



SUPPORTING CONTINUED ACCESS TO EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Emerging Promising Practices



The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented situation whereby schooling has been disrupted for **almost 1.6 billion children and youth** as governments enforce total or partial closures of schools in efforts to contain the spread of the virus. Higher education institutions have also suspended classes. As of late April, UNESCO estimates that 91% of those enrolled in formal education programmes have been affected.

The closure of schools, universities, technical and vocational training institutes has also affected refugee learners and students. In these challenging times, displaced and refugee students are at a particular disadvantage and there is a risk that progress in increased enrolment may be eroded. The suspension of school feeding programmes could affect the nutrition and health status of refugee children and youth. Lessons drawn from other pandemic responses that included extended school closures have shown that girls are less likely to return to school and are at greater risk of falling behind¹. As many governments move to at-home learning modalities, many refugees are disadvantaged as they experience uneven access to distance education and online learning opportunities and hardware, and do not have access to support services such as language classes.

As national governments and UNHCR operations respond to school closures and the impact of the pandemic on education, it is important to adopt a sequenced approach, first mitigating the cessation of some of the protection and support services offered through schools such as school feeding schemes, protection against violence, and mental health and psychosocial support programmes. Continued payment of teacher incentives and cash-for-education programmes is key to both protecting the education workforce, and continuing to support refugees' livelihoods. The current phase of the response is focusing on supporting access to continued opportunities to learn and supporting teachers to adapt to new teaching modalities. It is also important to begin preparing early for the re-opening of schools and resumption of activities, possibly with physical distancing measures in place, acknowledging the practical challenges that this poses in many of the contexts in which UNHCR works. Schools must be safe to re-open and WASH facilities may need to be improved and additional handwashing opportunities introduced. Additional support may be needed for students who have fallen behind; teachers may require support in disseminating public health messages and managing children and parents' anxiety after lock-down measures.

UNHCR has a key role to play in advocating for and ensuring the inclusion of refugees in national response plans to ensure the continuity of learning. Engagement with communities is also key to understanding the extent to which refugees have access to the home-based learning programmes introduced by governments. As this pandemic has the risk of deepening existing inequalities in education, early action is needed – in coordination with other partners – to minimize the risk of refugee children and youth being left behind.

This document is the first in a series that will highlight emerging practices as UNHCR operations and their partners work to support continued education for displaced and refugee students during the pandemic.

¹ Hallgarten, J., Evidence on efforts to mitigate the negative educational impact of past disease outbreaks, 2020

Working in Partnership with National Governments

JORDAN: Supporting national government initiatives to launch online learning platforms and build capacity to support virtual learning

UNHCR Jordan Education Team has leveraged its existing work on connected education to provide support to the Ministry of Education during the COVID-19 response and in their roll out of two online learning platforms (**Darsak** and **Noor Space**) that allow host communities and refugees to have access to online learning opportunities. UNHCR provided the Ministry with an Arabic version of the Kolibri platform, aligned with the national curriculum, which will be hosted on the Ministry's Noor Space platform. Both Darsak and Noor Space have been zero-rated by mobile operators in order to remove financial barriers to accessing materials.

The UNHCR Education team has been working with the Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education to provide university faculty with professional development focused on instructional design and the delivery of online and virtual learning modalities. The first training session on conducting student assessment online was attended by 50 professors, directors of e-learning centers, and ministry officials. Further sessions will focus on student engagement and collaboration.

CHAD, MALI, NIGER: Coordination to support Ministry responses

In **Chad**, the Education Cluster, of which UNHCR is an active member, is supporting the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the development of a comprehensive response plan to COVID-19 in the education sector. Collaboration and coordination are being strengthened with the Ministry of Education and others Local Education Group members to ensure that refugees and IDPs are included in the ongoing response to COVID-19.

UNHCR Mali is playing an active role in the decision making, elaboration and rapid execution of a MoE-led national education strategy for COVID-19 response. The strategy aims to ensure the continuity of learning in a protective and inclusive

environment, and to prepare for re-opening of schools.

UNHCR Niger is closely working with the Education Cluster and the MoE to identify and implement measures to ensure continuity of education to children during the school closure period and with the regional authorities in charge of Child Protection to ensure that the needs of the refugee and displaced children are met. A contingency plan is underway to start producing quality educational content such as self-learning programmes and booklets for students in their final years, for distance education in all regions.

Communicating with Communities about Opportunities for Learning

The **Jordan operation's web-based "Support Center"**, provides refugees and asylum seekers with information about services offered by UNHCR and its partners, including basic information on registration, resettlement, health, protection, and education. Information on the website has been updated to include information on the distance and home-based learning solutions offered by the Jordanian Ministry of Education and how refugees can access them.



In **Mexico** UNHCR shared information on access to education services and how children and youth can continue their education through **social media posts**.

Supporting Access Online Educational Programmes and Resources

As governments around the world begin to introduce distance learning programmes using broadcast technology (radio and television) and online learning programmes there is a risk that refugees and persons of concern who do not have access to either connectivity or the required hardware to access these services may be left behind.

UGANDA: Expanding and adapting existing connected education programmes with the support of Education Cannot Wait

Since 2018, **UNHCR Uganda** has been implementing a connected education partnership project with a grant from Google.org, Learning Equality, Hewlett Packard (HP) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) to provide teachers and learners with access to open online educational resources using the Kolibri platform which is adapted to low-resource and low-connectivity contexts. The Kolibri platform provides access to Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) and life skills content that is aligned with the national curriculum. The platform is

hosted on a government server and the site can be accessed through free Wi-Fi connectivity offered by MyUG hotspots in Kampala and Entebbe.

As part of its COVID-19 response, ECW has generously provided funding to UNHCR in order to provide refugee learners and select teachers with tablets which will be pre-loaded with content to support upper-secondary learners preparing for national examinations.

EGYPT: Using cash assistance for increased data connectivity to allow access national educational resources

The decision of the Government of Egypt to close schools and higher education institutions resulted in approximately 25 million children and youth, including refugee students, no longer attending classes in schools, university campuses or community

spaces and instead utilizing online education resources on Ministry of Education learning platform, including the Education Knowledge Bank.

UNHCR Egypt Education Unit undertook a phone survey targeting 3,000 refugee families who were receiving education grants to facilitate their children's enrolment in education. Many reported that they were unable to afford the costs of data connectivity to access online learning resources and online examinations at the end of the academic year.

In order to address this, UNHCR Egypt's Education Unit agreed with the partner Catholic Relief Services that existing funds allocated for transportation allowances to enable refugee children to attend remedial, extracurricular activities and language classes would be repurposed and paid to families to enable them to purchase the required

internet data packages from their internet service provider to support access to online learning and examination activities.



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Distribution of Educational Materials and Resources to Support Home-based Learning

NIGER: Distribution of school materials and radios

In collaboration with the Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and UNICEF, **UNHCR Niger** will procure and distribute small materials (pencils, notebooks) and radios to enable children to follow educational programmes. Self-learning programmes and booklets will be produced for students in their final years and for

Nigerian refugees attending the Distance Education Centers in Diffa.

With the support of UNHCR and other partners, the Ministry of Health is also collaborating with Studio Kalangou, which broadcasts daily programmes via more than 300 community radios across the country.

SOUTH SUDAN: Distribution of self-study packs

UNHCR South Sudan and its education partners are distributing self-study packs to refugees to facilitate continuity of learning during the school closure as a precautionary

measure against COVID-19. Partners have designed simple but effective distribution protocols to ensure the safety of students receiving the packs.

GHANA: Keeping children and youth studying by providing e-readers and TV sets

Prior to COVID-19 outbreak, **UNHCR Ghana** procured 350 e-readers from Worldreader for all the camp and host community schools.

These e-readers have been made available to school children during school closure. Small groups of children meet in identified ICT

centers and practice their reading with the support of 20 volunteer teachers (in three camps) and four DAFI students in Krisan camp. Volunteers teach children to wash their hands with soap under running water before entering the centers and make sure that social distancing seating arrangements are placed.

In addition, the Education Team in Ghana is working to ensure that all ICT centers in the camps have an internet connection, to enable the largest possible number of school children access to e-readers for online learning, while respecting social distancing protocols.

The Ministry of Education is planning to broadcast educational live distance learning programmes through the national television channel, however most households in camps do not have television sets. The Education Team in Ghana is planning on procuring 10



television sets and decoders that will be placed at various points where students can gather in small groups – following social distancing protocols – so they can follow live lessons during this period.

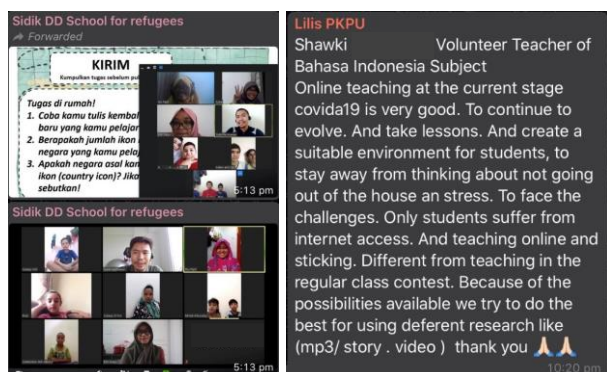
INDONESIA: Learning continues through instant messaging and video-conferencing applications

Since 14 March, the Indonesia Government has suspended all classes including non-formal education activities, and has switched to distance learning delivered through free online educational platforms, radio and TV lesson broadcasting. The Ministry of Education is also collaborating with three major telecommunications operators to provide free internet data to access online education platforms. The government has also advised higher education institutions to arrange distance learning-based courses for all higher education students.

Most of the learning centers established by **UNHCR Indonesia** and its education partners have moved to distance learning modalities using instant messaging and video-conferencing applications such as WhatsApp, Zoom and YouTube.

A Zoom class and a testimony from a refugee teacher volunteering at UNHCR established learning centre.

At present, WhatsApp is the most widely used application by both students and teachers. Students access online learning materials with the support of volunteer teachers who prepare and share learning materials in different forms (voice notes, videos, student worksheets) via WhatsApp study groups. These groups are formed by students and volunteer teachers who daily report on student attendance and study activities conducted. Partner staff are also part of the WhatsApp groups to monitor the activities and provide assistance where needed.



Preparing for the Future

BURKINA FASO, CHAD, MALI: ECW funds helps strengthen prevention and response measures to COVID-19

UNHCR Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali have secured funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) to support the COVID-19 emergency response. This funding enables the operations to make further efforts and scale up activities such as distance learning programmes and other educational support and continue to pay community teachers working in camp-based schools.

rehabilitation of WASH facilities for students, teachers and school staff and teacher training in hygiene and health security that will be conducted in close collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Health. Regular monitoring of schools for safe practices, awareness sessions and "back to school" campaigns will be also organized.

These funds are also expected to be used to support the school reopening through the

Using Radio and Television Broadcasts to Support Home-Based Learning

KENYA DADAAB: Supporting teachers to broadcast lessons using community radio station

Schools in Kenya have been closed, including those in refugee camps. In the Dadaab camp, home to over 200,000 refugees, community radio is being used to help ensure that children do not miss out on learning. Refugee teachers are preparing and presenting lessons for children that are based on the national curriculum.

UNHCR Kenya is also supporting refugees and host communities through partnership with the Ministry of Education and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development to air the national radio education programmes on local and community radio stations in both Kakuma and Dadaab.



Amina, Somali refugee teacher, gives an English lesson to grade five pupils over the community radio at Dadaab camp in Kenya.

SOUTH SUDAN: English, Math and Science lessons are almost ready to go on air

UNHCR South Sudan is also supporting the national Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) initiative to develop

lessons in key subjects (English, Maths and Science) that will be broadcasted in the local radio stations.

Supporting Refugee Teachers, Supporting Communities

UGANDA: Refugee teachers leading the way

In **Uganda**, during 2019, UNHCR worked closely with SEEMAT (Secondary Science and Mathematics Teachers Training Programme) to train teachers on the use of online learning materials.

These teachers have become “champion teachers” and since the shutdown of schools and introduction of new teaching modalities

they have been sharing guidance on how to make use of the Kolibri platform through WhatsApp groups for teachers. In addition, several teachers who benefited from this training have appeared on national television programmes to train and guide teachers on the use of online learning materials and how the platform works.

Continued payments of teacher incentives and student fees during school closures

In a number of UNHCR operations (**Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania and Mozambique**) teacher incentives will continue to be paid during the closure of schools. This support helps retain teachers and provides continuity of income during times when many other livelihoods opportunities have ceased.

Even as schools are closed, **UNHCR Somalia** is continuing to pay monthly fees for school students at both primary and secondary levels to ensure that school teachers and their families are not at risk of going home

without a salary. The continued payment of student fees is crucial to achieving positive outcomes for both learners and teachers. By paying student fees for refugee children and youth whose families could not afford them, UNHCR ensures not only access to learning materials (either online or paper-based) and the retention of refugee learners when school is resumed, but helps teachers keep their livelihoods by ensuring that their incentives and salaries continue to be paid.

Refugee Communities Actively Engaged in Supporting the Fight Against COVID-19

CHAD: Everyone plays their part in ensuring learning is not stopping

Chad currently does not have a national distance learning programme. But this has not stopped the whole community from coming up with initiatives that keep children and youth learning. These initiatives vary depending on the geographical areas, as the geographic coverage of radio, mobile telephone and internet access varies and access is expensive.

In the refugee camps in eastern Chad, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) have organized themselves to provide students with

homework exercises which are corrected each week, while in the south, provincial committees have set up distance learning programmes such as radio lesson broadcasting. In urban areas, youth training continues via WhatsApp and planning for home-tutoring is underway so as to help refugee learners prepare for the national examination this year. All these initiatives are taken in close collaboration with the local education authorities and their purpose is to revise the school programme already carried out in the classroom.

DAFI scholarship graduates at the forefront of the COVID-19 response

One of the key features of the DAFI programme is community service and encouraging scholarship holders to “give back” to their communities. In a number of countries current scholarship holders and DAFI alumni are active in the fight against COVID-19.

In Iran, Moheyman, a DAFI graduate, is working around the clock to assist Iranians and fellow refugees amid COVID-19 crisis. Moheyman is part of a team of dedicated nurses working tirelessly on rotation to treat and monitor patients with COVID-19 symptoms who have been admitted to

hospital for treatment and medial isolation while awaiting test results. Moheyman is an Iraqi refugee who was able to pursue his higher education studies and obtain a qualification as a nurse with the support of UNHCR’s DAFI scholarship programme.



“I remember people telling me that, because I was a refugee, I shouldn’t dream to go to university and instead focus on learning an easier trade. But I wanted to make a difference in people’s lives.”

In Kenya, Bahati, a DAFI graduate is doing a medical internship at Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi, and working night and weekend shifts to care for COVID-19 patients. Bahati is from Rwanda and received a DAFI scholarship that enabled her to study nursing.



Youth-led COVID-19 campaign: Global Youth Advisory Council and Tertiary Refugee Student Network

Although emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate the stigmatization and exclusion of foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers, the current situation also holds the potential to highlight how refugees positively contribute to their own as well as host communities.

using short self-recorded video messages, amplifies positive narratives, encourages others to share how they are helping their communities, and at the same time informs and inspires young refugees to safely take action.

Members of UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) and the Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN) have come together to raise awareness of refugees' positive contribution during the crisis. Their global social media campaign,

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