAPTER 1

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

Understanding the statistics on refugee enrolment

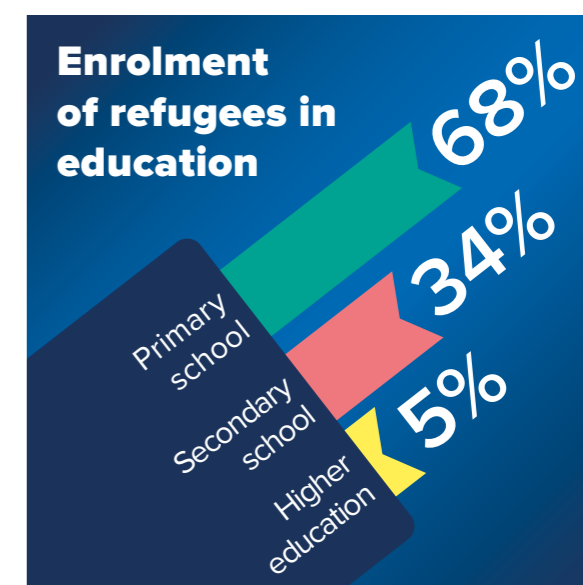
The most comprehensive data analysis UNHCR has yet carried out on refugee education reveals stark differences in school enrolment across the world, with rates in Sub-Saharan Africa well ahead of those in Asia and the Americas.

The average gross enrolment rate for the year from March 2019 to March 2020 for reporting countries was 68 per cent for primary level.² For secondary level, the corresponding rate for reporting countries was 34 per cent,³ illustrating that significant structural barriers remain for refugee learners to access post-primary education.

Comparing enrolment for host country and refugee learners reveals significant disparities in access. For example, at the primary level, enrolment for refugees stood at 59 per cent in Jordan, while the corresponding figure for host country learners was 82 per cent⁴ in 2019-2020. In Chad, enrolment for refugees was 78 per cent, while the figure for host country learners was 89 per cent⁵ over the same period.

The comparison is even more stark at secondary level. In Jordan, for example, the enrolment rate for refugees was 25 per cent, while the figure for host learners was 65 per cent⁶ in 2019-2020.

At tertiary level, enrolment rates for the same period were at 5 per cent.⁷ This increase, of 2



percentage points from last year, represents transformational change for thousands of young people and their communities. It is also testament to the momentum of the 15by30 campaign, which aims to raise the enrolment figure to 15 per cent by the year 2030. Achieving that goal, however, depends heavily on ensuring that more refugees have access to quality

² Country operations data for 44 reporting countries.

³ Country operations data for 41 reporting countries.

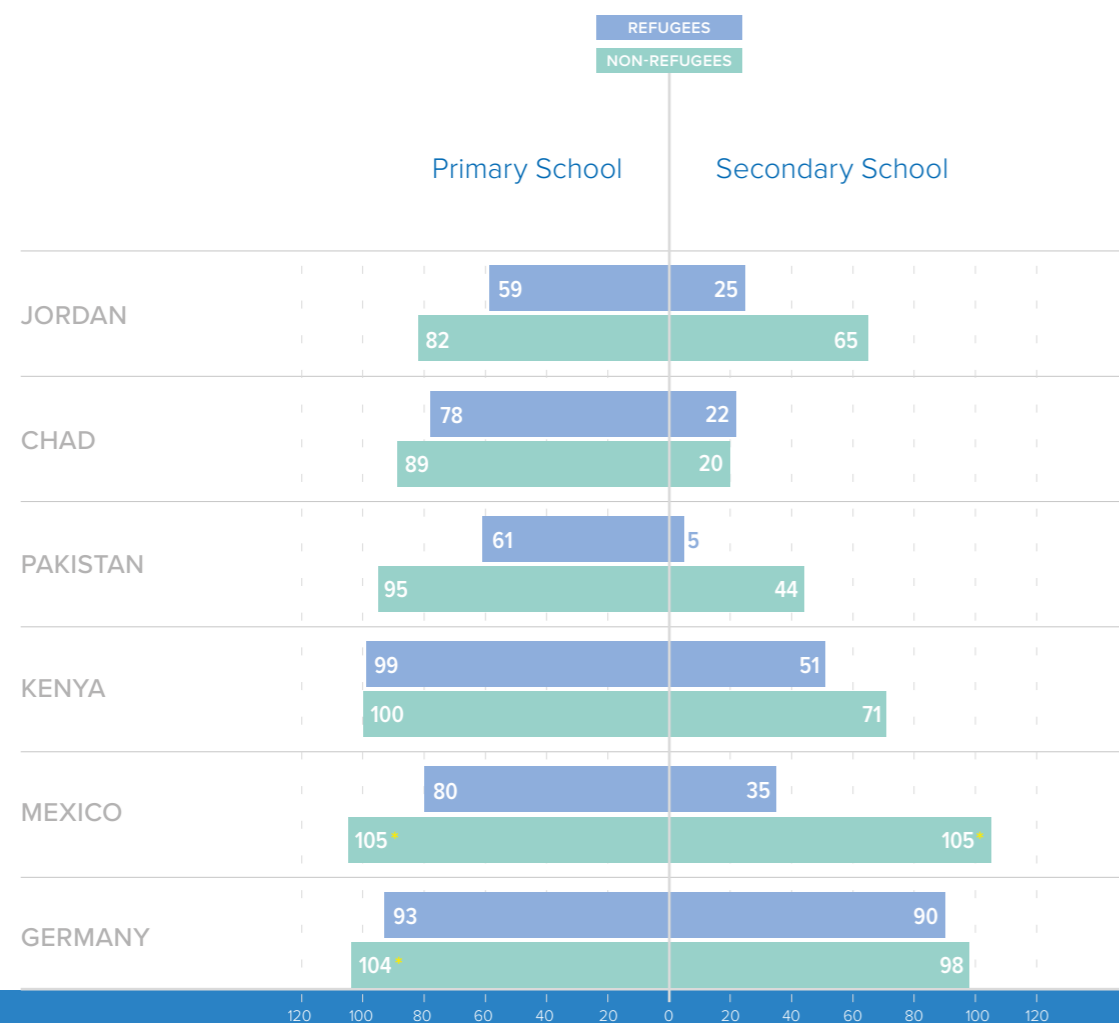
⁴ UNESCO-UIS. (2021). UIS Statistics. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

⁵ UNESCO-UIS. (2021). UIS Statistics. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

⁶ UNESCO-UIS. (2021).

⁷ Based on all countries with available data. Innovation, partner action and improved data accessibility contributed to the increased enrolment rate.

School Enrolment | March 2019 - March 2020



* Some figures are greater than 100 per cent because gross enrolment rates include over-age learners; the total may therefore be greater than the population of the official age group.

Figures for Kenya's host population are from 2019; those for Germany's host population are from 2018.

Figures for Mexico are from 2019-20 for refugees and 2018 for non-refugees.

Source: UNHCR COUNTRY OPERATIONS DATA, UNESCO-UIS & KENYA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

This continued rise in the global forcibly displaced population means that close to half of all refugee children – 48 per cent – remain out of school.

secondary education, can safely and successfully complete it, and get the support they need to transition to tertiary level.

All these figures must be seen in the context of record rates of forced displacement, with the total number of refugees reaching 26.4 million by the end of 2020, according to UNHCR's latest [Global Trends annual report](#), plus 4.1 million asylum-seekers and 5.4 million Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers^{8 9}.

Even though thousands of new refugee students were enrolled in school over the reporting period, this continued rise in the global forcibly displaced population means that close to half of all refugee children – 48 per cent – remain out of school.¹⁰

This year's reporting by more countries makes it possible to disaggregate data by regions, where enrolment rates vary. In countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, primary gross enrolment rates were 99 per cent and 76 per cent in Kenya and Uganda, respectively.¹¹ In the Americas, average primary enrolment rates were comparatively lower, reflecting the large

displacement of Venezuelans over the past few years (see Box).

The statistics also reveal that girls lag behind boys when it comes to access to education. At primary level, global gross enrolment rates for refugees were at 70 and 67 per cent for boys and girls respectively; at secondary level, the rates were 35 and 31 per cent.¹²

However, data capturing a comprehensive picture of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been gathered and analysed. [Around the world, nine in ten schools were closed](#) at some point and for varying periods since countries imposed lockdown and quarantine measures in 2020 and 2021.¹³ State and private-sector responses, including digital and blended learning, have not been equally available to the most marginalized communities, including for refugees, and as evidence is generated and gathered on the impact of the pandemic, it is reasonable to assume that learning outcomes will have been negatively affected and that out-of-school rates will have increased.

8 This figure includes Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers reported through the [Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#).

9 UNHCR (2021). *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020*.

10 Calculation based on UNHCR Country Operations data.

11 UNHCR Country Operations data.

12 Ibid.

13 UNESCO, "Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by COVID-19," *Education: from disruption to recovery*, 2020.

Pre-primary education

For the first time in its annual Education Report, UNHCR is supplying data on pre-primary enrolment rates for refugees, which was 34 per cent in the reporting period for 32 countries from

which data was collected.¹⁴ It is helpful to understand to what extent learners have opportunities to access pre-primary education, as it has been shown to [increase readiness for primary school](#),¹⁵ improve learning in later grades in school as well as [increase life skills](#).¹⁶

¹⁴ UNHCR Country Operations data.

¹⁵ Berlinski, S., Galiani, S., & Gertler, P. (2009). The Effect of Pre-Primary Education on Primary School Performance. *Journal of Public Economics*, 93(1), 219–234.

¹⁶ Aboud, F. E. (2006). Evaluation of an Early Childhood Preschool Program in Rural Bangladesh. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21(1), 46–60.

Focus

Education for Venezuelans in Colombia

At the end of 2020, there were 5.4 million Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, of whom 80 per cent lived in the Latin American and Caribbean region (mainly Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru).¹ More than a third of Venezuelans have arrived in Colombia, making it the largest host country for this displaced population.

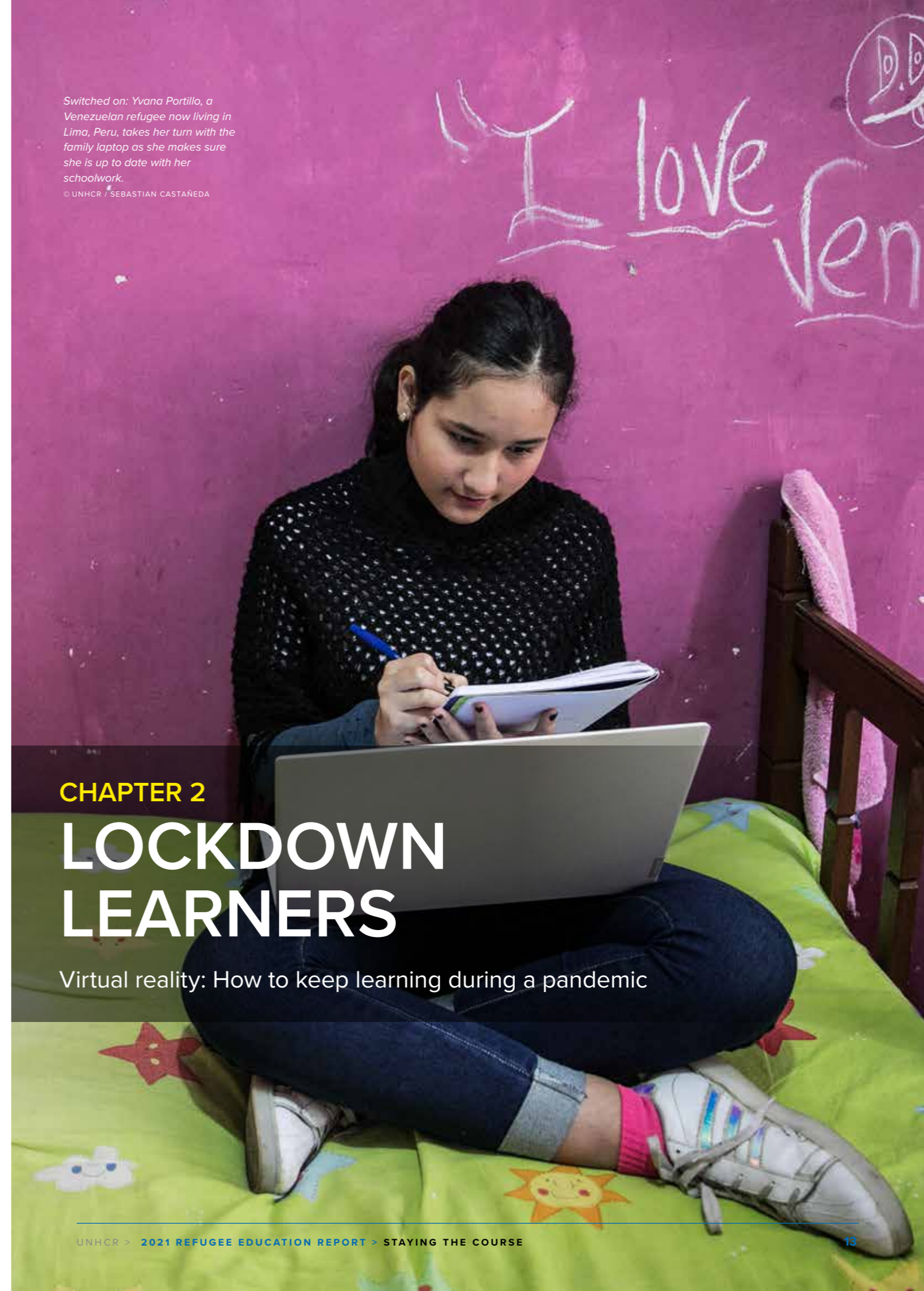
Until recently, access to education for Venezuelans in Colombia has been limited: according to 2019 data, approximately 206,000 students from Venezuela were enrolled in Colombian schools, with gross enrolment rates of 42 per cent and 34 per cent at primary and secondary levels respectively.² At primary level in particular, the enrolment rate is far below both the global average for refugee children and the rate for their non-refugee peers.

This is likely to improve now that [Colombia has granted Venezuelans Temporary Protected Status](#), giving them access to basic services including identification documents, formal employment, education, the health system and COVID-19 vaccination plans.³

¹ R4V. (2021). <https://www.r4v.info/>

² UNHCR Country Operations data.

³ UNHCR (2021). *UNHCR and IOM welcome Colombia's decision to regularize Venezuelan refugees and migrants*.



Switched on: Yvana Portillo, a Venezuelan refugee now living in Lima, Peru, takes her turn with the family laptop as she makes sure she is up to date with her schoolwork.

© UNHCR / SEBASTIAN CASTAÑEDA

CHAPTER 2

LOCKDOWN LEARNERS

Virtual reality: How to keep learning during a pandemic

To understand the challenges refugee students faced as the coronavirus swept around the world, we asked two members of the Canada-based Refugee Education Council – one in Lima, Peru, and one in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya – to quiz each other about how they had reacted, adapted and persevered despite the constant disruption to education.

Nhial Deng: "In school, I was able to find solace, hope and healing".

© UNHCR / SAMUEL OTIENO

Nhial Deng, aged 22, fled to Kakuma in 2010 after an armed attack on his village in Ethiopia. Among his many other projects, he heads the Refugee Youth Peace Ambassadors in Kakuma, an initiative promoting peaceful coexistence between communities in the camp and empowering young people as peacebuilders and social entrepreneurs. He will start university in Canada this academic year.

Yvana Portillo, aged 15, fled Venezuela with her family in 2017. Now in Lima, Peru, she has thrived in her new surroundings, overcoming hunger and a lack of money to shoot to the top of her class in high school, emerging as an advocate for accessible, quality education.

Yvana: Hi Nhial! Where are you at the moment, and how are your studies going?

Nhial: I'm in Kakuma Refugee Camp, preparing to go to Canada in August to start at Huron University College the following month. [Nhial has now arrived at Huron.] I hope to pursue Global Rights Studies with a minor in English and Cultural Studies. I haven't been in school since January, when I finished a year-long course in filmmaking and journalism run by an organisation called FilmAid. It was supposed to end in December but our studies were disrupted by COVID and all our classes were suspended.

We were sent home but I didn't have internet access or electricity there, and I live in a compound with more than ten other people – so finding a private, quiet place to study was not easy.

How about you, Yvana? How are your studies going?

Yvana: I'm still studying in my bedroom. At first, I thought the virus and the restrictions wouldn't last long – one or two months, maybe. But after a couple of weeks at school we were sent home, so I saw it wasn't going to be over so quickly.

The hardest thing was adapting to remote classes – for me, that was even harder than not being able to go out or see my friends.

Nhial: Did you have what you needed for virtual classes?

Yvana: Not at first. We had a cell phone and a laptop but my parents are teachers and they needed the laptop to teach classes and share their screen and all that. My brother and I just had the phone.

Then there was a week and a half when we didn't have electricity. We went to my mother's friend's house so we could attend class and my parents could teach. Luckily they were able to buy another phone.

How about you? You said you had no internet or electricity...

Nhial: I would go to a cyber café – they [the course organisers] set up a Google classroom and sent us content, documents and videos, so we could download it and watch offline – I was lucky enough to have a computer, which most refugees here don't have, and FilmAid provided us with data bundles. So I would download that content and wait until everyone was sleeping at home so I could take time to study.

Did you manage to adapt to online learning?

Yvana: We have a tutor who guides us through online classes. But our teachers were the ones having issues – they were not as used to online life as us [students], they weren't sure how to turn on their microphones or cameras or share their screens. But they've learned. They may not be as used to technology as we are, but it's been over a year now so they are more used to it.

How did you manage to stay motivated?

Nhial: My journalism course trainer helped me a great deal – she is Kenyan and I was very close to her. I like to reach out to people I trust, who I know can help me navigate any challenges. So I would give her a call or send a text every day.

One of the pieces of advice she gave me, which was very valuable, was that there are very limited opportunities in this world and everyone is competing for them. So she told me to be very forceful, go for the best in every situation. And that's what I've been doing, trying to find ways of propelling myself to new heights.

Are you looking forward to going back to school?

Yvana: Yes! I would choose to go to school 1,000 times over virtual learning. You study more. Or the internet connection [at home] sometimes drops and that stops you.

But I have to say I'm getting better grades now than when I went to school! I think it's because I can do more research on the internet, look for videos on

YouTube that explain the things I have to study. I have my parents close to me and they can help with my homework. So I'm able to find information better.

Nhial: So should digital learning play more of a role in education, even after the pandemic?

Yvana: Yes – learning should be “dual”. Digital tools can help us a lot in school. If I could make a recommendation to governments, it would be to provide refugee learners with the resources they need, and that includes access to digital information.

Nhial: I agree, though I look at this from two angles. First, I think school should continue – thinking of my own journey, when I first got to Kakuma I was lost, I was devastated, I was frustrated. I had nightmares about the violence I'd witnessed when fleeing my village in Ethiopia. In school, I was able to find solace, to find hope and healing. It was a safe place where I could think about a glowing future.

And I saw so many other young people from different places and who had endured so much, and they were getting an education because they believed it was their ticket to a brighter future. So I believe that physical school is something that should be [available].

But I also think there is need for an element of digital learning. Education should be an opportunity for people from different parts of the world to gather and learn together. An opportunity for someone in North America to get to know someone who is in Kakuma, someone in Kakuma to get to know someone in Europe. Every single school should be connected to the internet, to enable people from different backgrounds and places to share ideas and knowledge – and to make friendships.

“Our teachers were the ones having issues – they weren't sure how to turn on their microphones or cameras or share their screens.”

“I would download the content and wait until everyone was sleeping at home so I could take time to study.”

About the Council

The [Refugee Education Council](#), hosted by [World Vision Canada](#), was launched by the government of Canada in February 2021 as part of a campaign called Together for Learning. The council was set up in consultation with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group, a network of development partners seeking to advance education for vulnerable children and youth. Members of the council comprise students, teachers and community leaders who are living as forcibly displaced persons or in host communities.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY

New laboratory plugs secondary school into science studies

Exposed to the elements: Students at St Michael's Secondary School, Tongogara Refugee Camp, Zimbabwe, follow a science lesson in their newly constructed laboratory building.

© UNHCR / ZINYANGE AUNTONY

A secondary school in Zimbabwe has given science a prominent place on the curriculum, but it needs more resources if its learners are to get to the next level.

Her chalk tapping on the blackboard, Joyline Mhlanganiso begins a list of methods for separating different substances.

“Sieving,” she calls out over her shoulder. “What else?”

“Filtration,” ventures a student from somewhere in the middle of the classroom. Another says “decanting” and a third suggests “magnetism”. Mhlanganiso keeps writing as the ideas keep coming.

Science is serious at St Michael's Secondary School, in Tongogara Refugee Camp, located in the far south-east of Zimbabwe, ever since a new laboratory building was completed in 2019. All of the school's students, from Form 1 to 4, now study science.

“Our learners enjoy practical exercises and experiments when we have lessons, as well as field trips, which they enjoy a lot,” says Mhlanganiso, a Zimbabwean teacher who has been at St Michael's for nine years.

With pride, she recalls the day in 2018 when one of her students won a national science competition. “I had two students [compete in the competition],” says Mhlanganiso. “The girl came first while the boy, third. It was a great achievement.”

The students share her enthusiasm.

Jessica Momba, 16, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), names science, maths and geography as her favourite

subjects. She has her sights set on a career as a geographer.

“I love group experiments because I work these out with my friends in class,” she says.

“I enjoy doing experiments because they allow me to practise the concepts we learn in class,” adds Israel Mutata, a 16-year-old refugee, also Congolese.

There are more than 20,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Zimbabwe, most of them from the DRC and Mozambique. Tongogara camp hosts 14,800 refugees, of whom around 5,500 are aged between 5 and 17.

Demand for education is high but there aren't enough places and classrooms are often crowded. More than 1,150 school-age children are not enrolled in school. Indeed, St Michael's is the camp's only secondary school. It takes in 860 students, of whom 90 per cent are refugees.

In Zimbabwe, refugee children face several barriers to learning. Wilfred Ziracha, the school's headteacher, says Congolese students can find it difficult to make the switch to a new curriculum, not least because they must now study in English instead of French. (French is also taught at St Michael's, as is Shona, which is spoken throughout Zimbabwe).

And while the school is proud of its new lab – construction of which was funded by UNHCR – it still lacks some key materials. Ziracha says he would like a gas supply and Bunsen burners – at

CHAPTER 4 FIRST PERSON

“Ali* wants to follow me to university – but I can see his chances slipping away.”



Joyline Mhlanganiso, one of the two science teachers at St Michael's, where she has worked for nine years.
© UNHCR / ZINYANGE AUNTONY

present, students must make do with paraffin lamps, which are weaker and cannot be adjusted.

Whiteboards and projectors would make it easier to display information and diagrams, while wi-fi would bring a host of digital learning materials within reach. The school, UNHCR and other partners are seeking funds to purchase more equipment.

Ultimately, St Michael's has ambitions of offering Advanced-level teaching and examinations.

“There is a gap [between supply and demand],” says Memory Mandikiana, an education coordinator with the Jesuit Refugee Service, which supports the school's operations by buying textbooks, offering homework help

classes and running a library service. “At present, refugee learners have to go to other schools to get Advanced-level education.”

For girls, the science lab is particularly important. [According to UNESCO](#), girls' participation in STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – decreases as they get older, with participation dropping off at advanced secondary and higher levels.

“We have an advantage in this school, in that the only two science teachers are both women,” says Ziracha. “Of the three maths teachers, one is a woman, so those subjects are popular among girls. We say to them, ‘They did it, so you can too.’”



School run: Young Afghan refugees making their way to school in Pakistan in December 2020. They are among the 1.4 million Afghan refugees registered in the country, of whom 635,000 are under the age of 18.

© UNHCR / MUHAMMAD RAHIM MIRZA

Asma Rabi is an Afghan refugee, university student and researcher contributing to a pioneering study of refugee education. Here, she shares her thoughts and observations on the future of young Afghans at school in Pakistan, and on the dreams of a young man whose chances of a university place are slim...

“I found the refugee school in a corner of the most crowded part of the Pakistani city of Peshawar. It was small and felt abandoned, with a few scrawny plants on either side of the entrance and sewage running just a step away from the gate.

In fact, the school – one of the oldest refugee schools in Peshawar – was very much alive. Indeed, it has been open for more than two decades and is responsible for educating hundreds of Afghan refugees, mainly boys.

In a small, poorly lit classroom, a group of teenage boys at Grade 12 level were sitting on the floor on an old rug. Their voices echoed along the corridor as, with prompting from their teacher, they repeated phrases from their textbooks. As I entered the classroom, the smiles seemed never-ending.

This was March 2020, and I had been assigned to interview some secondary-school students as part of a large educational study. For the past two years, I've been one of a group of refugee researchers working on a project entitled [Voices of Refugee Youth](#), which focuses on Pakistan and Rwanda.

We use surveys, interviews and focus groups involving refugee learners to help us understand the role education plays in their lives. Using information from these interactions, we aim to help governments and international and national organizations to better plan their support for refugees.

After I had introduced myself to the class, a boy in one corner said he wanted to be the first to be interviewed. Then aged 17, this Afghan refugee – let's call him Ali* – spoke with real passion. His father was a farmer in a village near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Under constant threat of violence, his parents wanted him to be safe and sent him to neighbouring Pakistan. To his parents, Ali represents the family's best hope – even their only hope. They wanted to protect him.

In Pakistan, he had the chance to go to school. “I study and work hard so I can become an engineer and rebuild my country,” he said.

Ali told me that he worked two jobs until midnight to earn enough to cover costs associated with school. One of the best students, he had learned English from a teacher and, in turn, had volunteered to teach it to his classmates.

“I remember my school years well – instead of school bags, it felt like we carried the responsibility for the futures of our families on our small shoulders.”

After school, Ali would head off to teach at an English-language centre until the evening. Then he would collect old plastic bottles and cardboard from the streets to sell them.

His one advantage was his gender. In many Afghan refugee families, boys' education is prioritized over that for girls, or girls' education is seen as undesirable or acceptable only until puberty.

When I caught up with Ali earlier this year, he had finished secondary school and said he was saving up in the hope of being able to pay for university – but he needs hundreds of dollars to do so. If he cannot afford it, all the jobs that depend on higher education will remain out of reach. Yet the recent upheaval in Afghanistan has plunged the country's future into uncertainty. For Ali, a return to his village is not an option until there is peace.

“Imagine being a teenager and working so hard, doing things that you do not want to do,” he said. “Imagine having to work till midnight to earn some money instead of studying. This is how I am living my life as a refugee. But I know I can change my destiny.”

Visiting Ali’s school in Peshawar took me back to the days when I myself would leave home to start the school day. Indeed, I write this as an Afghan refugee, born and raised in Pakistan. My family left Afghanistan in the early 1990s. I consider myself blessed: I got the opportunity to learn, explore and develop, and in 2017 I won a scholarship (via [the DAFI programme](#), supported by UNHCR) to one of Pakistan’s leading universities.

But I remember my school years well – leaving home early in the morning with my school bag and meeting other refugee children on the way. Except that instead of school bags, it felt like we

carried the responsibility for the futures of our families on our small shoulders.

Thousands of young refugees have passed through Ali’s school. They are among 1.4 million Afghan refugees registered in Pakistan, nearly half of whom are under 18. They are human beings with dreams, passions, the ambition of giving back to the society in which they live, and of rebuilding their country if and when they can return.

Hearing Ali’s story and seeing how hard he works, I want to make his voice heard in the hope there will be support for him and others like him. Afghanistan may once more be in the grip of uncertainty but Afghan youth hold the promise of a brighter future. An investment in them is an investment in peace, stability and prosperity – both for their country and for the region. ”

* Ali’s name has been changed to protect his identity.

About Asma’s research project

Voices of Refugee Youth: impact of post-primary refugee education is an ongoing study that aims to help build the evidence base for the vital importance of post-primary education for refugee youth. Its innovative approach involves engaging young refugees to help carry out the research.

The study focuses on refugees in Pakistan and Rwanda, and the primary data collection method is a large-scale longitudinal survey – that is, one that follows the same research participants over time – along with input from experts, UNHCR colleagues and others from within the educational systems of both focus countries. A cohort of 15 young refugees in each country helped to shape the design of the study, receiving training in social research methods that will also provide them with a graduate-level professional qualification accredited by [John Carroll University](#), with transferable credits.

The research is being conducted in partnership with [UNHCR](#), [Jigsaw Consult](#) and [Refugee Education UK](#). The study is funded by [Dubai Cares](#) as part of the [E-Cubed](#) research envelope. For more details, check out the [Voices of Refugee Youth](#) website.

Family matters: Maria sits with her mother, Carmen, a former teacher who now works as an attendant at a gas station and convenience store.

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CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY

Venezuelan teenager takes online route to medical career

With options for attending both state and private schools curtailed, one girl found a way of preparing for accredited exams and keeping her career dream alive.

Maria* has wanted to be a doctor since the age of 4. Especially after learning she would have to cope with diabetes for the rest of life.

Now 15, she has refined that career goal to neurosurgeon – and if it was just a question of her intelligence and passion, she would have no problem.

The reality is tougher. Maria, like all refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children living in Trinidad and Tobago, is unable to join the national school system without a permit from the education ministry.

But without an education, her medical career will never take wing. “Education is very important. The sky is the limit when you have an education,” she says.

Maria and her family left Venezuela three years ago after it became increasingly difficult to get hold of the insulin she needs to treat her diabetes. More than 5 million Venezuelans have fled because of widespread food and medicine shortages and insecurity back home.

The twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago, just a few kilometres off the coast of Venezuela, [hosts just over 24,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants](#). Per capita, this is one of the biggest communities of displaced Venezuelans.

Now settled in the Trinidadian town of Chaguanas, Maria has turned once again to her goal of neurosurgery. “My family has supported me unconditionally,” she says. “They continue to motivate me every day.”

At first, she enrolled in a private school near home – something only possible because her mother worked three jobs to pay the fees. “She has always been focused and always strived to be at the top of her class,” says her mother, Carmen*, who used to teach accounting back in Venezuela but who now works as an attendant at a gas station and convenience store.

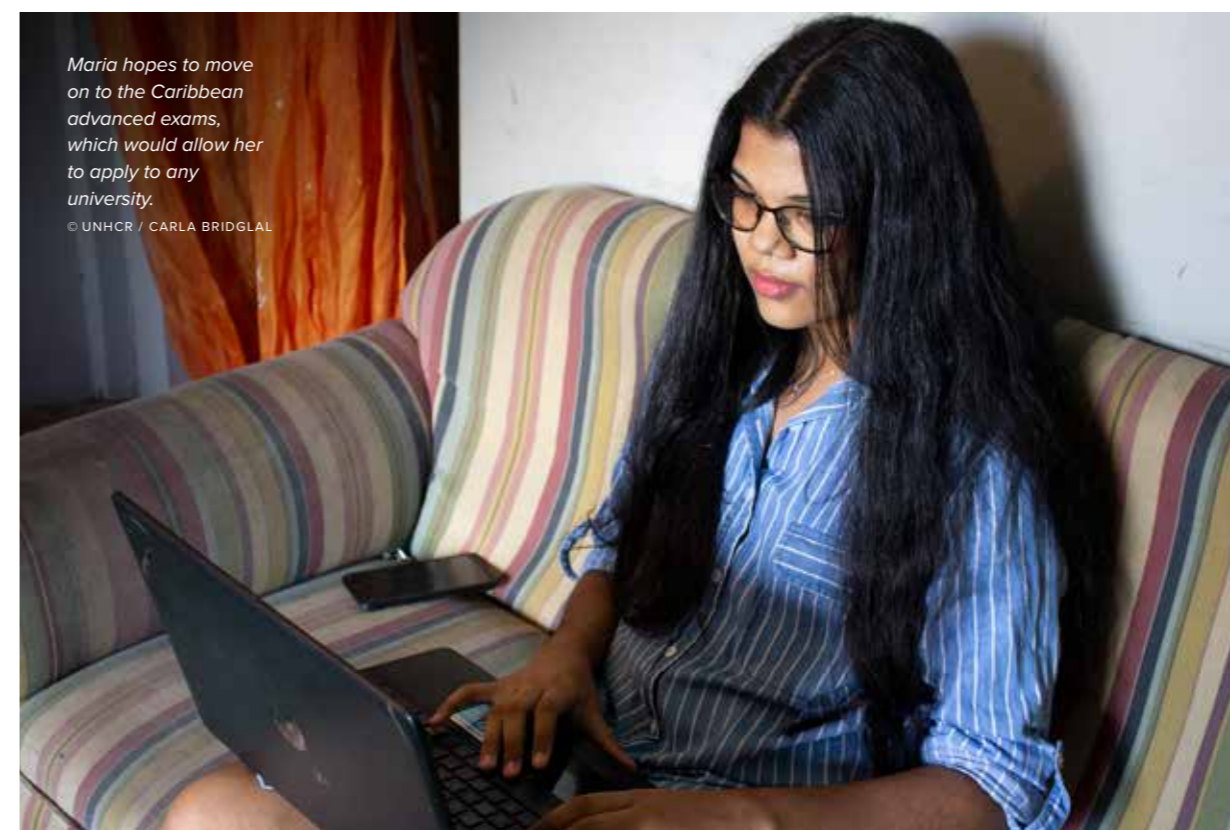
The switch from Spanish to English proved no problem – Maria mastered the new language so fast she was able to skip a grade. A year later, however, the school closed and Maria was stranded again, making her one of the 4,400 displaced children aged 5-17 who do not have access to public education in Trinidad and Tobago.

“She has always been focused and always strived to be at the top of her class.”

For at least some of them, hope has come in the form of [Equal Place](#), a blended-learning programme for refugee and asylum-seeker children launched by UNHCR, its local partner [Living Water Community](#), a Catholic ministry, and UNICEF.

Equal Place, which has been operational since September 2019, is run in both English and Spanish.

The English version was initially a mix of in-person and online teaching but went fully online once all schools closed in March 2020. Learners keep pace with the regional Caribbean



curriculum with a view to rejoining formal education when possible. The online-only Spanish version allows children to pursue their education in accordance with the Venezuelan or Colombian curricula.

Today, just over 1,300 children are enrolled in Equal Place. “I thought the programme would be excellent for Maria because it would allow her to complete her high-school education, including getting all the accredited certificates she would need,” Carmen says.

Children are taught via e-learning platforms loaded onto tablets donated by UNHCR, UNICEF, the US Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago, and the European Commission’s European Civil protection and Humanitarian aid Operations (ECHO).

Equal Place is run with support from the TT-Venezuela Solidarity Network; the Ministry of Education; the Catholic Education Board of Management; the Pan-American Development Foundation; and the Archdiocesan Ministry for Migrants and Refugees.

**Names have been changed for protection reasons.*

Fully virtual classes have taken getting used to. “It’s a drastic change,” Maria says. “I’m really talkative and like to participate, so not having [my classmates] to talk to is kind of hard.”

She registered for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examinations, which she sat this summer – an opportunity for her studies to be formally recognized. After that, she hopes to take on the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination. With those qualifications, she would be able to apply to university in other countries.

“Maria is one of our top performing students,” says Ashford Tamby, an education officer with Living Water Community and one of her tutors. “She had not let any of the difficulties or disadvantages of her situation hold her back.”

CHAPTER 6

INTERVIEW WITH STEFANIA GIANNINI

“We cannot let education be the victim of this crisis.”

Stefania Giannini has been UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, the top UN official in the field of education, since May 2018. Here she discusses the impact of COVID-19, and how UNESCO’s creation of the Global Education Coalition has helped the world provide better support for the forcibly displaced and other vulnerable communities.

How has education around the world been affected by the pandemic?

The pandemic has caused the biggest disruption to education since the Second World War. From the start, UNESCO has mapped school closures as they spread around the globe. More than 180 countries and 90 per cent of the world’s student population were affected – that’s about 1.5 billion learners.

These closures also highlighted that schools are far more than places of academic learning, especially for the most vulnerable. They provide protection, access to basic services and a sense of hope and opportunity. In that regard, the crisis has reinforced the need for more holistic

approaches to education encompassing health, nutrition and socio-emotional support.

What have we learned from our efforts to respond?

One positive is that the pandemic has accelerated efforts to rethink global coordination in education, in order to improve delivery at country level. That means more cooperation between different organizations working in the same area, and mobilizing increased financial and political commitment. Cuts in national budgets to education and to international assistance will have a dramatic impact. We cannot let education be the victim of this crisis – it could jeopardize all the advances made,

Stefania Giannini, UNESCO
Assistant Director-General
for Education.
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especially for young girls, with consequences for individuals and countries cascading across generations.

You mention cooperation. How has that developed over the course of the pandemic?

From the outset, we warned that deepening educational inequality – or, worse, exclusion – had to be addressed through more flexible cooperation and innovative partnerships. To that end, UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition in March 2020, an alliance of 175 public, private, multilateral, non-profit and civil society partners (including UNHCR), to help countries find ways of minimizing disruption to education and ensuring some continuity via

low-tech, no-tech and hi-tech approaches, prioritizing the most disadvantaged.

“More than 180 countries and 90 per cent of the world’s student population were affected by the pandemic – that’s about 1.5 billion learners.”

Elsewhere, we worked with [Education Cannot Wait](#), the global fund that aims to position education as a humanitarian priority, in crisis-affected countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo to adapt the primary curriculum into radio lessons. In Cameroon we contributed to the development of a national

digital learning platform that is reaching crisis-affected areas. And we have campaigned with UNHCR to improve learning opportunities for refugees during and after the pandemic.

UNESCO's pledge to the 2019 Global Refugee Forum – on implementing the Global Compact on Refugees – focuses on strengthening education systems. How can that be done?

One of the main challenges is the inclusion of refugees in national education systems. We are supporting ministries of education in several countries – I can think of Ethiopia, Jordan and Mali, for example – to strengthen their laws, policies and planning in order to meet the needs of displaced and marginalized learners – and of those who teach them.

We also map out good practices, tools and policies for inclusion, stressing the importance of bringing humanitarian and development actors together. The more fragile the context, the more resilient education systems have to be.

And a big part of inclusion is getting countries to recognize refugees' previous qualifications...

Yes, and this area was another of our pledges at the Refugee Forum. We collaborated with UNHCR on piloting the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants in Zambia and Iraq. The fundamental conviction here is that these populations have highly valuable contributions to make, yet all too often their prior qualifications are not recognized. Or refugees lack sufficient documentation to prove their educational background. The Passport assesses a refugee's educational level, work experience and language proficiency, thereby providing reliable and credible information for them to apply for jobs or admission to further studies and courses.

How can you tell if the Coalition's efforts are making a difference?

Good question, because one of the key challenges is the lack of reliable and timely data. The unpredictable and often protracted nature of displacement and the difficulty of accurately identifying displaced populations make data collection complex. National education management information systems often lack key crisis-sensitive indicators. The problem is aggravated when humanitarian and development planning takes place on different tracks.

“The more fragile the context, the more resilient education systems have to be.”

Along with Norcap [the Norwegian Refugee Council's expert deployment wing] and with support from Education Cannot Wait and Sida [the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency], we carried out case studies in six countries – Chad, Ethiopia, Palestine, South Sudan, Syria and Uganda – to see where the gaps are and improve the collection and use of data for crisis preparedness and response. But it is an ongoing issue.

Finally, large numbers of schools, governments and other educators have turned to digital learning in some form during the pandemic. Is this the future?

Digital learning can be a lifeline in a crisis but lack of connectivity and access to devices remain major barriers. There has been a pivot globally to remote learning, but this also exposed the digital divide that has been a major factor of exclusion from education for those without internet access. ►



Global outlook: For most of the past academic year, Rachel's school in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi, was closed because of COVID-19. As a result, Rachel and many of her peer group failed their final high-school exams. While she waits for the chance to retake the test, she has decided to embark on a computer literacy course offered by UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service, developing vital skills that will help her participate in today's digital world whatever the outcome of her exams.

© UNHCR / ANTOINE TARDY

Focus on partnerships

Effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders are central to UNHCR's work on refugee education, reflected in the Education 2030 Strategy as well as the Global Compact on Refugees. As we face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is only through the combined efforts of the international community that we will be able to ensure that the gains made to date in refugee education are not lost.

UNHCR welcomes discussions to safeguard education globally and calls on all partners to ensure that refugee populations are included in these conversations and in the planning, budgets and resource mobilization that follow, especially where they are not yet included in national systems.

- The Secondary Education Working Group¹**, led by UNHCR, is made up of 16 partners, including international NGOs, States and donors. Set up in 2020, it aims to ensure that all young people affected by crisis have equitable access to quality, inclusive and relevant secondary education, which they can complete in safety.
- UNICEF Blueprint:** At the beginning of 2020, UNHCR and UNICEF developed an ambitious Blueprint for Joint Action – a commitment to accelerate joint efforts in line with the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) to promote and protect the rights of refugee children and the communities that host them. Focused on education, water, sanitation and hygiene, and child protection, and starting in 10 countries, the Blueprint has seen an acceleration of efforts to promote the inclusion of refugees in national plans, budgets, datasets and service delivery systems.
- Education Cannot Wait:** ECW, which has a seat on UNHCR's Executive Committee and High-Level Steering Committee, has made big strides towards expanding access to quality education for children forced to flee. In 2020 it launched a \$19.5 million campaign to ensure that refugee children were not left behind in COVID-19 responses.
- Global Partnership for Education:** GPE plays a crucial leadership role in supporting national education systems, including getting refugee learners access to schools and building resilient and inclusive education systems. UNHCR and UNICEF share a seat on the GPE Board, amplifying our global advocacy work and support for the Global Compact on Refugees.
- Global Education Coalition:** The Global Education Coalition, an alliance of 175 public, private, multilateral, non-profit and civil society partners created by UNESCO, was formed to protect the right of children and youth to education during the disruption of COVID-19 and beyond. UNHCR is a committed member.
- The Education Commission – Global Education Forum:** UNHCR has worked with the Education Commission since its inception in 2019 under the leadership of Gordon Brown, the former UK prime minister. We applaud the Forum's publication of the Save Our Futures White Paper and its commitment to improving financing for education, quality foundational skills, and access to connected education.
- G7:** UNHCR welcomes the UK Presidency of the G7 and commends the group's efforts to galvanize action towards the achievement of the new SDG 4 milestone objectives, endorsed by the G7. Meeting these ambitious targets – to get 40 million more girls in school and to improve the quality of learning for 20 million more by 2026 – will not be possible unless we do more to educate girls affected by conflict and crisis. Only 31 per cent of refugee girls can access secondary education, and the pandemic is likely to result in even more dropping out. UNHCR calls on the G7 to at a minimum include tracking on displacement within the monitoring framework, and to ensure that all approaches to improve access and quality are tailored to include refugee populations.

¹ UNHCR, Education Cannot Wait, Finn Church Aid, Malala Fund, Plan International, UNESCO, UNICEF, Windle International, NRC, JRS, Save the Children, INEE, Refugee Education Trust, War Child Canada, GiZ, Global Affairs Canada.



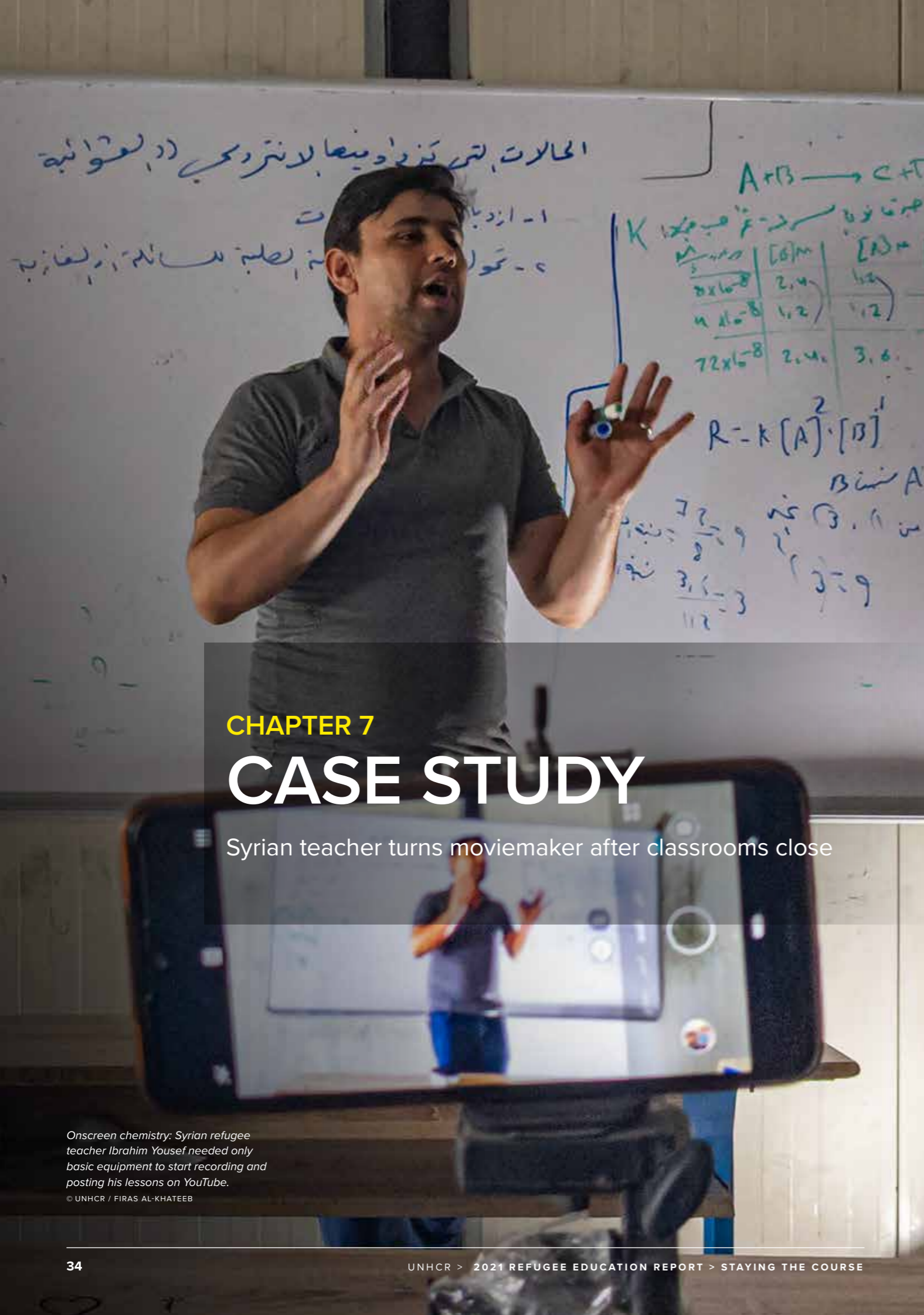
Problem solving: Komor Uddin, a Rohingya refugee assistant teacher at Kutupalong Learning Centre, gives guidance to a student and parent at home in December 2020 after COVID-19 restrictions closed all schools in Bangladesh. Volunteer teachers have played a crucial role in continuing to help Rohingya children learn during the pandemic, including by engaging parents and caregivers to support learning and providing workbooks and visual aids.

© UNHCR / HASIB ZUBERI

- ▶ Models of hybrid and blended learning, which combine face-to-face and digital teaching and resources, have by necessity become part of the education landscape and are here to stay. But building resilience to shocks like the pandemic entails designing investments to ensure that young refugees are digitally included and benefit from the expansion of these initiatives.

It is vital that digital learning complements and strengthens national systems, and enhances

learning within the classroom, an environment which has so many important benefits for learners, including socialization. That is why UNESCO, along with the UAE-based philanthropic group Dubai Cares (and with UNHCR on the advisory committee), is leading work to develop an International Declaration on Connectivity that will set out key recommendations to make technology a force for inclusion.



CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY

Syrian teacher turns moviemaker after classrooms close

Onscreen chemistry: Syrian refugee teacher Ibrahim Yousef needed only basic equipment to start recording and posting his lessons on YouTube.

© UNHCR / FIRAS AL-KHATEEB

With only the bare essentials, Ibrahim Yousef has found a small but devoted online following for his tutorials.

“When I recorded my first YouTube lessons, standing in an empty classroom giving a full lesson was very strange,” says Ibrahim Yousef, recalling the moment he turned to online teaching.

All he had was a mobile phone, a stand, a whiteboard – and some students stuck at home and in urgent need of a chemistry lesson.

It was February 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic closed Iraq’s schools, including the secondary school in Kawergosk Refugee Camp just west of Erbil, in Iraq’s northern Kurdish region.

Ibrahim, the school’s deputy head, also teaches chemistry to 12th grade students.

“I can empathize with them,” says Ibrahim, himself a Syrian refugee. “I understand their challenges and their difficulties.”

So when classrooms closed, Ibrahim started thinking about how he could keep on helping his refugee students. Soon after, his [YouTube channel, “Teacher Ibrahim Yousef”](#), was born. A natural, fluent performer on camera, he uses his films to teach the curriculum and to go through test papers question by question.

“It is hard to understand everything when you are studying on your own,” says Yafa Khalid, a refugee who watches Ibrahim’s lessons on her mobile phone. “You need a teacher to explain the material.”

The comments under his videos are full of praise. “Dear teacher, you explain the material so well,”

writes one viewer. “I don’t know if you are exactly aware of how much we are benefitting, especially in these current circumstances where schools are closed because of COVID and students find it difficult to understand everything on their own. You are a godsend, especially for refugees, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“It is hard to understand everything when you are studying on your own – you need a teacher to explain the material.”

Ibrahim is from a small village in Al-Hasakeh district, in Syria’s north-east. Before the war, his family – seven boys and four girls – lived comfortably thanks to his father’s business selling wheat, flour, lumber and other materials.

But a serious car accident forced his father to stop working. Ibrahim and his siblings had to support the family.

“One accident, and we instantly became a poor family,” he says.

Three of his brothers quit school completely, while Ibrahim worked during the summer break. He found a variety of jobs: daily labourer, painter and decorator, kiosk attendant selling snacks, and assistant at a veterinary clinic.

But he always went back for the new academic year, motivated by a teacher in elementary

school who once told him he could have a great future if he would complete his education.

In August 2014, the escalating Syrian crisis forced him to flee along with millions of others. “When you are constantly scared and fear sets into your mind ... that is when you feel you can’t stay and you have to leave”, Ibrahim says. He made his way to northern Iraq and soon found work as a teacher.

While perhaps not at full-blown influencer status, Ibrahim’s lessons have been a hit with his students. He is constantly online, answering follow-up questions on WhatsApp and Viber. He is also on several Facebook groups devoted to chemistry studies, and gets questions from as far afield as Tunisia and Algeria.

“Students sometimes study at odd hours when exams are approaching, and sometimes they stay up all night,” he says. “When it’s exam time, I try to answer

them on the spot if I am awake. So I don’t usually get much sleep!”

Even after schools started to reopen early this year, Ibrahim kept on posting his lessons as a revision aid. He plans to resume once the new academic year has begun, because students have told him how useful they find the online lessons as a way of reviewing material.

“I am always thrilled the day the results of the high school exams are out, I check on every student,” he says. “I feel like they are my children or brothers and sisters, and I am so happy when they get good grades.”

The feeling is mutual. “Thank you so much for your great efforts,” comments another student under one of the videos. “I had a problem with chemistry, but you made it so easy for me.”



See video

See how Ibrahim transformed himself into a YouTuber to beat the pandemic.

Nour* studies at one of ten connected learning hubs in Za’atari Refugee Camp, in Jordan.
© UNHCR

CHAPTER 8

FOCUS ON CONNECTED LEARNING

Emergency service: finding low-tech answers to lockdown

No school? No internet? One learning platform has proved to be an effective answer for displaced communities, even when lacking the latest technology.

With school closures forcing teachers, students and parents to seek out new methods of learning, the past 18 months have posed unprecedented challenges.

Schools across the world, including the majority of low-income countries, turned to online platforms to some degree, though the technology gap between richer and poorer regions was plain to see.

Yet the big shift online had its own problems: a greater dependency on the internet; identifying the right materials for effective study; and limited direct support from teachers.

[Kolibri, a free, open-source educational “ecosystem”](#) developed by the non-profit organization Learning Equality, is designed to circumvent those problems. In particular, it benefits learners who have little or no regular internet access – and for young refugees it has been one of the fastest-expanding educational platforms over the past 18 months.

The platform “seeds” a server, downloading content to it when an internet connection is available. After this step, other devices on the same local network – operating as a “mini-internet” – can also access the learning platform.

Kolibri is also designed to work on as many devices and operating systems as possible, meaning that learners don’t need to have the latest (and most expensive) phones or tablets but can use “legacy” devices that may be several years old.

Another crucial advantage is that Kolibri, which draws on more than 125,000 open educational

resources – both academic and related material to encourage further exploration – can be adapted to align with national curriculums. Teachers can curate material for their specific requirements, while the platform also lets them monitor students’ work and provide feedback.

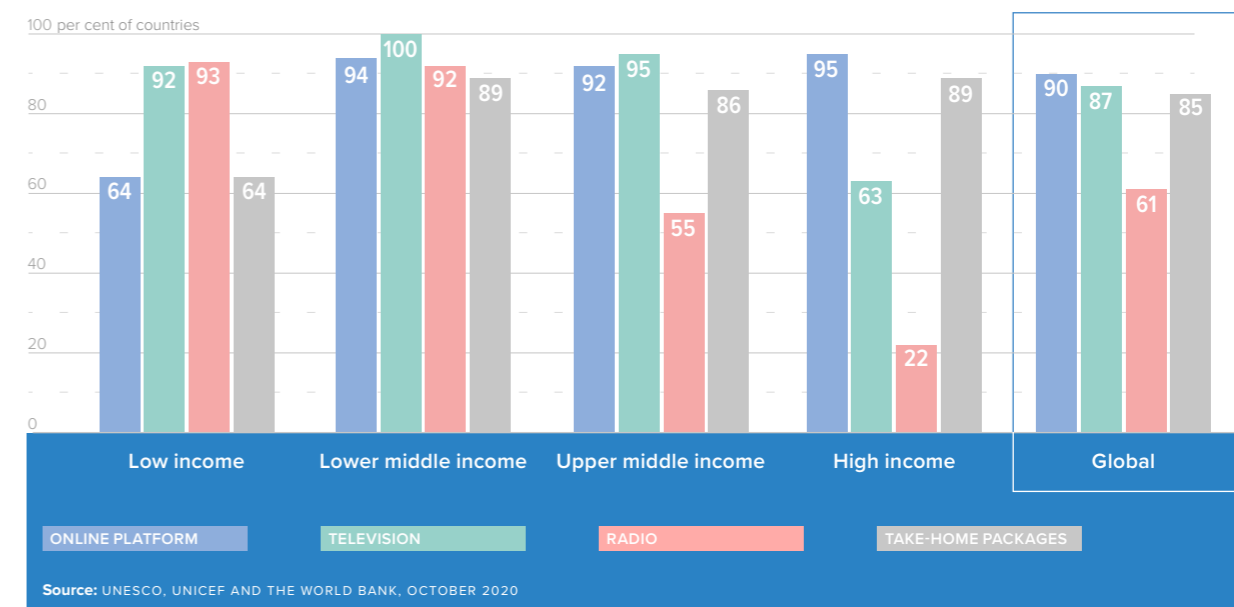
One place Kolibri was used effectively once the pandemic struck was Za’atari Refugee Camp, in Jordan. Nour* is a secondary student who was able to access one of ten connected learning hubs established before the pandemic throughout Jordan, thanks to a UNHCR and Learning Equality programme funded by Google.org, Google’s charitable arm.

“Kolibri has always focused on providing a supplement to classroom learning... rather than being a replacement. This is an important distinction.”

Initially designed for after-school support, the hubs – like almost 4,000 primary and secondary schools across the country – were closed once the scale of the COVID-19 emergency became clear. “Because classes are virtual and learning has become online, it is not always possible to ask the teacher questions about the things that I didn’t understand in the lesson,” Nour, 14, said.

To help learners use Kolibri-based resources from home, partner organizations behind the platform put the servers online and provided data bundles to refugee students so they could navigate the new reality of home-based learning.

Provision of remote learning modalities | by income group



“Through Kolibri, I was able to find more explanation about my lessons, and in a simplified way,” Nour said.

Sultan Al-Halaqi, an assistant coach at the hub, said Kolibri had enabled him and his colleagues to keep providing students with plenty of resources, particularly in English and the sciences. “Learners were able to find support, no matter what their level,” he said.

“In Jordan, what was so instrumental about Kolibri is that the partners – the education ministry, UNHCR, Learning Equality and Madrasati – were already working to align digital learning resources to the national curriculum,” said Tala Sweis from Madrasati, an initiative led by Queen Rania of Jordan to improve learning in public schools attended by the most vulnerable children. “Kolibri provided an effective digital offering during COVID, particularly to students that lacked access to quality education.”

UNHCR and Learning Equality have worked with education ministries and experts in five countries so far (Ghana, Honduras, Chile and Kenya as well as Jordan) to implement the same policy of aligning Kolibri content with national curriculums.

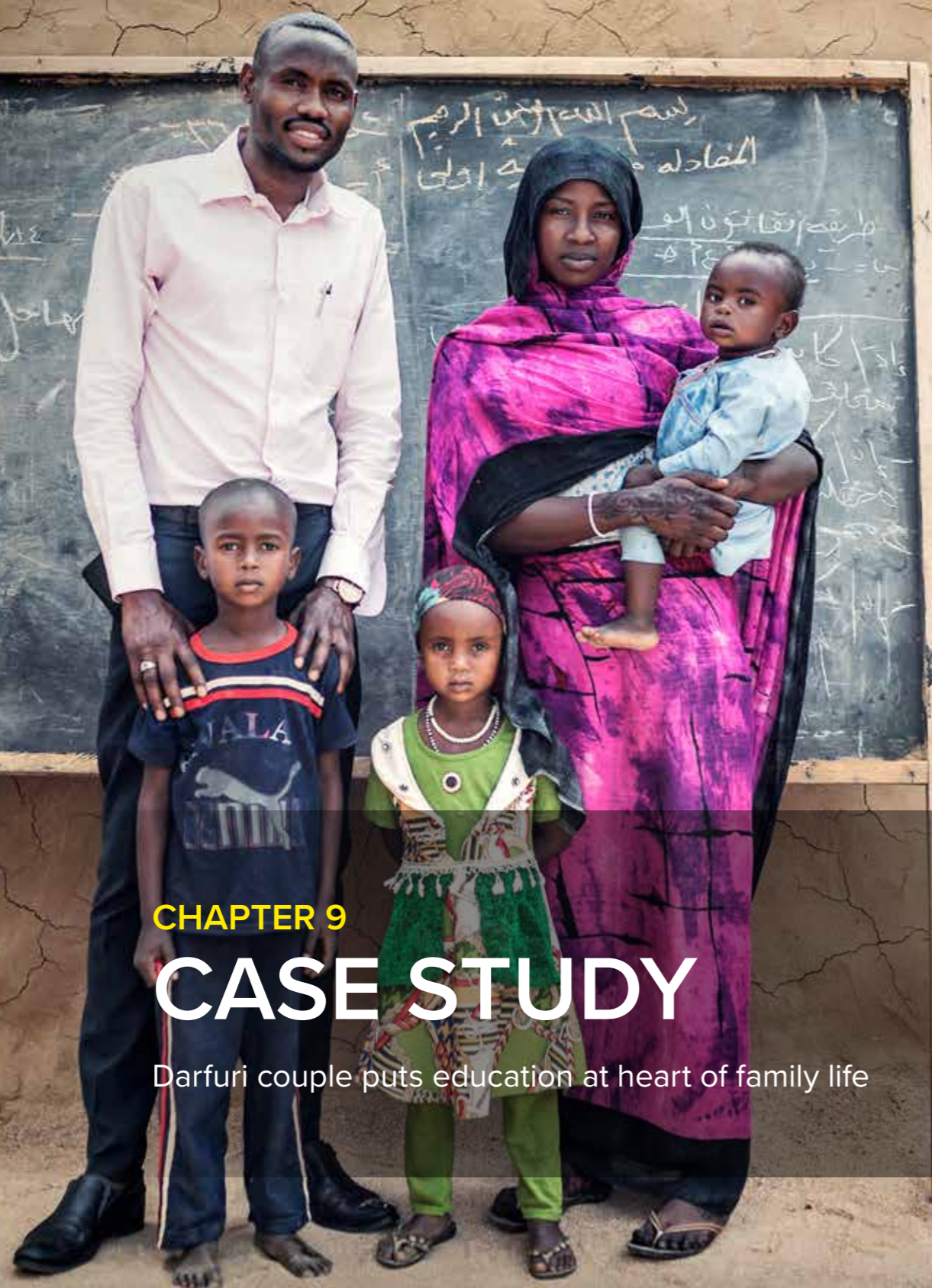
But even advocates of connected education say it is not intended to replace learning in school.

“If COVID-19 has taught us one thing, it’s that greater investments are required in connected education all around the world,” said Jamie Alexandre, co-founder and executive director of Learning Equality. “But how digital content is leveraged towards equitable learning outcomes needs to be carefully considered.

“Kolibri has always focused on providing a supplement to classroom learning, with supportive tools for teachers, rather than being a replacement. This is an important distinction.”

**Name changed for protection reasons.*

Team effort: Tadjadine, 30, (left), Djawahir, 24, and their three children, Hamoudi, Hafsa and Houssni, outside their family home in Kounoungou Refugee Camp, eastern Chad.
© UNHCR / ANTOINE TARDY



CHAPTER 9

CASE STUDY

Darfuri couple puts education at heart of family life

Years of disruption, delays and late starts have not stopped a young refugee family in eastern Chad from making school a priority.

A blackboard leans against the wall outside the two-room home of Djawahir and Tadjadine – a symbol of how highly this Sudanese refugee couple values education.

For the past 11 years, Tadjadine has taught at the local primary school in Kounoungou Refugee Camp, eastern Chad. His wife Djawahir attends the high school next door, where she is in her final year.

“Education is critical for humankind all over the world. This is even more true for us here,” says Tadjadine. “My father was killed during the war in Darfur and I am the eldest in our family, so I had to provide for my mother and my six siblings.”

When violence erupted in Darfur, western Sudan, nearly two decades ago, hundreds of thousands fled. Among them were the families of Tadjadine, aged 14 at the time and studying at primary level, and Djawahir, then only 7. Both arrived in Kounoungou in 2004.

For the next five years, Tadjadine tenaciously pursued his studies in the camp. But at the end of primary school, he hit a problem: although the refugee schools in eastern Chad are now integrated into the national education system, this was not the case in 2009, so he was unable

to sit the qualifying exam that would allow him to progress to secondary studies.

Aged 19, he made the expensive and dangerous trip back over the border to Sudan to sit his native country’s Basic Education Certificate examination. Tadjadine’s results were the best in his entire district. “It was not a safe journey,” he admits, “but I did it because there was no other way.” (Had his exam come a few years later, this trip would have been unnecessary: as of the 2014-15 academic year, the Chadian curriculum has been integrated into all schools attended by refugees.)

When he returned, he began studying at the secondary level – finally graduating with a Chadian baccalaureate in July 2019 – and also earned an income by teaching at his former primary school. Along the way he met Djawahir, who in 2010 had managed to enroll in school for the first time. They got married in 2014.

Although they started a family soon after, Djawahir was able to continue her studies as a young mother thanks to a school-based nursery in Kounoungou. Built by UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service, an international Catholic organization, the nursery looks after the children of teachers and students. Every morning,



Djawahir and other young mothers are able to drop their babies off at a nursery before going to school, but many nurseries are in a poor state of repair and lack essentials.

© UNHCR / ANTOINE TARDY

Djawahir is able to drop off her youngest child, Houssni, aged 1, while his older brother and sister attend primary school and kindergarten.

“It is ignorance that led to the war in Darfur,” says Djawahir. “We must study in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past.”

The nurseries are a vital service. Across Chad, thousands of girls drop out of school each year due to early marriage and pregnancy. But the impact of education on the lives of girls is overwhelmingly positive: [according to a World Bank study](#), each additional year of school can raise a girl’s future earning power by around 12 per cent.

There are nurseries in 12 camps in eastern Chad, helping around 320 mothers continue their education and enabling another 30 to pursue their teaching careers. Yet a lack of funding means they are often rudimentary and in dire need of staff and essential equipment – from milk to mats, nappies, toys and hygiene supplies. Many also need repairs or even rebuilding.

“It is ignorance that led to the war in Darfur. We must study in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past.”

And while the educational success of Djawahir and Tadjadine is heartening, it is rare. In Kounoungou camp, there is one high school, one middle school, three primary schools and four kindergartens. Only 6 per cent of secondary-age youth are enrolled in school, and only 1.5 per cent in higher education.¹⁷

[According to UNESCO data](#), children in Chad spend on average only 7.3 years in school (and less than 6 years for girls). The challenges of poverty – exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – force many secondary-age children and youth to seek work rather than go to school.

For those who do complete secondary studies, accessing higher education is an even greater challenge. There are few courses available, costs are prohibitive and scholarships are hard to come by. “I still very much hope to go to university but I’m 30 already, so there is no time to waste,” says Tadjadine.

Besides his teaching duties – he has 51 pupils in his class, with a wide range of ages and levels – and helping his family with their studies, Tadjadine uses the little free time he has left to learn French (in addition to his native Fur and Arabic), to improve his access to opportunities for higher education. When schools were closed due to COVID-19, he also organized tutoring sessions for children in his courtyard.

“We are good together as a family,” Tadjadine says with a wide smile. “Djawahir and I work hand in hand to provide the best for our family and our community, despite all the challenges we face.”

¹⁷ UNHCR Information and Management System Education (SIGE), March 2021.



UNHCR supporter John Green
with the children of a Syrian
refugee family in Jordan in 2016.
© UNHCR / JORDI MATAS

FINAL WORD

by John Green

Without an education, young refugees will see their futures disappear.

Author, vlogger and UNHCR supporter John Green on why displaced children deserve the same treatment as children everywhere – including the right to an education.

It has been a few years since I first met some of the millions of Syrians forced to flee the appalling violence in their home country. Visiting refugee camps in Jordan, I spoke to several young people whose lives had been upended by the violence – who had seen friends and family members killed and injured, who had been forced to leave their homes not knowing if or when they would return.

It is sobering to think that many of those kids will still be refugees, as the Syrian crisis – and the humanitarian disaster that accompanied it – is now in its 11th year.

Almost every child I met told me their number one priority was to get back into school. Through an interpreter, a 10-year-old girl named Aida told me: “I just want to learn.”

“The devastating reality is that the educational opportunities available to refugee children around the world are utterly inadequate.”

But the devastating reality is that the educational opportunities available to refugee children around the world are utterly inadequate. And with every missed year of school, kids lose ground and see their futures eroded piece by piece.

Many children have no schools to attend, and where schooling is available, the education systems serving refugees are grossly underfunded and overcrowded. Even where schools operate with a double-shift system to get more students through the doors, it is common for a classroom to contain over 100 students per teacher.

But an insufficient education system is only one problem. As refugee children grow older, just when they should be taking wing as learners, they face intense economic pressures to support their families by finding work or fulfilling domestic duties.

Being deprived of an education is dehumanizing. Imagine the effect on your self-esteem of being deemed unworthy of a place in the classroom, or of feeling that the world didn’t think the right to education applied to you because you didn’t matter.

At root, all young refugees want is to be treated the same way as young people everywhere – not as people to be feared or pitied, not as statistics, not as problems, not as people who

are somehow “less than” their contemporaries elsewhere, but as fully and multitudinously human.

Young refugees are often referred to as a “lost generation,” but in fact they are not lost. We know where they are and what they need: schools, teachers, books, equipment and technology, and care. Rather than being lost, they are waiting for the world to acknowledge their humanity and their right to education.

We cannot address this crisis on the cheap. Technology can be an important tool – and during the pandemic, it has been crucial in allowing learning to continue – but it should never replace the environment of the classroom for socialization and learning, nor the valuable skills, training and experience of a teacher.

We have to invest in young people as a collective entity, not cut several million kids out of the social deal because their circumstances make it inconvenient to give them an education. Every young person is our responsibility because every young person will help us face the challenges of health care, climate change, poverty, tech and employment, equality and human rights, and more.

We decide how to treat our fellow human beings, and we can decide to support the world’s children, including young refugees, with the compassion and resources they deserve.

John Green has been a supporter of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, since 2015. John has drawn attention to the global refugee crisis via his popular social media platforms, and supported major UNHCR campaigns including #WithRefugees and World Refugee Day.

Girl Power: In April 2019, the UK-based artist Lisa Milroy, director of Hands On Art Workshops, led a three-day workshop for 35 students from Angelina Jolie Primary School, Morneau Shepell Secondary School for Girls and Our Lady's Girls Secondary School in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. The students created a collaborative painting entitled "Group Portrait".

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CALL TO ACTION

Every step counts towards giving refugees the future they deserve

As each year passes, the likelihood of young people in crisis-affected regions, including refugees and internally displaced people, progressing to the next academic grade drops sharply. Even before COVID, [these young people were around 30 percent less likely to complete primary school, and half as likely to complete lower-secondary school](#)¹⁸.

Secondary school is the gateway to further education, to personal and social development and to improved employment opportunities. This drop in enrolment deals a crushing blow to a displaced young person's right to a brighter future.

The stories in this report are a testament to those who do make it through, and those who still hope to. Refugee youth, their families and communities know that education remains the most powerful investment in their future. But the enrolment rates for refugees of just 34 per cent

at secondary level shows that huge challenges remain.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures will see many marginalized young people experience increased inequality and is expected to result in significant lost learning. This is especially true for adolescent girls, who are at heightened risk of dropping out.

Here are four priority areas of action for States, the private sector, educational institutions and others: ►

¹⁸ "The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a better world", report by The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016.

ENSURE THE RIGHT OF ALL CHILDREN, INCLUDING THOSE IN CRISIS-AFFECTED CONTEXTS, TO ACCESS SECONDARY EDUCATION

- All States should provide unfettered access to secondary education to all young people, including refugees, on an equal basis.
- States should ensure national education plans include all young people, in ways that respect their diverse needs, abilities and capacities, free from all forms of discrimination.
- States should overturn or scrap policies and regulations that prevent young mothers and pregnant and married adolescent girls from accessing education.
- Both host and refugee communities should lobby for refugee inclusion into national systems at all levels, and specifically for access to secondary education.

PROVIDE DEDICATED, MULTI-YEAR FINANCING FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Host governments should increase overall spending for education, targeting the increase towards the most marginalized learners.
- So that families can afford school-related costs, they need access to legal work. Scholarship programmes and other forms of financial support need to be scaled up for the most marginalised learners.
- We ask that donor countries restate and meet their commitments to allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to aid and devote at least 10 percent of that to education.
- Partners, including donors and the private sector, should ensure reliable, multi-year funding of evidence-based secondary education programmes for refugees, including teacher training, school infrastructure, learning materials, connected education investments, scholarships and more.

ENSURE THAT ADOLESCENT GIRLS ENJOY THE LIFE-CHANGING BENEFITS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

- States should strive to ensure girl-friendly school environments, including improved hygiene infrastructure, whole-school approaches to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, and gender-responsive teaching practices and materials.
- Children and youth, specifically adolescent girls, should be included in policy and programme decisions through consulting them on their needs and priorities.

ENSURE THAT QUALITY SECONDARY EDUCATION EQUIPS YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE SKILLS THEY NEED

- Education systems need to be flexible and respond to the learning and post-education needs of young people with an eye to work skills, life skills and demand-driven training specifically for refugees.
- All children and youth enrolled in formal schooling should gain foundational skills (literacy, numeracy, digital) and transferable skills up to secondary level.
- The private sector can help UNHCR to innovate and find solutions to new and longstanding problems – from classroom equipment to teacher training, connectivity and infrastructure, online resources to internships, apprenticeships, training and opportunities.

For more information about UNHCR's educational work, please contact Rebecca Telford at telfordm@unhcr.org

You can also visit our website, "[Becoming Who We Are](#)", dedicated to UNHCR's work in the field of education.



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© COURTESY OF LISA MILROY

Since 2015 the UK-based artist Lisa Milroy, director of *Hands On Art Workshops*, has been leading a series of practical art sessions to primary and secondary school students in Kakuma Refugee Camp and the Kalobeyei Settlement, Kenya. These have been facilitated by Instant Network Schools, a programme run by Vodafone Foundation and UNHCR. The students and Milroy communicated using the connectivity, video technology and tablets provided by the programme, though before the pandemic the artist also visited Kakuma annually. *Hands On Art Workshops* is supported by Vodafone Foundation, UNHCR, Colart, Slade School of Fine Art, UCL and Windle International Kenya.

In 2019, Milroy established the annual *Hands On Art Workshops* scholarship to support full secondary school tuition, while in 2020 she set up a bursary to give a Kakuma secondary school graduate a year's salary as an art coach. Once schools were shut because of COVID-19, she and her fellow artist Stephanie Nebbia continued to connect with the refugee students and offered art workshops via mobile phone.



© COURTESY OF LISA MILROY



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To mark the International Day of Education on 24 January 2020, Milroy collaborated with Vodafone Foundation and the National Gallery in London to create the world's first live-streamed school trip for refugees, in which students in Kakuma "visited" the gallery using VR headsets and tablets (pictured above). Milroy hosted the tour, exploring a selection of nine paintings on the theme of time.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We lead international action to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

We deliver life-saving assistance, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place called home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

We work in over 130 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for millions.

Cover image:

Students participate in a science lesson in the new laboratory at St Michael's Secondary School, at Tongagara Refugee Camp, in Chipinge, Zimbabwe.

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For more information and enquiries, please contact:

UNHCR
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

