



**FROM BARRIERS TO BREAKTHROUGHS:  
PROGRESS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES**





Bangladesh. Goodwill Ambassador Atom Araullo makes second visit to Kutupalong camp. © UNHCR/Joshua Paul

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by UNHCR. The research was designed and conducted by Ruth Naylor (independent consultant) in collaboration with Mohamud Hure and Nina Papadopoulos from the Education Section in the Division of Resilience and Solutions, UNHCR.

We would like to thank the many individuals who have given their time and expertise to share their stories of success and to contribute to the findings and conclusions of this report. We are particularly grateful to the students, teachers, school leaders, parents, education officers and

supervisors who welcomed us into their classrooms and offices and shared their experiences with us. We are indebted to the many UNHCR and partner organisation staff who helped us to identify the key successes and challenges, and to validate the findings. We would like to thank all those who facilitated the field visits to Bangladesh and Rwanda, in particular Mohammed Jahedul Islam Chowdhury and Girma Yadeta, for their hard work and dedication to ensure that visits produced rich sources of evidence and learning.

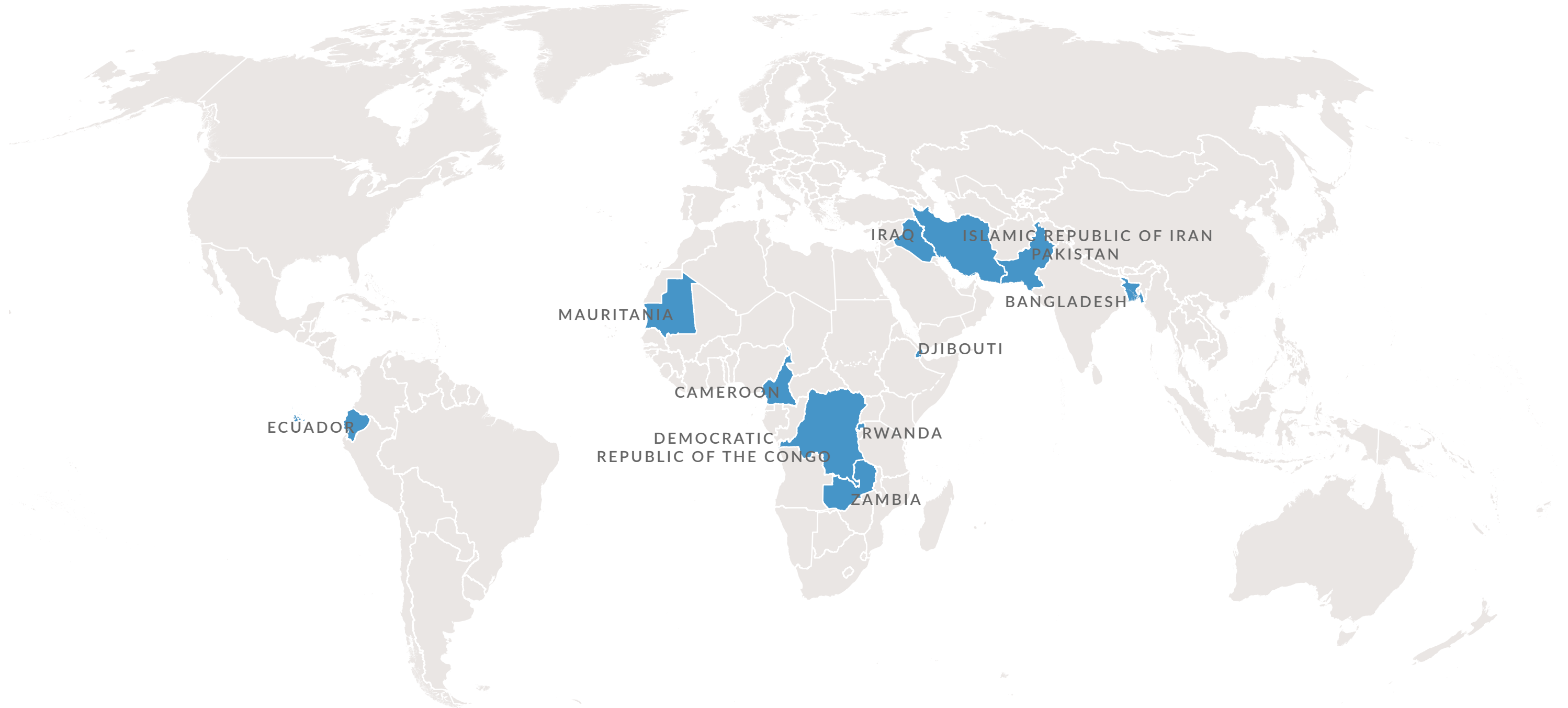
Suggested citation: Naylor, R. (2024). From Barriers to Breakthroughs: Progress in Primary Education for Refugees. UNHCR.


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## COUNTRIES FEATURED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY



 Countries featured in the research study



# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ALP</b>	Accelerated Learning Programme
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>ECW</b>	Education Cannot Wait
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Information Management Systems
<b>FDMN</b>	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
<b>FER</b>	First Emergency Response
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership for Education
<b>IIEP</b>	International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO)
<b>IDA</b>	International Development Association
<b>KRI</b>	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<b>LCFA</b>	Learning Competency Framework and Approach
<b>MYRP</b>	Multi-Year Resilience Programme
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PTA</b>	Parent Teacher Association
<b>REB</b>	Rwanda Basic Education Board
<b>REIP</b>	Refugee Education Integration Policy
<b>RSW</b>	Refugee Sub-Window
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WHR</b>	Window for Host Communities and Refugees

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores how primary education for refugees can be improved: in terms of access, quality, finance, and policy. Based on the evidence gaps identified, UNHCR sought to answer three overarching questions.

1. What are the breakthroughs and successes in the inclusion of refugee students in national education systems at the primary education level in terms of access, quality, financing, and policy parameters?
2. What were the key drivers and enabling factors contributing to these successes?
3. What are the contextual considerations that countries, donors, and international actors need to take into account when planning reforms to support the inclusion of refugee students at the primary education level?

It explores successes achieved within different policy environments, ranging from contexts where refugee children have no access to national education systems to full inclusion where refugee children attend public schools with the same rights and financing as national children.

This review used a “most significant change” approach, asking stakeholders to identify examples of breakthroughs in primary education for refugees at a range of levels: individual, local, regional, national, and global. Desk-based country studies were conducted for nine refugee hosting countries and field-based case studies were conducted in Rwanda and Bangladesh. Remote interviews were conducted with representatives of global organisations involved in refugee education and with UNHCR education staff working at the regional and country office level. In-country data collection involved interviews and focus groups with UNHCR staff and partners, students, teachers, head teachers, supervisors, parents, and government representatives.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Successes identified at the global and regional levels

- Over the last decade, a strong global consensus has been built regarding the importance of including refugees into national education systems as soon after arrival as possible. This consensus around the inclusion agenda was apparent at every level: from global stakeholders to country office staff and their partners, and, in the case of Rwanda, among students, parents, teachers, and Rwandan government officials. It is supported

by regional agreements such as the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa in 2017.

- The architecture of international donor finance to education for refugees has evolved considerably. There are now a range of funding mechanisms that can fund education for refugees across the whole of the humanitarian-development continuum, and support governments to include refugees in national education systems. But the absolute amount of international aid to primary education for refugees remains inadequate.
- There have been considerable improvements in the availability of data on refugee education, including the availability of age and sex disaggregated data and on learning outcomes. Major gaps remain, but country data dashboards produced by the UNHCR Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa demonstrate what can be achieved through a modest investment in education data and monitoring personnel.

### Successes identified at the national level

- Iran and Ecuador were identified as countries that hosted very large refugee populations and where the governments proactively supported their inclusion into national schools. When there was a big influx of refugees into Cameroon in December 2020, the local educational authorities in the area announced that they were accepting all children into the education system.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, refugees can legally enrol in primary schools but the capacity of the public school system in refugee hosting areas is very low and underfunded. The UNHCR country office pulled together small but catalytic amounts of funding and technical support from a range of multilateral agencies to ensure that the needs of a remote refugee hosting region were considered in national education planning processes.
- In Iraq, the Government of Kurdistan has worked with partners to integrate Syrian refugees into the national education system. The roll out of the Refugee Education Integration Policy started in 2022, with refugees fully integrated into national schools in grades 1-4. The transition plan included language bridging courses for students, teachers, and parents. It resulted in a 20% increase in enrolment, and 374 Syrian teachers were employed by the Ministry of Education.
- In Pakistan, primary schools in refugee villages previously delivered a version of the Afghan

curriculum. Transition to the Pakistan curriculum started in 2019, alongside a national curriculum reform. The transition has been supported with extensive and continuous professional development for teachers. It provides a pathway to certification and will make it easier for primary school graduates from refugee villages to transition to secondary school.

- Djibouti has translated its curriculum into English (from French) for refugees from East Africa. The refugees are now able to study the national curriculum without being required to learn a new language, and the translated curriculum broadens the options available to nationals.

## BUILDING INCLUSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RWANDA

Rwanda's laws provide refugee children with access to primary education on the same basis as nationals. But when the refugees arrived there were few learning facilities available in hosting areas. The World Bank has funded the construction of 250 classrooms (primary and secondary) as part of an International Development Association (IDA) grant through the Refugee Sub Window (RSW). UNHCR, through its partnership with Educate a Child, has contributed to the construction of school facilities, community awareness raising activities, and provision of uniforms and school supplies for students.

The key success in financing of primary education for refugees in Rwanda is that if donors finance the construction of schools in refugee hosting areas, the government provides teachers with learning materials and covers other running costs. The positive policy environment, together with close working relationships between UNHCR, donors, and the government, both at district and national levels, means that donor investment in infrastructure supports the long-term inclusion of refugees within the Rwandan education system. Primary enrolment rates are high, with 94% of primary school-age refugee children attending school, learning the Rwandan curriculum alongside Rwandan students.



Ecuador. Refugee children and youth find hope in inclusive schools nationwide. © UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard

## DEVELOPING TEACHING TEAMS IN COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

Bangladesh hosts over 950,000 refugees, predominantly Rohingya from Myanmar. Government policy does not allow Rohingya refugees to access the Bangladesh school curriculum. Starting in late 2021, partners working in the education sector response to the refugee crisis have been rolling out a version of the Myanmar formal school curriculum in learning centres in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

As preparation for the roll out of the Myanmar curriculum, the humanitarian sector has invested in teacher capacity development. The pedagogy training session observed during the mission was engaging and interactive. Short courses in the training centre are followed up with longer periods of supervised classroom-based practice. The basic pedagogy course is certified by BRAC and takes two months to complete.

The government has set out clear guidelines on the recruitment of teachers. Each learning centre is staffed by a national teacher paired with a volunteer teacher from the Rohingya community. The teachers work together as teams: planning lessons and teaching together. Teachers from different learning centres come together regularly in study circles.

The teachers in the focus groups agreed that they had seen significant, and very positive changes in the learners' behaviour as a result of introducing more participatory pedagogies. Parents and implementing partners reported observable improvements in children's literacy and numeracy skills.

### Enablers of Success: Responses from refugees

The refugee students, teachers, and parents who contributed to the case studies in Bangladesh and Rwanda identified what had enabled success in their contexts. Three overarching themes emerged:

- **Parents** were identified as one of the main success factors for enrolment, attendance, and learning: encouraging their own children to study and parents of other families to send their children to school.
- **Pathways** to secondary and higher education, via a formal national curriculum, were seen as important for motivating parents to send their children to primary school and inspiring learners to study hard.
- **Peaceful collaboration** between refugees and host community members was valued by students in Rwanda and by teachers in Bangladesh.

### Enablers of Success: Improving refugees' access to primary education

- Parents can play a pivotal role in encouraging all households to send their children to school. Community awareness campaigns conducted in close collaboration with parents were important for driving up enrolment and attendance.
- Viable post-primary education pathways, including accessible, quality secondary education, are important for raising and maintaining demand for primary education.
- The Bangladesh case illustrates that refugees put high value on access to formal, national curricula that follow a traditional grade structure over informal "custom made" competency-based frameworks.

Introduction of a formal curriculum can boost access.

- Evidence from Bangladesh and Pakistan indicates that creating female only learning spaces that deliver a formal curriculum within homes and religious education centres can facilitate access to education for adolescent girls in contexts where their safety and/or cultural attitudes limit their access to mixed schools.

### Enablers of Success: Improving the quality of primary education for refugees

- The introduction of a new curriculum is a good opportunity to assign children to grades based on their learning levels, and to upgrade teachers' skills.
- Teacher development should combine short courses with supervised classroom practice and peer-learning.
- Pairing national and refugee teachers in collaborative teams brings together different skillsets and supports their professional development.
- Social cohesion is an important aspect of education quality in refugee contexts and is valued by students.
- Making the national curriculum available in a language that refugees are familiar with can be a useful stepping-stone in transitioning into national systems.

### Enablers of Success: supporting progress towards full inclusion

- Transitioning from a parallel education system to a fully inclusive one is technically and politically



complex. It requires close coordination and careful sequencing. Where progress has been made, it has been through coordinated and proactive actions by governments, humanitarian, and development actors, leveraging the widespread global consensus.

- Having an education technical expert in the UNHCR country office can help to accelerate the planning and implementation of reforms that support inclusion. UNHCR education officers need to be able to engage authoritatively with the government, donors, other UN agencies, and civil society organisations.
- Key moments in national education planning and reform, such as the development of an education sector plan or introduction of a new national curriculum, can be used as windows of opportunity to advocate for and progress the inclusion of refugees into national systems.
- Close partnership with local education authorities supports the implementation of inclusive education policies and the sustainability of investments in refugee education.
- Many of the cases illustrate the importance of close engagement with refugee communities when planning reforms for greater inclusion. Changes in curriculum and language of instruction at the primary level can motivate demand when they are seen as leading to greater opportunities for post-primary education. But communities are likely to resist changes, especially to the language of instruction, when post-primary options are limited.

#### Enablers of Success: Responsibility sharing through coordinated donor financing

- Donor investment in school infrastructure in refugee hosting areas can support the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, provided there is close coordination between UNHCR, Ministries of Education, local education authorities and development partners, as observed in Rwanda.
- Although there are clear efforts at the global level to coordinate donor support to education of refugees, coordination at the national level can be more challenging. UNHCR education officers and development officers at the country level can play a key role in facilitating this.

- Any reduction in humanitarian funding needs to be accompanied by additional international development funding to education to support governments to expand the capacity of their education systems to accommodate refugees. Restricting some forms of humanitarian funding, such as teacher incentives, can act as a catalyst to drive forward reforms to include refugees in national systems, but can put access to education in refugee areas at risk if donors are not willing to share the costs of education of refugees through development funding.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR UNHCR'S ROLE IN REFUGEE EDUCATION: MANAGING TRANSITIONS

There is already a vast body of evidence regarding what works in primary education in development contexts. Much of what has been learned about what works in non-refugee contexts can be applied to improving primary education for refugees. However, in refugee contexts there are additional challenges around managing transitions: transitions of individual refugee students into primary schools and beyond, transitions of curricula and language of instruction, transitions in the management of the education workforce, and transitions in how education of refugees is financed. Achieving success in primary education for refugees requires careful management of these transitions.

As it continues to develop its policy work, programming, and organisational learning in the primary education subsector, UNHCR should focus its technical expertise and evidence building around managing transitions in education for refugees. In many of the successful transitions identified in this review, UNHCR education staff working at the country level played a key role in coordinating local, national, and international actors and driving forward positive change for refugee education.



Rwanda. Digital education improves teaching experience in refugee-hosting schools. © UNHCR/Eric Didier Karinganire



# 1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Providing refugee children with access to inclusive and equitable quality education remains an important strategic priority for UNHCR. Inclusion of refugees in national education systems is the agreed upon sustainable solution to achieve this goal (UNHCR, 2022). With UNHCR’s limited resources, primary education has been prioritized as essential support for both protection and education pathways. Despite this prioritization, participation rates remain low, and around a third of primary school- aged refugee children remain out of school (UNHCR, 2023a). Most of the primary education budgets are directed at meeting recurrent costs. Severe quality and capacity bottlenecks persist.

UNHCR’s policy to pursue the inclusion of refugees in national education systems as provided for in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Goal 4, and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is premised on creating productive and beneficial conditions for refugees and for host country nationals (UNHCR, 2019a). However, the inclusion agenda is relatively new, and requires an increased evidence base on how to implement successfully and finance for sustained results. This paper targets policy makers, donors, and program designers and explores

how access, quality, finance, and policy can be improved for primary education.

UNHCR commissioned this review in order to:

- provide strategic insights into existing successful approaches, the conditions for their success, and strategies, financing, and capacities needed to affect increased sustained change;
- bring clarity on how donors can effectively contribute resources for sustainable gains in refugee education; and
- contribute to an evidence base and emergent learning agenda on inclusion of refugees in national education systems.

UNHCR’s annual education reports (UNHCR, 2022, 2023a) summarise the latest available data on access, quality, policy, and finance for refugee education. This review has been designed to complement the global overview presented in these reports by looking at examples of where progress is being made, and the factors driving those successes.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The research questions and conceptual framing for this study were developed in response to the findings of a review of data and literature relating to access, quality, policy, and financing of primary education for refugees (Naylor, 2023). The review noted a growing body of evidence on promising practices (see for example Mendenhall et al., 2018; Save the Children et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2020) but more limited evidence on approaches that are known to have led to significant progress. A more recent evidence synthesis and intervention map (Burde, Coombes, Ring, et al., 2023), and set of country case studies (Burde, Coombes, Thomas De Hoop, et al., 2023) emphasised the need for more evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that run through national education systems.

Based on the evidence gaps identified, UNHCR sought to answer three overarching questions.

1. What are the breakthroughs and successes in the inclusion of refugee students in national education systems at the primary education level in terms of access, quality, financing, and policy parameters?
2. What were the key drivers and enabling factors contributing to these successes?

3. What are the contextual considerations that countries, donors, and international actors need to take into account when planning reforms to support the inclusion of refugee students at the primary education level?

## 2.1 REFUGEE INCLUSION IN EDUCATION AS A CONTINUUM

Inclusion of refugees in national education systems has been prioritized as the most durable and sustainable long-term solution for refugee children (UNHCR, 2019a). Inclusion in national education systems prepares refugee children and youth for a productive life in host countries. It can increase their safety and help to build social cohesion. Humanitarian agencies and governments recognise that the costs of the alternative solution, providing parallel education systems for refugees, are unsustainable.

Education of refugees takes place across a broad spectrum of policy and delivery contexts. Full inclusion

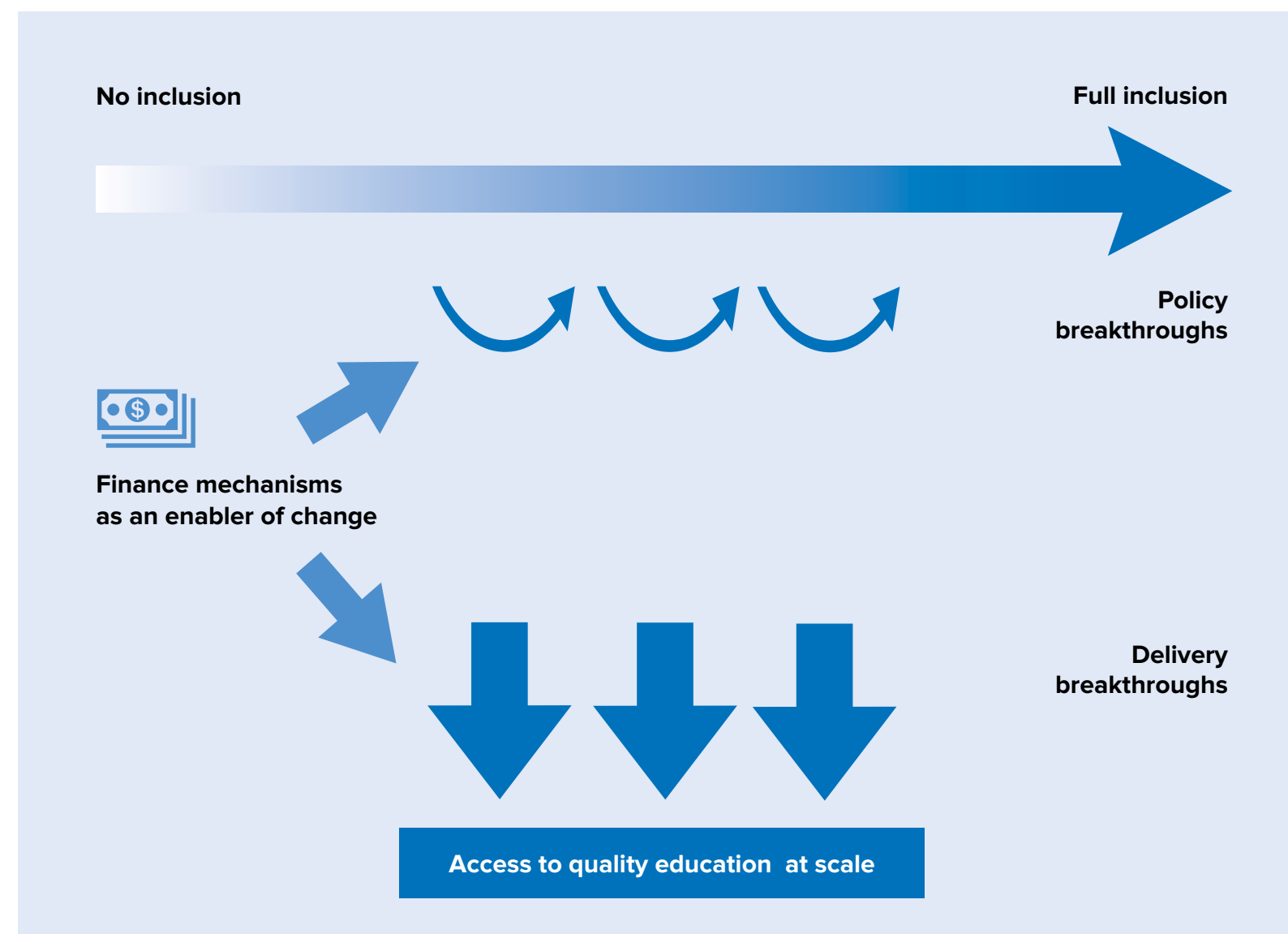
means that refugee children attend public schools with the same rights and financing as national children, and that they are given any necessary additional support needed to help them participate fully in learning and school life (UNHCR et al., 2023). At the other end of the spectrum, refugee children do not have access to formal education, although some non-formal provision may be available. Between these extremes there exists a range of degrees of inclusion, depending on which curriculum refugees follow, whether they learn in the same classrooms as host community students, and how schools are managed and financed (see Dryden-Peterson, 2018; UNHCR, 2022; UNHCR et al., 2023).

Inclusion serves as both the context in which effective refugee education programming takes place and a desirable policy outcome. A further important aspect of inclusion relates to who teaches refugees, and the extent to which refugees are included in the education

workforce. UNHCR has commissioned a separate study on the typology of teachers of refugees, so teacher policy is not a focus of this review.

The paper seeks to identify enabling factors and contextual constraints to help build an understanding of what works where. Enablers of change were identified by considering cases where there has been significant movement along the inclusion continuum (policy breakthroughs) and where policy implementation and programmes have led to improvements in access and quality at scale (delivery breakthroughs). These enablers include financing mechanisms, programme reforms, and actions of a range of stakeholders that have contributed to the breakthroughs. The conceptual framework is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



## 2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

This review used a “most significant change” approach, asking stakeholders to identify examples of breakthroughs in primary education for refugees at a range of levels: individual, local, national, regional, and global. Breakthroughs were validated through further interviews and document review, using an iterative approach to focus down on the most significant changes, and exploring the enabling factors behind these successes. Interviews and focus group discussions focused on two primary questions: “what positive changes and successes have you seen in primary education?” And “what contributed to that success?”

Initially a broad range of “candidate” breakthroughs were identified through a literature review, UNHCR operational data review, and interviews with stakeholders working at global and regional levels. Based on this list of candidates, a few countries from each region<sup>1</sup> were selected for desk-based case studies (see table 2). The selection of case study countries took into consideration country coverage by recent and concurrent research into education of refugees to avoid duplication, and to learn from education successes in less-well documented contexts.

For each desk-based country study, remote interviews were conducted with UNHCR country office education focal points alongside document reviews. Documents and data were sourced using country pages of [UNHCR's operational data portal](#), the [pledge database for the](#)

[Global Compact on Refugees](#), document search facilities on websites of the relevant donors and partner agencies, Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies, Reliefweb, and targeted searches using generic search engines. In the case of Iraq, further interviews were conducted with the Ministry of Education and an international partner representative.

The review included missions to Rwanda and Bangladesh to identify “what works” in terms of programme delivery in different policy contexts. These two countries were selected on the basis that they represent very different points along the inclusion continuum, and UNHCR has a recent history of education programming at scale in both. The case study missions were of five days duration each and included visits to primary schools and learning centres serving two different refugee communities in each country. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with UNHCR staff and partners, students, teachers, head teachers, supervisors, parents, and government representatives.

One limitation of the methodology used is that the findings are not as comprehensive as those of more structured approaches. Data collection was guided by the successes identified by respondents. This means that the desk-based country studies did not systematically cover all four areas of focus (access, quality, policy, and finance), but instead focused on the area of success within that context. It also means that not all types of refugee contexts were included, with examples from early education responses to new refugee crises being a notable exception.

**Table 1: Remote interviews**

Level	Organisations/ respondents
Global	Education Cannot Wait, GPE, Geneva Global Hub, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO IIEP, World Bank
Regional	UNHCR Regional Bureaus (N=7)
National	UNHCR country offices, (N=11), Save the Children (KRI), Ministry of Education (KRI), UNESCO IIEP (focus on Mauritania)

<sup>1</sup> Although some successes in the education of Ukrainian refugees were identified in the literature review and consultation with global stakeholders, countries from Europe were not included as case studies on the basis that learning from high-income country contexts is not always easily transferable to low- and middle-income contexts.

**Table 2: Case study countries (field-based studies in bold)**

UNHCR region	Country	refugee population 2022 (approx)	refugees as % of national population	World Bank economic grouping (2022)
Asia	Iran*	3400000	4.0%	Lower middle
Americas	Ecuador*	560000	3.1%	Upper middle
MENA	Mauritania	100000	2.2%	Lower middle
EHAGL	Djibouti	20000	1.8%	Lower middle
WCA	Cameroon	470000	1.7%	Lower middle
<b>EHAGL</b>	<b>Rwanda</b>	<b>120000</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>Low</b>
Asia	Pakistan	1700000	0.8%	Lower middle
MENA	Iraq	270000	0.7%	Upper middle
<b>Asia</b>	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>950000</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>Lower middle</b>
Southern Africa	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	520000	0.5%	Low
Southern Africa	Zambia	61000	0.3%	Low

Sources: Refugee population data extracted from [UNHCR Refugee data finder](#) on 31/08/2023, and rounded to two significant figures. Note that the estimates for Ecuador and Iran include people in refugee-like situations. World Bank data on [population](#) and [economic grouping](#) extracted 31/08/2023.

**Table 3: Field-based interviews and observations**

	Rwanda	Bangladesh
National	UNHCR, Rwanda Basic Education Board, World Bank	UNHCR, UNESCO, BRAC Institute of Educational Development
District/camp level	UNHCR, Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management Disaster Management (MINEMA), District Education Office, World Vision	UNHCR, education sector coordinator, UNICEF, BRAC, Save the Children, CODEC (implementing partners)
School/ community level	Students: current (N=20) and recent primary graduates (N=40), teachers: refugee (N=8) and national (N=6), head teachers (N=5), parent representatives (N=11)	Teachers: refugee (N=13) and national (N=14), teacher trainers (N=7), supervisors (N=5), Community Education Support Group members (N=21) including parents
Observations	Lessons, school tours	Tours of learning centres and training centres, Lessons, teacher training session (general pedagogy)



Ecuador. Refugee children and youth find hope in inclusive schools nationwide.  
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## 3. FINDINGS

This section presents the successes and breakthroughs identified by respondents at the global, regional, and national levels, and explores some of the contextual constraints. It then presents the findings from the field-based case studies in Rwanda and Bangladesh. These include examples of successes at the local and school level. Section 3.6 then presents the enabling factors identified across the successes presented.

### 3.1 GLOBAL LEVEL SUCCESSES

#### 3.1.1 Consensus building and international agreements

One of the successes identified during interviews at the global level was the extent to which the inclusion agenda has gained consensus across a wide range of governments and multilateral actors. The international community is, to a large extent, speaking with one voice regarding the importance of including refugees into national education systems as soon after arrival as possible. This consensus around the inclusion agenda as a key objective was apparent from interviews with respondents at every level: from global stakeholders to country office staff and their partners, and, in the case of Rwanda, among students, parents, teachers and Rwandan government officials.

UNHCR's [Education Strategy 2012-2016](#) (UNHCR, 2012) set out an approach of integrating refugee learners into national systems where possible, and inclusion in national education systems is central to the vision statement of UNHCR's more recent strategy, [Refugee Education 2030](#) (UNHCR, 2019a)

This consensus building of inclusion in education is part of a much wider set of discourse, agreements, and commitments set out in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016 and the UN Member States of the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018. The consensus has supported the establishment of more coordinated planning at the global level, including the [UNICEF-UNHCR Strategic Collaboration Framework](#) and a joint action plan developed by major multilateral donors to education (Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and World Bank) on [Ensuring More Effective, Efficient and Aligned Education Assistance in Refugee-Hosting Countries](#). These joint action plans could pave the way for more efficient, coordinated, and sustainable funding mechanisms for refugee education, if implemented effectively at the country level (see section 3.3.5 and 3.3.6).

<sup>2</sup> Data reported from 2020 onwards

#### 3.1.2 Overcoming data challenges

Having reliable data of refugee education is vital for informing planners and policy makers on where to focus their efforts, and for holding duty bearers to account. Over the past decade there have been considerable improvements in the data available on refugee education, including the availability of age and sex disaggregated data. But there are still major gaps. In 2023, UNHCR had recent<sup>2</sup> data on enrolment rates of refugee children for more than 70 refugee hosting countries. But these data did not include some large refugee populations such as those in Iran. Data on completion of primary education and learning outcomes were more limited, with only 23 countries reporting data on the number of primary school examination candidates and pass rates.

The inclusion agenda could ultimately lead to more systematic and comprehensive monitoring of refugee education through inclusion in national Education Information Management Systems (EMIS) and other national statistics on education. Currently, few national education data systems and surveys disaggregate by international protection status. In some cases, data are disaggregated into useful proxies, including nationality. The inclusion agenda therefore presents new challenges to the collection and monitoring of data on refugee education. These data challenges were a recurring theme raised during interviews conducted for this review.

Data on refugee learning outcomes are limited but are becoming more widely available. UNHCR has started collecting end of primary school examination data. These data, although not comparable between countries, give an indication of the number of students completing primary education, and can be used to compare learning outcomes of girls and boys, and of refugee and host community children. ECW encourages grantees to collect learning outcome data as part of the monitoring process and is supporting learning assessments in many contexts of forced displacement. In Bangladesh, as part of the roll out of the Myanmar Curriculum, the education sector has conducted a number of large-scale measurements of learning to inform the placement of children into the most appropriate grades (see section 3.5). However, country level interviews conducted for this review indicated that the data generated by these placement tests is of limited value for monitoring learning outcomes. Despite the joint action planning of multilateral agencies at the global level, education data sharing between organisations often remains limited at the country level. For example, no published summary of the data on learning levels of refugees in Cox's Bazar was available at the time of writing.



Cameroon. Refugee and host community children study together at school.  
© UNHCR/Xavier Bourgois



### 3.1.3 Improvements to the global architecture of international aid

Over the last decade, the architecture of international donor finance to education in protracted crises has evolved considerably. There are now a range of funding mechanisms that should, in theory, fund education across the whole of the humanitarian-development continuum, and support governments to include refugees in national education systems. UNHCR's support extends across the spectrum. But other funding mechanisms can provide support at specific points. ECW's First Emergency Response (FER) grants provide countries with support to meet the education needs of a sudden new influx of refugees. The Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) grants provide countries with medium term support as emergency education provision for forcibly displaced populations transition into longer term solutions. The eighteenth and nineteenth replenishments of the International Development Association (IDA18 and IDA19) included financing dedicated to supporting lower-income countries hosting large refugee populations: the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window (RSW) and the IDA19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR). Countries can use this funding to expand the capacity of schools in refugee hosting areas, improving education for host and refugee children. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) provides grants that support national education

planning processes and the implementation of national plans. Where refugees are included in national education plans, GPE grants can be used to strengthen education systems' capacity to respond to their needs.

In countries where the national policy already supports inclusion of refugees into national schools, these funding modalities have been used to support the implementation of the policies and overcome practical barriers. In Cameroon, for example, funding through the IDA18 RSW funding is providing school grants to schools in refugee hosting areas. By the end of 2022, 150 schools had received grants. These schools enrol 33,600 refugees (out of a total of 99,000 pupils). The number of refugees enrolled has already exceeded the target set for 2026 (World Bank, 2023).

When it is well-coordinated, donor financing can facilitate greater inclusion of refugees in international education systems. In Mauritania, for example, the potential funding through the IDA19 WHR has enabled the government to plan for greater inclusion (see section 3.3.5). However, it should be noted that although this funding supports governments to cover the initial costs of inclusion, it does not provide a mechanism through which the longer-term recurrent costs of including refugees in national systems can be shared by the global community.

GPE funding represents another mechanism through which the costs of including refugees in national systems can be shared with international donors. Many respondents for this review cited the inclusion of refugees in national education sector plans as recent successes, although it was noted that the plans for inclusion of refugees were often not costed, and rarely budgeted for. Interviews with UNHCR staff indicated that ensuring that refugees were considered in national planning processes associated with international donor financing of education systems required extensive support by education staff in UNHCR country offices (see section 3.3.6).

Although the international donor finance architecture has evolved, the absolute amount of international aid to education of refugees remains inadequate. A costing study by the World Bank and UNHCR estimated that the global cost of inclusion of all refugees into national education systems is around US\$4.85 billion per year. Based on a 2016 estimate, humanitarian and development aid to education of refugees would cover less than a sixth of this cost (World Bank and UNHCR, 2021). More recent evidence indicates that the conflict in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to international aid being diverted away from the education sector and away from refugee situations in low- and middle-income countries (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2023). Full responsibility sharing of the costs of educating refugees would require international donors to dramatically increase their overall aid to education in low and middle-income countries hosting large refugee populations.

### 3.1.4 Financing of refugee education in upper middle-income countries

Both GPE and RSW include eligibility criteria that exclude upper-middle income countries, even for countries hosting large refugee populations. Donors have often responded to large scale refugee crises in such countries through dedicated education funding streams. Jordan and Lebanon (upper middle-income until 2021) both received substantial education development aid to support the education response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Both countries were cited by global level respondents for this review as success stories in primary education for refugees.

By comparison, Iraq has received very little education development aid relative to the population of refugees that it hosts. In 2021, Iraq received only \$62 official aid to primary education per refugee hosted, compared to

\$164 per refugee in Lebanon and \$413 in Jordan.<sup>3</sup> For Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), where most refugees in Iraq are hosted, access to education development funding to support the inclusion of refugees is further constrained because it is an autonomous region of a federal republic. Official development assistance channelled through the federal government does not necessarily reach KRI, and inclusion of refugees is not a priority at the federal level.

Ecuador and Iran (upper middle-income until 2020) host very large numbers of refugees and are ineligible for the GPE and RSW funding. These countries already have very inclusive education policies but receive limited international support to implement them. Ecuador has received grants from ECW to support its response to the Venezuelan migration crisis. But Iran, recently identified as the country with the second highest refugee population in the world (UNHCR, 2023b) receives very little international aid for primary education. In 2021, Iran received only \$0.5 million official aid to primary education, and \$2 million to training, school feeding, and school facilities, representing around only \$4 per refugee hosted.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.2 REGIONAL LEVEL SUCCESSES

### 3.2.1 Regional frameworks supporting inclusion of refugees in education

In many parts of the world there are regional frameworks and agreements that support inclusion of refugees in education. Many of these predate the Global Compact on Refugees. For example, in West Africa, inclusion in education is supported by the Economic Community of West African States 1979 Free Movement Protocol. In member states refugees are generally able to access schools on the same basis as nationals, and in almost all cases attend schools alongside nationals. Most barriers are practical rather than legal, and refugees face similar barriers to locals, albeit with poverty, distance to school, and overcrowded, low-quality education being common barriers in many of the areas where refugees are hosted.

The European Union's standards for the reception of applicants for internal protection directive (Directive 2013/33/EU) obliges member states to enrol any school age child within the country into school within 3 months of their arrival, and states that there must be an assessment of their learning needs, with language and preparatory classes provided where needed. More recently, in 2017, the Intergovernmental Authority on

<sup>3</sup> Data accessed from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System, downloaded 23/6/23

<sup>4</sup> Financial data accessed from OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System, downloaded 23/6/23. Note refugee numbers are based on UNHCR 2022 estimate.



Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa developed the [Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education and its Operational Plan](#) as a non-binding legal instrument. This contributed to the development of multi-year costed national education response plans for Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda (ECW, 2022).

### 3.2.2 Increased data and evidence capacity in West and Central Africa

During the initial data and evidence review, it was notable that UNHCR's operational data on education access and learning outcomes in the West and Central Africa region was more comprehensive and accessible than data from other regions. This is largely due to the efforts of a full-time education data post at the UNHCR Regional Bureau, the only region with this level of dedicated staffing for monitoring education. During a three-year contract, the post holder has pulled together data from across the region on attendance, exam performance, outputs, and achievements, and produced annual data updates and dashboards. Country focal points have been trained on data collection. Seeing the data in use has encouraged them to contribute. However, where refugees are enrolled across many national schools, the effort required is significant. Interviews with UNHCR country office staff in several countries including Cameroon, Pakistan, and Zambia mentioned how they were working with governments to collect data disaggregated by protection status in EMIS.

## 3.3 NATIONAL LEVEL SUCCESSES

### 3.3.1 Inclusion of refugee learners in Iran

As discussed above, Iran hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world but receives minimal international aid to support their education. Respondents at the regional level highlighted Iran as a context where inclusion of refugees into the national education system had been particularly successful. In 2015, the Iranian Supreme Leader decreed that all Afghan children, including un-documented school-aged children, should be able to enrol in Iranian schools, and they are able to access public schools on the same basis as nationals. Accommodating refugees has led to overcrowding in some schools, and the recent influx from Afghanistan has exacerbated capacity constraints. UNHCR has supported the education sector through the construction of new schools in refugee hosting areas. The government provides the land, the teachers, and the teaching materials. The international donor funding available to support the new influx is minimal and insufficient, and the financial costs of education for refugees are predominantly being borne by the government.

### 3.3.2 Taking an inclusive approach from the onset of a refugee crisis

The consensus building around the importance of inclusion has changed the approach taken by humanitarian actors and donors at the onset of new refugee crises. Where possible, the international community has worked with national governments to support an inclusive approach from an early stage. Global level respondents mentioned Lebanon's Reaching all Children with Education initiative, launched in 2013 in response to the influx of refugees from Syria, as one such example. Global level respondents also highlighted the education response of Poland to accommodating Ukrainian refugees, and Colombia's response to the influx of Venezuelans displaced abroad.

Several countries covered by this review have included refugees in national systems from the onset of recent displacement crises. For example, in Cameroon when there was a big influx of refugees from the Central African Republic in December 2020, the local educational authorities in the area announced that they were accepting all children who entered the territory into the education system. Ecuador and Iran have also supported recently arrived refugees to enrol in public schools.

When there is a large and sudden influx of refugees into a low-income country, it can be very difficult to accommodate refugee learners in national systems, especially where the host country itself is a crisis-affected context, and national schools are already under-resourced and over-crowded. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has a very supportive legal framework for refugees. They are allowed access to all services on the same basis as nationals and have the right to work. But in practice there is very limited access to free primary schools in refugee hosting areas. It is challenging for UNHCR to advocate for refugee access to services on par with nationals, when national service provision is so poor and the needs of nationals, including around six million internally displaced persons, are so great. UNHCR has therefore taken a system strengthening approach, advocating for support to areas that have absorbed the most refugees. Raising funds and building consensus among donors at the country level for this approach has taken considerable effort (see section 3.3.6).

In many refugee contexts, parallel education systems have been established for refugees by the humanitarian sector. These parallel systems often predate UNHCR's strategic objective of inclusion of refugees in national education systems. They are often focused more on preparing refugees for return rather than for protracted refugee situations. The choice of curriculum was often guided by the desire of refugees to maintain continuity with the curriculum in their country of origin, and to learn in their home language. Schools in refugee camps and

Iraq. © UNHCR/Firas Al-Khateeb



settlements in contexts like Iraq, Mauritania, Pakistan, and Djibouti have been managed and financed by international agencies and their partners for many years, in some cases for decades. Although there is an increasing move towards the use of the curriculum of the country of asylum, some refugee education systems were set up to deliver the curriculum of the refugees' country of origin, that of a third country or an unaccredited curriculum developed by humanitarian actors.

Education sector responses are also constrained by national policies relating to other rights of refugees, such as policies around encampment and refugees' right to work. In many of the contexts included in this study, teachers of refugees have been hired on an incentive basis and their qualifications, training, and pay were often not aligned to those of teachers in the national system. In these contexts, transitioning learners, schools, and refugee education systems into the national education system becomes very challenging indeed, and examples of success were more difficult to identify. As one global-level respondent explained during an interview for this review: "Once you have a camp education delivery system set up, it's very difficult to unravel."

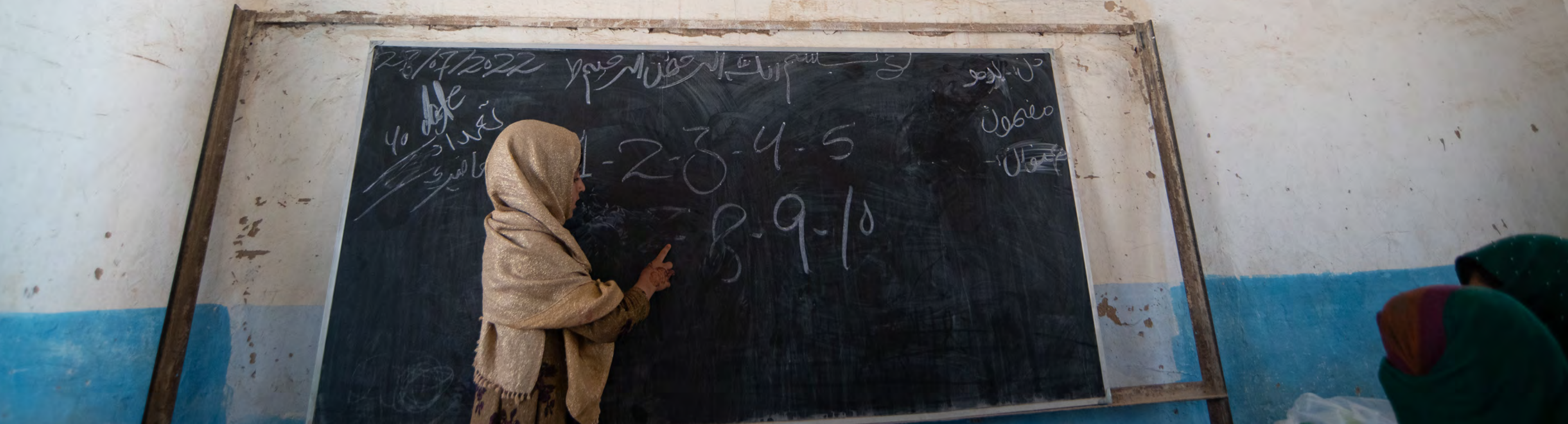
The following sections look at some of the cases identified by this review where promising progress has been made in transferring a parallel refugee education system into a national one.

### 3.3.3 Development and implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Iraq hosts around 290,000 refugees, mostly Syrian Kurds. The majority are hosted in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Until 2022, most Syrian refugees were taught in a parallel system: they followed the KRI syllabus but taught in Arabic. They learned in refugee schools, staffed by refugee teachers paid incentives by international humanitarian actors; primarily by UNICEF and Save the Children (Khan et al., 2020).

Prior to 2020, UNHCR's role in the coordination of refugee education in Iraq was relatively limited. There was no dedicated education officer, and UNHCR tasked the education cluster with coordination of refugee education. The Government of Kurdistan had a positive attitude towards integration, but progress in





this area was very slow (Khan et al., 2020). In 2019, the education cluster members came together to write to the government and request that it paid the teacher incentives. All partners agreed to stop paying incentives (Iraq Education Cluster, 2019). The stopping of incentive payments coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and some refugee children spent up to two years out of school as a result.

In late 2020, the UNHCR country office appointed an education specialist and UNHCR began to work more closely with UN agencies, partners, and donors to re-engage the Ministry of Education on the integration process, and to advocate for sustainable solutions in education. In late 2021, the Ministry of Education developed the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) and sought endorsement from the Minister of Education and the Kurdistan Regional Government Council of Ministers.

Initially many international partners wanted the government to lead on implementation planning, but progress in developing an action plan was slow, and time was limited. From March 2022, UNHCR took a more proactive role. They had already developed an internal action plan in anticipation of such a policy development, so were relatively well prepared to take a greater lead in the planning process. Two planning workshops were held, and the full government endorsement came in July,

with the plan to start delivering the curriculum in schools in grades 1-4 from September 2022.

The Ministry of Education agreed to take over the paying of refugee teacher salaries. There were bureaucratic challenges with the civil service pay structure, as the Iraq constitution does not allow for non-nationals to be employed as teachers. But the Ministry of Education worked around these challenges by including refugee teachers on the pay role through lecturer contracts. Following placement tests, 374 Syrian refugees were employed by the Ministry. UNHCR and other education partners agreed to fund classroom construction to expand the capacity of national schools.

Most Syrian refugees speak Kurdish, but a different dialect to that spoken in KRI, and they had not had formal education in reading and writing in Kurdish. The implementation plan therefore included bridging language classes for students, teachers, and, in some cases parents to help them to adapt to the Kurdish language curriculum. The launch of the policy was accompanied by a large back to school campaign and extensive community engagement. There were also remedial and catch-up classes for the children who had fallen furthest behind in their learning. The costs for these transition activities were covered by the international community.

After 6 months of implementation, around 26,000 refugee students were enrolled into grades 1-4 in 977 schools across the region, a 20% increase when compared to October 2021 enrolment rates. On 4 July 2023, the Ministry of Education announced the extension of the REIP with its implementation in grade five starting September 2023.

### 3.3.4 Transition to the National curriculum for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan's refugee villages

Pakistan hosts 1.7 million Afghan refugees and is one of the largest and most protracted refugee situations in the world. Around a third of refugees live in formally recognised refugee villages. UNHCR has been providing primary education in refugee villages for over four decades (UNHCR, 2019b). Until recently, refugee village schools taught a version of the Afghan curriculum in the languages of Afghanistan: Pashto for most, and Dari for some.

Transition to the Pakistan curriculum in refugee villages started in 2019. The transition took place alongside a national curriculum reform which puts greater emphasis on Urdu and English in the curriculum. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, refugee schools have been registered as non-government schools with the provincial Ministry of

Education and given identification numbers, an important first step in the synchronization of refugee education data with the provincial EMIS system. The government provides the textbooks, with some financial support from UNHCR.

The transition has been supported with extensive and continuous professional development for teachers in the refugee village schools. Whilst not accredited, it is aligned to government teacher professional development programmes conducted nationally. There is a shortage of qualified refugee teachers. Teachers in the refugee village schools are currently around 40% host community and 60% refugee community. UNHCR is looking for ways to provide more refugees and host teachers with access to certified teacher training.

Initially there were concerns regarding the changes in the medium of instruction, and that there was insufficient teacher training (Burde et al., 2023). More recent anecdotal evidence indicates growing support for the curriculum transition from the community, as it provides a pathway to certification and makes it easier for primary school graduates from refugee villages to transition to secondary school. However, there are still concerns about language barriers to parental support to learning, and loss of cultural identity and language. The impact of the change of medium of instruction on learning is yet to be seen.



Transitioning to the national curriculum provides a pathway to certification in the host curriculum and ensures that access to a quality curriculum is regulated by the host country.

### 3.3.5 Progress towards inclusion in Djibouti and Mauritania

Djibouti and Mauritania, although located on opposite sides of the African continent, face similar situations in terms of progressing inclusion of refugees in education. Both are small, middle-income countries, hosting populations of refugees that are large relative to the national populations (around 2%). In both countries, most refugees (around 80%) are hosted in camps in remote border regions of the country with camp-based primary education schools managed and predominantly financed by UNHCR. In both countries the government has demonstrated a strong commitment to working with international partners to move towards greater inclusion of refugees into the national education systems.

The Djibouti case provides an interesting solution to managing the issue of language of instruction for refugees. The national curriculum is taught in French. Refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia are hosted in camps in the south of the country. Primary schools in these camps used to deliver an uncertified version of the Kenyan curriculum in English. Refugees from Yemen, hosted in the north of the country, follow a certified version of the Yemeni curriculum, taught in Arabic. As a small francophone country, with Arab and English-speaking neighbours, the government of Djibouti can see the advantages of having its national curriculum available in English and Arabic, for citizens as well as for refugees. With financial support from UNHCR, Djibouti has translated its primary curriculum into English. This is now being taught in refugee schools in the south of the country and refugees sit nationally certified exams. There are plans to translate the curriculum into Arabic, so that this curriculum can be delivered in schools serving refugees from Yemen.

In 2019, the Government of Djibouti, UNICEF, and UNHCR developed and agreed on a strategy for refugees' inclusion in the national education system, together with an implementation plan. Full implementation of the plan would see refugees taught in public schools, managed, and financed by the Ministry of Education. However, aside from the transition to the English medium national curriculum in some camp schools, progress on the implementation of the plan has been slow. Respondents for this review identified the lack of dedicated technical expertise and high-level commitment to education at the UNHCR country level as significant factors delaying progress, together with constraints to UNHCR's funding modalities (see section 3.3.6 below). Human resource constraints have made it difficult for UNHCR to engage

fully in national education planning processes and discussions between the government and donors.

Mauritania hosts around 100,000 refugees, many of whom came from Mali over a decade ago. Most are hosted in the remote Mbera camp. Legally, refugees have access to national schools but until recently refugees were not included in national education planning processes. UNHCR leads the management of primary schools in Mbera camp. These schools were set up as an emergency response and deliver the Malian curriculum in French. Inclusion in the national system will require students to transition to the Mauritanian curriculum, taught in Arabic.

UNHCR has increased its technical expertise and staffing supporting education in Mauritania, including an in-country development specialist. In 2021, UNHCR led a workshop for education stakeholders from the Mbera camps and developed a 2-year road map, with an action plan and recommendations. Refugees were included in the national joint sector education review and are being included in the next 10-year national education plan. The government and development partners are working towards a new model with inclusion mainstreamed and teacher training institutionalised. UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) is providing technical support to the Government of Mauritania to develop a costed action plan, and to propose a way forward to integrate Malian students and teachers into the Mauritanian national system. Initially refugees were resistant to the idea of a change from the Malian curriculum, but since 2021 there has been a considerable change in attitude, with inclusion into the national system being widely seen as a desirable outcome. Systematic advocacy from UNHCR has contributed to a change of mindset among national level stakeholders, development partners, and the refugee population. As highlighted in the following section, changes to the donor funding environment have also helped to stimulate progress towards inclusion.

These two cases highlight the importance of UNHCR and other UN agencies investing in education expertise in countries where there is a clear appetite for greater inclusion of refugees into national systems.

### 3.3.6 Coordinating donor responses at the national level

Section 3.1 highlighted the successes in global consensus building around the importance of supporting refugee inclusion in national education systems, and commitments to joint planning by UN actors and multilateral donors. Joint planning for refugees is often not as easy at the country level where the education needs of other marginalised groups can "crowd out" the needs of refugee hosting areas from national education



Democratic Republic of the Congo. Online learning improve access to quality education for CAR refugees and Congolese. © UNHCR/Vittoria Moretti

planning processes, and from the agendas of donors and other UN organisations. From the interviews carried out with country level staff it was clear that many challenges remain in translating global level commitments to coordinated support to refugee education, into coordination at national and sub-national levels. The effectiveness of education planning coordination mechanisms has been analysed elsewhere (Nicolai et al., 2020). This section mentions cases where respondents identified country-level coordination as a limitation or enabler of the successes identified.

Djibouti illustrates an example of a context where lack of coordination of funding by international donors is presenting a barrier to progress in inclusion. The plan for refugee inclusion, as agreed by Government of Djibouti, UNICEF, and UNHCR in 2019, included adding refugee teachers to the pay roll, with a phased transfer of costs from UNHCR to the Ministry of Education over a 3-year period. If implemented as agreed, the plan would involve a significant increase in donor financing of teacher salaries to cover the first two years of the plan but would greatly reduce UNHCR's annual costs in the longer term. But the adoption of the strategy for inclusion was not matched with a joint fundraising and planning effort among partners. UNHCR's funding structure makes it difficult to for it to cover the full salary costs in the initial years of the plan. The UNHCR country office did not have a dedicated education advisor. This has limited the extent to which UNHCR has been able to engage with the Local Education Group, and to ensure that the plan for inclusion of refugees was fully considered during

national education development planning and financing discussions with development donors.

Some development funding for education in refugee hosting areas has been made available. For example, Djibouti has received funding through the IDA18 RSW for expanding education access. But this funding, managed by the World Bank, was primarily being used for infrastructure, and could not be used to cover teacher salary costs. In 2023, the planned transfer of teachers of refugees to the government pay roll remained stalled due to lack of donor funding.

With concerted and dedicated effort by UNHCR staff working at the national and subnational level, commitments to coordination by donors made at the global level can translate into effective coordinated funding of inclusion of refugees at the national level. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), UNHCR pulled together small but catalytic amounts of funding and technical support from a range of multilateral agencies to ensure that the needs of a remote refugee hosting region were considered in national education planning processes. The process also led to a commitment from the provincial leadership to pay the salaries of teachers of refugees in the future.

DRC has hosted a large population of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) since 2013, mainly in Ubangi Nord province. UNHCR has been supporting schools within refugee settlements for many years,



Bangladesh. High Commissioner visits Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.  
© UNHCR/Kamrul Hasan



paying teacher incentives. In 2021, there was a large influx, bringing the number of refugees from CAR to over 200,000. In June 2021, ECW provided a \$2 million First Emergency Response (FER) grant to support the education response. The funds were mainly used to improve the infrastructure of public schools in the refugee hosting areas. By October 2022, 56 classrooms had been completed out of a target of 100, and 8,000 refugee and host children enrolled in school. In October 2022, ECW announced a further \$2 million costed extension, focusing on teacher training, supporting transition to secondary education and local system strengthening through piloting of a learning assessment.

The funding coincided with the start of the national education sector review process. UNHCR advocated for Nord Ubangi to be one of the provinces included in the review. For the province to be included in the national review, UNHCR needed to find funding to cover the costs of a provincial education sector review. First, they collaborated with a social protection project financed by the World Bank through the IDA19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees. This project was able to construct some classrooms with funding for social infrastructure in the province. This freed up funds for the ECW FER grant to cover the costs of the first provincial education review workshop. GPE then agreed to fund the second workshop. UNESCO led the sector review process and staff from the Ministry of Primary and

Secondary Education and Vocational Training in Kinshasa came for the review. The findings were then presented at the national level education sector review in October 2022. During the provincial sector review process, the governor of Nord Ubangi agreed to progressively take over payment of teachers currently paid by UNHCR.

### 3.3.7 Supporting refugee girls' education

When the global refugee population is taken as a whole,<sup>5</sup> primary school-age refugee girls are slightly less likely to be enrolled than refugee boys. There are several countries where refugee girls' primary gross enrolment rates lag ten percentage points or more behind those of refugee boys (UNHCR, 2023a). But there are many countries where refugee girls have similar or higher enrolment rates to those of boys. Of the countries covered in this review, Ecuador, Iraq, and Rwanda had all achieved gender parity in primary enrolment rates for refugees. In Rwanda, UNHCR has supported the construction and staffing of dedicated girls' rooms in refugee-hosting schools and teachers and students reported that this had contributed to girls' attendance.

The Bangladesh case study below illustrates some of the strategies that can be used to support girls' education in contexts where cultural constraints and protection concerns, combined with a shortage of educated

adult females, present gendered barriers to access to education.

As with Rohingya refugee girls in Bangladesh, Afghan refugee girls in Pakistan face substantial challenges in accessing school, and many girls drop out before the end of primary school. Recent reliable enrolment data for refugees are limited, but available data indicate large gender disparities. A mapping of education hosting areas in 2017 recorded 47 per cent of Afghan boys enrolled in primary school, compared with 23 per cent of girls (UNHCR, 2017). UNHCR data reported by the Pakistan country office indicated that in refugee villages in 2021, half as many girls sat the end of primary school exam as boys. UNHCR applies similar gender responsive strategies as in Cox's Bazar: in formal schools there is a deliberate policy of recruiting female national teachers to balance the shortage of female host teachers.

In Pakistan there are also community-based girls' only classes that deliver an accelerated learning programme (ALP). The government is leading an extension of ALP education up to secondary as accredited non-formal learning. Mothers' committees involved in the management of ALPs have been important advocates for girls' access to education.

### 3.3.8 Linking education to protection in Ecuador

The UNHCR country office in Ecuador explicitly links its education programming to protection. It considers protection risks which act as barriers to inclusion in education, including risks such as gang violence, domestic abuse, child labour, child pregnancy, discrimination, and xenophobia. The process starts with identification of out of school children, and children at risk of dropping out, and ensuring all their details are registered on the secure database. The registration process involves interviews with all family members using the basic set questions from the Washington Group to determine disability status. With funding from ECW, UNESCO, UNHCR, and UNICEF and their partners provide targeted support to children based on UNHCR's protection needs analysis data. Alongside this community-level support, UNHCR and its partners work with schools and education authorities to raise awareness and train staff on Ministerial Agreement 26A which recognises the special educational vulnerability of children in human mobility (refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people) and protects their right to education. UNHCR is implementing a methodology to address xenophobia (*Respiramos Inclusión*) in 210 schools. The programme also provides psychosocial support to teachers.

Ecuador. Refugee children and youth find hope in inclusive schools nationwide.  
© UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard



<sup>5</sup> Based on the 70 countries reporting data



Rwanda. Digital education improves teaching experience in refugee-hosting schools. © UNHCR/Eric Didier Karinganire



## RWANDA CASE STUDY

### 3.4 RWANDA CASE STUDY

#### 3.4.1 The refugee contexts

Rwanda hosts around 130,000 refugees including 80,000 refugees from DRC, many of whom have been in Rwanda since 1996, and 50,000 from Burundi, most of whom arrived in 2015. Refugees are mostly hosted in camps around the country. Recent fighting in eastern DRC led to around 6,500 new arrivals in the 6 months since November 2022, with arrivals continuing into the second half of 2023. In this case study, Camp 1 refers to a camp hosting predominantly Burundian refugees, and camp 2 refers to the camp serving the more protracted caseload of refugees from DRC.

Article 18 of the Refugee Law enshrines into national law the enjoyment of all rights accorded to refugees by the 1951 Convention, including freedom of movement, right to work and own property. However, camp-based refugees need to request permission to leave the camp (IDA, 2021).

Most refugees speak shared local languages with the host communities and are able to understand Kinyarwanda, the national language of Rwanda. Refugees have had to adapt from French medium education in their own countries, to English medium education in Rwanda. But Rwanda itself has undergone a transition from French to English as the medium of instruction, so refugees and nationals face similar challenges with adapting to English medium education.

#### 3.4.2 Policy implementation

Inclusion in education is widely valued and thoroughly embedded. Rwanda is “walking the talk” of refugee inclusion in education, with refugees and nationals learning together in public schools. Article 18 of the 2014 Refugee Law provides refugee children access to learning in the same way as nationals. The commitment to inclusion, and awareness of its value, was evident from interviews at all levels: student, school, camp, district, and national. It was also evident across different stakeholder groups: parents, UNHCR staff, NGO partners, and government.

Schools serving camp populations are, in almost all cases, owned, managed, staffed, and funded by the government. The one exception is a school built inside a camp established in the 1990s (camp 2). This is staffed by refugee teachers paid incentives by UNHCR. But it is included in the national system to the extent that it follows the national curriculum, is a national examination centre, and enrolls some children from the local community. UNHCR is in the process of handing it over to the government as a public school. Even at this

school, the community valued the government’s policy of inclusion:

Thanks to the government of Rwanda there’s no segregation between refugees and Rwandans. We recommend that the school is integrated into the public system then we’ll get other good things from the government. Even the teachers will be paid well.

*PTA member, camp 2, 1/06/2023*

District education offices have played a key role in the implementation of inclusive policies. As one respondent from a multilateral donor described it:

Districts are super switched on regarding the value of integration and how to do it.

*Donor representative interview, Kigali, 2/6/2023*

From interviews and discussions at the schools, it was clear that the policy of integration was being enacted in the classroom. When a group of refugee and Rwandan secondary school students was asked to describe what had helped them to succeed at primary school, one of the most common themes that they spoke about was the teamwork, cooperation, and sense of unity among students. For example, one said:

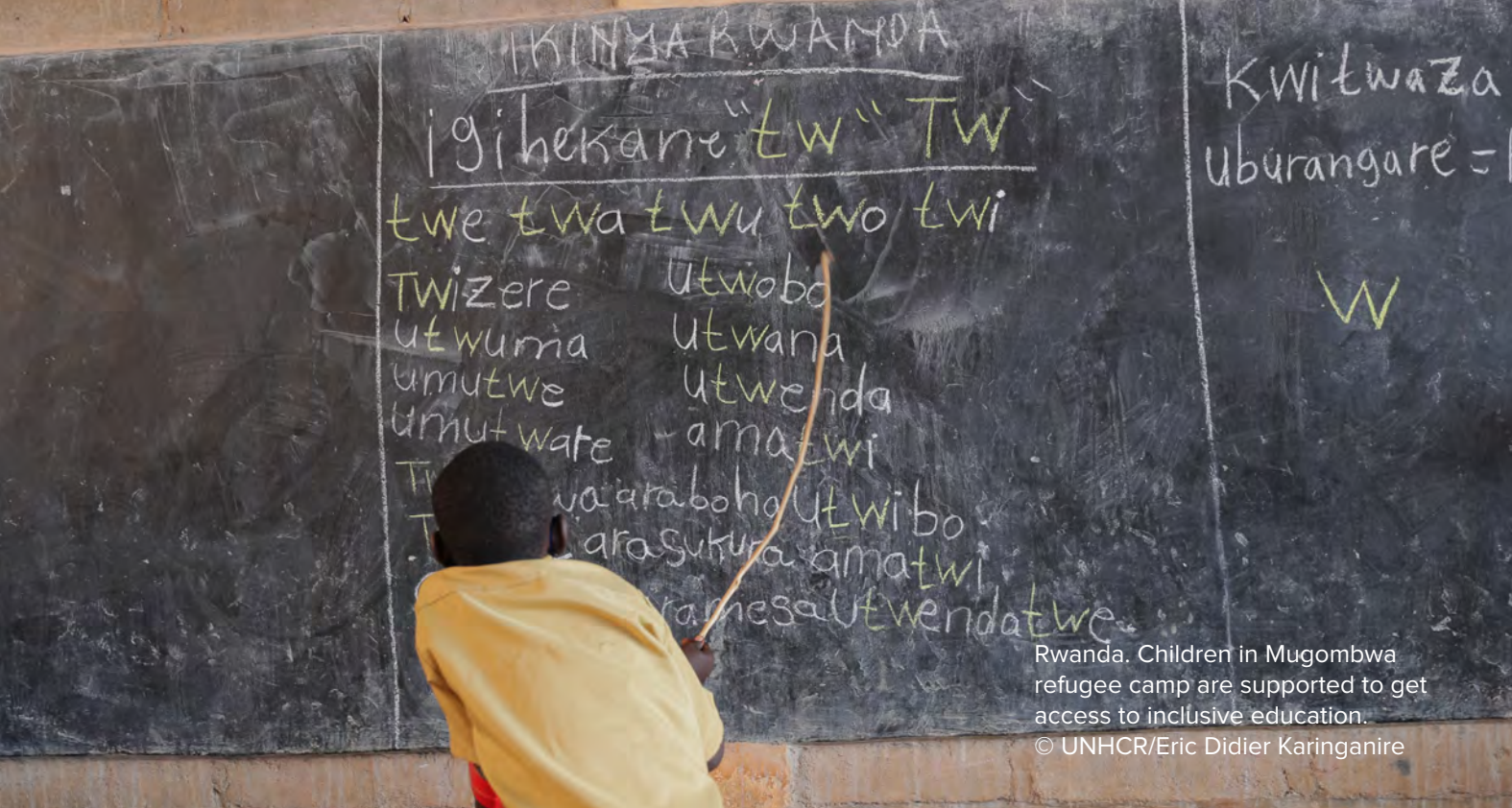
We had equal opportunities for all students, this helped to promote unity and it helps us to work together. We have different cultures and backgrounds, but this helps us to have success.

*Secondary school student focus group, 30/5/2023*

Teachers spoke of the value of inclusion more broadly. They valued the way that their school was accessible to all, including the poorest, and that the design and management of their school meant that learners with disabilities were also included.

Some administrative and bureaucratic barriers remain, and some new ones have arisen. For example, the district education officer interviewed for this study was very positive about employing qualified refugees as teachers and some (around 20) refugee teachers had been included on the government payroll through local recruitment practices. However, the teacher recruitment process has changed to a centralised online system that can only be accessed by national ID card holders, and not by refugees.





Rwanda. Children in Mugombwa refugee camp are supported to get access to inclusive education.  
© UNHCR/Eric Didier Karinganire

### 3.4.3 Access

Primary enrolment rates for refugees are high, with 94% of primary school-age refugee children attending school. Children among the recently arrived asylum seekers had been accommodated in local schools and would receive a bridging course to help them transition from French to English over the holidays.

Many respondents, but students especially, noted the important role that parents played in supporting and encouraging their children to attend school. Parents and students also pointed out that seeing refugees succeed in secondary school and go on to get scholarships for higher education and employment was another motivating factor. They also pointed out how the quality improvements (see below) encouraged good attendance.

According to respondents at camp 1, there had been notable increases in enrolment and attendance over the last five years, with a reduction in dropouts. The teachers noted a reduction in the number of early pregnancies. School managers also reported that parental engagement had improved. They attributed these improvements partly to activities to raise awareness of parents, including about the importance of childbearing girls continuing their education. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members mentioned their role in this awareness raising process. They spoke about how they had been involved in enrolment campaigns and followed up with home visits to families of persistently absent students. The teachers and students also noted the benefits of a dedicated girls' room in helping maintain their attendance.

UNHCR's programming approach is designed to ensure that education is free for refugees, and that all household costs are covered. Students are provided with free uniforms, stationery, and books. In recent years the Government of Rwanda has introduced a policy of school feeding, with all primary schools providing a mid-day meal. The costs of delivering this are shared between the government and parent contributions. UNHCR provides the parent contribution for refugees.

### 3.4.4 Quality

National exam pass rates for the schools at both camps were high. The school at camp 1 had seen a steady improvement in primary school national examination results over recent years. Pass rates had risen from 57% in 2020, to 71% in 2021, to 89% in 2022. In the 2022 exams, a student from this school was the best performer in French and had received a national language award. A school manager at this camp linked the school's successes in learning to the focus on play-based learning and mother tongue literacy in the early grades. At both camps, students and school managers spoke about the high quality of teaching. They attributed the success of the schools to teachers' hard work and expertise.

The school at camp 2 had consistently scored top out of the schools in the local area. In 2021, 91% of primary students had passed. In 2022, their results had dipped to second place (81% pass rate). The school manager attributed this drop in results to the fact that that year they had to run schooling in two shifts, so that secondary students could be accommodated in the same buildings as the primary students. Now that the secondary school

was fully functional, the primary students studied for the whole day and the school aspired to return to its position of top performing school in the area.

Much of the discussion with government teachers focused on the multiple forms of professional development that they had had access to including trainings, regular supervision, pedagogical support from the head teacher, subject based mentors, and weekly meetings with school-based mentors.

Whilst teachers acknowledged support of international agencies and NGOs, they saw the Rwandan Government and the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) as the main agents behind improvements. Schools hosting refugees benefit from national reform processes and donor funded interventions designed to improve the quality of education. These include blended teacher professional development models aimed at improving teacher competence in teaching literacy (English and Kinyarwanda) and numeracy and school leadership training.

When asked about the most important changes they had seen since they started at the school, primary students spoke enthusiastically about the tablets, projectors, and technology facilitated lessons that they now take part in. Devices have been provided with content that is available offline. It included materials that had been pre-approved by REB, and a wide range of curated e-books, and other teaching and learning materials, including videos. Devices could be connected to the internet and students had learned how to use search engines and other common applications. Each teacher had been provided with a laptop, in line with the national strategy for education technology. From the activities observed during the school visits, and the interviews with students, it is apparent that these devices are regularly used for teaching, with a focus on the upper primary grades. Teachers reported and were observed using their laptops to prepare lessons, source teaching materials, and to record student progress.

Students, school managers, and parents at camp 1 reported that there had been an improvement in discipline, and secondary students from both camps said that school discipline was one of the factors that led to their success at primary school. School managers and teachers attributed this to an improved mindset among students and parents, as well as to the programme of teaching life skills.

The schools provided a broad range of extra-curricular activities including clubs for gender equity, peace and harmony, and sports. Teachers and students participated in the monthly national community volunteering programme. As mentioned above, students valued the peaceful and cooperative culture at the schools, as well

as the hope that education gave for their future.

You have gone through bad experiences, but at school you get a chance to talk to friends, and you realise that you can have a good life.

Primary school student, camp 1, 20/5/2023

### 3.4.5 Finance

UNHCR Rwanda has received additional funding for primary education through its longstanding partnership with Educate A Child. This has contributed to the construction of school facilities, community awareness raising activities, and provision of uniforms and school supplies for students. There is also funding from ProFuturo for some of the technology provision in refugee hosting schools. The World Bank has funded the construction of 250 classrooms (primary and secondary) as part of an IDA grant through the Refugee Sub Window (RSW).

The key success in financing of primary education for refugees in Rwanda is that if donors finance the construction of schools in refugee hosting areas, the government provides teachers, learning materials, and covers other running costs. The positive policy environment, together with close working relationships between UNHCR, donors and the government, both at district and national levels, means that donor investment in infrastructure supports the long-term inclusion of refugees within the Rwandan education system.

One implementing partner representative described how the situation had improved, and attributed this to advocacy efforts at the district level:

Once a classroom has been built, this triggers the teacher to be deployed. It wasn't always this way. The previous partner had to advocate hard. But districts heard us and now they have taken on the responsibility of providing teachers.

Implementing partner interview, 30/05/2023

Refugees enrolled in government schools are also benefiting from education programmes funded by other development partners, including GPE and bilateral donors.

Although the supply side recurrent costs of primary education are largely covered by the government, UNHCR continues to cover recurrent household costs through provision of uniforms, school materials, and the school feeding contribution.



Bangladesh. Rohingya boys attending lessons at Pin Gou Njan youth club.  
© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

## BANGLADESH CASE STUDY

### 3.5 BANGLADESH CASE STUDY

#### 3.5.1 The refugee contexts

Bangladesh hosts over 950,000 refugees,<sup>6</sup> predominantly Rohingya, fleeing from persecution in Myanmar. The majority arrived during a sudden influx in 2017. They joined around 130,000 Rohingya refugees living in a situation of protracted displacement in Bangladesh since the 1990s. Most refugees are hosted in camps in Cox's Bazar district. In this case study, camp A refers to a camp hosting more recently arrived refugees, and camp B refers to the camp serving the more protracted caseload of refugees. Around 75,000 refugees have been transferred to a settlement on the island of Bhasan Char. This settlement is outside the scope of this study.

The Government of Bangladesh has a strict encampment policy and activities within camps are tightly regulated. The policy framework does not allow refugees access to livelihoods, wage-earning employment, or formal education in the Bangladesh curriculum. Standing policies were adapted to respond to the large influx in 2017 and have retroactively been applied to the historical refugee population (International Development Association, 2021).

The overcrowded nature of the camps means that space is very limited, making it difficult to create new infrastructure. Restrictions prohibiting the construction of multi storey and permanent structures further limit what is possible in terms of developing infrastructure for education and other services.

Most refugees speak Rohingya, which is an unwritten language. It is similar to the local Chittagonian dialect of Bangla, and refugees are able to communicate with the host community, although there are some linguistic differences. Whilst in Myanmar, rural Rohingya had only limited access to post-primary education, but those that managed to reach secondary school have a degree of fluency in Myanmar language. Some Rohingya use Arabic or Urdu in religious contexts (Translators Without Borders, 2020).

#### 3.5.2 Policy development and implementation

The government of Bangladesh does not recognise the more recently arrived Rohingya as refugees, instead it recognises them as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN). Government policy decisions regarding service provision for this population are taken by the National Taskforce on FDMN and executed by the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner based in Cox's Bazar. The partners that comprise the education

sector for the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar work with these government bodies. Direct interaction with the Bangladesh Ministry of Education is very limited.

Following the large influx of Rohingya in 2017, FDMNs were not allowed access to formal education. The education sector worked together to develop a non-formal alternative: the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA). This was approved by the National Taskforce and implementation began in 2019.

The LCFA was designed to cover the equivalent of pre-primary up to grade 8, based on four levels. It was an English medium curriculum. Research within the Rohingya community demonstrated that this curriculum was not greatly appreciated by parents and children. There was a strong demand for a national formal curriculum with a grade structure and clear progression to secondary education. Based on this demand, the education sector advocated for permission to conduct a pilot of a Myanmar Curriculum, starting in grades 6 to 9. This was approved in January 2020. The adaptation and use of textbooks from Myanmar formed the basis of what is understood as the "Myanmar Curriculum" in Cox's Bazar. At the time of writing, it was not accredited.

UNHCR worked with the education sector to produce a scale up road map, with a plan that by July 2022 the curriculum would be rolled out to kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2, then up to grade 10 in 2023. COVID-19 delayed the initial implementation of the pilot, so delivery started in December 2021. Although the pilot was not formally evaluated, there was a lot of scrutiny by government and by donors. The target of 10,000 learners was exceeded. It was clear that the community of more recently displaced Rohingya welcomed the use of a Myanmar curriculum. The donor community advocated that the delays due to COVID-19 increased the urgency of rolling out the Myanmar Curriculum to all grades. Delivery up to grade 2 began in July 2022. In May 2023, UNICEF was leading the implementation of placement tests of all children, in preparation for rolling out the curriculum to grades 3 to 10 for students who succeeded in passing an exam in July 2023.

The roll out of the Myanmar Curriculum has required close inter-agency collaboration between UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, and other partners, and persistent ongoing advocacy efforts with the Government of Bangladesh.

The government has set out clear guidelines on the recruitment of teachers. Each learning centre is staffed by a national teacher or educator. They are paired with a volunteer teacher from the Rohingya community. The official language of instruction provided by national

<sup>6</sup> Refugee population data extracted from [UNHCR Refugee data finder](#) on 31/08/2023



Bangladesh. Rohingya children attend youth club in Kutupalong.  
© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau



teachers is English, so the Rohingya volunteers deliver most of the curriculum which is in Myanmar language.

### 3.5.3 Access

In 2022, around 70,000 children were enrolled in primary classes in learning centres in the Cox's Bazar camps. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, survey responses indicated that most (82%) children aged 3-10 were attending learning centres, or home-based learning with a teacher, but for older children, especially girls, attendance rates were much lower, with 39% of girls in camps aged 11-14 not attending (compared to 19% for boys) (Cox's Bazar Education Sector and REACH, 2021).

The introduction of a Myanmar Curriculum has contributed to increased enrolment. The community places huge value on a formal national curriculum with a clear grade structure, continuing up to upper secondary. The previous non-formal curriculum (LCFA), designed to focus on foundational learning, whilst probably better adapted to learning needs of most children in the camps, was not widely appreciated, and demand was limited, apparently contributing to lower enrolment and attendance.

Many respondents for this review noted positive changes in parents' attitudes to education, with the introduction of a Myanmar Curriculum mentioned as an important motivating factor. The increase in opportunities for Rohingya to work in the camp as volunteers was also mentioned as a reason for the increased interest and participation in education.

The placement tests were used as an opportunity to enrol out of school children and raise awareness of the availability and value of education. The placement test exercise in 2023 involved rigorous community engagement. Through cross-sectoral collaboration, and support from the Government camp administrators, the education sector was able to set up registration booths throughout the community: in child friendly centres, health centres, and nutrition posts. 77,000 registered for the test and about a third of these were out of school.

There are very few secondary-educated females among the Rohingya, making it a challenge to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer female teachers. Some families are reluctant to send their daughters to learning centres with male staff. The sector has therefore focussed on recruiting female teachers from the host community where possible. Rohingya teachers interviewed for this study reported that seeing females being recruited as teachers encouraged girls to study.

Once girls reach puberty, many parents are reluctant to send them to mixed-sex schools. The community members consulted during the mission said that they would be very happy to send their daughters to a female-only class, even if it meant that they had to travel further than they would to a mixed-sex class. To support the access to education for adolescent girls (aged 11 to 18), Save the Children runs community-based learning facilities in refugee's homes. The staff reported that they had seen positive changes in attitudes to girls' education since the establishment of these classes.

The community-based learning space approach is also used for kindergarten classes. The use of refugee homes is an important strategy given the lack of space to accommodate new classrooms. UNHCR is also exploring collaboration with religious leaders and is delivering the Myanmar curriculum in 20 madrasas within the camps. Bangladesh has a history of delivery of formal education through the madrasa system, and this strategy has been linked to the country's own success in increasing girls' participation in education (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013).

A further huge challenge is delivery of education among the older caseload of registered Rohingya refugees who were following the Bangladesh curriculum until 2019. Respondents from camp B were very resistant to the introduction of the Myanmar curriculum and did not want either the LCFA or the adapted Myanmar curriculum that the education sector had developed to replace the Bangladesh curriculum. According to the teachers, headteachers, and implementing partners, resentment at withdrawal of access to the formal Bangladesh curriculum and education in Bangla has led to high levels of absenteeism and school refusal among the community, with many children not returning to school since the COVID-19 closures in 2020. As with the more recent caseload, respondents expressed a very strong desire for a formal curriculum. Most are second generation refugees, taught in Bangla medium, so Myanmar language is their fourth language, and teachers and parents interviewed for this review expressed very strongly that they did not want to learn Myanmar language or teach it to their children.

### 3.5.4 Quality

In late 2018, an assessment found that 76% of 6-14yr olds were at level 1 of the LCFA (roughly equivalent to kindergarten level), and only 1% were at level 3 or above. By the end of 2019 most level 1 learners (67%) had been promoted to level 2. However, promotions from level 1 to 2 were largely based on attendance. Promotion to level 3 and above was based more on learning outcomes, and by the end of 2019 only 12% of learners were in levels 3 or above (Cox's Bazar Education Sector and REACH, 2021). Given the very limited access to education during the first years after their displacement, as well as initial instruction provided in English when Rohingya teachers were not present in classrooms, it is not unsurprising that children's apparent learning outcomes registered at low levels.

Although this review did not have access to data from recent learning assessments, there was anecdotal evidence of improvements in learning. Progress in foundational learning at a large scale was one of the key successes mentioned by several respondents.

400,000 children can now write their name count and read some English, and at the community level there is a hope that their children can get an education.

*Implementing Partner, camp A, 5/05/2023*

Several respondents, including implementing partners, teachers, and members of a community education support group, mentioned that the children were passing on their literacy skills to their parents.

*I've seen a big improvement in numeracy and literacy not just the students but also the parents. Initially they could not read or write.*

*National teacher, camp A, 5/05/2023*

Overall, the quality of education observed in the learning centres visited for this review was remarkably high. The classrooms were well lit and ventilated bamboo structures. The walls were covered with stimulating learning resources and beautiful decorations made by the children. The girls and boys in the class were enthusiastic, confident, and keen to show their work. The teachers were observed using interactive teaching methods. Each class has one Rohingya teacher and one national teacher. The teachers appeared to work well together as a team, and interviews confirmed that this was the case. One teacher would be leading the lesson from the front, while the other circulated among the students, providing individual support.

There has been a large investment in teacher capacity development. The pedagogy training session observed during the mission was engaging and interactive. The training centre was designed to look like a classroom, and there were training and teaching resources covering the walls. During the training session observed, trainees practiced planning and delivering lessons through role play and play-based approaches. Short courses in the training centre are followed up with longer periods of supervised classroom-based practice. The basic pedagogy course is certified by BRAC and takes two months to complete. Rohingya teachers described how their approach to teaching had changed as a result of the training.

*At the beginning I taught as I had seen at home in Myanmar: the teacher comes in, starts to lecture and then leaves. But now we have been trained, we are using play-based methods and many activities.*

*Rohingya teacher, camp A, 06/06/2023*



The teachers in the focus groups all agreed that they had seen significant, and very positive changes in the learners' behaviour as a result of introducing more participatory pedagogies. The national teachers described how the children had initially been very afraid of the teachers, but now they had a good relationship with them. Both groups of teachers mentioned that there was no corporal punishment in learning centres.

The constrained context, with very limited physical space for learning and limited policy space (e.g. restrictions on use of Bangla language at the same time as insistence of use of teachers from the host community) has driven innovation to develop a system that reflects international best practice in many aspects. For example:

- learners are assigned to the appropriate grade based on a learning assessment, facilitating teaching at the right level;
- teacher capacity development is continual and predominantly classroom-based. Short centre-based training courses are followed up by supervised classroom-based practice, and regular mentoring sessions; and
- teachers work as teams: in each learning centre a Rohingya teacher is teamed with a host community teacher, teachers plan lessons and teach together. Teachers from different learning centres come together regularly in study circles.

High quality pedagogy training by BRAC, and continual supervision and support is resulting in good teaching practices. Child friendly learning environments, with stimulating classrooms and small class sizes also contribute.

However, the use of Myanmar language as the medium of instruction presents huge challenges around quality assurance, teacher capacity and recruitment, especially as the curriculum is rolled out to higher grades. The Rohingya community has limited capacity in Myanmar language, and the national teachers virtually none. In practice, much of the oral communication in learning centres was conducted in Rohingya and Chittagonian. Language presented huge barriers to effective teaching and learning under the LCFA (Cox's Bazar Education Sector and REACH, 2021). But the transition to a Myanmar curriculum has exacerbated some language-related capacity constraints. Most of the subjects (6/7) and curricular materials are in Myanmar language, placing a disproportionate burden of lesson delivery on the Rohingya teachers.

<sup>7</sup> For example, during 2023 the World Food Programme cut food rations from \$12 per month to \$8 per month in response to funding short falls. See United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2023) "[Bangladesh: UN experts decry devastating second round of rations cuts for Rohingya refugees](#)" accessed 30/10/23

Trainers, supervisors, and implementing partner staff are nationals and do not read or speak Myanmar language, greatly limiting their capacity to assess the quality of lesson content delivery. The limited capacity in Myanmar language has already led to significant quality compromises. For example, the first round of placement tests in 2022 included some open questions and were marked by Myanmar language speaking teachers. But this was logistically very challenging. The 2023 round was primarily based on multiple choice response questions so that it could be marked by non-Myanmar language speakers. This limits the diagnostic capacity of the test, especially for children with emergent literacy in Myanmar language.

The education sector has formed cross-border working groups with agencies in Myanmar to facilitate access to Myanmar curricular materials and Myanmar language expertise. The presence of education technical expertise in UN agencies based in both countries has facilitated cross-border working.

### 3.5.5 Finance

Education of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is funded by a wide range of donors including European Union, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Global Affairs Canada, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development, Office, USAID, and the LEGO Foundation.

ECW has provided over \$30 million funding, mainly through MYRP grants and GPE transferred over \$8 million through its accelerated funding facility in the first year of the response. The refugee hosting area has received funding to education through an IDA Refugee Sub Window (RSW) grant, supporting education in the camps and in the surrounding area.

The roll-out of the Myanmar curriculum will require a considerable scaling up of investments in teachers, learning centres, Myanmar language medium teaching materials, language and subject based training and supervision in order to accommodate more learners and to teach higher grades. The sector is trying to implement this scale up in the face of funding cuts to the wider humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis.<sup>7</sup>



Rwanda. Primary school students use tablets in the classroom through partnership with ProFuturo Foundation. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno

## 3.6 ENABLING FACTORS IDENTIFIED FROM THE COUNTRY CASE STUDIES TO INFORM FUTURE POLICY AND PROGRAMMING ELSEWHERE

Many of the factors contributing to the successes described above are highly contextual and specific to the countries in which they took place. For example, Rwanda's unique history means that many of its leaders have experienced living as refugees themselves. It has contributed to a concerted and conscious national effort to promote peace, unity, and equality. Conversely, the refugee policy context in Bangladesh represents one of the least inclusive situations in the world. This restrictive context has pushed the education sector to work closely together to provide innovative approaches to providing quality education. This section highlights the transferrable enablers of the successes identified in Rwanda, Bangladesh, and in the desk-based country case studies conducted for this review.

### 3.6.1 Access

- Interviews with refugees in Rwanda and Bangladesh indicate that parental support is often key to students' individual successes in primary education, and that parents can play a pivotal role in encouraging all households to send their children to school. The case studies from Ecuador, Iraq, and Pakistan also highlighted the importance of community awareness campaigns and close

collaboration with parents in driving up enrolment and attendance.

- Viable post-primary education pathways, including accessible, quality secondary education, are important for raising and maintaining demand for primary education. The Pakistan case illustrates how transition to a national curriculum can facilitate this.
- The Bangladesh case illustrates that refugees put a high value on access to formal, national curricula that follow a traditional grade structure over informal "custom made" competency-based frameworks. Introduction of a formal curriculum can boost access.
- Evidence from Bangladesh and Pakistan indicates that creating female only learning spaces that deliver a formal curriculum within homes and religious education centres can facilitate access to education for adolescent girls in contexts where their safety and/or cultural attitudes limit their access to mixed schools.

### 3.6.2 Quality

- Evidence from refugee contexts in Rwanda and Bangladesh demonstrate that, as found in non-refugee contexts, teacher development programmes that combine short centre-based training with more extended periods of supervised classroom practice, supported by self-study materials and peer-learning (teacher study circle) systems are effective at improving the quality of teaching.
- The case studies from Bangladesh, Djibouti, and



Pakistan illustrate how the introduction of a new curriculum can be used as an opportunity to assign children to grades based on their learning levels, and to upgrade teachers' basic pedagogical skills.

- The Bangladesh case indicates that pairing national and refugee teachers in collaborative teams can bring together different skill sets (e.g. language skills and pedagogic skills) to provide for the wide range of learning needs often found in refugee classrooms. It also enables teachers to learn from each other.
- The Rwanda case indicates that if education technology hardware is provided in forms that align with national education reform initiatives, and with software that gives learners access to approved curricular and supplementary materials, then utilisation rate is likely to be high.
- From interviews with students in Rwanda it was clear that young people who have experienced the trauma of forced displacement value school environments that are peaceful, disciplined and where they can learn and socialise with children from other backgrounds. The Ecuador case provides an example of school-based programming to promote social cohesion between host and refugee learners.
- The cases of Djibouti and Iraq illustrate that making the national curriculum available in a language that refugees are familiar with can be a useful steppingstone in transitioning parallel refugee education systems into national systems.

### 3.6.3 Policy shifts

- Many of the cases in this study highlight the technical and political complexity of transitioning from a parallel education system for refugees, financed and managed by international actors, to a system in which refugees, and the teachers of refugees, are fully included in national education systems. Where progress has been made, it has been through coordinated and proactive actions by governments, humanitarian and development actors, leveraging the widespread global consensus.
- The cases of Iraq and Mauritania illustrate that having an education technical expert in the UNHCR country office can help to accelerate the planning and implementation of reforms that support the inclusion of refugees into national education systems. UNHCR education officers need to be able to engage authoritatively with the government, donors, other UN agencies and civil society organisations.
- The cases from Cameroon, DRC, and Rwanda illustrate that close partnership with local education authorities supports the implementation of inclusive education policies and the sustainability of investments in refugee education. Respondents in the Iraq case study also highlighted the importance of including district level government representatives

in the development and implementation of inclusion policy reform.

- The cases illustrate the need for careful planning of the timing and sequencing of the implementation of policy reforms for example: in Bangladesh, the Myanmar curriculum was initially piloted in grades 4-6 to meet the demand for post-primary education among refugees. In KRI and Pakistan, the transition started with lower grades. The condensed timeframe for the implementation of the REIP in KRI was problematic for grade four learners as they had to sit national exams in Kurdish, having studied in Kurdish medium for only one year.
- The cases of the DRC, Mauritania, and Pakistan illustrate that key moments in national planning and reform processes, such as an education sector analysis, the development of an education sector plan, or the introduction of a new curriculum, can be used as windows of opportunity to advocate for and progress the inclusion of refugees into national systems.
- Many of the cases illustrate the importance of close engagement with refugee communities when planning reforms for greater inclusion. The cases in Bangladesh, Iraq, and Pakistan illustrate how changes in curriculum and language of instruction at the primary level can motivate demand when they are seen as leading to greater opportunities for post-primary education. But communities are likely to resist changes, especially to the language of instruction, when post-primary options are limited.

### 3.6.4 Finance

- Donor investment in school infrastructure in refugee hosting areas can support the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, provided there is close coordination between UNHCR, Ministries of Education, local education authorities and development partners, as observed in Rwanda.
- Although there are clear efforts at the global level to coordinate donor support to education of refugees, coordination at the national level can be more challenging. UNHCR education officers and development officers at the country level can play a key role in facilitating this.
- The DRC case illustrates the potential of taking an area-based approach to securing sustainable financing for education in refugee hosting areas. Conducting an area-based education assessment with a range of local and national stakeholders is an important element of this approach.
- The cases of Djibouti, Iraq, and Mauritania indicate that, where there is a clear appetite and willingness of a government to move towards full inclusion, UNHCR may need to “invest to divest” by frontloading investment in technical assistance

and covering some of the transition costs of teacher training, training and materials development to support transitions in medium of instruction and curriculum, and transitioning teachers of refugees onto the national government payroll.

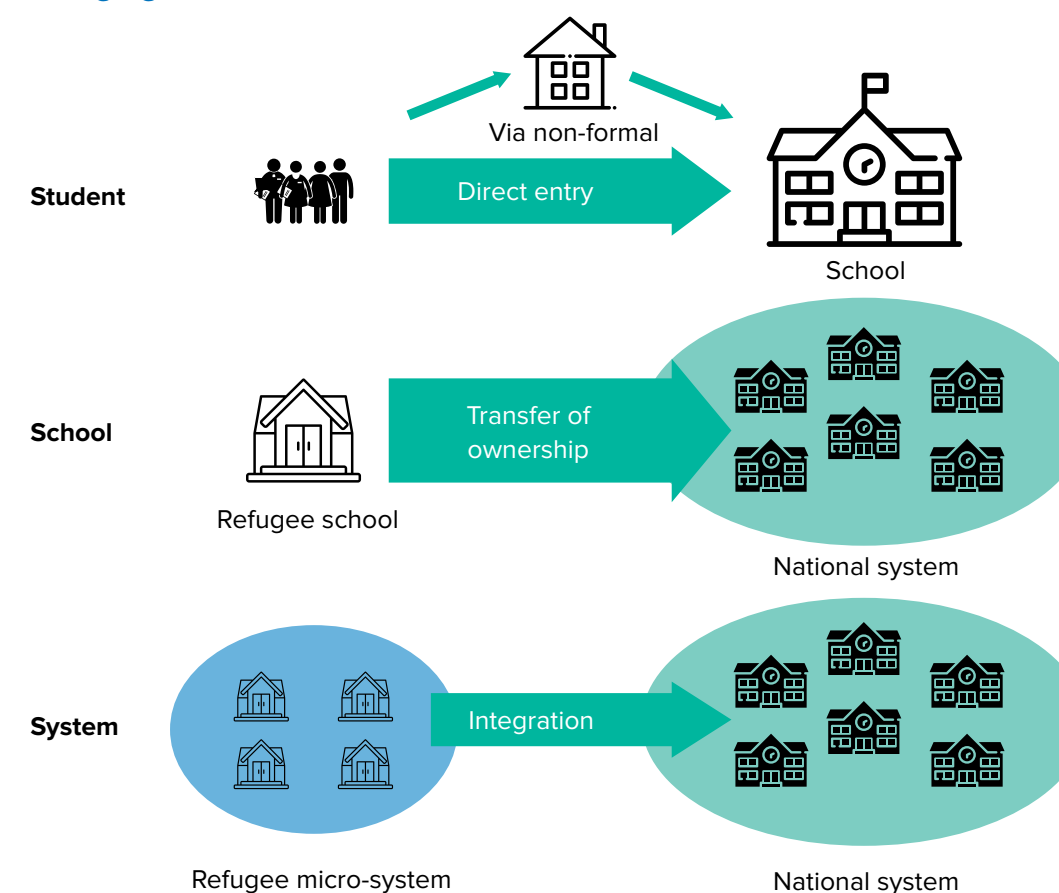
- Any reduction in humanitarian funding needs to be accompanied by additional international development funding to education to support governments to expand the capacity of their education systems to accommodate refugees. Restricting some forms of humanitarian funding, such as teacher incentives, can act as a catalyst to drive forward reforms to include refugees in national systems, but can put access to education in refugee areas at risk if donors are not willing to share the costs of inclusion through development funding.
- Some respondents at the global level saw Lebanon and Jordan as examples of successes: where large amounts of donor development investment have supported the inclusion of Syrian refugees into the public systems. However, it was notable that Iran and KRI both host large numbers of refugees and have inclusive education policies but receive relatively little aid to education from international donors. The cases highlight the concern that geopolitical interests, and efforts to limit migration to Europe remain significant determinants of the distribution of donor financing to education for refugees.

### 3.6.5 Transitions

There is already a vast body of evidence regarding what works in primary education in development contexts. Much of what has been learned about what works in non-refugee contexts can be applied to improving primary education for refugees. However, in refugee contexts there are additional challenges around managing transitions: transitions of individual refugee students into primary schools and beyond, transitions of curricula and language of instruction, transitions in the management of the education workforce, and transitions in how education of refugees is financed. Achieving success in primary education for refugees requires careful management of these transitions.

As it continues to develop its policy work, programming, and organisational learning in the primary education subsector, UNHCR should focus its technical expertise and evidence building around managing transitions in education for refugees. In many of the successful transitions identified in this review, UNHCR education staff working at the country level played a key role in coordinating local, national, and international actors and driving forward positive change for refugee education. The different types of transitions are outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Managing Transitions





Pakistan. Afghan refugee students attend a public school in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. © UNHCR/Saiyna Bashir



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

This review sought to identify what works in progressing access, quality, and governance of primary education for refugees. It has done this by identifying examples of successes and looking at the enablers and contextual considerations behind those successes: from global level consensus building and international aid architecture, to the individual successes experienced by refugee learners.

Every refugee learner who acquires foundational skills and graduates from primary school represents a success. The refugee students, teachers, and parents who contributed to the case studies in Bangladesh and Rwanda identified what had enabled success in their contexts. Three overarching themes emerged:

- **Parents** were identified as one of the main success factors for enrolment, attendance, and learning: encouraging their own children to study and parents of other families to send their children to school.
- **Pathways** to secondary and higher education, via a formal national curriculum, were seen as important for motivating parents to send their children to primary school and inspiring learners to study hard.
- **Peaceful collaboration** between refugees and host community members was valued by students in Rwanda and by teachers in Bangladesh.

These enabling factors were also evident in many of the narratives of success described by respondents working at the local, national, and global levels.

The successes and enabling factors identified in this review contribute to the evidence of what works in primary education for refugees. There is already a vast body of evidence regarding what works in improving access, quality, and governance of primary education in development contexts. Much of what has been learned from non-refugee contexts can be applied to improving refugee education. However, in refugee education there are additional challenges around managing transitions: transitions of individual refugee students into primary schools, transitions of curricula and language of instruction, transitions in the management of the education workforce, and transitions in how education of refugees is financed.

The cases of Ecuador and Iran can be considered, to some degree, “best case scenarios” in terms of inclusion in education. Both countries have absorbed large populations of refugees into their national school systems. In both countries the language barriers are minimal. Barriers to enrolment related to costs and certification have been addressed. UNHCR’s programming in Ecuador demonstrates how a rigorous assessment of individuals’ protection and education needs can support their transition into the most appropriate level of education, and used to target support to address protection risks that could lead to dropout. Support to the social integration of refugee students within schools is also important, working with school communities to address xenophobia and promote social cohesion.

In countries like Cameroon, DRC, Rwanda, and Zambia, policies support inclusion in education, and to a large extent refugees are included in national systems: they study the national curriculum alongside national students. In these contexts, UNHCR pays teacher incentives, either to expand the capacity of national schools or, in a few cases, to staff schools managed by UNHCR and its implementing partners. Transitioning the management of teachers into national systems is very challenging because of the significant recurrent costs involved and because refugee teachers often lack the required qualifications. If it is well coordinated, as seen in Rwanda, funding from IDA to support school construction in refugee hosting areas can be used to facilitate this transition. The DRC case study indicates the potential of GPE funding to play a similar role.

In contexts like Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, and Pakistan, parallel education systems have been set up for refugees, and refugees followed a curriculum in a different medium of education to what was taught in most national schools. Transitioning from these parallel systems into full inclusion of refugees into the national education system is very complex and challenging, even where there is political support for inclusion from the national government. As well as the politically and financially difficult issue of transferring the management of teachers, the sector needs to address language development needs of learners, teachers, and parents,

teacher development, provision of teaching and learning resources and expanding the capacity of public schools to accommodate refugees. Key moments of national education reform can be useful opportunities to instigate transitions, as these can be used to ensure that refugees are included in sector planning and donor financing discussions. Transition to a national curriculum during the introduction of national curriculum reform can support the inclusion of teachers of refugees in national teacher professional development programmes.

Although there is very little prospect of Rohingya refugees being included into Bangladesh’s national education system in the near future, managing the education of refugees in Bangladesh has also involved the management of transitions: the transition of individual refugees into the appropriate classes through placement tests, and administering a sector-wide change to the curriculum and language of instruction. The transition to the Myanmar Curriculum from the non-formal LCFA curriculum was welcomed as a very positive reform by the more recently arrived refugees and had increased the demand for education. But among the older caseload of Rohingya refugees, who had previously had access to the Bangladesh national curriculum, the transition to the Myanmar Curriculum was a backwards step and was having a negative impact on access. This case highlights that policy gains made along the inclusion continuum can be reversed, and the need for ongoing advocacy work in support of refugee inclusion, especially during new influxes.

UNHCR education staff have a key role to play in managing and facilitating these transitions. When UNHCR is not fully engaged in the education sector, progress can stall. Although there is almost unanimous commitment among donors to the importance of access to quality education for refugees, and to the inclusion of refugees in national systems, the protection of refugee’s right to education can fall through the gaps in national education planning and financing processes unless UNHCR has a seat at the table. Where donor finance is being directed to improve education in refugee hosting areas, it can be more effective if it is well-coordinated, and UNHCR education country level staff can play an important role in this coordination process.

In order to be an effective advocate for improvement in the education of refugees, and to provide effective technical support, UNHCR needs to have access to more and higher quality data on refugee’s access to education and learning. Data remains a huge challenge, but greater data sharing between organisations and disaggregation of national EMIS data by protection status could dramatically increase the availability of refugee education data.



Cameroon. Refugee and host community children study together at school.  
© UNHCR/Xavier Bourgois

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section first sets out recommendations for approaches to programming, policy, and financing in a range of different refugee education contexts. It then presents a learning agenda for how UNHCR, as an organisation can most strategically use, generate, and share data and evidence relating to primary education for refugees.

### 5.1 Progressing inclusion and responsibility sharing in the financing of refugee education

#### Where refugees are already included in national systems

- Donors should work together with local and national governments to assess education sector needs in refugee hosting areas, and to develop and finance plans to address these. UNHCR country office education staff have an important role to play this.
- The international community should support governments to assess refugee children's learning, language, and protection needs to support their transition into the most appropriate level of education, and to provide targeted, ongoing support.
- School communities hosting refugees should be supported to address xenophobia and promote social cohesion.

#### Where parallel delivery systems have been established for refugee education, and where host governments show openness to greater inclusion in education

- UNHCR should strategically target key moments of national education reform (for example education sector assessments and plan development, curriculum reform) to plan for a staged transition to inclusion of refugees into the national system.
- Donors need to work with governments, and with each other to coordinate a transition from humanitarian modes of financing of refugee education, to a development funding modality, with refugees fully included in national systems. Donors from high-income contexts need to consider how they take shared responsibility for the inclusion of refugees in national education systems in low- and middle-income hosting countries; not only for the initial costs such as expanding school infrastructure, but also for the longer-term cost implications.
- UNHCR has a key role to play in this coordination process, as so it needs education technical staff in country.
- International agencies financing education for refugees need to be transparent with each other on how the funds are being used.

#### Where host governments are not open to inclusion of refugees in national education systems

- UNHCR and its partners in the refugee education sector should work together with refugees, the host government and, where necessary, with UN agency country offices in neighbouring countries to identify and agree on a certifiable national curriculum that can be delivered to refugees.
- UNHCR and its partners in the refugee education sector should seek opportunities for collaboration with a range of national education actors, including teachers, universities, and NGOs, in the delivery of education.

#### At the onset of a refugee crisis

Education responses at the early stages of a refugee crisis should be designed in a way that balances the need to provide immediate access to quality primary education with the longer-term goal of full inclusion in national systems. The most appropriate response will always be highly contextually dependent, taking into account national policies on refugees and education; as well as gender dynamics, local education system capacity, language issues, and many other factors. As noted in the methodology chapter, a limitation of this review is that it includes very limited evidence from contexts of recent large influxes of refugees. However, it highlights issues that should be considered when planning an initial response in order to avoid potential barriers to inclusion at a later stage. For example:

- if new schools/ learning spaces need to be built, work with the Ministry of Education and its local offices to agree how these can be registered with, owned and managed by the Ministry of Education; either from the outset or after a period of planned transition;
- if language capacity constraints make it difficult to deliver the national curriculum in refugee settings, explore the options for translating some or all of the national curriculum into the language spoken by most refugees as an initial step to transition to the national curriculum in the national language; and
- if temporary unqualified teaching staff and teaching assistants need to be recruited from the refugee and/or host community, consider how they can be teamed with nationally qualified staff, and potential pathways to future qualification.



Pakistan. Afghan refugee boy reads a story to out of school refugee children.  
© UNHCR/Muhammad Rahim Mirza



## 5.2 Increasing the availability of data on primary education for refugees

Robust refugee education data is crucial for policy guidance and accountability, but substantial gaps persist, with many countries lacking essential data on refugee enrolment, primary education completion, and learning outcomes. Addressing these data challenges and integrating refugee education data into national Education Information Management Systems (EMIS) is vital for systematic and comprehensive monitoring, aligning with the inclusion agenda.

In order to protect refugees right to education, UNHCR needs to have **access to more and higher quality data on refugees' access to education and learning**. It should therefore:

- Advocate for and support greater disaggregation by protection status of national EMIS, and other education data collection systems, alongside disaggregation by sex, age, and disability status.
- Practice and advocate for increased data sharing between organisations working in refugee education.
- Invest in building capacity in refugee education data collection and management at the UNHCR regional and country level.

## 5.3 Building evidence and technical expertise around education for refugees

Policy makers and technical staff designing primary education programmes in refugee contexts should draw on evidence of “what works” in primary education elsewhere (see Evans, 2023 and Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2023 for examples). Evidence-based practices highlighted in this review include:

- raising awareness among (and via) parents of the returns to education, for girls and boys;
- taking a gender responsive approach, providing female-only spaces and recruiting female teachers as appropriate;
- teacher training courses that involve extensive supervised practice and peer learning; and
- teaching to the right level, for example, using placement tests to ensure refugee learners are placed in the most appropriate grade, and given appropriate learning support (e.g. language).

In terms of its own learning agenda, UNHCR should focus its technical expertise and evidence building around **managing transitions** in primary education for refugees including:

- transitions of individual refugee students into primary schools and beyond,
- transitions of curricula and language of instruction,
- transitions of “refugee schools” into public schools,
- transitions in the management of the education workforce, and
- transitions in how education of refugees is financed.

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Pakistan. UNHCR's education initiatives in Balochistan July 2022.  
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