UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

COVID-19 REFUGEES' RETURN TO SCHOOLING GUIDELINES

December 2020

Acronyms

AEWG	Accelerated Education Working Group
CBI	Cash-based Interventions
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
GEC	Global Education Cluster
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education Emergencies
NFE	Non-formal Education
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Health
WHO	World Health Organization

How to use this document

This document aims to provide practical suggestions – for UNHCR operations and partners - on how the specific needs of refugee children, youth and families can be addressed as schools begin to re-open. It complements and draws on detailed guidance issued by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Global Education Cluster, other UN agencies and NGOs and includes links to key resources.

Ensuring a safe and full return to schooling by refugee children and youth depends on cross-sectoral action. This guide has therefore been designed as a resource document for use by **UNHCR multi-functional teams,** including Community-Based Protection, Cash, WASH, Livelihoods, Health, Programme and Communications with Communities specialists.

Inter-sectoral linkages are highlighted in the document, using the following symbols:

PROTECTION   CASH   WASH   LIVELIHOODS   COMMUNICATIONS WITH COMMUNITIES   HEALTH

Please use the **content table** to navigate the document and click through to the information that is most relevant to your area/context.

In other countries, where refugees are included in the national education system and attend host country schools, UNHCR may have higher levels of engagement in advocacy and policy discussions with national governments and less operational presence in the education sector.

This document acknowledges these different operational contexts and offers recommendations on **advocacy** to ensure the full, equitable inclusion of refugees in back to school programmes and practical **actions** for contexts where there is greater operational engagement in the delivery of education programmes (both formal and non-formal).

For further examples of specific actions broken down by UNHCR operational involvement in education, please refer to our **Summary Guidance** section in annex.

This document is intended to supplement and complement other guidance on returning to schooling and can be read alongside documents such as the *Framework for Returning to Schooling* (UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, World Bank and UNHCR) and *Safe back to schools – a practitioner's guide* issued by the Global Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility. Additional information and resources can also be found in the *INEE Resource Collection on COVID-19*.

Resources are identified by the above symbol. Click on the image to access the resource.

Supporting refugees' return to school

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt across all communities, regardless of nationality or international protection status, with governments around the world acting swiftly to put in place response strategies and offer national leadership.

At the heart of all of UNHCR's advocacy and programming is the need to ensure the protection of persons who have been displaced and have sought international protection. While recognizing that refugees share many commonalities with marginalized and host communities, there are also specific needs and vulnerabilities that arise as a result of their international protection status as refugees or asylum seekers. Throughout this document we will examine the ways in which 'Returning to Learning' strategies may need to be adapted or modified to ensure that these needs are met.

The *Global Compact on Refugees* and *Refugee Education 2030* both emphasize the importance of:

- inclusion of refugees in national education systems; and

- ensuring that refugees are able to access education services under the same conditions as host community children and youth.

An estimated **4.2 million children and youth of concern to UNHCR** have been affected by mandatory school closures across 134 UNHCR country operations. Our goal is to ensure the **equitable** and **effective inclusion** of refugees within national response plans and efforts to support learners to return to school.

Interaction of different elements underpinning the framework for supporting refugees' return to schooling.
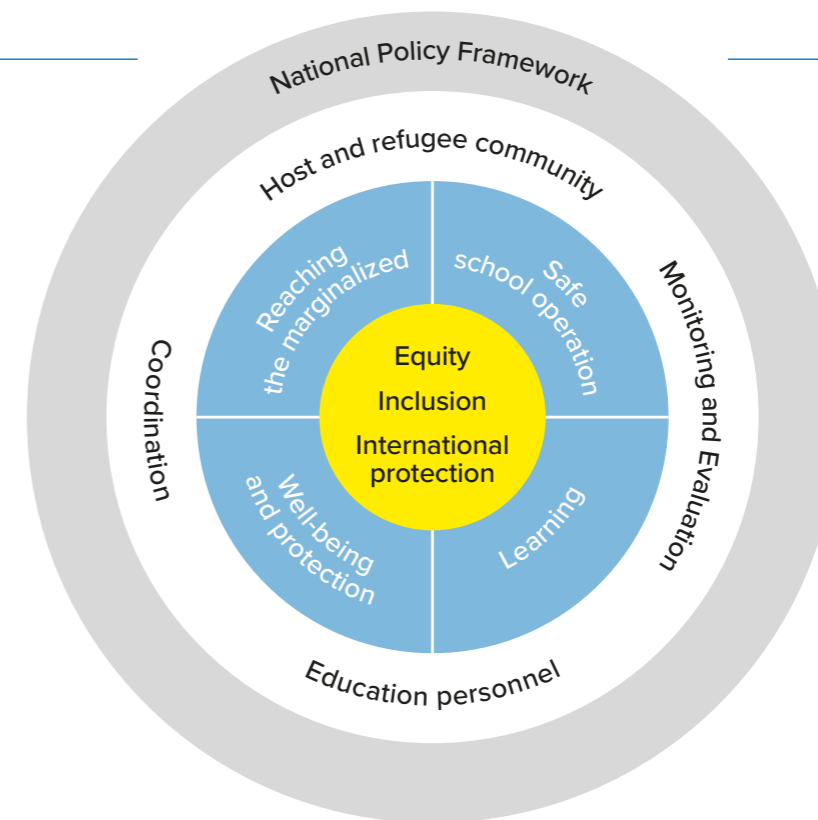
We have organized this guidance around four domains identified within the *Framework for Re-opening Schools* issued by UNICEF, UNESCO, WFP, World Bank and UNHCR in June 2020:

1 SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS

2 LEARNING

3 WELLBEING AND PROTECTION

4 REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

Additional guidance is also provided on:

A INCLUSION OF REFUGEE LEARNERS IN NATIONAL RESPONSE PLANS

B COORDINATION

C RETURNING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

D MONITORING RETURNS TO EDUCATION

E BUILDING BACK BETTER AND BEING PREPARED FOR FUTURE

The success of actions proposed relies on the engagement of and support from educational personnel (in schools, district offices and Ministries of Education) and local communities. **Good communication, consistency of messaging** and **practical support** to educators, families and communities is therefore key.

Many of the actions discussed in this document require regular discussion with both teachers and communities - acknowledging and responding to concerns about health and safety, taking joint responsibility for actions and decisions, and recognising the multi-layered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities. All of these actions take place within the policy and regulatory environment established by host governments, for both the delivery of education and the management of the response to the pandemic.

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A. INCLUSION

A.
INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN NATIONAL RESPONSE PLANS

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance (as well as efficiency and cost effectiveness) of including all children in national response strategies, regardless of their status. The inclusion of refugees in national response plans for COVID-19, contingency planning and funding for educational recovery thus underpins UNHCR's engagement with national governments, donors and both humanitarian and development actors.

> " *Inclusion in equitable quality education contributes to resilience, prepares children and youth for participation in cohesive societies, and is the best policy option for refugees, displaced and stateless children and youth and their hosting communities.* "

UNHCR in *Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion* Edition 2019

Whilst response plans have been finalized in most countries, there may be additional space to engage in both back-to-school planning and ensuring that the aspirations of including refugees are turned into action for e.g. through budget planning or national funding requests.

The achievement of this vision requires strong, consistent advocacy by UNHCR's Senior Management, for inclusion of refugees in national policies, response plans and strategies to enhance the quality of education, with host governments (Ministries of Education and other entities responsible for the management of refugee issues). This can be done through:

- 📢 Promoting UNHCR participation in the coordination mechanisms managing Education in Emergency appeals;
- 📢 Participation in National Education Sector (including Local Education Group)

meetings with government, development partners and civil society managing roll-out of contingency planning, amplified by accelerated national and development funding. Where UNHCR is not able to participate consider partners such as UNICEF who can advocate for refugees;

- 📢 Participation by Senior Management in Development Education Partner Groups attended by members of the donor community, in order to create a shared understanding of whether refugees are reached through funding allocated.

Equity can only be achieved when response strategies take into account the specific circumstances of different groups and communities and ensure that their needs are met.

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B. COORDINATION

B. COORDINATION

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Effective coordination is essential to ensuring the successful return of refugee learners to school and learning.

Putting the principle of "building back better" into practice also requires collaboration with development funders and actors.

It is recommended that advocacy efforts, the planning and design of activities and monitoring of return to schooling be coordinated across different coordination platforms such as:

🔊 The Education Cluster (where one is active);

🔊 Local and national education coordination bodies led by the Ministry of Education; and

🔊 Groups with an active donor presence, such as the Local Education Group.

This approach requires coordination across structures that have traditionally had only humanitarian or development remits.

Many issues related to the immediate needs of refugee learners will also be faced by internally displaced or host community children and there may be opportunities for convergence with strategies and approaches developed to support these groups.

Inter-sectoral coordination and active engagement with the protection, public health and WASH sectors will be key to implementing many of the recommendations and suggestions contained in this document.

Within UNHCR it is recommended that due to the cross-sectoral nature of supporting effective returns to schooling a small **multi-functional team** be established with a specific focus on returning to schooling, including protection specialists, cash-based intervention (CBI) focal points, public health and WASH, and Programme units.

This could be mirrored at the inter-agency level through the creation of an **inter-sectoral task team** that draws on contributions from a range of sectors.

IN PRACTICE

SOMALIA: COMBINING EFFORTS AND EXPERTISE FOR SCHOOL RE-OPENING

As refugee students were returning to learning in August, UNHCR Somalia coordinated closely with the Ministry of Education and partners to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in camp schools. Through open dialogue and a shared commitment to the education of refugee students and to the health and wellbeing of all people in camp schools, UNHCR, the Ministry of Education, and partners in Somalia developed, agreed on, and used safe school reopening guidelines, as well as tools to track refugee children who are returning to school and those who are missing out, to make sure that all refugee children are healthy and learning in camp schools.

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1. SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS

1.
SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS
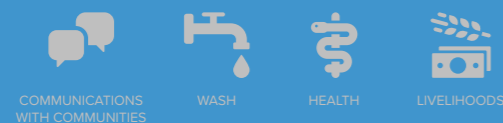
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Note: Decisions on when and how to reopen should be guided by a risk-based approach, with adequate time taken to ensure preparedness and meet safety standards. National guidance for *when* and *how* schools open supersedes any measures recommended in international guidance or in this document.

Safety is a primary consideration for parents, children and educational personnel. Demonstrating that efforts are being taken to create a safe learning environment is therefore crucial to building community confidence in sending children back to school.

The decision as to when to re-open schools lies with host governments and is informed by a combination of factors that include public health considerations, the educational impact of not returning to school and the protection risks to children of remaining out of school.

Clear communication & consistent guidance on new practices and approaches

Successful re-opening of schools and implementation of new COVID-19 prevention and control measures depends upon collective action and clear communication with all members of the community - on when and how schools will be opened and operate. Communication with the education community (educators, school managers and other staff) and the broader community should therefore be a key part of UNHCR's strategy for supporting an effective return to school.

In contexts where UNHCR is directly involved in the delivery of education (such as in schools in camps) it is recommended that education partners, public health specialists and education personnel agree on the following as early as possible:

- **A clear set of instructions/conditions** under which schools will operate and under which localized closures may take place, based on the number of COVID cases in a school or community; and

- **Clear, easy-to-implement protocols** for cleaning, disinfection, handwashing and social distancing in schools.

Additional suggested actions

- **Co-create core messaging on reopening and return to schooling** in partnership with educators, school management and community, building on Ministry messaging where possible

- **Prevent social stigma** related to COVID-19 infection and/or communities perceived as being at high risk of infection by sharing facts and highlighting that the virus does not follow geographical boundaries, ethnicities, age, ability or gender within communication with the community, teachers and learners. More detailed guidance on preventing stigma can be found here.

- **Hold information sessions** for teachers and other education personnel to ensure that everyone understands new practices and procedures that will be introduced. UNHCR may also work with Ministry of Education officials in refugee hosting areas to support information dissemination to teachers

- **Use range of formats**, adapted to literacy levels, to deliver information & invite community members to share concerns– for e.g. presenting information visually and in languages spoken by refugees and host communities. Explore use of social media, short WhatsApp videos/messages and community radio to disseminate information

- **Draw on older students' ability to communicate and connect** with younger learners to share information, discuss challenges and propose solutions

- **Provide variety of channels** for community & education personnel to voice concerns and fears around return to school and implementing new hygiene and safety procedures, as the adoption of new practices may initially create anxiety and uncertainty.

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1. SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS

Hygiene, cleaning and disinfection of schools

Guidance issued by the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), WHO, UNICEF and others has underscored the vital role of good hygiene practices in limiting the spread of COVID-19 – particularly handwashing and respiratory hygiene. Providing practical support to host community schools to improve hygiene conditions can promote social cohesion between refugees and host community members and help ensure that refugee children are not excluded when schools reopen.

Recognising the practical limitations that exist in many contexts, country operations and their partners are advised to consider the following minimum actions:

- **Establish a clear schedule** for cleaning of school premises;

- **Hire additional cleaning staff** for schools in camps and local communities (cross sectoral linkages with Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion); and

- **Procure additional cleaning materials and equipment** for school to allow for wiping down surfaces with either soapy water or bleach solutions.

IN PRACTICE

WESTERN CENTRAL AFRICA

As schools were preparing to re-open their doors to students, UNHCR Offices in Western Central Africa collaborated with their education and WASH partners to ensure that refugee and host community children could return to safe, sanitary and hygienic learning spaces. Cross-sectoral collaboration has led to the construction of hundreds of hand-washing facilities, latrines and waterpoints, as well as the distribution of thousands of handwashing kits and classroom cleaning kits to prevent and combat COVID-19 as students returned to learning in schools in **Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger** in June. Schools are now equipped for refugee and host community students to learn good sanitation and hygiene practices to help protect learners and their families against infection.

Managing physical distancing in crowded educational settings

Large classes are common in camps and refugee hosting areas, making physical distancing recommendations difficult to implement.

The following strategies may help alleviate over-crowding:

- **Increase the space** between children in classrooms by using all available space in the room

- **Mend broken classroom furniture** or build additional desks and chairs (cross sectoral linkages with Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion programmes) so that fewer children have to share the same bench

- **Use outdoor spaces** for classrooms in addition to regular classrooms (temporary or tent classrooms could be erected)

- **Identify other venues** that can be used as classrooms (e.g. community centres)

- **Ensure that classrooms are well ventilated**

- Consider the **introduction of multiple shifts**, using the same school buildings or adopting a hybrid instructional model (learning in the classroom for some days of the week and at home for the remaining time).

- **Recruit community volunteers** to help manage and oversee adherence to distancing during times when children congregate (e.g. lunch times and returning to the classroom).

More information on hybrid instructional models and the use of technology-enhanced learning.

IN PRACTICE

MALAYSIA - LEARNING AT A SAFE DISTANCE

As part of the COVID-19 education response and the need to adhere to the Government's guidelines on physical distancing in school, new rotation systems were adopted by learning centres in Malaysia, with students alternating between studying at home and at school in order to reduce class sizes, manage school-based hygiene and support physical distancing.

Back to School campaigns

National campaigns have been organized in many countries ahead of the start of the school year or the resumption of schooling.

Suggested actions to leverage these campaigns:

- **Engage with national and humanitarian coordination structures** (such as the Education Cluster), relevant partners such as UNICEF, and the Ministry of Education to ensure that Back to School messaging is inclusive of refugees

- **Mobilise refugee committees, outreach volunteers and community organizations** for dissemination of information. Share information through platforms and networks used by refugees

- **Utilise a single set of messages** in Back to School campaigns for both host communities and refugees

- **Translate Back to School materials** and messages into languages spoken by refugees.

An indigenous Awá student sits in a class taught by local teacher, Ramiro Rodríguez Canticus, in the border community of San Marcos, Ecuador.

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2. LEARNING

During the COVID pandemic, refugee learners are likely to have had less access to national distance learning opportunities provided by the Ministry of Education or implementing partners, as well as learning resources or support by teachers or parents. As such, refugee learners are likely to have missed out on more education than their host country counterparts and will require additional resources and support from all education stakeholders to catch up, remain enrolled and progress to the next grade.

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Catching up lost learning opportunities: Formal Education

■ **Catch-up programmes** are short-term transitional education programmes for children & youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption. They provide students with the opportunity to learn content missed due to the disruption and support their re-entry to the formal system.

■ **Remedial programmes** are additional targeted support, concurrent with regular classes, for students who require short-term content or skill support to succeed in regular programming.

■ **Accelerated Education Programmes** are flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who missed out on, or had their education interrupted by, poverty, marginalisation, conflict and crisis. The goal of Accelerated Education Programmes is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education, using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity.

Note: It is not advisable to further accelerate or condense accelerated education programmes, however time can be extended.

UNHCR and its partners should advocate for:

🔊 Inclusion of refugee schools and learners in national programmes supporting learners to catch up;

🔊 Design of national programmes and delivery mechanisms that take into consideration refugees' needs.

When exploring and determining appropriate options to help refugee learners catch up and get back on track consider the following:

● What kind of education programme were they engaged in before COVID-19? (also consider those who were not in education)

● What access to education did refugee children have during COVID-19 disruption?

● How much education has been missed?

● What is needed to help refugee children and youth return to learning?

National programmes may need to be adapted for refugees by:

■ Adjusting the **language of instruction and materials** to be in the language(s) understood by refugees

■ Considering whether proposed **adjustments to academic calendars** may affect refugee learners differently

■ Identifying possible **administrative barriers for enrolment/ registration,** such as documents or health checks/requirements that may be hard for the refugee learner to meet

■ Considering whether **extended instructional time** – which may include lengthening the school day or week, shortening holidays/breaks, leveraging distance learning, or double shifting - conflicts with important days/times for refugee learners such as food distribution or registration. If the school day is extended into the evenings this could lead to safety risks for refugee learners getting home, especially female students.

Where programmes are designed specifically for refugees, these initiatives should be **aligned as closely as possible to national strategies and programmes.** Priority should be given to the extension of the coverage of national programmes to refugee hosting areas, rather than designing new initiatives.

Grade 8 learners at Arid Zone Primary School attend a language lesson while wearing facemasks donated by the US Government, through UNHCR.

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2. LEARNING

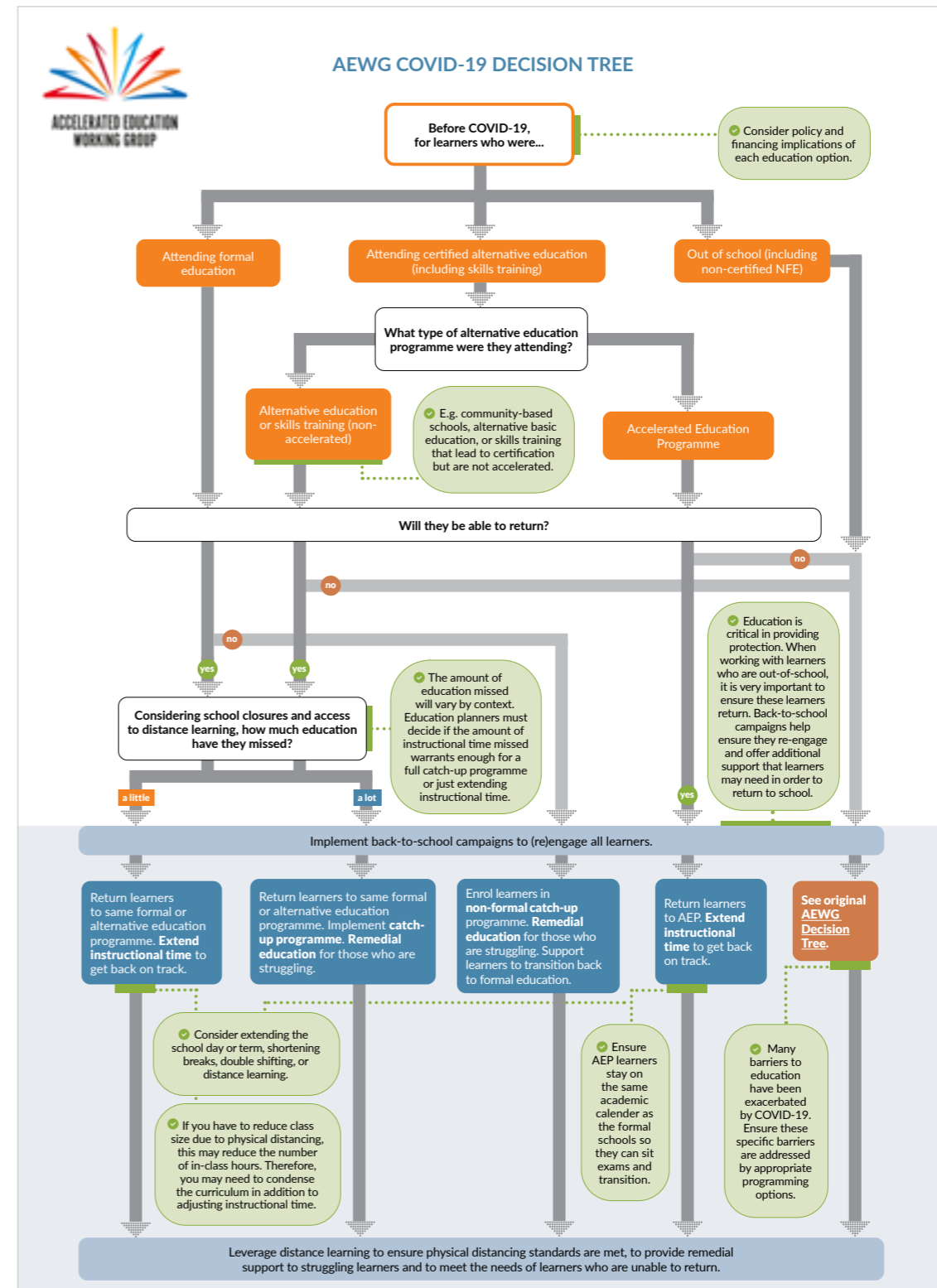# Catching up lost learning opportunities: Non-formal Education

Note: Agreements with partners and donors may need to be revised in order to accommodate implementation over a longer duration.

The response to COVID-19 must consider not only children who were previously attending formal education who are able to return, but also those attending non-formal education, those who have dropped out due to the pandemic, and those who were previously unable to be in school.
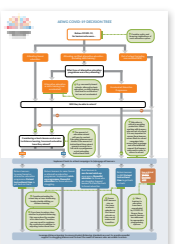
Suggested actions for out of school youth include:

- **Supporting the expansion of national non-formal and alternative education programmes** to cater for refugee learners who were out of school e.g. certified or recognised catch up and accelerated education programmes with clear transition pathways into formal education can be implemented.

A young asylum-seeker from Afghanistan attends class at a non-formal education school, located next to the Vial reception and identification centre on Chios, Greece.

©UNHCR /A. ZAVALLIS

The *AEWG COVID-19 Pathways for the Return to Learning* and *AEWG COVID-19 Decision Tree* (below) are useful resources to support thinking through options for learners with different educational backgrounds and experiences.

AEWG COVID-19 DECISION TREE

Before COVID-19, for learners who were...
- Consider policy and financing implications of each education option.

Attending formal education | Attending certified alternative education (including skills training) | Out of school (including non-certified NFE)

What type of alternative education programme were they attending?

Alternative education or skills training (non-accelerated) | E.g. community-based schools, alternative basic education, or skills training that lead to certification but are not accelerated. | Accelerated Education Programme

Will they be able to return?

- The amount of education missed will vary by context. Education planners must decide if the amount of instructional time missed warrants enough for a full catch-up programme or just extending instructional time.

- Education is critical in providing protection. When working with learners who are out-of-school, it is very important to ensure these learners return. Back-to-school campaigns help ensure they re-engage and offer additional support that learners may need in order to return to school.

Considering school closures and access to distance learning, how much education have they missed?

a little | a lot

Implement back-to-school campaigns to (re)engage all learners.

Return learners to same formal or alternative education programme. **Extend instructional time** to get back on track. | Return learners to same formal or alternative education programme. Implement **catch-up programme**. **Remedial education** for those who are struggling. | Enrol learners in **non-formal catch-up** programme. **Remedial education** for those who are struggling. Support learners to transition back to formal education. | Return learners to AEP. **Extend instructional time** to get back on track. | **See original AEWG Decision Tree.**

- Consider extending the school day or term, shortening breaks, double shifting, or distance learning.

- If you have to reduce class size due to physical distancing, this may reduce the number of in-class hours. Therefore, you may need to condense the curriculum in addition to adjusting instructional time.

- Ensure AEP learners stay on the same academic calender as the formal schools so they can sit exams and transition.

- Many barriers to education have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Ensure these specific barriers are addressed by appropriate programming options.

Leverage distance learning to ensure physical distancing standards are met, to provide remedial support to struggling learners and to meet the needs of learners who are unable to return.

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2. LEARNING

Using digital, online and connected education resources to support catch up

As children return to school, online, digital and broadcast learning materials can support the kinds of catch-up and remedial programmes mentioned above. The use of these resources can also help to attract learners back to education and reassure them that it is possible to catch up on what was missed during school closures.

As part of managing over-crowding, governments may adopt a hybrid instructional approach, which blends learning in school with home-based learning using either printed materials or other technologies.

Digital content and resources can supplement classroom teaching in ways that both reinforce the acquisition of knowledge and teach important digital skills, while supporting social (physical) distancing measures. For example: teachers might divide a class into groups and have some learners watching content (both inside the classroom and outside or at home) while others work on exercises, hold discussions or complete assessment tasks in the classroom with the teacher. Continued use of broadcast lessons (radio and television) and linking these to in-class instruction and the completion of tasks also provide ways of increasing opportunities to learn.

Digital content and tools can also be used by teachers to assess learners' levels of comprehension as they return to school, which is important given the likely variation among children in terms of their level, depending on the access they had to continued learning during school closures.

Important safety considerations

⚠ Regularly clean tablets, laptops and high-touch surfaces before and after each user

⚠ Equipment must be wiped down with a damp (not wet!) cloth and electronics must not be sprayed directly or saturated

⚠ Make use of online/offline resources to ensure all learners understand proper hygiene and enhanced precautionary measures.

> **IN PRACTICE**
>
> **TAJIKISTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, AND KAZAKHSTAN**
>
> Whether learning is happening online or in person, UNHCR Offices in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are supporting refugee and host community children to keep studying during the pandemic. UNHCR and its partners are helping vulnerable refugee households through CBIs to procure devices and internet connectivity to make online learning accessible to their children.

Some ways of utilizing connected education resources when schools re-open to support catch-up and examination preparation:

■ **Social distancing and hygiene protocols**

••• Organise small groups of students to work individually on tablet-based activities (observing social distancing protocols)

••• Keep students at a safe distance from one another in line with the advice of national health authorities

••• Use a projector and speakers to play lesson content

••• Where students have access to individual devices, allow students to use their own devices to access activities in class and at home.

■ **Assessing student knowledge**

••• Utilize online resources to identify gaps and potential lost progress across critical subjects/learning objectives.

■ **Exam preparation**

••• Use platforms like Kolibri or national content platforms to identify and/or compile content that can be used for revision and reinforcing knowledge or skills that should have been covered during school closures

••• Allow students time to review and practice with past exam papers

••• Develop exam preparation groups for specific subjects and skills, based on student performance data

■ **Increasing access to teaching and learning materials**

••• Obtain and share pre-recorded lessons aired on radio or television with teachers and with students through platforms like WhatsApp and Skype

••• Partner with local/community radio and television stations and negotiate on airtime to broadcast educational content aligned to the host country curriculum

••• Inform students and other teachers about zero-rated or free access to specific educational websites and apps.

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3. WELLBEING AND PROTECTION

3.
WELLBEING AND PROTECTION

PROTECTION   LIVELIHOODS

Protection is at the heart of UNHCR's work and all elements of the COVID response should be approached through a protection lens – ensuring that interventions reach the most marginalized and do not exacerbate inequalities. Special consideration also needs to be given to identifying any barriers to accessing services that are directly related to families' status as refugees or asylum seekers.

Teacher wellbeing and support

Teachers are key frontline workers who are not only responsible for the delivery of the curriculum, but also provide important health messages to students and their families, offer emotional and psycho-social support, engage with communities, advocate for education and follow up on the well-being of students.

As face-to-face schooling resumes it is important to consider how the following issues could affect refugee educators, many of whom may not enjoy the same labour rights and entitlements as host community teachers:

■ **Sick leave entitlements:** Review sick leave policies for refugee teachers, to reduce the risk of teachers coming to school when they may be showing symptoms of COVID-19

■ **Recognition for work done** during school closures: Consider whether there are ways (financial and other) that teachers can be recognized and celebrated for the work that they have done while schools were closed

■ **MPHSS for teachers:** Acknowledge that teachers are front-line workers in this pandemic and may have additional support needs

■ **Contingency plans** should be put in place if it is likely that there will be shortages of teachers. The use of distance/ remote learning resources, video lessons and printed materials may compensate for shortages in the short-term, but alternative plans will be needed to compensate for loss of capacity, such as:

••• Putting in place agreements with national governments that undeployed teachers be assigned as supply teachers;

••• Fast tracking teacher training for high school graduates;

••• Having teachers with underlying health conditions or factors restricting their ability to return to teaching in person facilitate online lessons or be assigned to administrative or marking tasks.

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Somali refugee teacher, Amina Hassan, prepares to give an English lesson to grade five pupils over the radio system at Dadaab camp in Kenya.

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Enhancing Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support Programmes (MHPSS)

MHPSS

The pandemic, changes in routine, isolation, illness and possible bereavement can compound trauma as a result of displacement. As schools re-open it is important to consider mental health and psychosocial support for both educators and learners and plan accordingly.

UNHCR should advocate for the inclusion of refugee children in all support programmes implemented by host governments.

UNHCR can support national initiatives to provide MHPSS by:

- **Supporting an increase in the numbers of teacher counsellors** or support staff; and

- **Sharing information with service providers** on refugee-specific needs and the effects of displacement on MHPSS needs.

Where UNHCR plays a more direct role in the provision of education, the following actions could be integrated into existing education activities delivered through schools and non-formal education programmes:

- **Provide information to teachers** on the impact of the pandemic and disruptions to schooling upon children's emotional wellbeing, concentration and behaviour

- **Provide practical suggestions on** simple exercises **to reduce anxiety,** which teachers can incorporate into the school day and can be practiced at home - short videos with relaxation and breathing exercises can be circulated through social media and other communication platforms

- **Include time for MHPSS activities** within the instructional schedule when plans for curriculum delivery are developed

- **Ensure that teachers and education personnel are aware** of services provided in the community, to which learners can be referred.

•••/••• [Teacher wellbeing and support *continued*]

Extended school closures and the nature of the health crisis may affect the number of teachers who are available to resume duty once schools open. As part of the preparation for resumption of schooling, it is important to identify **how many teachers will return to work,** taking into consideration the needs of those with underlying health conditions who may be at greater risk if they contract COVID-19, those who have moved away or who have been forced to take on additional work or family responsibilities.

Teachers who are unable to return to work due to underlying health conditions or factors that may place them at risk also require additional support. In order that teaching expertise is not lost, these teachers could help facilitate online lessons using community radio facilities or recorded messages, could be assigned administrative tasks or be requested to support in the correction of written tasks or exercises. This would enable these teachers to continue being eligible to receive stipends and not lose access to an important source of income.

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Integrating a focus on 'return to schooling' in protection monitoring

Protection monitoring is a central part of the work carried out by UNHCR's Community-Based Protection teams and partners. It is a valuable source of information on the extent to which refugees are able to benefit from national programmes for the continuation of learning, as well as for monitoring whether children have re-enrolled in school.

Information on **referral pathways** and available services for children and girls who may have been exposed to GBV during school closures and lockdowns should be widely disseminated to community leaders, health care providers and teachers.

Suggested actions

- **Include questions on return to schooling** in protection monitoring tools used in visits to households

- **Hold discussions on resumption of education** activities during community meetings

- **Support the identification of learners with specific needs** (e.g. pregnancy, child labour, increased domestic/agricultural workload, disability, underlying health conditions) that prevent a return to school and may require additional assistance or specialized interventions

- **Examine who is most at risk** of not returning to school, disaggregating data by age, gender and disability.

- **Identify and document where stigma, xenophobic attitudes or incidents** negatively affect returns to school

- Consider whether refugees' return to school is being deprioritized by schools or authorities through the introduction of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 (e.g smaller classes, double shifts).

The monitoring section of this document presents guidance on ways to gather data on the overall return to school by refugee communities, while this section focuses on protection monitoring at the community and household level. When schools re-open, monitoring returns to school should be integrated into any protection monitoring tools that are in use.

The following questions could be integrated into multi-sectoral protection monitoring tools:

- Were your children previously enrolled in school? (disaggregate response by level of education)

- Now that schools have re-opened, have they returned to school? (yes/ only some children/ no)

- (If no/ only some children) What are the reasons that they have not returned to school?

- What assistance is needed to help your children return to school?

4.
REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

PROTECTION   CASH   WASH

Refugees may need additional support compared to host communities in order to be able to return to school. In addition, within refugee communities there are groups that experience different levels of vulnerability and will also need additional support to overcome some of the negative educational and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Support packages & cash-based assistance for families

Many refugee families are experiencing additional financial pressure as a result of the COVID pandemic, resulting in loss of earnings and an increase in living costs in some areas. In order to ensure that these financial pressures do not result in children not returning to learning, additional incentives can be provided to families that help them meet or offset financial costs associated with returning to school.

📢 UNHCR and its partners should advocate for refugee children to have access to support packages that are offered to vulnerable host country nationals to incentivize return to schooling; and

📢 Consider ways in which existing cash-based assistance programmes can be extended to include an education top-up as part of multi-purpose cash programmes , or provide a separate 'Back to School' grant at the start of the school year.

Where refugees are unable to access local markets or where items are not available, then school kits with stationery items and bags can be provided to students.

Internally displaced Malian children receive solar-powered radios and school kits from UNHCR at Sarema school.

©UNHCR / A. GUINDO

Cash-based assistance allows refugees to make choices based on their personal needs and circumstances and can easily complement assistance provided by other organizations. The use of cash-based assistance also supports local economies and traders. Things to consider when providing cash-based assistance to incentivize return to school:

■ **Do not** make the provision of grants conditional on demonstrating enrolment in school as this may delay disbursements at the start of the school year. The adoption of different modalities for school opening and COVID-related restrictions may mean that it is more difficult for families to obtain proof of enrolment

■ Communicate that additional funds are specifically for **supporting return to learning**

■ **Include questions on return to schooling** protection monitoring tools used in visits to households

■ **Calculate the value of the top-up** based on the typical costs incurred by families (e.g. enrolment fees, school uniforms, stationery, school bag, etc).

■ If particular groups are more at risk of dropping out of school, **different rates** can be provided for families with children of the age to attend secondary school, girls etc.

■ **Targeted assistance** can be provided for families with **specific protection needs,** such as children with disabilities or working children and youth.

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4. REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

Supporting girls and young women to return to education

Refugee girls were already at a disadvantage in accessing education prior to the pandemic and faced increased gender-based cultural, social and legal barriers to completing secondary education. At secondary level, refugee girls are only half as likely to enrol in schools as their male peers. Now an estimated 20 million secondary school-age girls are at risk of not going back to school after COVID-19.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic refugee girls and young women may be more exposed to the risk of exploitation and reliance on negative coping mechanisms, including transactional sex, child-, forced-, and early-marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, unplanned pregnancies and mental distress. Social isolation may be increased, particularly amongst married girls, who may be overwhelmed with additional domestic responsibilities and limited access to pre-natal and maternity healthcare.

Girls who do plan to return to schooling may have had limited opportunities to learn remotely - due to limited connectivity and access to online resources.

In areas where UNHCR directly supports the delivery of education services it is important to train teachers (in formal and non-formal settings) to identify behaviours that may be signs that a child needs extra support or has heightened protection risks.

Potential mitigating measures include:

- **Ensuring response plans support pregnant girls and young mothers** through the removal of regulations preventing or limiting re-enrolment;

- **Actively supporting adolescent girls** (including those who are pregnant and young mothers) to return to learning by waiving enrolment/examination fees;

- **Encouraging the introduction of flexible scheduling and learning methods** that accommodate pregnancy, childcare and household responsibilities;

- **Exploring the introduction of flexible learning delivery modalities** such as self-paced learning and low-tech home-schooling options (e.g. radio broadcasting) and remedial, accelerated or catch up education tailored to adolescent girls' needs;

- Ensuring that the design and roll-out of national response strategies for return to learning and continuing home-based learning **take into consideration the digital gender divide.**

The following actions could be implemented to provide targeted support to facilitate a return to learning by adolescent girls:

- **Put in place targeted back to school campaigns for women and girls** – women's community groups can be enlisted to support these campaigns

- **Ensure school toilets are safe** (equipped with inside locks, water, light) and designed to support menstrual hygiene management, including the discrete, safe disposal or laundering of menstrual hygiene products

- **Increase the use of cash and voucher assistance** with higher values for girls, to support a return to schooling

- **Scale up the in-kind provision of dignity kits in secondary schools** - dignity kits may include menstrual hygiene materials, such as soap, underwear, re-usable sanitary pads, along with other items, such as washable face masks and soap, based on the context

- **Train education staff to identify signs of GBV** and provide in-school referral and reporting

- **Enhance PSS for those exposed to GBV during lockdowns or school closures** and increase information dissemination on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights

- **Increase monitoring at school and community level** for girls at risk of drop out, to identify girls who have not re-enrolled or who have prolonged absences or irregular attendance. Appoint community members and PTAs to conduct home visits to ensure vulnerable girls receive the support needed to return to and stay in school

- **Support female teachers to return to work** following school closures - ensure that they have access to in-school safe spaces and sanitation facilities as well as adequate dormitory accommodation.

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C. RETURNING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

C.
RETURNING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Face-to-face teaching in universities was suspended in many countries, with many quickly adopting online learning modalities to enable students to continue their studies.

Many higher education institutions in refugee-hosting countries lack both the hardware and connectivity to deliver educational content remotely, and/or do not have access to online or digital content. Many refugee students are more likely to have poor or no internet access, insufficient access to quiet places to study and experience pressure to support families and contribute to household finances. Refugee students who are scholarship recipients may have lost access to university housing and meal plans during campus closures.

Advocacy:

- 📢 **Advocate for digital infrastructure investments** as well as offline teaching and learning materials;

- 📢 **Promote access to training for lecturers** on delivery of online content and adaptation of content to online delivery; and

- 📢 **Include refugee-specific considerations** in government COVID-19 return to campus planning.

Additional suggested actions

- **Assess to what extent teaching and learning will continue via online modalities** and to what degree refugee students can be supported to access hardware

- **Establish computer labs and other workspaces** in anticipation of continued online or distance learning programmes, in adherence with social distancing requirements

- **Identify where closures have disproportionately affected marginalised or underrepresented refugee students,** such as those with disabilities, whose participation in education may be affected by mobility or accessibility limitations related to closures

- **Continue the payment of tuition and student allowance payments** throughout periods of institutional closure to ensure that students are able to continue to study remotely and re-start their studies after re-opening

- **Enhance health and mental health support services** to anticipate the specific stresses and risks that refugee students may have faced or continue to face during closure and as institutions reopen, including:

  - ••• Movement restrictions based on migration status

  - ••• Confinement to overcrowded camp or settlement areas

  - ••• Lack of access to adequate health services during lock down or due to legal status

  - ••• Economic or social pressures to not return to school

- **Support the acquisition of digital literacy skills** and increase comfort with using online tools and content

- **Facilitate the formation of study groups** in refugee hosting areas so that students can support each other with catch up, continuation or preparation for exams

- **Provide financial support** for refugee student clubs to continue activities, in line with public health guidelines, to promote continued commitment and connection to higher education programmes

- **Ensure testing is available for refugee students at no cost** in the locations where they reside, prior to returning to campus. Increase allowances for medical treatment and testing where refugees do not have access to subsidized or free services.

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D. MONITORING RETURNS TO EDUCATION

D. MONITORING RETURNS TO EDUCATION

Timely collection and analysis of education data will be essential for monitoring, programming and mitigating the impact on schooling, as well as measuring drop out by refugee children and youth. Targets should be, at minimum, set at pre-COVID enrolment and attendance rates and ideally seek increased enrolment as part of the building back better efforts.

As was the case before the pandemic, monitoring enrolment and attendance is easier in the context of camp or settlement schools. The monitoring of return of refugee students who are attending national public schools, particularly in urban settings, will prove more challenging – particularly in countries where Education Management Information Systems do not disaggregate by international protection status. In such situations, the return to school and attendance of children and youth can be monitored through socio-economic assessments conducted by UNHCR, household and telephone surveys, or as part of verification exercises to update UNHCR's progress registration system.

UNHCR and its partners should advocate with national authorities for:

- **Regular, comprehensive collection of data** on returns to schooling (attendance not just enrolment) and ensure that data is disaggregated by gender, age and disability;
- **More systematic follow-up of children** who fail to return to school - those who fail to re-enroll or who exhibit sporadic or erratic attendance may have underlying protection risks; and
- **The establishment of clearly communicated protocols** for referring children identified as being at-risk or potentially at-risk to the appropriate social or health services.

Suggested actions

- During mandatory school closures **collect participation data on alternative learning options,** such as distance and home-based learning - source of data can include distribution lists of radios, tablets, home-learning packs. This will help identify those children and youth who had access to alternative learning options during the lockdown

- Once schools reopen, conduct an **early, rapid assessment** which will provide baseline data on enrolment figures, number of teachers, availability of learning spaces to meet social distancing requirements & WASH facilities, to establish a measure of enrolment rates in the different grades prior to COVID

- Resume enrolment and attendance monitoring processes - use the same data sources (e.g. school administrative data) and level of disaggregation as before the pandemic. Collect data on a **monthly basis or more frequently,** depending on the availability of collection tools. Increasing data collection frequency will speed up the response to dropouts

- Where data on refugee enrolment and attendance are not readily available **advocate for the systematic inclusion of refugees into national surveys** (household, telephone surveys, etc.) or use verification phases to collect data through proGres

- As part of the back to school campaign, **engage children, youth, parents and the community as a whole into monitoring activities,** including identifying children who have not returned to school and understanding the reasons leading to dropout.

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E. BUILDING FUTURE

E.
BUILDING BACK BETTER AND BEING PREPARED FOR FUTURE DISRUPTIONS TO LEARNING

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to improve both access to and the quality of education provision.

The rapid introduction of emergency distance learning modalities around the world highlighted the impact of the digital divide upon different communities in the same country. It has also drawn attention to the poor state of WASH facilities in many schools hosting refugees and the urgent need to improve these facilities in order to support infection prevention and control (not only for COVID-19 but also other diseases).

Contingency planning

The unpredictability and speed with which COVID-19 infections spread in communities may lead to more localized shutdowns, resulting in full or partial closure of schools – meaning children only attend school for a limited number of days per week or where the attendance of selected grades is prioritized. This requires governments and education providers to implement contingency plans for greater use of home-based learning. It is crucial that these plans are tailored to the context and take into account the extent to which refugees and other communities have access to hardware and connectivity to access learning opportunities and support programmes (including lessons broadcast on radio and TV and online programmes).

Suggested actions

- **Provide advice and information** to parents on ways in which they can support home-based learning

- **Promote greater access to and use of existing textbooks** and opportunities to learn through completion of written exercises

- **Improve communication with families** through block committees and updating contact information for families (see more info on communication here)

- **Budget for the provision of additional/ supplementary printed materials** for home-based use by students

- **Increase the provision of notebooks** for students to complete written exercises at home

- **Develop a costed contingency plan** to allow for continuation of education support activities in case of further school closures

- **Teachers' continuity of income:** Payment of stipends and incentives for refugee teachers should continue during institutional closures.

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E. BUILDING FUTURE

Improving the quality of educational provision

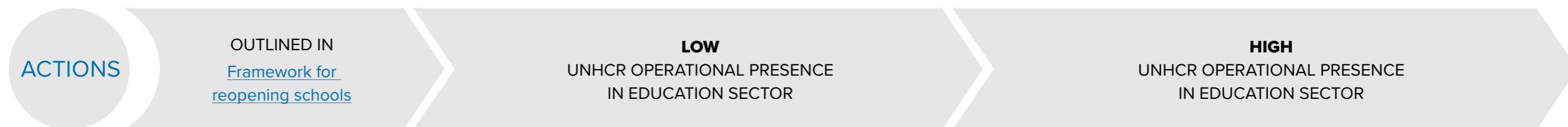The pandemic offers an important opportunity to improve refugees' educational opportunities and experiences through:

- **Improving sanitation facilities and hygiene practices** in schools so that they comply with SPHERE/ INEE and UNHCR minimum standards

- **Enhancing teacher training to include a focus on digital literacy and technology-enhanced teaching:**
  - ••• Invest in infrastructure that supports the use of technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning
  - ••• Provide teachers with in-service or pre-service training that builds skills in the use of different forms of technology (including the use of mobile phones) to support teaching and learning
  - ••• Advocate for digital literacy programmes for refugee parents and learners

- **Expanding the use of flexible, accelerated education programmes** for out-of-school children and youth long-term:
  - ••• Expand, adapt and use learnings from the introduction of more flexible mode of teaching, to reach those who have been out of school for long periods
  - ••• Enhance the quality of non-formal and alternative education pathways to offer more opportunities to children and youth whose education has been disrupted

- **Revising policies pertaining to the status of refugee teachers:** In many countries refugee teachers are not part of the national teaching force or do not enjoy the same rights and protections as host country teachers. This is an opportunity to improve the status of refugee teachers and benefits they receive.

Eighteen-year-old Rohingya refugee and Burmese language instructor, Nur Ayna, teaches a young student at Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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ANNEX
SUMMARY GUIDANCE

ACTIONS	OUTLINED IN Framework for reopening schools	LOW UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR	HIGH UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR
1 SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS — Develop clear national guidance for reopening of schools		Communicate national guidance to students, teachers and communities	Together with camp management, establish clear guidance and decision framework for re-opening (and re-closing) schools, informed by national policies and public health considerations
Provide guidance on decision making that is localised or adapted to schools and disease trends		N/A – decision to reopen host community schools driven by national government	
Develop clear and easy to understand protocols on social distancing & procedures for hygiene		Support host community schools to facilitate implementation of national guidance, for e.g. through: • Provision of temporary classrooms, additional furniture, distribution of PPE (face masks) • Distribution of cleaning supplies • Drawing on UNHCR's strengths regarding community centres & NFE centres to supplement classroom space	Practical guidance needed on how to implement protocols on decongestion of classrooms for e.g.: • Use of open-air facilities • Double shifting • Adapting school timetable to have students attending 2-3 days a week and engaged in home-based learning on other days • Using classroom space effectively • Improving ventilation
Develop protocols on handwashing and use of PPE		Ensure access to PPE if mandated – particularly for refugees so that access to PPE (masks) is not a reason for exclusion/ non-attendance	Ensure access to PPE if mandated (linking with WASH protocols and standards - see other points on improving WASH facilities).
Revise attendance policies for personnel (sick leave certification, health absences, remote working)		Ensure that refugee teachers have the same entitlements (regarding attendance and sick leave) as nationals	Revise teacher management policies to accommodate work done during school closures and alternative forms of delivery (where the teacher is not in school)
Protection of personnel and learners with underlying health conditions that may limit return to schooling		Protection monitoring & identification of specific needs - follow up of those with special needs, as identified in registration systems	• Teacher personnel policy should have explicit accommodations for those unable to return • Model/ track teacher supply & deployment (return to classroom) • What accommodations can be made for learners unable to return to school?

•••/•••

1
SAFE OPERATION OF SCHOOLS

ACTIONS	OUTLINED IN Framework for reopening schools	LOW UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR	HIGH UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR
Investment in WASH facilities – prioritise funding for costs of supplies, services for delivery of clean water, disinfection		Support to host community schools	Budget prioritisation of WASH improvement in 2021 planning cycle (See key UNHCR WASH standards)
Communication of policies on re-opening (local coordination and dialogue)		• Communicate with communities in languages that refugees speak • Effective CWC on re-opening policies, schedules, timing of school day, adaptations to schedules, safety protocols	• Communicate with communities in languages that refugees speak • Effective CWC on re-opening policies, schedules, timing of school day, adaptations to schedules, safety protocols
Monitoring of re-opening (ensuring that refugees are not excluded or marginalised)		• Monitor re-opening in refugee hosting areas (institutional level) • Protection monitoring supporting tracking of actual return to schools by refugees and any practices that may contribute to exclusion	Improve data collection on institutional opening and operation
Working towards improvement of WASH facilities and compliance with standards (gender segregation)		Implement Quick Impact Projects (QuIPs) in schools – which contribute to social cohesion - to support host community schools to reach minimum standards/ have better quality facilities	Reiteration of WASH standards
Train staff on the implementation of physical distancing and hygiene protocols		N/A	Delivery of appropriate, contextualised training
Guidance on response if learners are unwell (isolation, non-stigmatisation)		N/A	Recommend development of protocols that are practical and implementable in context
Promotion of good hygiene practices that support continuous behaviour change		• Extension of programmes supporting good hygiene • Integration into NFE programmes	Extension and localisation of programmes supporting good hygiene
Model for closure/ opening of schools as needed in response to infection rates		Clear communication of national/ district policies to communities (CWC)	Preparedness policies (see further detail in full guidelines document)

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2
LEARNING

ACTIONS	OUTLINED IN **Framework for reopening schools**	**LOW** UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR	**HIGH** UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR
Provide teachers and learners with support on remote learning (preparatory)		• Provide training and guidance to parents on their roles and how to support learners during home-based learning • Develop skills of NFE delivery staff	• Integrate remote learning guidance into teacher professional development programmes- use of technology-enhanced teaching and adapting to different delivery modalities should be central to teacher professional development/ preparation • Provide guidance on use of national programmes (radio broadcast etc)
Most vulnerable should be included through ensuring availability of resources in different languages			
Development of alternative academic calendars (adjusting start/ end of school year; examinations seasons)		Communicate changes in academic programme to communities (CWC)	• National programme followed in most cases • May need to also consider Country of Origin (COO) academic schedules where examination periods are aligned with COO
Certification and examination practices reviewed (including recognition of prior learning, accreditation, examinations schedules, introduction of universal promotion, waiving examination requirements)		• Ensure communities informed of new arrangements • Prioritisation of support for exam preparation (if schools are opening for key grades)	
Update learning pathways		• Increase coverage of non-formal education (NFE) programmes • Highlight the key role that learning centres and other NFE programmes can play	**Policy opportunity** – increase coverage and esteem of NFE programmes (as legitimate alternative pathways to obtain certification)
Remove administrative barriers to enrolment/ re-registration		Monitor whether inability to update residence/asylum status/identity docs during lockdowns could have an impact on re-enrolment in schools. Integrate into protection monitoring.	
Introduce remedial and catch up programmes		Expand coverage of NFE Introduce programmes supporting refugee and host communities Disseminate information on AEWG decision tree	Expand coverage of remedial and catch up programmes Guidance on condensing a curriculum applicable
Invest in accelerated education programmes		Policy advocacy with government on the importance of AE programmes – part of long-term systemic investment	

3
WELLBEING AND PROTECTION

ACTIONS	OUTLINED IN Framework for reopening schools	LOW UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR	HIGH UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR
Ensure continued payment of teacher salaries		Advocacy for refugee teachers to continue being paid (if their conditions of service are not the same as those of host country teachers)	• Ensure continued payment of teachers (incentives) and advocate with donors as needed • Ensure that teacher counsellors continue receiving incentives • Increase coverage of counseling support
Increase MHPSS services in schools to address stigmatisation and discrimination		• Emphasise importance of presence of counsellors in schools • Prioritise resumption of MHPSS programming in schools (including in the classroom) and NFE centres	
Strengthen referral pathways and services		• Teacher training to include information on identification of impact of stress, anxiety etc • Dissemination of information regarding referral pathways to existing services, paying special attention to GBV referral services	
Resumption of support services as soon as possible (school feeding, vaccination, other support programmes)			
Undertake risk assessments for teachers (personnel) and learners who may face higher risk in returning to school			
Managing fear and anxiety over coming back to school		Possible inclusion in CWC programmes and Back to School messaging	

4

REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

ACTIONS	OUTLINED IN Framework for reopening schools	LOW UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR	HIGH UNHCR OPERATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION SECTOR
Provide Back to School grants and pro-poor funding for schools		CBI support – non-conditional, labelled education grants integrated with MP CBI	
Waive school fees and related costs of school attendance		• Advocacy • CBI • School kits/ stationery etc	• CBI • School kits/ stationery etc
Adopt school opening policies that expand access to marginalised groups (out of school, disabled, refugee etc)			
Diversify communications formats to use languages understood by communities		Integrate advice into sections dealing with CWC and include visual/low text options for non-readers	
Take specific steps to support the return of girls to school		• Monitoring impact on girls • Supporting pregnant girls to return to school • Advocacy for policy change to ensure pregnant girls and young mothers are not excluded • Pro-female funding and targeting of CBI and other incentives • Cross-reference to section on WASH- improving menstrual health management • Enhance ante-natal monitoring of teen pregnancy and referral for support to return to learning	
Ensure WASH facilities are accessible to those with disabilities		See WASH guidance under Safe Operation of Schools	

COVID-19 REFUGEES' RETURN TO SCHOOLING GUIDELINES

December 2020

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 photo:
A teacher at a non-formal education programme on the Greek island of Chios examines the homework of a young asylum-seeker from Afghanistan.
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