

# UNHCR COVID-19 Education Response

## Highlights

During the COVID-19 pandemic UNHCR **supported the continuity of learning** during school closures through:

- Distributing textbooks and printed materials to nearly 223,000 learners
- Distributing 26,690 radios and making available 10,208 tablets with educational software
- Providing some 60,000 persons with data bundles to access online learning programmes
- Training over 9,300 teachers on new methodologies to support learning during school closures
- Providing more than 2,000 teachers with additional mobile data allowances
- Continuing to pay incentives to almost 16,000 teachers

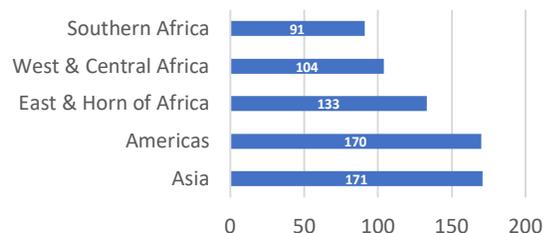


School closures disrupted the education of refugees around the world

**Ahead of school re-opening**, UNHCR supported refugee learners' return to face-to-face learning by:

- Distributing some 1,633,500 facemasks to teachers and learners
- Cleaning more than 2,800 schools in accordance with COVID safety protocols
- Providing cleaning materials to almost 4,000 schools
- Improving WASH facilities in some 3,800 schools
- Constructing 244 additional classrooms and providing additional furniture to support physical distancing measures and reduce over-crowding

Average number of school days lost by region (March 2020-March 2021)



## Introduction

The closure of schools in 2020 and 2021 to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 disrupted the education of over 1.5 billion children and university students worldwide, including refugee children and youth. As education systems shifted to home-based learning, often using online resources and broadcast technologies, marginalized families who lacked the resources to access these platforms risked being left further behind. Around the globe UNHCR operations, with their partners, sought to minimize the effect on refugees' educational lives and to support a safe return to face-to-face learning when schooling resumed.

This report summarises the efforts of 58 UNHCR operations<sup>1</sup> as they responded to the heightened needs arising from the pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> **Data note:** The figures in this report are based on responses by 58 operations to a survey distributed by the HQ Education section in May/June 2020. This report focuses only on actions carried out directly by UNHCR or through partnership agreements. Beneficiary numbers therefore differ from reporting against the Global Humanitarian Response Plan which encompasses both services supported by both UNHCR and other actors. Data on school closures affecting refugee learners is drawn from data submitted by 37 country operations.

## Response summary



Nearly **23,000** learners provided with learning support materials. Over **10,000** tablets available for remote learning



Just over **26,500** radios distributed to access remote learning



Over **7,300** students supported to continue higher education



Almost **4,000** schools provided with cleaning materials

*(March 2020 to June 2021)*

### Refugees' access to learning programmes during school closures

In April 2020, when school closures were at their height, many national governments quickly rolled out programmes to support the continuity of learning. Where refugees follow the national curriculum, they too had access to these initiatives. However, lack of access to the required hardware, weak broadcast signals in refugee hosting areas and the costs of connectivity often meant that refugee learners were not able to benefit fully from these opportunities.

The distribution of printed materials to sustain learning, often coupled with guidance on what exercises to complete or short explanations shared through text or voice messaging systems, was home-based learning approach most widely available to refugee learners. Instructional programmes that relied on hardware (radios, televisions, computers etc.) were also available, but not on the same scale.

### Supporting access to home-based and remote learning programmes

UNHCR operations implemented a variety of initiatives to enable **half a million refugee learners (539,958)** to continue learning remotely. Operations distributed printed

learning materials to **222,890 learners** and provided **data bundles to 60,057 persons**. In areas using educational broadcasting, 26,690 radios were distributed and in some areas communal viewing areas were set up to receive televised broadcasts. In addition, **10,208 tablets** used in connected education programmes were made available for use by learners. In several operations laptop computers and software were made available to residential centres housing young refugees to enable them to access online learning programmes. Over 2,000 computers and 10 televisions were provided to Ministry of Education schools/ centres to support learning by those who were unable to follow distance or online programmes from home.

### Supporting teachers during school closures

During school closures UNHCR continued to pay **incentives to 15,981 teachers**, with many refugee teachers continuing to support students' remote learning during this time. The continuity of payments was also a means for ensuring protection given that during lockdowns refugee incomes dropped. Additional **training** on the use of new teaching methods and modalities to support learning from home was offered to **9,309 teachers**.

### Adapting support services offered through schools

For many refugees, schools offer more than an opportunity to learn – they are also a means to receive psycho-social support, counselling and to benefit from complementary services such as school nutrition or health screening programmes. In place of school feeding programmes, take-home rations replaced school distributions in four locations, and in two countries the size of household distributions was increased. In-school programmes were substituted with cash distributions in only one location. Psycho-social support (PSS) services were adapted in 72% of reporting operations, with UNHCR introducing telephone-based counselling and hot-line services. PSS support was also integrated into instructional messages, along with advice and guidance for parents.

### Supporting girls to return to schooling

Back to School campaigns took place in 72% of countries that participated in the survey. In 13 countries these were linked with cash-based incentives for almost 51,000 learners to incentivize a return to school and to offset costs associated with education. In nine of these countries programmes were designed to specifically encourage a return to school by girls. In 27 countries UNHCR and its partners undertook specific advocacy to encourage girls to return to school. In many of these countries girls' participation in education was already lower than that of boys, particularly in upper primary and at secondary levels. Specific efforts to encourage re-enrolment of girls included the distribution of menstrual hygiene materials and the establishment of separate classes for girls and provision of cash-based incentives.

### Opening schools in line with COVID safety protocols

UNHCR operations supported schools hosting refugees to open in line with national

governments' guidelines on safe re-opening through the provision of **over 1.5 million facemasks** to learners and education personnel. A further **75,539 items of other personal protective equipment** (gloves, face shields for use by teachers that allowed hearing impaired children to lip-read, equipment for cleaners etc) were provided for personnel working in schools. **Contactless thermometers** were provided to **2,744 schools** where government protocols required daily temperature scans for teachers and learners.

In line with WHO guidelines on infection control, **2,836 schools were deep cleaned** ahead of re-opening and **3,896 provided with cleaning materials** for ongoing use. **Handwashing** points were increased in **2,649 schools** and general WASH infrastructure was improved in 3,837 schools. Host community schools attended by refugees also benefited from these programmes.

**Additional classrooms** were built in **244 schools** in order to reduce over-crowding in classrooms and allow for greater physical distancing; **440 schools also received additional furniture** to allow children to sit further apart and to have fewer children sharing a desk.

### Support for the continuation of higher education

During the closure of higher education institutions, UNHCR continued to pay **stipends** for all the **7,343 DAFI scholarship holders**. With many universities moving to online or hybrid learning programmes, students were provided with additional allowances for mobile data and connectivity as requested by the programme managers in the country. In some selected countries, the programme also supported the students with additional allowances for hygiene and personal protective equipment to enhance hygiene and protection during the pandemic.

**More action needed to mitigate learning losses and effects of school closures**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on children and young people around the world, resulting in disruptions to learning and increased protection risks which could significantly undermine the progress made in refugees’ access to education. In addition to the immediate effects on school attendance and children’s learning, this could have disastrous consequences for the long-term resilience of refugee communities by deepening poverty levels and limiting future access to skilled employment. When considering these risks it is important to recognise that even before the pandemic struck, 48% of refugee children were already not attending school.

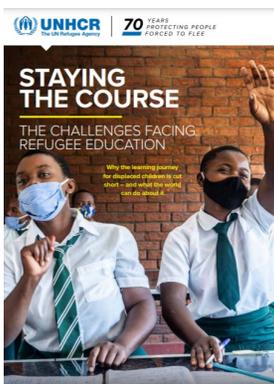
We therefore urge governments and other education stakeholders to:

- Include refugees in national programmes to recover lost learning time
- Invest in support programmes to help minimise learning losses and which take into consideration the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable learners
- Innovate and establish initiatives to address the needs of students who are at risk of drop out or have dropped out due to increased protection risks or heightened poverty

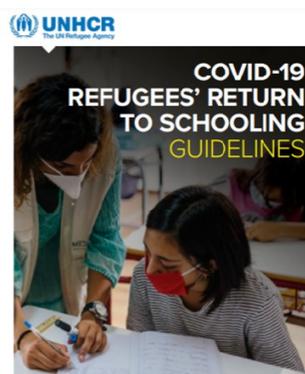
**More information:**



[UNHCR COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal 2021](#)  
(launched 18 December 2020)



[Staying the Course](#)  
UNHCR Education Report 2021



[COVID-19 Guidelines: Refugees’ return to schooling](#)

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