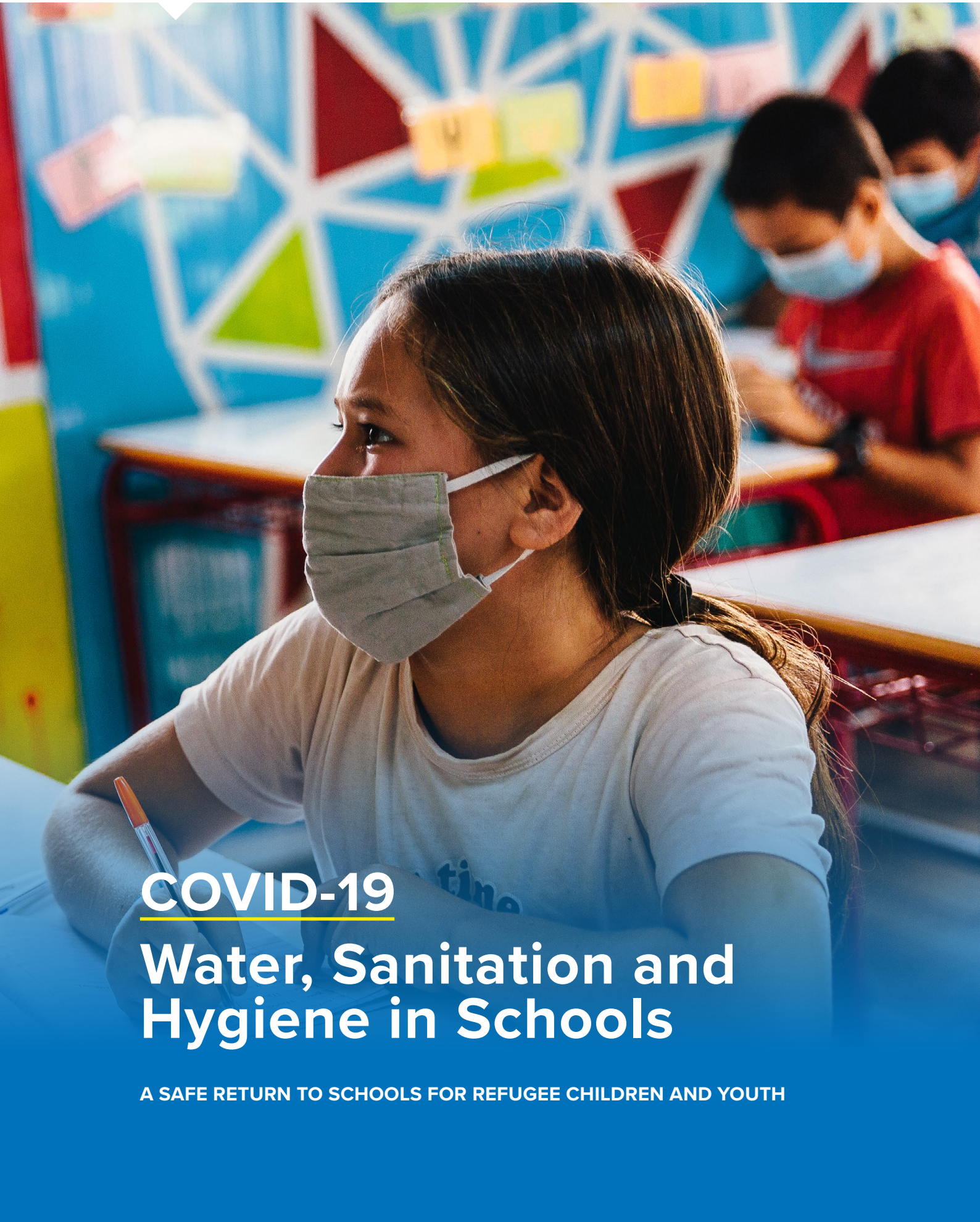




**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



**COVID-19**

# Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools

A SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOLS FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN AND YOUTH





This document presents the results of a survey assessing the WASH readiness of schools in UNHCR-supported refugee camps and refugee settlements. UNHCR and partners are using the results to improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) COVID-19 mitigation measures in schools and design targeted improvements to WASH facilities to allow for safe operation of schools.

More than 60% of the world's school-age children have been or are affected by ongoing school closures, with most having missed out on at least one term of learning. This situation risks reversing many of the gains made in refugees' access to education and in the quality of their learning outcomes. A key commitment of UNHCR is to support children and youth to continue learning during institutional closures and to return safely to school on re-opening. It is estimated that 750,000 refugee children and youth in 63 countries are currently supported with distance/home based learning. UNHCR is supporting access to online education programmes and resources, distributing education materials and using radio and television to support home-based learning, supporting teachers to adapt to new ways of teaching, ensuring continuity of school-based support services such as school meals, psycho-social support and counselling<sup>1</sup>.

To ensure a safe return to school, UNHCR and partners are strengthening and adapting WASH services in schools by implementing basic COVID-19 infection prevention and control to disrupt transmission. UNHCR is also redesigning and installing additional WASH facilities to ensure basic water, sanitation, and waste management services. Communication and training on COVID-19 transmission is a key priority, emphasizing that schools follow daily disinfection and cleaning protocols and appropriate environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures. Other relevant WASH-related activities to ensure a safe return to school include support through in-kind and/or cash assistance.

Globally, it is estimated that three billion people lack soap and water at home to practice good hand hygiene, some 40 percent of healthcare facilities are not equipped with handwashing stations, and 58% of secondary schools and 56% of primary schools had basic hygiene services<sup>2/3</sup>.

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1. See UNHCR (2020) Supporting Continued Access to Education During COVID-19 – Emerging Promising Practices Issue 1 and Issue 2.
  2. JMP (2020). Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Schools- Special Report on COVID-19. Available at <https://washdata.org/reports>.
  3. See UNHCR (2020). Emerging practices; WASH and Covid 19 field practices Issue 1.

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## **COVID-19 preparedness survey in schools**

To prioritise the WASH preparedness activities for school return, UNHCR has conducted a global survey assessing the WASH readiness of schools in UNHCR-supported refugee camps and refugee settlements to operate safely during COVID-19. Conducted between July and August, the survey was informed by interagency guidance on the safe re-opening of schools (*Global Education Cluster, 2020; IASC, 2020*). The survey was conducted in 991 schools in 161 refugee camps and settlements in 28 countries.

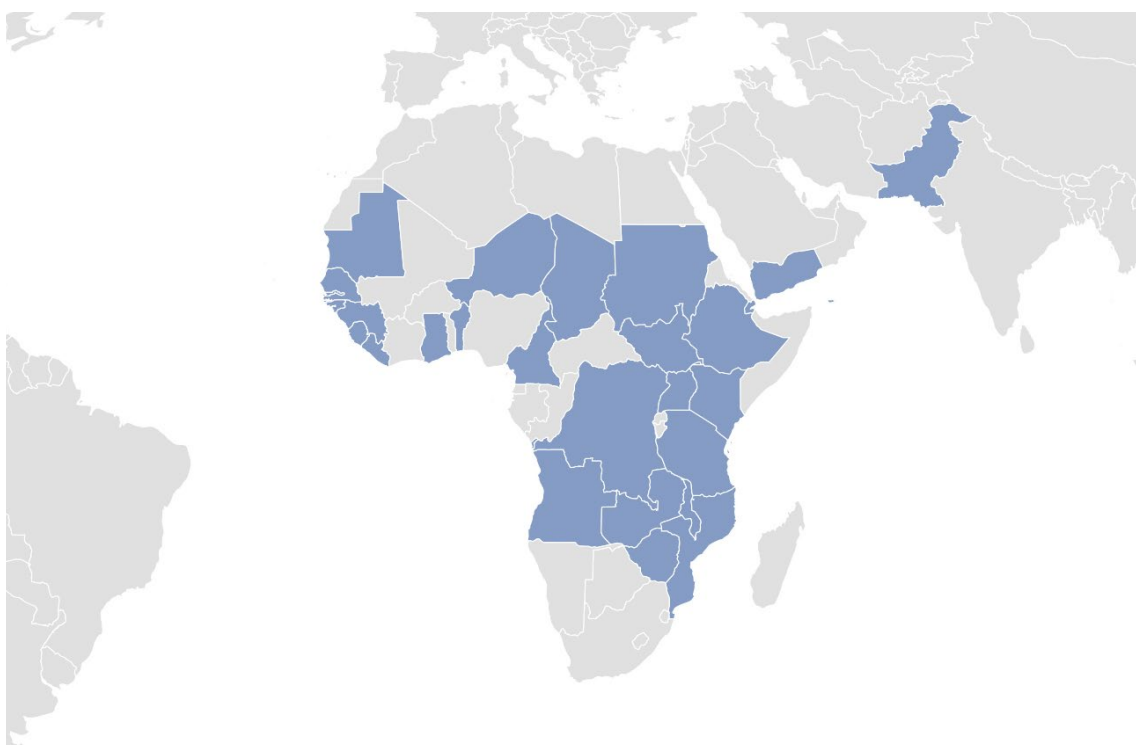


Figure 1. Countries included in the study

### **School Attendance**

- ▶ A total of 1,092,488 students (46% female, 54% male) are enrolled in 28 countries at the time of the survey.
- ▶ Out of the targeted students (1,092,488), 28% students are attending school in 7 countries at the time of the survey, 72% were out of school of whom 9 countries had closed the schools due to Covid19 lockdown, and 13 countries were out of school due to partial covid19 lockdown or school holidays.

### **Infection Prevention and Control:**

- ▶ Of the schools in session (n=201), 39% reported having classrooms that had been cleaned and disinfected and 77% reported available handwashing supplies
- ▶ Most schools however had a shortage of available cleaning materials.

## WASH Services

The results of the survey are presented alongside the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for schools<sup>4</sup>.

Service Ladder	Drinking Water	Sanitation	Hygiene
<b>Basic Service</b>	Drinking water from an improved source and water is available at the school at the time of the survey.	Improved sanitation facilities at the school that are single-sex and usable (available, functional and private) at the time of the survey.	Handwashing facilities with water and soap available at the school at the time of the survey.
<b>Limited Service</b>	Drinking water from an improved source but water is unavailable at the school at the time of the survey.	Improved sanitation facilities at the school that are either not single-sex or not usable at the time of the survey.	Handwashing facilities with water but no soap available at the school at the time of the survey.
<b>No Service</b>	Drinking water from an unimproved source or no water source at the school.	Unimproved sanitation facilities or no sanitation facilities at the school.	No handwashing facilities or no water available at the school.

A comparison was done between the 2020 UNHCR survey in the schools in refugee camps and settlements in and the most recent statistics from the JMP, considering national level figures, for the same 28 countries.

Figure 2. WASH monitoring in schools

## Drinking water in schools

- ▶ 79% of the schools in refugee camps and settlements have a basic drinking water service with 7% having limited service. The remaining 14% had no drinking water service, 2% accessing surface water or an unimproved source and 12% with no water source at the school. Often times students are required to bring water, soap, and any other hygiene materials they may need.
- ▶ Regional coverage varied from 46% in Southern Africa to 91% in the Middle East and Northern Africa region.

4. <https://washdata.org/>

## **WASH services are more essential than ever to support infection prevention and control.**



- ▶ Particular shortages of basic drinking water services in refugee schools were seen in Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, and Senegal with over half of the schools lacking an improved water source. With the exception of Senegal, national level statistics from the JMP were similar.
- ▶ 81% out of primary schools and 70% out of secondary school had a basic drinking water service.
- ▶ In total 192,029 refugee children in the 28 countries including in this survey do not have access to basic drinking water services.

### **Sanitation in schools**

- ▶ 77% of schools in refugee camps and settlements have a basic sanitation service with 10% having limited service. The remaining 13% had no sanitation service including (10% access unimproved sanitation facilities and 3% with no facilities at all).
- ▶ Regional coverage varied from 67% in Southern Africa to 82% in the Middle East and Northern Africa and Asia and the Pacific.
- ▶ Particular shortages of basic sanitation services in refugee schools were seen in Benin, Congo, Senegal, Zambia, and Zimbabwe with less than half of the schools accessing basic services.
- ▶ 80% out of primary schools and 75% out of secondary school had a basic sanitation service.
- ▶ In total 246,447 refugee children in the 28 countries including in this survey do not have access to basic sanitation services.

### **Hygiene in schools**

- ▶ 60% of schools in refugee camps and settlements have basic hygiene measures in place (i.e. handwashing station with soap and water available), with 22% having limited service. 18% of schools had no hygiene services (i.e. No handwashing facilities or no water available at the school).
- ▶ There was extreme variability in regional coverage to basic hygiene services ranging from 6% in Asia and the Pacific to 100% in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

- ▶ Particular shortages of basic hygiene services in refugee schools were seen in Djibouti, Kenya, Liberia, Pakistan and Sudan where less than one quarter of schools provide basic hygiene services.
- ▶ 63% out of primary schools and 57% out of secondary school had a basic hygiene service.
- ▶ In total 425,501 refugee children in the 28 countries including in this survey have no access to hygiene services.

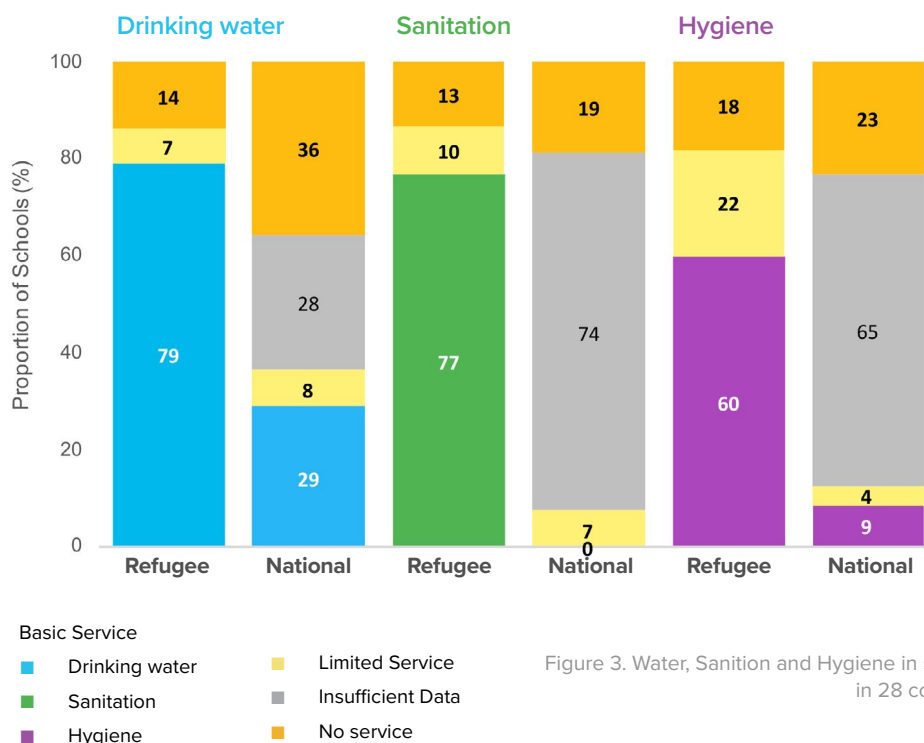


Figure 3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in schools in 28 countries

## Next steps key priorities and areas of intervention

WASH services are more essential than ever to support infection prevention and control, but they are also critical to ensure a safe environment for the return to schools. The survey results were used to identify the most critical gaps in services and resources have been immediately mobilised to address these gaps. Key interventions are now focusing on the implementation of basic COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures in schools in UNHCR-managed refugee camps and settlements. These include additional measures for ensuring physical distancing and other measure that reduce the risk of transmission. In addition, construction of handwashing stations and the expansion of water storage capacity, as well as additional latrines and the procurement of hand cleaning agents, such as soap and cleaning supplies and equipment, and provision of additional resources for personnel to support daily cleaning and school disinfection. Additional training of staff and students on handwashing and COVID-19 mitigation measures are conducted. Additional financial resources and longer-term planning will be needed to address the considerable gaps in water supply and sanitation services which includes constructing or rehabilitating water supply systems and building 14,000 toilets for nearly 200 schools.