



EDUCATION ACCESS FOR THE FORCIBLY DISPLACED

During and in the aftermath
of the COVID-19 pandemic

October 2022

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by a UNHCR team led by Cirenia Chávez Villegas and Jedediah Fix of the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS). The report benefitted from contributions from other UNHCR staff—Ibrahima Sarr, Craig Loschmann, and Florence Nana Pokuaah Nimoh. The team thanks Artur Krzysztof Borkowski of UNESCO, Theresa Beltramo of UNHCR, Jeffery Tanner and Harriet Mugeru of the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, Harriet Kasidi Mugeru of the World Bank, and Charlotte Berquin of UNHCR for their peer review of this report.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented socio-economic disruptions, some effects of which may be lasting. During this time, the academic literature has been heavily populated with studies documenting the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic, including its consequences for children in terms of protection and learning outcomes. When it comes to education, the literature is unequivocal in its message: the impacts of the pandemic are massive. Nine out of 10 students (1.6 billion) were affected by the temporary closure of schools (UNESCO, 2020a). Learning outcomes are overall poorer as students and families adapted, some less successfully than others, to challenges ranging from access constraints to the limitations associated to remote learning.

The global evidence base also documents disproportionately more profound impacts experienced by some of the most vulnerable learners, including children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Moscoviz & Evans, 2021; Patrinos et al., 2022). While it is well understood that vulnerable students suffered higher learning losses, the literature does not distinguish how particular groups of vulnerable learners, forcibly displaced children included, have been affected by school closures associated with the pandemic.

This research brief contributes to the existing literature by examining educational access during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 for forcibly displaced children under UNHCR's protection mandate. With that understanding, this brief also looks at measures taken during the pandemic to support continuity in learning and the lessons that can be gleaned to help forcibly displaced children return to school or continue learning.

2. Key research questions

This brief sets out to address the following research questions and sub-questions:

RQ1. What was the state of education access for forcibly displaced persons during school closures associated with COVID-19 and after schools reopened, and how do they compare with pre-pandemic access levels?

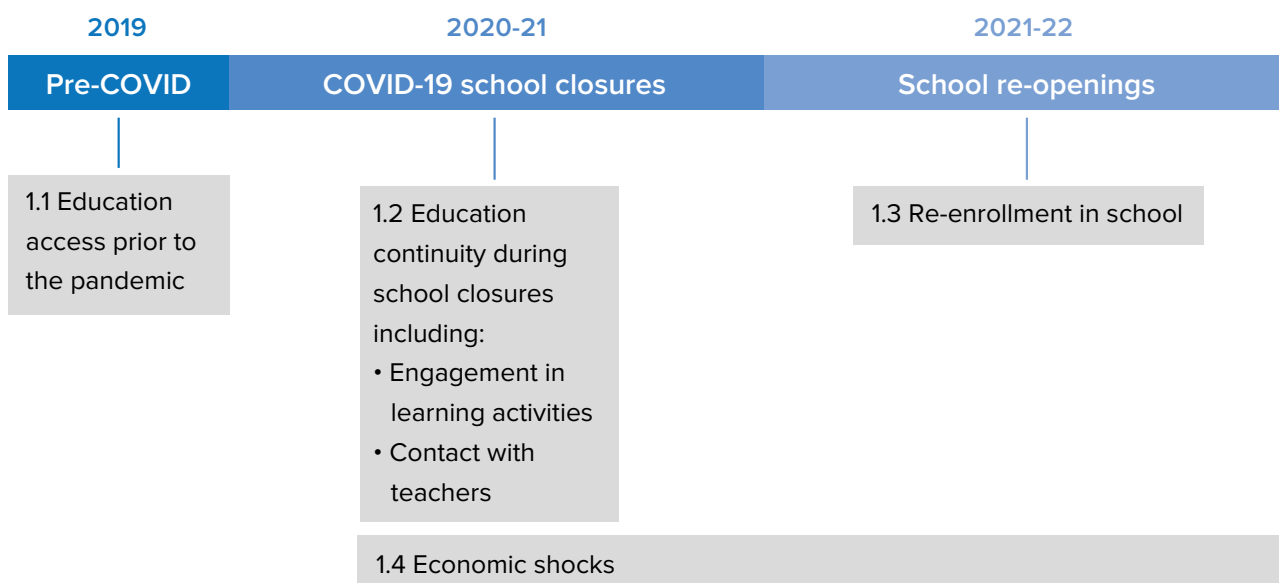
RQ2. What are some good practices that have emerged to mitigate the erosion of learning outcomes?

Figure 1 maps out the areas of research interest. Below are the relevant sub-questions addressed in this brief:

- a. What was the state of educational access for forcibly displaced children before the pandemic?
- b. Throughout periods of school closures, did forcibly displaced children engage in learning activities? If so, which activities? And if not, why not?
- c. With the reopening of schools, to what extent have forcibly displaced children re-enrolled or returned to school? If not, why not?

To answer the second research question, the brief highlights some promising UNHCR practices that emerged from the pandemic to ensure the continuity of learning and for forcibly displaced children to re-enroll in school.

Figure 1 Areas of interest in education access for forcibly displaced children



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: The authors are aware that school closures and re-openings have not been linear or homogenous but rather dynamic. This figure is solely for illustrative purposes for the areas of interest of this brief.

3. Literature review

Early efforts to understand the pandemic’s impact on education largely re-examined evidence from past pandemics, epidemics and school closures, and their respective impacts on educational outcomes, including school attendance, drop out and learning achievements. Undertaking a systematic rapid review exploring the impacts of previous pandemics and epidemics on child protection outcomes, Bakrania et al. (2020) found that at least 15 studies (out of the 53 studies included in their review) reported on the impacts on education outcomes. These studies found that previous pandemics and epidemics considerably impacted school attendance and dropouts, both of which were consequences of poor learning, children taking on unpaid or paid work and/or adolescent pregnancy (2020).

School closures unrelated to pandemics were also shown to negatively influence children’s learning outcomes. However, the extent of the impact varied when considering factors such as the duration of school closures, the quality of education before and after closures, and whether learners experienced traumatic events (Memon et al., 2020). In a related analysis exploring the association between foundational reading skills and non-attendance or absence from school in young children using data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys 6 (MICS6) for five countries, Conto Albán et al. (2020) noted that missing school was associated with reductions in foundational learning, with the latter measured by core literacy and numeracy skills. Children aged 9 to 11 who were out of school at the time of the survey were between 11 and 43 percentage points less likely to acquire foundational reading skills when compared to children who had stayed in school.

Table 2 Areas of research covered by existing research

Population	Area of interest
Non-forcibly displaced children of school age	Area 1: Impacts of previous pandemics/epidemics and school closures on education outcomes
	Area 2: Education continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic
	Area 3: Impacts of COVID-19 on education outcomes, including learning
Forcibly displaced populations	Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the forcibly displaced

A second area of evidence documented the responses of governments across the globe as they tried to ensure learning continuity despite school closures due to COVID-19. A joint effort by UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank documented national responses to education as COVID-19 led to school closures. Of the three rounds of surveys, the second round involving 149 countries found that online platforms and television were most frequently used to provide remote learning, and were offered in 90 percent and 87 percent of countries, respectively (2020). The next most adopted modality was paper-based take-home materials offered by 85 percent of countries, and radio-based remote learning offered by 61 percent of countries (2020). Though insightful, these efforts do not indicate the extent to which learners

were reached with these options. By UNICEF (2020) estimates, at least 463 million – or 31 percent – of school children worldwide could not be reached by digital or broadcast remote learning programmes. In other words, 3 out of 10 children did not engage in learning despite being offered these learning modalities.

A third area of the literature tried to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education outcomes, including learning. Knowledge and skills development are fundamental to human capital, sustainable growth, social cohesion, and poverty reduction. But a decade or more of progress has been threatened by the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). A study simulating the potential impacts of the pandemic on learning outcomes, using data on 157 countries, estimated that the pandemic could result in a loss of between 0.3 and 0.9 years of schooling after adjusting for quality, lowering the years of basic school from 7.9 years to between 7 and 7.6 years (Azevedo et al., 2020). In another simulation paper, Azevedo (2020) estimated that learning poverty – the inability to read and understand an age-appropriate text by age 10 – could increase from 53 percent to 63 percent in low- and middle-income countries as a result of the pandemic.¹

In a review of studies estimating the impacts of the pandemic on learning loss and dropout rates, Moscoviz and Evans (2021) found that most studies document negative impacts on children's learning. Similarly, a review of studies covering the learning losses of school-age children and youth during the first two years of the pandemic found that in 36 robust studies across 20 countries, learning loss amounts to, on average, half a year of learning (0.17 of a standard deviation). In virtually every case, learning loss was concentrated among children from the poorest households (Patrinos et al., 2022).

Additional attempts have been made to estimate the impact of the pandemic on re-enrolment. Azevedo et al. (2020) estimated that close to 7 million students from primary to secondary school could drop out of school due to income shocks and financial difficulties arising from the pandemic alone, while UNESCO (2020) estimated that about 24 million learners globally from pre-primary to the university level were at risk of not returning to school after school closures due to COVID-19.

Finally, a separate stream of publications focused on the experiences of forcibly displaced populations evaluated the broader socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Based on data from eight refugee-hosting countries, the Center for Global Development showed that refugee populations are 60 percent more likely to have been working in sectors highly impacted by the pandemic, such as accommodation, food services, manufacturing, and retail (Dempster et al., 2020). Adding to the evidence base, high-frequency phone surveys (HFPS) conducted by the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC) in eight countries demonstrated that the socio-economic wellbeing of forcibly displaced and host populations deteriorated during COVID-19, with the forcibly displaced suffering setbacks in health access, education, wages and employment, non-labour income, and food security (Tanner et al., 2021). Similarly, surveys carried out by Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in 14 countries confirmed widespread job losses, increased food insecurity, and reduced access to remittances (NRC, 2021).

¹ At the country and regional level this has been explored as well, for example in the Middle East and North Africa, where learning poverty was projected to increase by 9.4 percent (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021).

Relatively less research has been done at the intersection of these bodies of work on the impacts of the pandemic on the education of forcibly displaced populations.² What is known at this stage is that for most school-aged groups, displaced children's low school enrolment before the pandemic was followed by even lower educational engagement during the pandemic (Tanner et al., 2021). Three out of four displaced people surveyed by the NRC said they were less likely to send their children to school, in part due to the economic strain of the pandemic (NRC, 2021). Qualitative work from previous pandemics also highlighted the need for attention to the specific circumstances of sub-groups of vulnerable children, including the forcibly displaced (Loganathan et al., 2021). This work considered education, but only in passing.

To the best of the knowledge of this brief's authors, no study has yet focused on educational access for forcibly displaced children during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The availability of high-frequency phone surveys (hereafter HFPS) in more than a dozen countries offers the possibility of deeper analysis and this brief exploits those data to fill the knowledge gap and develop responses to the two research questions set out earlier: assessing how forcibly displaced children's education have been impacted by the pandemic, and highlighting good practices that have emerged to mitigate erosion of learning outcomes.

² The review of literature has not been systematic

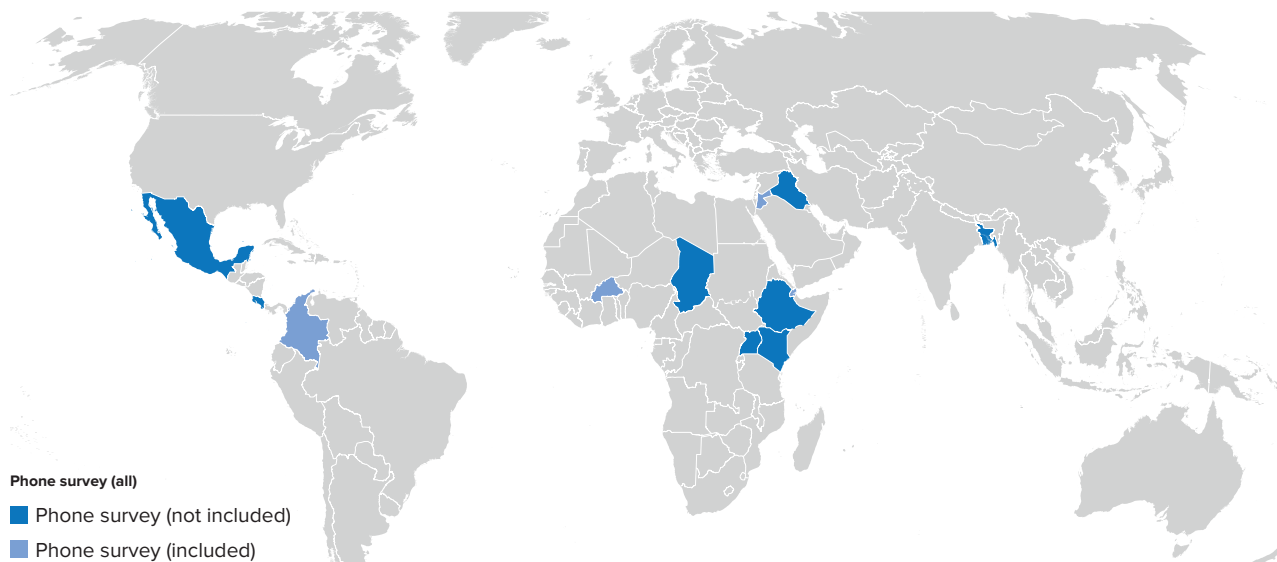
4. Methodology

This research brief combines existing information and evidence on school closures with primary data from HFPS conducted by the World Bank, UNHCR, national statistical offices, and others over the course of the pandemic. As a starting point, a mapping exercise was undertaken to:

- (i) identify the countries where HFPS on forcibly displaced populations have been conducted by the World Bank and UNHCR, frequently with support from the JDC;
- (ii) understand whether questions or items related to education were included in the surveys;
- (iii) identify in which waves of the survey education items were included; and
- (iv) identify education-specific questions within the different waves of the surveys.

The questions relating to education were grouped into several areas of analysis. Of the 12 countries where the World Bank, UNHCR, and the JDC conducted HFPS, the eight countries analyzed in this brief – Bangladesh, Chad, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Mexico, and Uganda – had relevant information on educational access. Together, the eight country surveys conducted over 70,000 household interviews across 24 survey waves.

Figure 3 Summary of HFPS that include forcibly displaced³



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dark blue: HFPS included in this note (included forcibly displaced sub-sample, education questions).

Light blue: HFPS not included in this note (included forcibly displaced sub-sample, but no/sufficient education questions or access to materials).

³ The countries covered in this brief are as follows: Bangladesh, Chad, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Mexico, and Uganda. Burkina Faso, Colombia, Djibouti, Jordan and Lebanon also conducted phone surveys on forcibly displaced but were not included due to lack of education questions or data availability.

This brief's authors undertook a desk review of publications that used data from the HFPS surveys. Where there were findings on education, we collated and organized them into areas of analysis corresponding to our research questions. Where education items were identified but no results have been made public, and the data is available, descriptive statistics were used to generate new findings. All of the surveys reviewed for this brief cover forcibly displaced populations. Where possible and where the data allow, we present results for refugees and compared them with host country populations.

To address the second research question on promising educational practices, the authors of this brief reached out to UNHCR regional bureaus and country operations to inquire about practices implemented to support learning continuity during the pandemic. Unfortunately, none of the practices have yet been rigorously evaluated. Where available, monitoring data provided by UNHCR operations is presented in this brief (see Annex 1 for an overview of the HFPS, including sampling and harmonization).

Box 1: High-frequency monitoring of COVID-19 impacts

To respond swiftly to the growing demand for information on the impacts and responses to the crisis, the World Bank led the design and implementation of HFPS in more than 100 countries. Carried out over the phone due to social distancing policies limiting in-person interviews, the surveys consisted of between two and seven waves, were spaced consecutively or months apart, and covered topics such as knowledge and concerns about the pandemic, access to food and other basic needs, employment and income loss, education continuity and safety nets and coping strategies. While based on a global template, the flexible design of the questionnaire allowed for topics to be altered according to evolving needs, priorities, and insights from emerging data.

With support from UNHCR and the JDC, samples of refugees and asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons, and other persons of concern to UNHCR were collected alongside national samples in more than a dozen of these countries. UNHCR further expanded the scope of the forced displacement surveys using the same question template in two additional countries.

The results show, in nearly real time, the scale and scope of the impacts of the crisis on different population groups as well the speed of the recovery. Today, in addition to a wide range of country-specific briefs and survey summaries, harmonized indicators have been produced for 16 topics across 83 countries, allowing greater comparison across times, places, and populations.

Read more about the World Bank's high-frequency monitoring [here](#).

5. Findings on education access for forcibly displaced populations during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic

This next section begins with a snapshot of the characteristics of global school closures. The findings are then organized according to the two research questions, with school attendance and enrolment addressed in the first sub-section, followed by learning activities throughout the pandemic and school attendance after school re-openings. While the analysis focuses on eight countries, comparative data was not always available. The brief presents findings for all countries or select countries, depending on data accessibility and availability.

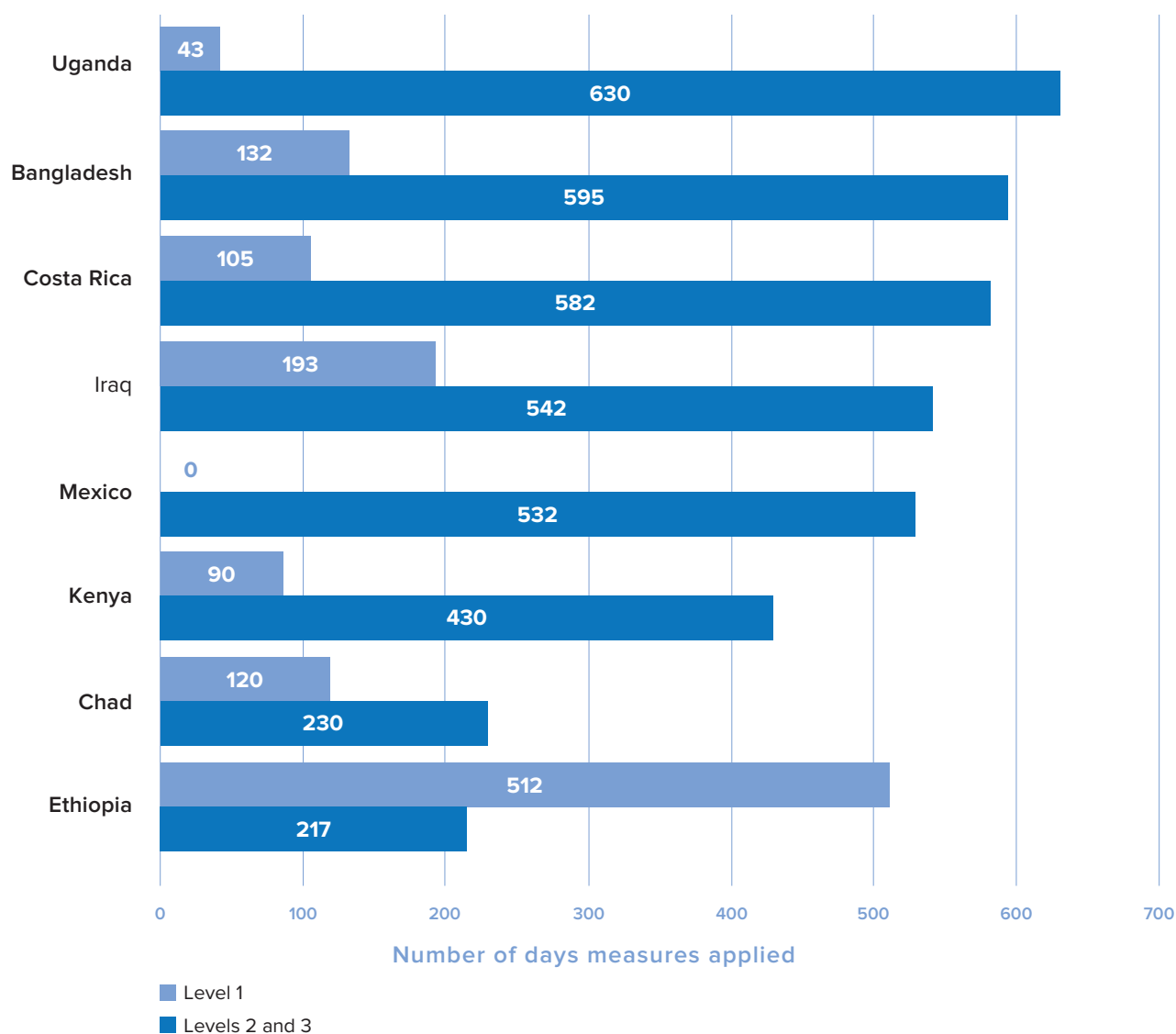
5.1 Global school closure characteristics

The intensity and timing of school closures varied by country and location, as did the measures developed to monitor the closures. UNICEF classifies the status of schools as ‘fully closed,’ ‘partially closed,’ or ‘fully open’ (2021). The Oxford University COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, on the other hand, categorizes school closures using stringency levels, where 0 indicates no measures were enacted, 1 indicates limited measures, 2 indicates the closing of some schools, and 3 indicates the required closing of all schools at all levels (see Annex 2) (Hale et al., 2021).⁴ This note adopts the Oxford University stringency levels and these are referred to as: 0 – no measures, 1 – limited measures, 2 – partial closure, 3 – full closure.

Among the eight countries covered in this brief, the rate of full or partial closures ranged from 25 to 75 percent of the school year. Uganda experienced the most number of days of stringency levels 3 and 2, which resulted in 630 days of full or partial school closures from 1 January 2020 to mid-March 2022. Over the same period, Ethiopia had the fewest days of stringency levels 3 and 2, with students there experiencing 217 days of full or partial closures (Figure 4).

⁴ The four levels used in index are the follow: 0 - no measures; 1 - recommend closing or all schools open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to non-Covid-19 operations; 2 - require closing only some levels or categories, such as closures only for high school, or just public schools); 3 - require closing all levels.

Figure 4 School measures according to stringency levels from 1 January 2020 to 15 March 2022

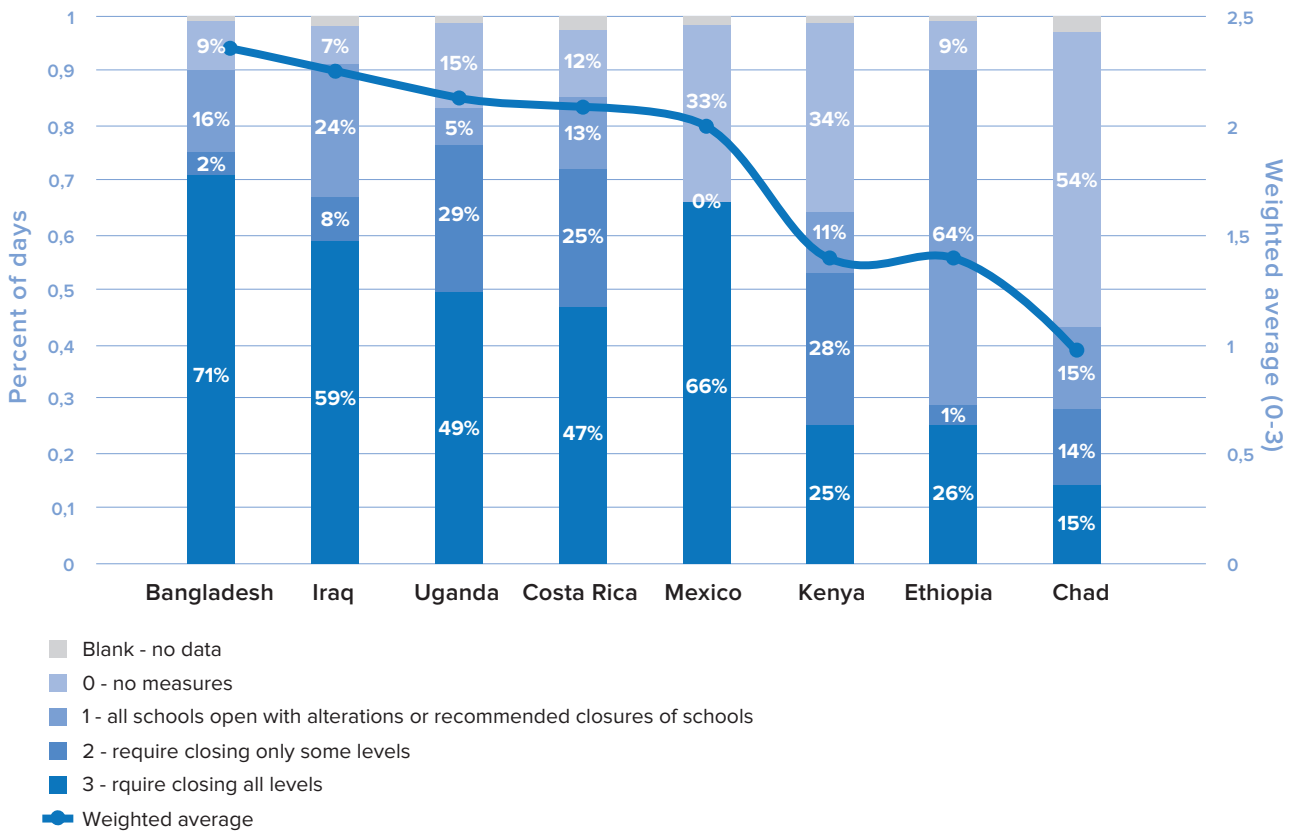


Source: Authors' elaboration using stringency criteria from Hale et al. (2022).

Note: The four levels used in the index are as follows: 0 - no measures; 1 - recommend closing or all schools open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to non-COVID operations; 2 - require closing only some levels or categories, such as closures only for high schools, or just public schools; 3 - require closing all levels.

The rate of full closure to full reopening also varied among these countries. When looking at this same period across these countries and comparing the different levels of stringency in the approach to school closures, the results indicate that Bangladesh had the highest proportion of days (71 percent) in the specified period where school closures had a stringency level of 3 (schools closed at all levels), followed by Mexico (66 percent), and Iraq (59 percent). The data also illustrates that for over half of this period of time in Chad and for over one-third of the same period in Kenya, no school closures were implemented (Figure 5). Schools in refugee camps followed national guidelines on school closures. Where refugees attend public schools, they were subject to the same regulations affecting national students.

Figure 5 Stringency of school closures from 1 January 2020 to 15 March 2022



Source: Authors' elaboration using stringency criteria from Hale et al. (2022).
N=805

As school reopening started, the timing was similarly non-linear, intermittent, and based on local conditions and the spread of the virus. From between late February (Iraq) and mid-April (Chad) of 2020, schools in all eight countries underwent full closures. The first countries to start reopening did so in October (Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Iraq). Schools in Bangladesh and Mexico remained entirely closed through August 2021, while Iraq, Uganda, and to a lesser extent, Costa Rica, reopened during an interim phase in late 2020/early 2021, only to close again for much of 2021. Beginning in late 2020/early 2021, school reopening in Kenya, Chad, and Ethiopia was more sustained. In Chad and Ethiopia, schools were operating with limited or no measures for the majority of 2021. As detailed below, the phone surveys occurred at different times during the closure and reopening cycle. A complete timeline of closures and reopening is illustrated in Annex 3.

5.2 Access to education for forcibly displaced children before school closures, and education continuity during school closures and after reopening

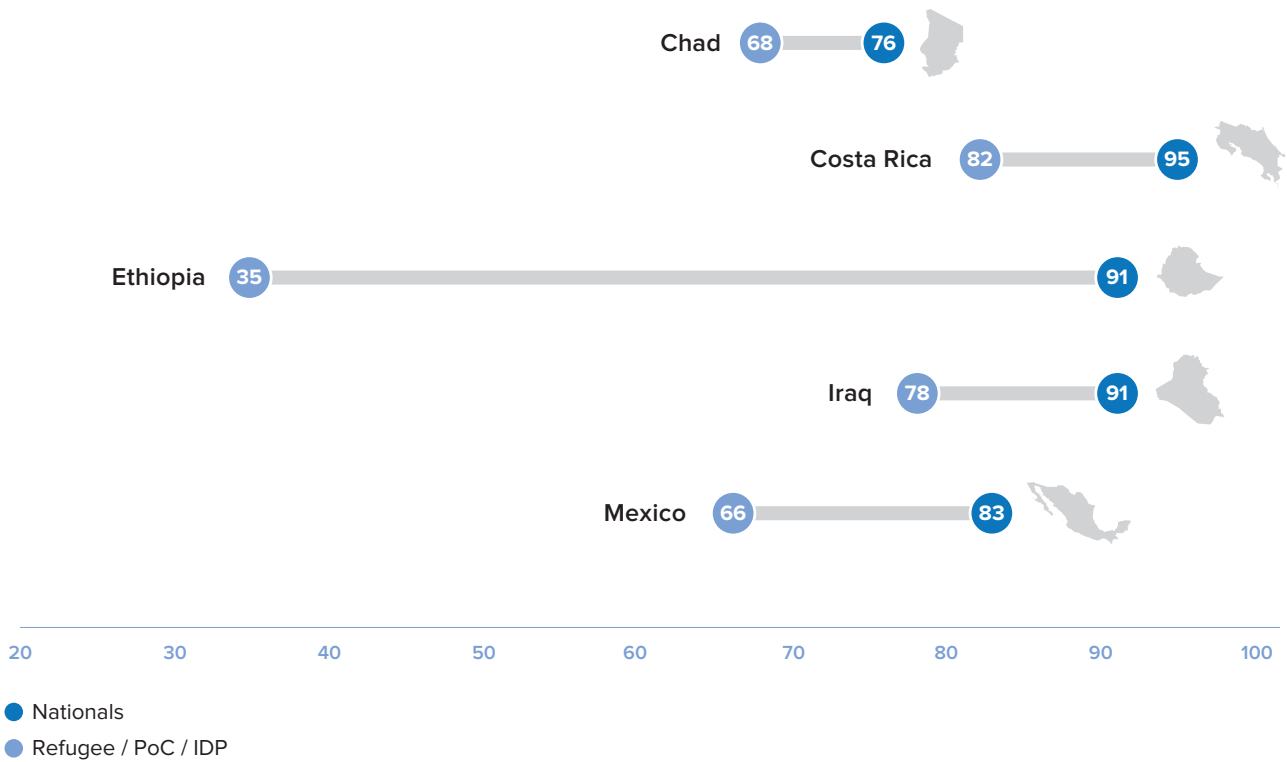
According to the 2021 Global Compact Indicators Report, almost half of refugee students are out of school. On average, they access education on the same terms as nationals in three-quarters of surveyed countries for primary school and two-thirds for secondary school. Others continue to attend schools managed by UNHCR, partner organizations, or religious entities, which may or may not be accredited by the national authorities (UNHCR, 2021a).

Overall, gross enrolment rates in reporting countries were estimated at 68 percent at the primary and 37 percent at the secondary levels in academic year 2020-21 (UNHCR, 2022). However, refugee girls are less likely to have access to education than refugee boys, and there are other significant variations in access among population groups (discussed in the following sub-section) (UNHCR, 2021c). In recent years, progress has been made in ensuring the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems. But as the data on enrollment shows, barriers to access remain in place, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.

5.2.1 Access to education before the pandemic

Compared to national populations, forcibly displaced persons were less likely – by an average of 21 percentage points – to attend school before the pandemic, consistent with previous findings. This is true for refugees and asylum seekers in Chad and Ethiopia, IDPs in Iraq, and registered persons of concern in Costa Rica (Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Cubans, among others) and Mexico (Hondurans, Salvadoreans, Haitians, and Cubans, among others) (Figure 6). The average gap in access to education between forcibly displaced populations and national populations is 21 percentage points: from 8 percentage points in Chad to 56 percentage points in Ethiopia (Figure 7).

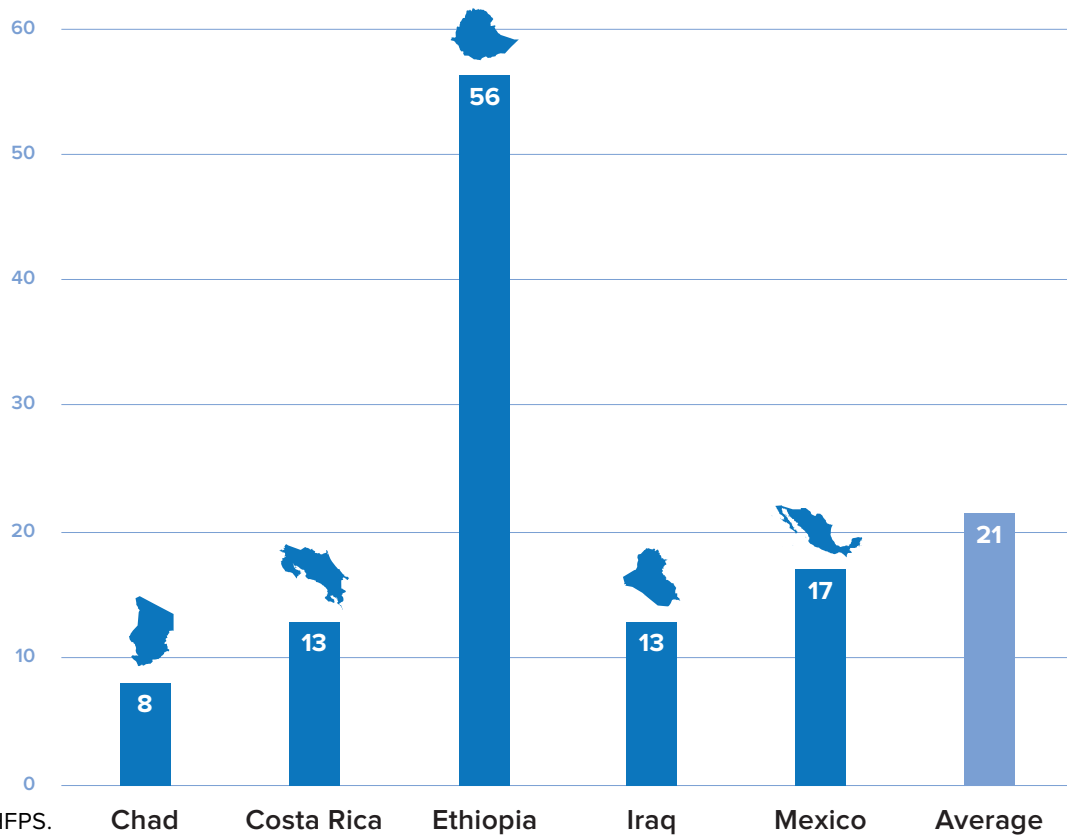
Figure 6 Pre-pandemic education enrolment, all students (primary and secondary), by legal status, select countries



Source: HFPS (see Annex for detailed citation).

Note: Chad enrolment reflects refugees; Costa Rica, Mexico and Ethiopia PoCs; Iraq, IDPs. Costa Rica calculated from national HFPS. Any discrepancies between data reflected in this graph and data reported on UNHCR's annual education reports are attributed to the source (data reflected here is based on HFPS). Furthermore, data reflected is average enrollment for both primary and secondary.

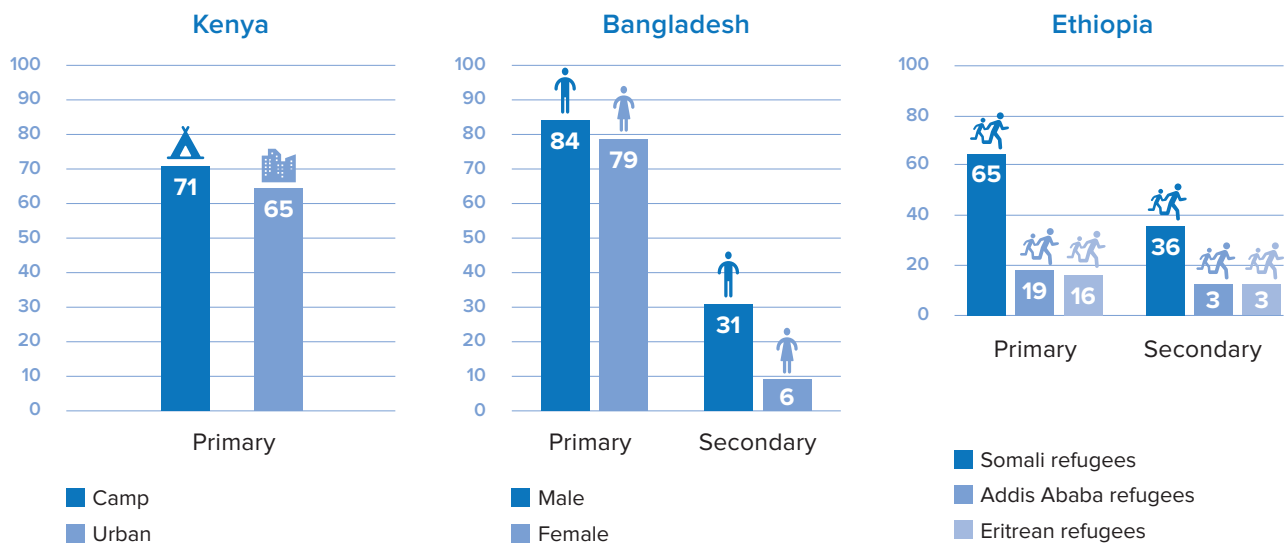
Figure 7 Pre-pandemic education enrolment, all students, gap between displaced and national/non-displaced (Chad, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Iraq and Mexico)



Source: HFPS.

There were significant gaps in access to education among displaced persons within countries according to where they lived, their gender, country of origin and education level. In Kenya, for example, refugee children in camps and settlements were more likely to be attending school, compared to those in urban areas: 64 percent to 60 percent. In Bangladesh, school enrolment – limited to informal, parallel instruction in Learning Centers – is high for both male and female students in primary schools (84 percent, 79 percent). However, dropout rates at the secondary level were substantial for both groups, but especially for girls, with attendance falling to 31 percent for boys and 6 percent for girls and boys. In Ethiopia, school enrolment varies greatly by refugees’ country of origin. While Somali refugees had attendance rates similar to national populations at 65 percent for primary school and 36 percent for secondary, rates for Eritreans were very low, at 19 percent for primary and only 3 percent for secondary.

Figure 8 Pre-pandemic education enrolment, disaggregated by location type (Kenya), gender (Bangladesh), and country of origin (Ethiopia)



Source: HFPS.

5.2.2 Learning activities during school closures

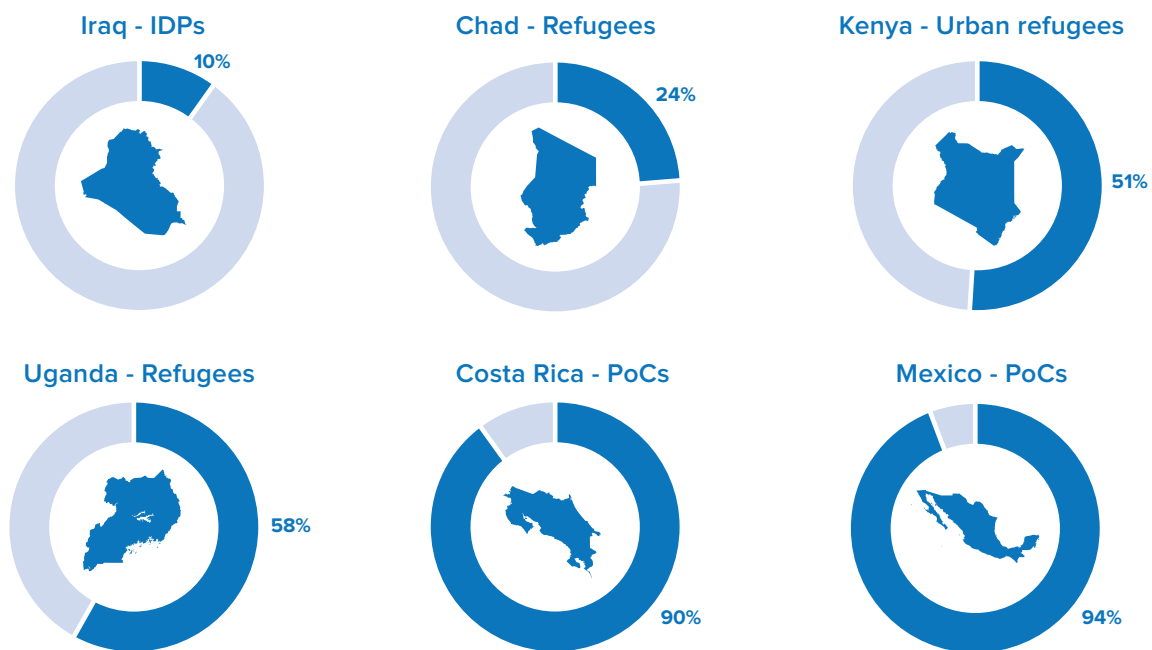
Participation in learning activities

Results reveal a noticeable disparity across countries regarding the extent to which forcibly displaced children engaged in learning activities during school closures. These results, which apply to households with children who were enrolled or attended school before school closures – range from a low participation rate of only 10 percent of IDP households in Iraq engaging in some form of learning activities during school closures (World Bank et al., 2021); to over 90 percent engaging in learning activities in contexts like Costa Rica and Mexico. In Mexico, for example, 94 percent of forcibly displaced households – predominately from Venezuela and Honduras⁵ – who had children attending school before closures participated in learning activities. In Chad, though participation rates in learning activities were low, just 24 percent of refugee households with children enrolled in school before the pandemic participated in learning activities; this was a higher proportion than the 16 percent of Chadian households with children participating in learning activities (Zakaria et al., 2022) (Figure 9).

⁵ But also from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru.

Data from at least one country suggests that participation in at least one form of learning activity increased throughout the pandemic, as illustrated by data from different survey waves. In Kenya, where data from five waves are available, 51 percent of households in urban areas with refugee children were found to be participating in a form of learning activity right after school closures (World Bank, 2021) and only 15 percent of camp-based children were doing the same. Analysis of other survey waves reveals that after schools reopened in January 2021, 86 percent of urban refugees and 89 percent of camp-based refugees engaged in some form of learning. By April 2021, engagement in learning was comparable to early 2021 for refugees, with 84 percent of refugees participating in learning activities (2021).

Figure 9: Proportion (percent) of forcibly displaced households with children engaged in learning activities during school closures



Source: Authors' elaboration with data from HFPS, World Bank et al. (2021), and INSEED & the JDC (2021).

Note: Persons of Concern (PoCs) in Mexico refer to Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans; PoCs in Mexico are from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, and Venezuela.

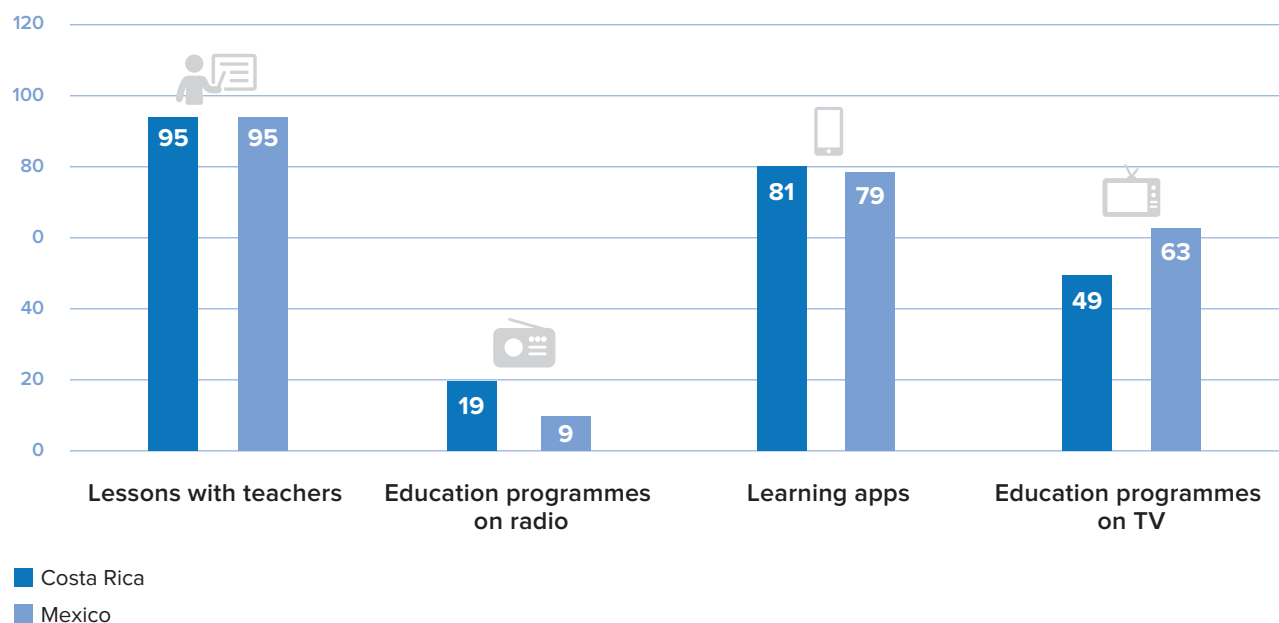
Participation by types of learning activities

Across the five countries with available data, meetings with teachers were the most common activity displaced learners engaged in during school closures. The data is not always comparable and not all country surveys asked about the types of activities that learners were engaged in. Across the five countries where data was available, the most common learning activities children in forcibly displaced households participated in were: 1) sessions or meetings with teachers since closures; followed by 2) mobile learning apps; 3) educational TV programmes; and 4) programmes on radio. On average for these countries, 46 percent of forcibly displaced households with school-aged children enrolled in school before the pandemic had sessions or meetings with teachers since closures in the five countries analyzed. In contrast, only 9 percent of households engaged in learning through educational programmes on the radio.

As sessions or meetings with teachers were the most common activity displaced children participated in during school closures, countries like Costa Rica and Mexico asked respondents about the channels students used to communicate with teachers. Data from Mexico indicates that the most common form of contact with teachers was through WhatsApp – 76 percent of forcibly displaced households with learners who were in contact with teachers used this medium. The next most common form of communication was through online apps (42 percent) and contact by phone (34 percent).

Comparisons across the countries show wide variation in participation rates of forcibly displaced households in learning activities after school closures. In Chad for example, virtually no refugee household participated in any of the four specified activities of the surveys. In contrast, in Costa Rica and Mexico, there were very high participation rates in different forms of learning. In both countries, 95 percent of displaced households that had children enrolled in school before the pandemic had sessions or meetings with teachers and 81 percent of households in Costa Rica and 79 percent in Mexico had used learning apps (Figure 10). Educational programmes on the radio were less popular in both countries.

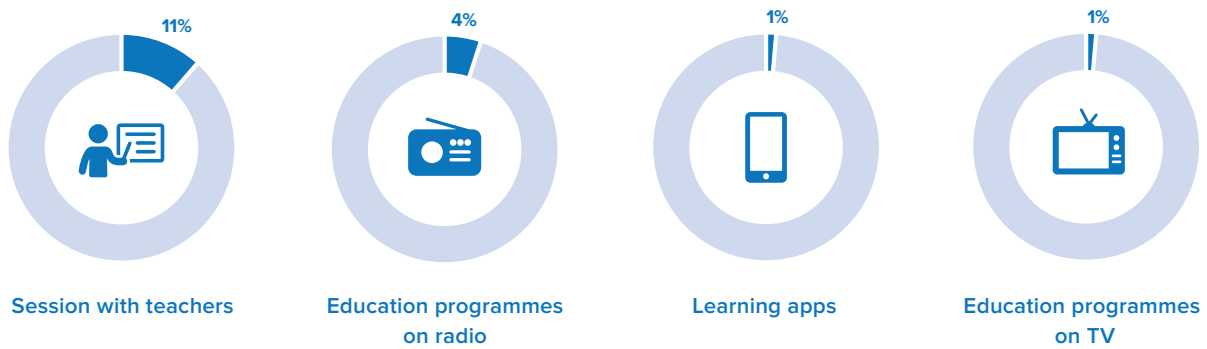
Figure 10 PoC households participating in learning activities after school closures, percent



Source: Authors' elaboration with data from HFPS.

A comparison of learning participation rates of forcibly displaced and national households finds that the national participation rate was higher in some contexts, while the reverse was true in others. In Chad, a very low proportion of national households engaged in any of the four specified learning activities and participation rates of refugee households were virtually zero. For nationals, the share of households involved in learning activities through learning apps and educational programmes on TV was practically non-existent, but there was a marginally higher rate of engagement by nationals through sessions with teachers (11 percent of households) (Figure 11).

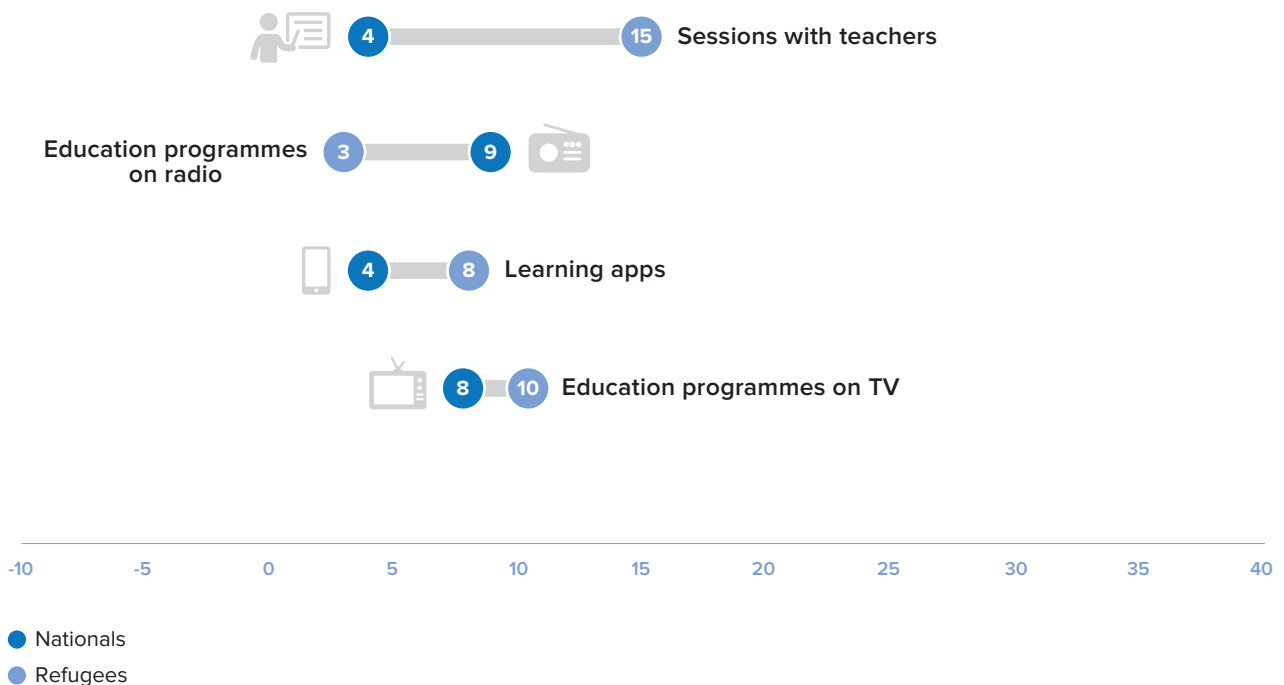
Figure 11 Households with children engaged in learning activities: nationals, Chad, percent



Source: Authors' elaboration with data from HFPS.

In Ethiopia, while engagement in learning activities was low among both refugee and national households, a higher proportion of refugee households participated in three types of activities. The highest engagement modality is sessions with teachers – with 15 percent of refugee households having had sessions/meetings with teachers after school closures. The share of households for nationals was only 4 percent (Figure 12).

Figure 12 Proportion of households with children engaged in learning activities: refugees and nationals, Ethiopia, percent



Source: Authors' elaboration with data from HFPS.

Box 2: Socioemotional impacts of school closures in Kenya

The richness of the HFPS data collected in Kenya – seven waves covering a range of thematic areas, including child development – provides a solid basis for research on the broader impacts of the pandemic.

Based on survey data for more than 5,000 households– including nationals, refugees, and stateless persons – a recent study shows that despite efforts to introduce more remote learning options, access to education declined significantly during school closures, which totaled nine months. While school attendance rates remained largely unchanged between 2019 and 2020 for children who live in households with college-educated heads of families, they fell by almost two percentage points for those living with families whose head is less educated. Girls living in poor households were the least likely to adopt remote learning or return to school when restrictions were relaxed.

Additionally, more than one in five children reported suffering from at least one negative change in internalizing (less speaking, more withdrawn, irritable) or externalizing (more crying, defiance, destruction) behavior by June 2021 – signs of the mental health burden of the pandemic. Those who had not yet returned to in-person instruction felt these impacts more strongly, supporting the move to reopen schools once it is safe to do so (Cameron et al., 2022).

5.2.3 Return to school

The sequencing of the phone surveys before, during, and after school reopening speaks to the challenges of returning to in-person instruction. Against the varying lengths and intensities of national school closures as discussed in Section 5.1, the first country to launch a phone survey wave was Kenya in May 2020, followed by Ethiopia and Uganda in October 2020. In six of the eight countries (excluding Costa Rica and Uganda), the first survey wave took place at the highest level of stringency (when all schools were closed), and subsequent waves tracked the reopening process. In the case of Chad, the first survey captured a return to full closure after a period of partial re-opening. Within the surveys, different sets of questions explored intentions to send children back to school (while schools were still closed) and actual attendance (after school reopening, fully or partially). The analysis is limited by the non-linear process of the reopening, coupled with the fact that in many cases, survey waves did not continue long enough to provide a complete picture of back-to-school trends. The resumption of regular survey programmes will be critical in this regard.

Re-enrolment in school has been complex and dynamic, as evidenced throughout the process of school closures and reopenings. Of the eight countries studied in this research brief, just two countries – Mexico and Uganda – experienced sustained and uninterrupted school closures that lasted well over a year (two years in the case of Uganda). The literature from previous pandemics and epidemics pointed out how school closures were linked to

students dropping out of school, particularly among the most vulnerable children (Bakrania et al., 2020). This pattern similarly played out throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. For female students, having to take on additional care responsibilities at home, or increased adolescent pregnancy rates coupled with unfavorable school environments towards pregnant girls, can be deterrents in re-enrolling back in school. For refugee girls – the prediction was dire: the Malala foundation estimated that in countries where the secondary gross enrolment ratio of girls before the pandemic was less than 10 percent, all refugee girls were at risk of dropping out of school for good (Nyamweya, 2020). For boys, particularly adolescent boys from disadvantaged families, including refugees, participating in income-generating activities to support their families could make re-enrolment in school equally difficult. This is especially the case in settings where adolescent boys have taken on a breadwinner role.

Intention to send children back to school and attendance rates after schools reopen

Despite the limitations, some patterns are evident in back-to-school intentions and post-reopening attendance.

Countries with high levels of return or expected return to school

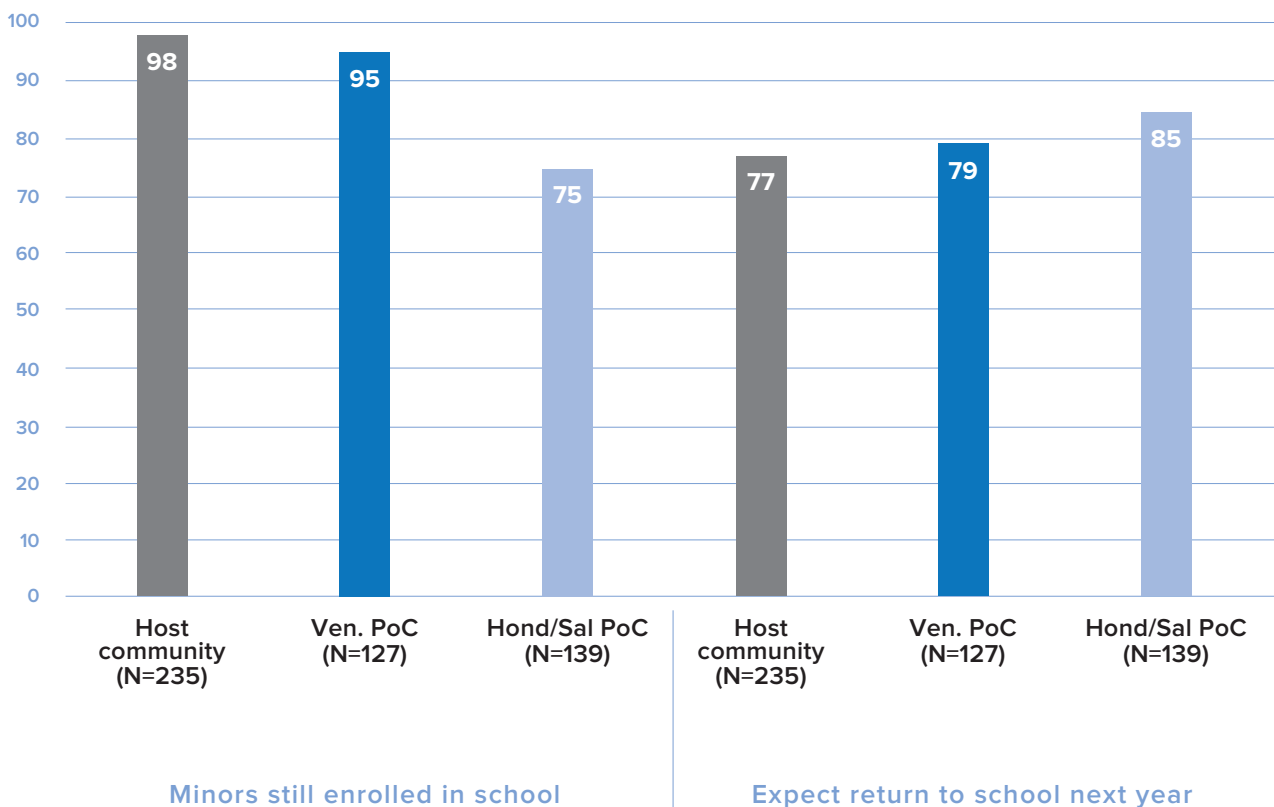
In Costa Rica, high pre-pandemic enrolment levels and relatively high levels of engagement during closures translated into high levels of expected return to school among all persons of concern to UNHCR. Despite the 11 months of full school closure, for those students enrolled before the pandemic, there was little evidence of extensive dropouts, with most remaining enrolled in school and expecting to continue so in the coming school year. Nevertheless, school quality is perceived to be worse since the pandemic began and school closures were enforced. Nearly half of all respondents assessed the quality of school as poor or very poor in August 2021, compared to only 15 percent before March 2020. Challenges around remote learning are likely the main reason, especially for Nicaraguan households who report less access to the internet and other computer resources such as laptops.

In Chad, despite more average initial enrolment rates, most refugee households reported that they intended to send their children back to school, and when schools opened, they quickly did so. The two waves of phone surveys (January/February 2021 and March/April 2021) captured both sides of a relatively quick reopening. Most refugee households reported intending to send previously enrolled children back to school in wave 1 (91 percent). By wave 2, at which point the majority of schools (93 percent) had reopened, most had already done so (90 percent). The return rate for refugee students is comparable to the national return rate of 96 percent.

Countries with sub-groups of displaced populations face higher and potentially lasting learning loss

In Mexico, following a prolonged closure of schools, there is evidence of potential dropout among Honduran and Salvadoreans, where one in four households have at least one child no longer attending school. Voluntary return to face-to-face classes was announced in May 2021, and schools reopened in September 2021 following a 19-month full closure. The second survey wave – finishing as the full reopening began – shows modest evidence of dropouts among Honduran and Salvadorean households: one in four households has at least one child who is no longer enrolled in school – as illustrated in Figure 13. Even though that same group also has a slightly higher expectation of returning to school in the next year, a non-trivial share of Honduran and Salvadorean children are at risk of dropping out permanently. In addition, the quality of school is perceived to be far worse since the pandemic began and school closures were enforced. Around half of all respondents assessed the quality of school to be poor or very poor in August 2021, compared to only 10 percent before March 2020. Challenges around remote learning are likely the main reason, especially for Honduran and Salvadorean households who report less access to all potential remote learning resources, especially the internet and other computer resources such as laptops.

Figure 13 School enrolment and expected return to school, Mexico



Source: HFPS.

In Uganda, the share of refugee households with children returning to school increased substantially between rounds 1 and 2, but rates remained significantly lower in Kampala. Before the initial lockdown, 81 percent of households had at least one member attending school, falling to only 58 percent during the first round of surveys, then rising to 70 percent in the second round in December 2021, as restrictions were somewhat lifted (schools in Uganda remained closed or partly closed for much of the two years). The average individual participation rate was lowest in Kampala (49 percent), followed by the South West region (57 percent) and the West Nile region (75 percent). No significant gender differences were observed.

Countries where refugees are facing difficulties with reopening

Despite relatively high levels of pre-pandemic attendance, only 9 percent of IDP households in Iraq were sending children to school in November 2020 – compared to 36 percent of returned IDPs and 25 percent of non-displaced households. While these rose the following month, as reopening advanced, schools later closed again. Overall, the number of children per IDP household attending school fell from around 2.5 before the pandemic to 1.5, versus less significant decreases for returnees and the non-displaced. The majority of children who did attending school did so for only one day per week.

For refugee households in Ethiopia, the slow speed of re-enrolment compounds low pre-pandemic enrolment rates. Before reopening, households had the opportunity to register their children for the upcoming school year. By the time of the survey, schools had reopened for around 10 percent of refugee school-attending children, yet only 32 percent of refugee households in those schools had registered. The shares were highest for refugee children in Addis Ababa, most of whom are Eritrean refugees, compared to Eritrean refugees who live in camps and Somali refugees. Only 19 percent of Somali refugees were registered, compared to 65 percent before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, Somali refugees were far more likely to attend primary school (65 percent) than refugees in Addis Ababa (18 percent) or Eritrean refugees in camps (16 percent). Additional follow-up will be necessary to understand how these trends are evolving and to make up for lost time.

Reasons for non-attendance, not re-enrolling, or challenges cited

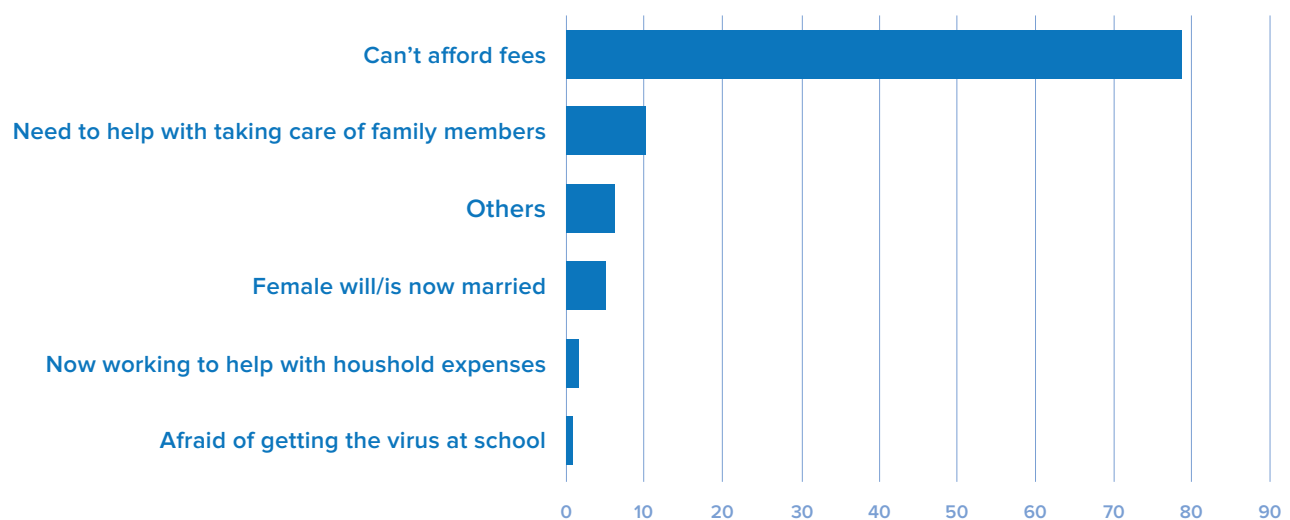
Financial concerns appear to weigh heavily on attendance decisions, followed by interest in school, caring needs, and health considerations. In Chad, unlike the national population where lack of interest was a common reason cited for not returning to school (45 percent), money was a more considerable constraint limiting factor for refugee children (65 percent). Next were the child's work and lack of interest in school (20 percent) and the child's illness (9 percent). Nearly all refugees faced moderate to severe food insecurity (97 percent), with deteriorating perceptions of well-being and security.

In Uganda, refugee households in Kampala were the least likely to send school-age children back to school during the first reopening. Common reasons cited were the inability to pay fees in Kampala, followed by caretaking needs, mainly in West Nile (Figure 14). Non-governmental organizations in the South West and West Nile, where most refugee

settlements are located, may have helped offset the shock by covering education needs at a low cost. In contrast, refugees in urban settings must cover their educational needs with minimal assistance.

In Costa Rica and Mexico, the number of respondents who indicated the reasons for children dropping out of school during the pandemic was very few. In Mexico's second survey wave, plans by the family to move, followed by health, were the main reasons cited for students dropping out. In Costa Rica, financial constraints were the main reason children dropped out of school, followed by discrimination and parents indicating that they were waiting for face-to-face classes to resume.

Figure 14 Main reasons for not returning to school, Uganda



Source: HFPS Brief, Wave 1.

Box 3: Labour market spillover effects of school closure in Kenya

The impact of school closures extends beyond children to parents, family members, and other caregivers. Research from Kenya documents how childcare responsibilities resulting from school closures spilled over into the labour force participation of adult family members. Using the HFPS data to compare changes in the labour participation of parents whose children's schools reopened in October 2020 to those in adjacent classes who had not yet done so, the findings show that the return to classes increased adults' weekly labor hours by 22 percent. Taken in the context of the overall employment shock caused by the pandemic and lockdowns, the results indicate that up to 30 percent of the general reduction in average working hours is due to changes in childcare burden. Somewhat unexpectedly, the results are not significantly different by sex of the adult. Both men and women took on greater responsibilities for childcare during this time, each increasing hours by about one-third (though women's increased more in absolute terms, and they took on more responsibility as older children returning to school were unavailable to care for younger ones). Overall, the results demonstrate the scale of sibling child care and suggest that policies that improve childcare availability and affordability could increase the adult labour supply in Kenya (Biscaye et al., 2022).

5.3 Promising practices emerging from UNHCR and national responses to support continuity in learning during the pandemic

The sections above illustrate how access to remote learning for the forcibly displaced was limited, as were efforts to re-enroll children in school. To understand the UNHCR response to help address the issues outlined, the authors reached out to UNHCR Country Offices on the front lines of the response to the pandemic. A survey on the COVID-19 educational response by UNHCR found that the most common support provided was printed materials for students to take home, followed by information and communications technology (ICT) online support and radio distribution.⁶ UNHCR further provided specific support to refugee girls, including cash-based incentives in 13 countries, among which programmes in nine countries were designed to encourage girls to return to school. Additional efforts to promote the re-enrolment of girls in school included distributing menstrual hygiene materials and establishing separate classes (UNHCR, 2021b).

Case studies from countries (including countries not part of HFPS) illustrate some of the measures implemented, as well as the learning and promising practices that emerged out of this need for innovation:

- On 20 March 2020, following the first COVID-19 case in **Chad**, all schools and universities closed for an open-ended period. This led to over 93,000 refugees being out of school with very few resources to continue to engage in educational activities at home. While the Ministry of National Education and Citizenship Promotion (MENPC) provided a programme through television, phone, radio, and internet to allow national students to follow classes from home, in the refugee camps of Eastern Chad, access to television, radio signal, and the internet is extremely low. With the support of UNHCR and its partner JRS, the refugee community organized itself to support the students that undertook national exams during the summer: including preparing 1,640 children for the lower-secondary exam (BEF) (including 1,044 girls) and 931 for the Bacca-laureate (including 607 girls). For the 12 camps of Eastern Chad, the results were quite positive: 899 girls attended the BEF exam, and the pass rate for girls was 76 percent. Those rates were similar to the national average of 80 percent. For the Bacca-laureate, 899 female candidates attended the exam with a pass rate of 37 percent,⁷ pass rates that are similar to the national average of 38 percent.⁸
- In **Egypt**, the government closed all schools in March 2020 to control the spread of COVID-19. The government's education response included providing various virtual, remote learning resources for host and refugee students. UNHCR conducted a phone survey targeting 5,000 refugee families who had been assisted with education grants to facilitate their children's enrolment, with the findings revealing a pressing need to support families with additional cash assistance to access education materials. Funds previously allocated for transport allowances for refugee youth to attend remedial

⁶ UNHCR provided printed materials for students to take home in 49 out of 58 reporting countries. ICT online support was provided in 42 countries and radio distribution took place in seven operations.

⁷ For this exam, the pass rate is calculated based on the number of children registered for the exam as per Chadian official guidance.

⁸ Males and females; gender disaggregated data is unavailable.

courses, extracurricular activities and language classes were then paid to economically disadvantaged families for them to purchase internet packages. This supported access to online learning and examination activities, benefiting both male and female students. In addition, young women were providing peer support and referral services to adolescent girls in order to address the increasing trend of sexual and gender-based violence (UNHCR, unpublished).

- ▶ In **Malaysia**, schools first closed in March 2020. A qualitative study noted that the lockdowns in the country disproportionately impacted non-citizen households, including refugees and asylum seekers (Loganathan et al., 2021). To mitigate disproportionate impacts on persons of concern and to reduce the risk of drop-out and ensure the primary to secondary transition, Qatar, in partnership with UNHCR, provided 1,700 tablets targeting students enrolled in upper primary and secondary schools. Further funding has been channeled to support learners' connectivity (through SIM cards and data plans) to ensure uninterrupted access to online learning. Community cluster classrooms have also been established, which involve teachers travelling to communities to conduct small-group classes on rotation and disseminating learning materials and homework. It has been reported that as well as actively engaging existing students, this effort has also attracted out-of-school children (OOSC) – especially girls – to join in (UNHCR, unpublished). According to Loganathan et al. (2021), there were teachers serving non-citizens conducting 'cluster classrooms', where a teacher will have discussions on a rotation basis with small groups. In this process, they discovered there were girls who were previously not allowed to go to school and were now able to participate. "The reason being some of these parents understand the need for education, but they are just so concerned about safety and security. So, when education is brought to the community, at their homes, then the parents are okay with the girls participating." (2021: 11).

6. Recommendations

6.1 Research recommendations

The research brief finds that before the pandemic, gaps in access to education between forcibly displaced and host country children and adolescents were wide. In some instances, school closures and economic constraints due to COVID-19 further widened educational gaps for forcibly displaced households, and there is evidence of low rates of intention among some households to re-enroll their children in school (for example, Hondurans and Salvadoreans in Mexico).

To inform ongoing and future efforts to allow forcibly displaced children to close educational gaps or prevent a further slide in their learning losses, the recommendations that follow are to:

- Continue to measure the loss of learning of the most vulnerable learners, with a particular emphasis on refugees, so that conclusions can be drawn on the impact of the pandemic on these specific population groups. Data should be made available in a way that comparisons can be made on learning loss between forcibly displaced and host populations.
- Explore why forcibly displaced households with children had higher rates of participation in learning activities in comparison to national households in some contexts and vice versa. Conduct further analysis to explore whether higher participation rates can be tied to the UNHCR response.
- Conduct qualitative research to identify what practices can be replicated and adapted from the provision of education responses in contexts like Costa Rica and Mexico, where engagement in learning activities throughout school closures amongst both forcibly displaced and national households was consistently higher.
- Conduct further research to understand the types of engagement with teachers, as this was one of the most common ways to continue learning activities during school closures. Identify the enabling factors or teacher practices that facilitated this to replicate these practices across contexts with lower participation rates.
- Further research is needed to understand better the reasons for the non-engagement of the forcibly displaced in learning activities during school closures. This question item was not included across all surveys and is a crucial data point to enact an effective response for the continuity of learning. Further waves of the survey in contexts of forced displacement should incorporate this question with a view towards standardization of this item across country surveys.
- Evaluate promising education practices that have emerged from the pandemic, such as using WhatsApp for students to contact and communicate with teachers.

6.2 Programmatic recommendations

This research brief, by extracting data related to education from the COVID-19 high-frequency phone surveys, has shown the extent to which forcibly displaced children's access to education has altered over the course of the pandemic and its aftermath.

Programmatic recommendations arising from the findings include:

- Implement accelerated education or other measures of remedial support to prevent the most vulnerable learners from falling behind and advocate with governments to ensure that refugee learners are proactively included in these efforts.
- WhatsApp was identified as a common method employed for contacting teachers, highlighting the importance of having connectivity to engage in learning activities. Effective responses to guarantee education continuity should consider data bundles, and though some UNHCR operations have provided these, they have not been systematic across all operations.
- Incentivize teachers to continue engagement with learners during school closures and provide capacity building.

The findings of this research brief regarding the modalities that students were most engaged in during school closures indicate ways that UNHCR and its partners could study further to increase the effectiveness of its educational programmes. The innovative measures by countries to support continuity in learning also showcase innovation and high degrees of adaptability to the given situation. Taken together, these modalities and measures should inform UNHCR's educational responses in forced displacement settings, even after the pandemic.

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Annex 1: Overview of HFPS for selected countries

	Bangladesh	Chad	Costa	Ethiopia	Iraq	Kenya	Mexico	Uganda
Baseline	*	*				*		*
Wave 1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wave 2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wave 3	*				*	*		*
Wave 4					*	*		
Wave 5						*		
Wave 6								

Light Blue – data collection, data available

Grey – data collection, data not yet available

* - Published report or brief

Summary of reports and briefs

Bangladesh

- Data: not available
 - Reports/briefs: [Demographics and Educational Attainment in Cox's Bazar](#) (baseline); [Impacts of COVID-19 on Children's Educational Attainment and Continuity](#) (wave 2); [Status of Education Among School-Aged Children in Cox's Bazar](#) (wave 3)
 - "[Status of Education Among School-Age Children in Cox's Bazar](#)" covers rounds 1 and 2 (of 4)
-

Chad

- Data: not available
 - Reports/briefs: [COVID-19 Impact Monitoring on refugee households in Chad](#) (wave 1); [COVID-19 Impact Monitoring on refugee households in Chad](#) (wave 2)
-

Costa Rica

- Data: [UNHCR Microdata Library](#) (waves 1 and 2)
 - Reports/briefs: [Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Forcibly Displaced Populations](#) (waves 1 and 2)
-

Ethiopia

- Data: not available
 - Reports/briefs: [Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Refugees in Ethiopia](#) (wave 1); [Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Refugees in Ethiopia](#) (wave 2)
-

Iraq

- Data: [World Bank Microdata Library](#) (waves 1-4)
 - Reports/briefs: [Iraq High Frequency Phone Survey \(IHFPS\)](#) (waves 1-4)
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Kenya

- Data: [UNHCR Microdata Library](#) (waves 1-6)
 - Reports/briefs: [Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in Kenya](#) (waves 1-5)
-

Mexico

- Data: [UNHCR Microdata Library](#) (waves 1 and 2)
 - Reports/briefs: [Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Forcibly Displaced Populations](#) (waves 1 and 2)
-

Uganda

- Data: not available
 - Reports/briefs: [Monitoring Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Refugees in Uganda](#) (wave 1); [Monitoring Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Refugees in Uganda](#) (wave 2); [Monitoring Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Refugees in Uganda](#) (wave 3);
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Sampling and harmonization

The HFPS aim to be nationally representative, with the recognized limitations and challenges of sampling and coverage for phone surveys in mind.⁹ In Kenya, the sample of forcibly displaced persons consisted of urban and camp-based refugees, as well as stateless people registered by the UNHCR, with the sample aiming to be representative of the refugee and stateless populations in the country. It comprises five strata: Kakuma refugee camp, Kalobeyei settlement, Dadaab refugee camp, urban refugees, and Shona stateless, where sampling approaches differ across strata. In Costa Rica and Mexico, on the other hand, the sample can be considered representative of PoC registered with UNHCR, though not necessarily representative of the entire displaced population in the two countries. In Mexico, sampling for PoCs was based on UNHCR's registration data – proGres. The sample is representative of persons of concern (PoC) registered with UNHCR, though not necessarily representative of all displaced populations in the country. The sample sizes for PoCs for the different survey waves are summarized below (Table 3). To ensure that findings are comparable across countries, surveys were designed to both allow comparison across countries that have implemented surveys on the impact of COVID-19. The country questionnaire maintained most core questions based on the World Bank's high-frequency survey and in some cases, added country specific questions and some evolution across survey waves

Table 1 PoC sample sizes

Persons of Concern (PoC) sample sizes	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Costa Rica	1163	2761		
Mexico	1220	2701		
Ethiopia	1676	1429		
Iraq (IDPs)	765	852	815	826
Chad		865		
Kenya	1326	1687	1469	1357
Uganda	2010	1852	1985	

Direct comparisons across countries are limited due to the challenges of data harmonization. Section 5 presents comparison based on harmonized results for access to education pre-pandemic and participation in learning activities during school closures, where relevant. Other results are generally presented on a country-by-country basis.

⁹ Jeffrey Tanner, "The pitfalls and potential of high-frequency phone surveys during COVID-19," Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (blog), April 1, 2021, <https://www.jointdatacenter.org/the-pitfalls-and-potential-of-high-frequency-phone-surveys-during-covid-19>.

Annex 2: Forced displacement context for selected countries

Table 2 UNHCR Population Figures for selected countries, 2021

Country of asylum	Refugees under UNHCR's mandate	Asylum-seekers	IDPs of concern to UNHCR	Venezuelans displaced abroad	Others of concern
Bangladesh	918,907	48	0		0
Iraq	280,072	11,508	1,186,556		730
Kenya	481,048	59,001	0		0
Mexico	73,448	157,150	0	63,179	165,218
Costa Rica	10,224	152,507	0	21,766	10
Ethiopia	821,283	2,251	3,646,267		419
Uganda	1,529,903	43,388	0		0
Chad	555,782	4,705	406,573		106,913

Source: UNHCR Population Figures (2021)

Annex 2: Forced displacement context for selected countries

School closure measures

Estimates for timing and intensity of school closures are extracted from the *Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker* [database](#).¹⁰

The dataset contains 21 indicators and a miscellaneous notes field organized into five groups:

C - containment and closure policies

E - economic policies

H - health system policies

V - vaccination policies

M - miscellaneous policies

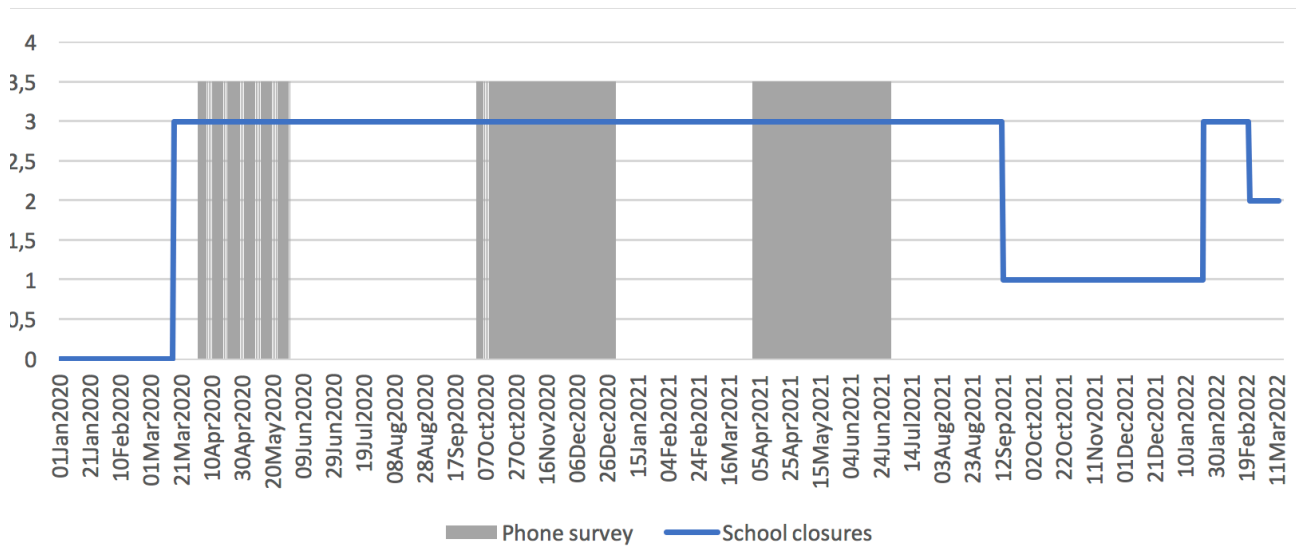
Coding for the indicator school closures (C1, record closings of schools and universities) is as follows:

- 0 - no measures
- 1 - recommend closing or all schools open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to non-Covid-19 operations
- 2 - require closing (only some levels or categories, eg just high school, or just public schools)
- 3 - require closing all levels

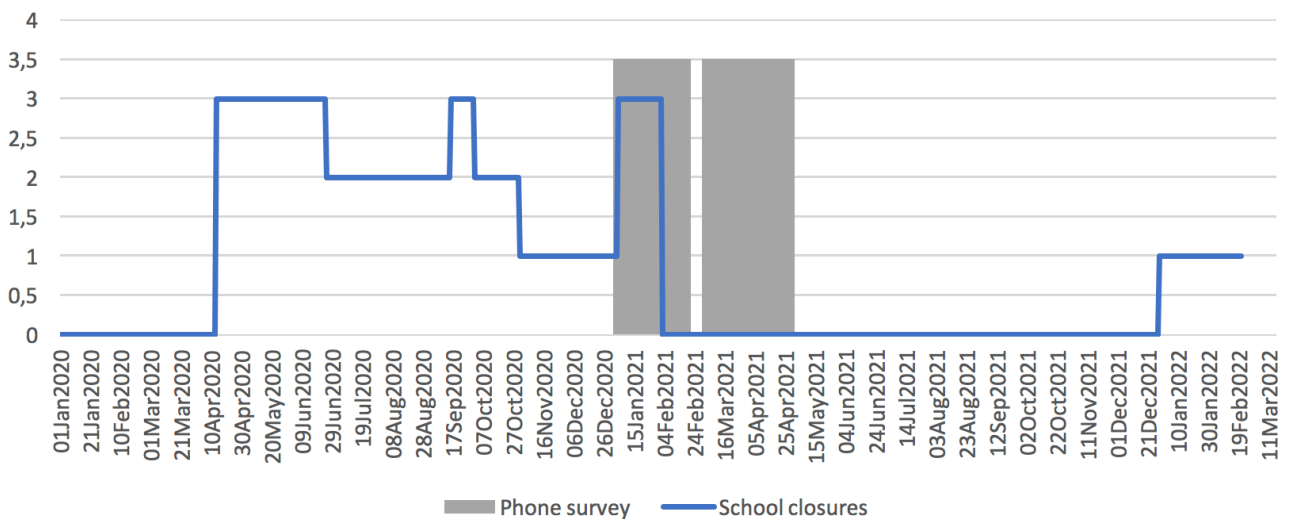
¹⁰ Thomas Hale, Noam Angrist, Rafael Goldszmidt, Beatriz Kira, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, Samuel Webster, Emily Cameron-Blake, Laura Hallas, Saptarshi Majumdar, and Helen Tatlow. (2021). "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker)." *Nature Human Behaviour*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01079-8>

Country-level timelines (school closures and phone survey waves)

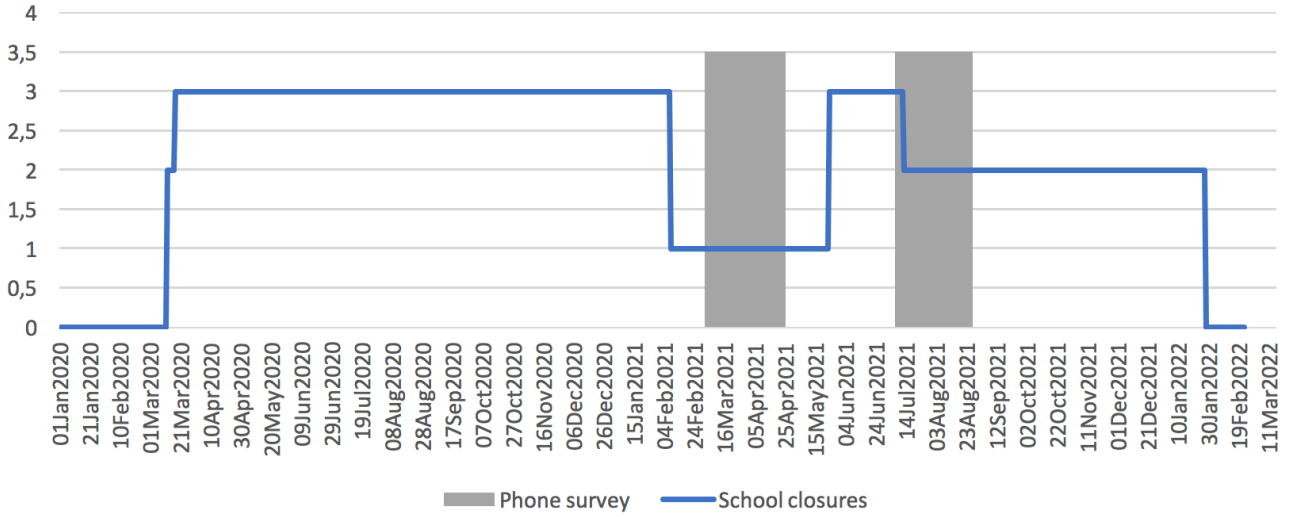
Bangladesh



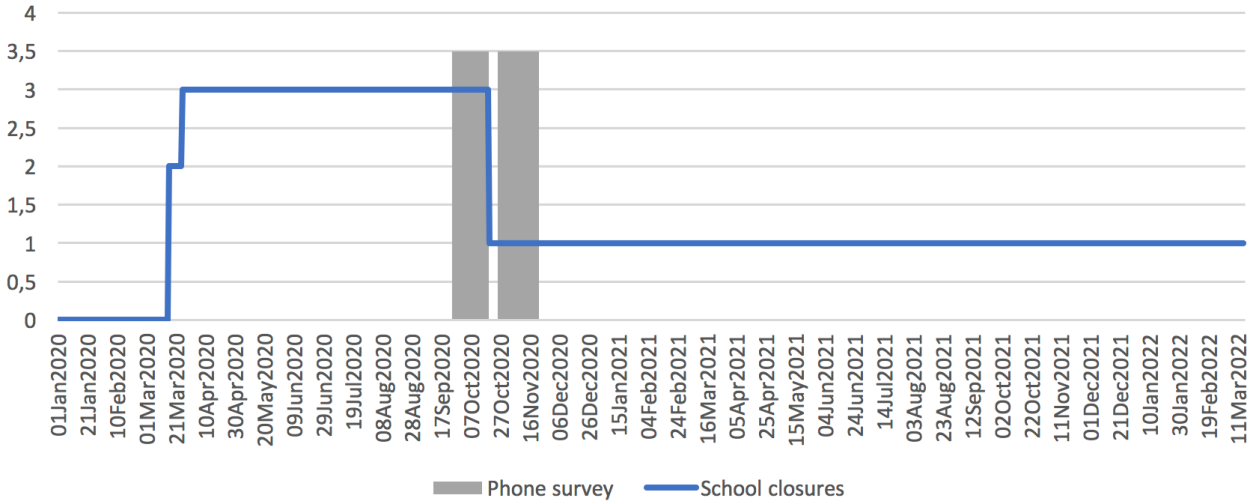
Chad



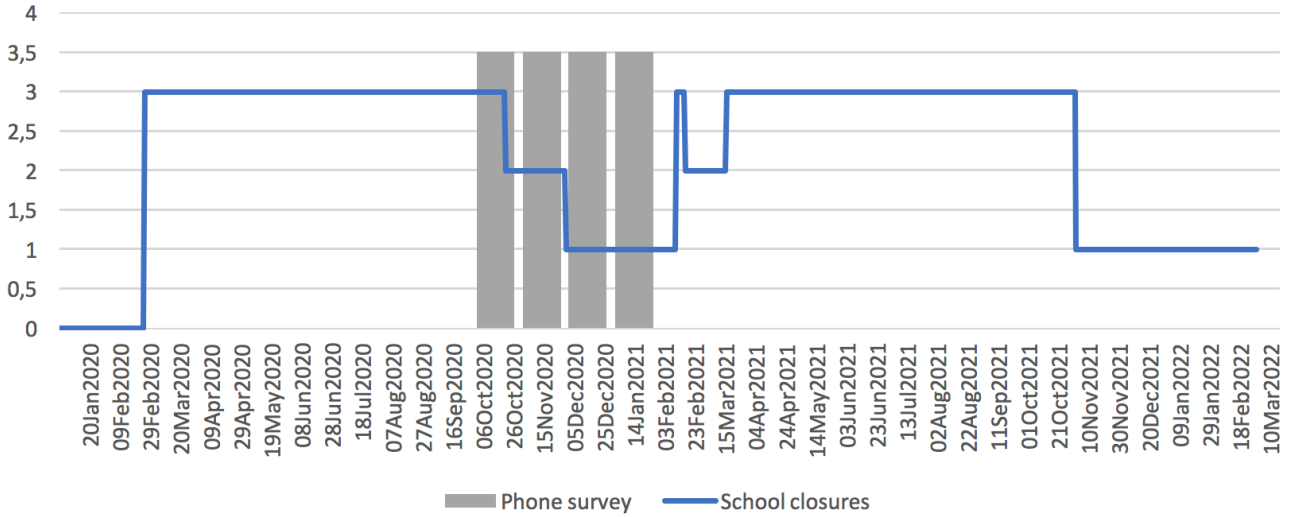
Costa Rica



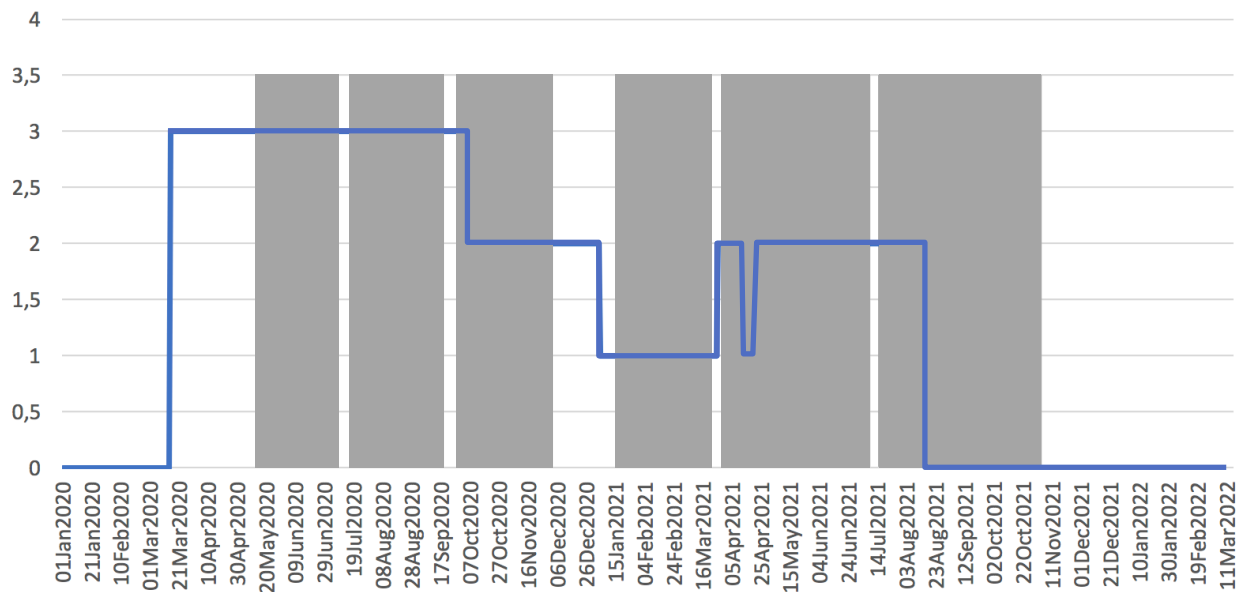
Ethiopia



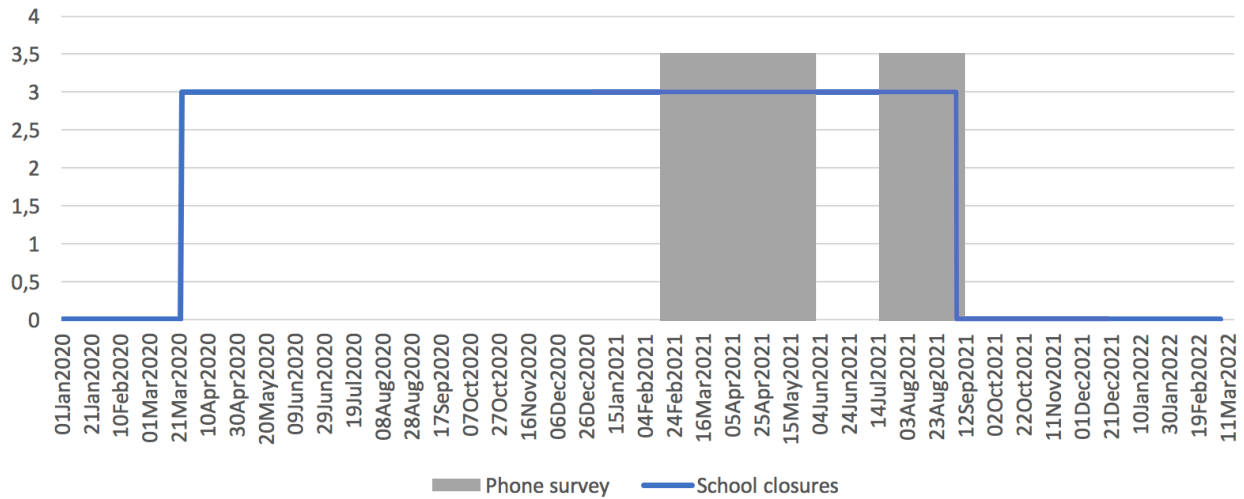
Iraq



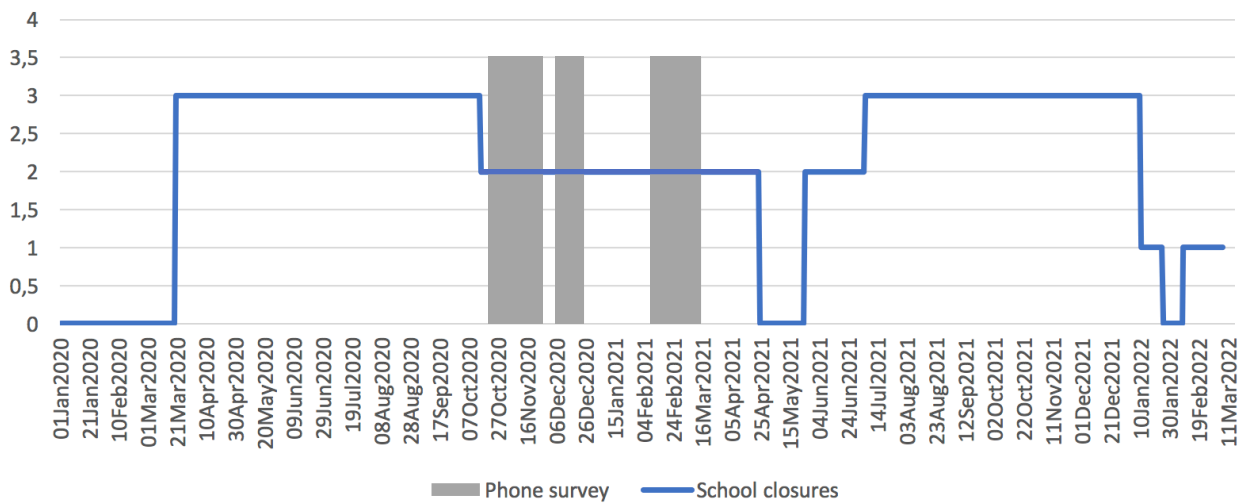
Kenya



Mexico



Uganda



EDUCATION ACCESS FOR THE FORCIBLY DISPLACED

During and in the aftermath
of the COVID-19 pandemic

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October 2022

FRONT COVER

UGANDA. A teacher from the Ugandan host community visits South Sudanese primary school children in the Omugo refugee settlement to teach and keep them engaged as schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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