

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region

October – December 2020



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Mary, a Refugee Teacher, is one of the over 230,000 South Sudan refugees who Came to Bidibidi in Uganda from South Sudan because of the war.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL RE-OPENING

Status of school reopenings across the region

In March 2020, with the exception of Burundi, nearly all schools in East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes (EHAGL) region were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan Tanzania and Uganda). An estimated 1.1 million refugee children and youth were unable to physically attend classes in school. Between October-December 2020, five countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda) partially re-opened schools starting with the examination classes. The partial re-opening provided the litmus test on whether it was possible to have students return to school while ensuring the risk of COVID-19 infections at school were minimized.

- **On 5 October 2020, South Sudan**, reopened examination classes only. The Government released a circular providing direction on how schools would be partially re-opened observing COVID-19 guidelines. Prior to this, the Ministry of General Education ensured that all education partners in the country were sensitized on COVID-19 guidelines and had prepared schools accordingly. Phase 2 of school re-opening for South Sudan is planned for April 2021.
- **On 12 October 2020, Kenya** opened three grades only, **grade 4 & 8 in primary schools and form 4 in secondary schools**. Universities and colleges were also allowed to resume classes. This partial re-opening was considered phase 1, with phase 2 scheduled for January 2021. Prior to school reopening, Kenya held several education stakeholder consultation meetings. Public debates including education experts, parents and the public were also conducted. The Government further developed a COVID-19 school reopening guideline that was broadly shared with key

stakeholders. Education officials were trained and teachers recalled to schools in advance to make final preparations for the reopening. UNHCR used the time of school closures to renovate and build additional classrooms, latrines and hand washing stations in the camp schools to adhere to national guidelines ahead of phase 2.

- **On 15 October 2020, Uganda** started phased re-opening with examination classes only. The Government released COVID-19 guidelines to all education stakeholders ahead of the re-opening.
- **On 2 November 2020, Rwanda** commenced their gradual reopening of primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Even as the students returned to school, the Government of Rwanda continued to deliver distance learning programs to enhance and improve the quality of education for the learners.
- **In early November, Ethiopia** started the gradual re-opening of classes with some locations opening grade 8 and 12, while other locations started learning programmes with lower grades. The Ministry of Education put in place school re-opening guidelines. The guidelines were implemented by the Region Education Bureaus (REBs) in the country and applied by all partners supporting education in the country.

By the end of December 2020, eight countries in the EHAGL region (Tanzania, Somalia, Djibouti, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Ethiopia) had reopened schools either fully or partially.

School Reopening: Regional Overview

Country	Date of partial school reopening - Phase 1	Proposed Dates of re-opening of all classes – Phase 2
Tanzania	29 June 2020	Fully re-opened
Somalia	15 August 2020	Fully re-opened
Djibouti	6 September 2020	Fully re-opened
South Sudan	5 October 2020	April 2021
Kenya	12 October 2020	January 2021
Uganda	15 October 2020	TBC
Rwanda	2 November 2020	23 November 2020*
Ethiopia	November 2020	TBC

*Rwanda closed all schools again in Kigali effective 18 Jan 2021, while schools outside the capital remained open.

Tips on School Reopening and Student Safety

In March 2020, the Inter-Agency Steering Committee produced [interim guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in schools](#). This guidance remains key to ensuring schools re-open safely and are a good source for information that can be included in school-level protocols. In December 2020, UNHCR released the “[COVID-19 Refugees’ Return to Schooling Guidelines](#)” which, amongst other documents, draw on the IASC guidelines to provide suggested actions to ensure that parents, teachers and children feel comfortable with the measures adopted by schools to ensure children’s safety.

Additional suggested actions

- **Co-create core messaging on reopening and return to schooling** in partnership with educators, school management and community, building on Ministry messaging where possible
- **Prevent social stigma** related to COVID-19 infection and/or communities perceived as being at high risk of infection by sharing facts and highlighting that the virus does not follow geographical boundaries, ethnicities, age, ability or gender within communication with the community, teachers and learners. More detailed guidance on preventing stigma can be found [here](#).
- **Hold information sessions** for teachers and other education personnel to ensure that everyone understands new practices and procedures that will be introduced. UNHCR may also work with Ministry of Education officials in refugee hosting areas to support information dissemination to teachers
- **Use range of formats**, adapted to literacy levels, to deliver information & invite community members to share concerns– for e.g. presenting information visually and in languages spoken by refugees and host communities. Explore use of social media, short WhatsApp videos/messages and community radio to disseminate information
- **Draw on older students' ability to communicate and connect** with younger learners to share information, discuss challenges and propose solutions
- **Provide variety of channels** for community & education personnel to voice concerns and fears around return to school and implementing new hygiene and safety procedures, as the adoption of new practices may initially create anxiety and uncertainty.

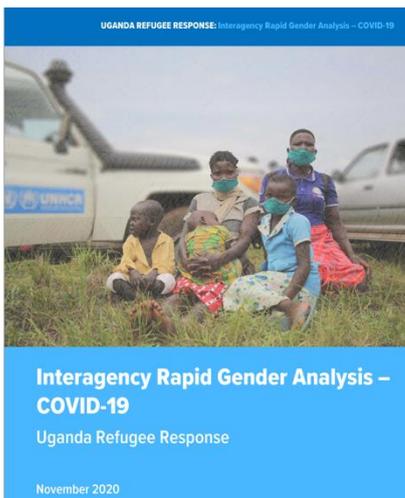
Refugee Students Reached by Distance Learning Programmes during School Closure:

As the year came to a close, a quick analysis indicated that during school closures an approximate total of 275,500 refugee students were reached with Distance Learning Programmes. Distance Learning will remain a key mode of learning going forward. UNHCR will continue to deliver distance learning programmes to improve the quality of learning for refugee students in schools, and expand it to reach out of school children and youth.

Country	Student enrolment before COVID-19	Students Reached by Distance Learning Programmes	% Reach
Djibouti	4,084	4,084	100%
Ethiopia	199,388	83,181	42%
Rwanda	38,881	27,399	70%
Kenya	157,094	84,840	48%
Somalia	5,669	4,226	75%
South Sudan	104,298	12,254	12%
Uganda	349,356	61,271	18%
Sudan	86,829	4,256	5%
Tanzania	93,632	5,612	2%
Eritrea	37	0	0
Total	1,039,268	275,656	27%

Impact of COVID-19 on Girls Education

As every year, October 11 marked the International Day of the Girl Child. This year, the regional education team focused on understanding how girls specifically were impacted when most schools in the region closed, and girls were no longer able to be in the protective environment that the school offers them. Reflecting upon this day, the UNHCR Regional Bureau Director, Clementine Nkweta-Salami wrote an [Op Ed](#) highlighting some of the major observations from UNHCR operations in the region on the impact of school closures on girls. These included increased incidents of gender based violence, teenage pregnancies and domestic work carried out by girls, along with indications of an unlikely return to school for many girls in the region. As actors working in the humanitarian space must do more to ensure that girls are able to thrive. The article also highlighted key examples of how the opportunity for enabling girls to complete their education journey puts them on a pathway to a sustainable future.



In Uganda, UNHCR undertook [an interagency multi-sectoral analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on women, men, boys and girls](#). The results confirmed that close to 40% of children did not have access to learning materials and that more girls (27.4%) than boys (13.3%) were expected to help with additional housework, limiting the time they can dedicate to learning from home. An increase in child marriage and pregnancies was projected to result in high dropout rates once schools fully resumed in 2021. The analysis also indicated that teenage boys were less likely than girls to return to school. This is because parents also rely on boys to support family income. The opportunity cost of sending girls back to school is lower, as they contribute less to a family's survival.

As multiple countries start to undertake assessments and analysis on school re-opening and returns, UNHCR will strive to ensure that girls return back to school and that any gains made prior to COVID-19 are sustained. An increase to enrollment and improvement of quality education and safe learning school environments will be prioritized. To showcase the ongoing work that partners are doing in the education space, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has [launched a blog series to elevate promising practices for girls in Education in Emergencies](#), particularly those making COVID-19 adaptations. This collection of stories will increase transparency and accountability to document progress made against the Charlevoix Declaration commitments of 2018.

Education in Emergencies (EiE) for the Tigray Response in Sudan



Primary students at a temporary learning structure in Um Rakuba camp. UNHCR/Linda Akach.

In early November, violence erupted in Ethiopia's Tigray region after several months of political

tension. The ongoing conflict led to immediate and large-scale displacement across the border into East Sudan, with currently 57,500 refugees seeking safety there. Approximately 45% of those displaced are children who need both care and education.

In Gedaref State of East Sudan, two camps have quickly been set up to host newly arrived refugees – Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah. Approximately half of the arrived Ethiopians have been moved from the reception sites at the border to these camps. There is a high demand for education among the population. Prior to school closures in March 2020 (due the pandemic), the gross enrolment rate in Tigray was very high at 117% for primary, 70% for lower secondary and 15% for upper secondary, exceeding the national average. Although access rates were high,

educational quality has been low, with more than half of students not able to read at basic levels. Secondary enrolment especially for girls was lagging; however, primary gender parity had been achieved prior to displacement.

Within the first 72 hours of settling into the Um Rakuba camp, the population had identified teachers and enrolled children into school. With leadership from the Norwegian Refugee Council and material support from UNHCR, basic temporary learning structures (TLS) with five classrooms were erected in two different sites in Um Rakuba and primary students were attending one of two shifts in these spaces. As of December, approximately 1,500 learners have been enrolled. Additionally, Save the Children erected Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) to serve young children and will begin offering early

childhood education soon. Both services will focus on non-formal learning and psychosocial support in the first three months of displacement, with the aim to transition to a more formal learning following the initial period. Implementation for all levels of learning is being designed with COVID-19 protocols in place, though many gaps in WASH remain.



Children play outside a child friendly space in Um Rakuba Camp. UNHCR/ Linda Akach.

Expanding Higher Education Scholarship Opportunities for Refugees

UNHCR is looking forward to the opportunities 2021 holds to increase scholarship opportunities in higher education for refugee students across the region. This includes expanding existing scholarship programmes to new countries and seeking new programmes and innovative platforms for refugee students to access more tertiary education scholarship opportunities.

UNHCR together with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) on the scholarship programme “Leadership for Africa”, funded by the German Foreign Office, was launched in September 2020. The programme aims to support the academic qualification and advancement of young African refugees and national scholars from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Sudan to study for a Master’s degree at higher education institutions in Germany. Courses offered include medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, law, the arts, and architecture. UNHCR supported eligible refugee students to apply for the scholarships, resulting in more than 100 applications from refugees.

In addition to this, DAAD offered an “In-Country/In-Region Programme in Developing Countries,” a scholarship programme for the training of future professionals and managerial staff in developing countries. The programme provides scholarships for future university teachers from developing countries for Master’s degree courses as well as for doctorates in multiple higher education institutions in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Sudan. The objective of the programme is to qualify graduates for taking on positions of responsibility in development-related areas in teaching and research. It also aims to promote the participation of women and disadvantaged groups and to strengthen the organisational, financial, and personnel capacities of partner institutions.

Programmes like these offer great opportunities for young male and female refugee students to learn new skills, expand their qualifications, find new employment opportunities and to build bridges for sustainable livelihoods in their country of residence, their home country upon return, as well as internationally.

Q4 EDUCATION TRAININGS, WEBINARS and UPCOMING EVENTS

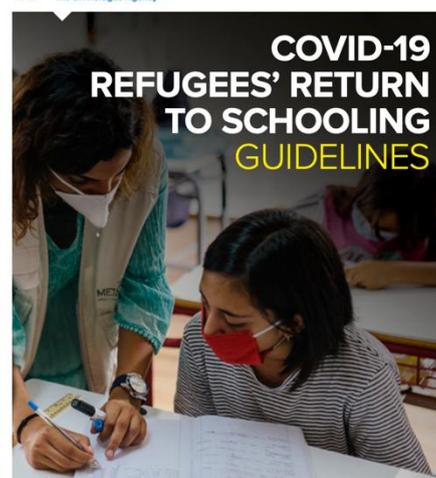
The final **Regional Education webinar for education** staff focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of Accelerated Education, part 2 of the learning series. Staff were taken through a thorough review of the Programme Checklist when developing or reviewing Accelerated Education projects, including guidance to existing resources found on the [INEE website](#).

The **Humanitarian Leadership Academy launched** a free course on **Education in Emergencies** which links to the INEE competency framework and gives a good overall understanding of key EiE topics and areas. This is the online component of the Certificate of Advanced Studies offered by the University of Geneva.

On **January 25, the International Day for Education**, NORRAG will **launch the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies**. The high-level panel will exchange with participants on how the Geneva Global Hub can be a catalyst for change to respond to children's education needs in contexts affected by conflict, violence, disasters and displacement. [Registration for the event is linked here](#).

FURTHER READING

In December 2020, UNHCR released the "[COVID-19 Refugees' Return to Schooling Guidelines](#)", which includes practical suggestions on how the specific needs of children, youth and families can be addressed as schools begin to re-open. This document supplements previous guidance such as [the Framework for Returning to School](#) and the [Safe Back to School – A Practitioners' Guide](#), referenced in previous newsletters.



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LINKS

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<https://www.unhcr.org/education.html>