CONNECTED EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES:

ADDRESSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Acknowledgement

Cover photo:
© UNHCR/Antoine Tardy Egypt. Students learning at Al Farooq Omar school with support of the Instant Network School programme.

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© UNHCR/Vodafone Foundation/Sala Lewis. Mozambique. Amosi, fled conflict in the DRC with only his younger brother.

Key highlights/messages

- COVID-19 has disrupted education for all learners but has had an acute and profound effect on refugee and displaced learners who were already facing unique obstacles in accessing, staying in, and completing education prior to the pandemic. It is estimated that **refugee learners lost an average of 142 days of schooling from the first school closure at the onset of the pandemic up to March 2021** (UNHCR, 2021).

- The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing risks to academic success (impacting both retention and progression), while also magnifying inequities by negatively affecting the most vulnerable children, adolescents, and youth – particularly in low and lower-middle income countries. The impact has been devastating on refugee learners, who often do not have adequate access to digital infrastructure, devices or connectivity.

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR and partners had worked for a decade to demonstrate the viability and value of investing in digital learning, working in a select number of contexts. However, as the world becomes increasingly digitally dependent, it is being recognised that these investments need to be dramatically scaled up to ensure all refugees, and their host communities, are digitally included.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic related school closures, digital learning modalities were rapidly scaled up by governments and education actors providing a critical resource for ensuring continuity of learning. A variety of multimodal approaches was deployed across the globe to support teaching and learning processes. However, a significant digital divide prevented many learners, especially refugee and displaced learners in low-resourced contexts, from meaningful participation in continuous learning programmes. Despite early investments, UNHCR estimates that **57 per cent of refugee or displaced learners who were enrolled in school prior to COVID-19 pandemic were not supported by any digital or home learning programme during school closures**.

- When this number is combined with the estimates of refugees who are out-of-school, it is estimated that globally there were **78 per cent of refugee children with limited-to-no access to learning opportunities,** during pandemic-related school closures.

- Educational responses to COVID-19 school closures have demonstrated **the need for greater and more thoughtful digital learning approaches that can be utilized during school disruptions but also within the classroom and to support remedial learning.** However, as these investments are made, it is vital they are **developed with a focus on inclusion.** This means designing approaches that meet the needs of all students and communities, including those in low-resource and low-tech contexts. It is also imperative for these communities, including those hosting refugees, to be targeted for greater digital investments to help narrow the digital divide. It is vital that **Governments, education partners, and the private sector identify concrete plans and commitments that will assist in ensuring that all learners are able to benefit from today's digital advancements and national digital learning investments, including ensuring the meaningful inclusion of refugee and displaced learners.**

© UNHCR/Catherine Wachiaya. Students are excited to use tablets from the Instant Network Schools (INS) kits available at a community centre.

PART 1:

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing inequities and risks offsetting prior educational gains, particularly for the most marginalized learners, including refugee and displaced students

© UNHCR/Eugene Sibomana. Rwanda. Primary school students in Mugombwa refugee camp, return to the classroom after extensive school closures due to COVID-19, 12/05/2021

PART 2:

Digital learning solutions were rapidly scaled up and deployed worldwide to support continuity of learning during school closures and to mitigate the learning losses for all learners

© UNHCR/Anthony Karumba. Kenya. Stateless Shona woman becomes first to attend university.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and across all continents. (UNESCO, 2020). In 2020, schools around the world were fully closed on average for 79 instruction days, ranging from 53 days in high-income countries to 115 in lower-middle-income countries (LMIC), across all education levels (i.e. pre-primary level, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary) (UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and OECD, 2021). More disruption has occurred for refugee learners. Based on estimates from 37 countries, refugee learners **lost an average of 142 days of schooling from the first school closure at the onset of the pandemic up to March 2021** (UNHCR, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed millions of children and adolescents at risk of not returning to school, offsetting the progress made prior to the pandemic. It is estimated that, globally, an estimated 23.8 million children, adolescent and youth may drop out, or not have access to school, due to the pandemic's economic impact alone (UNESCO, 2020). The pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on the most marginalized communities, particularly on refugee and displaced learners, but also amongst those with disabilities, from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, living in remote or rural areas, as well as adolescent girls from rural and disadvantaged families who are likely to assume more household chores and care work during school closures (UN, 2020). **It is estimated that because of COVID-19, half of all refugee girls in secondary school will not return when schools reopen** (UNHCR, 2020)[1]. This is a dire prediction considering that the cohort of girls who made it to secondary level prior to the pandemic was already limited. Refugee female students are less than half as likely to attend secondary school as their male counterparts (UNHCR, 2020).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant learning losses in settings where this has been assessed. A recent UIS report estimated the magnitude of learning lost due to pandemic-related disruptions. The results

indicate that children had lost, on average, 54% of schooling time due to partial or full school closure, which translated into a learning loss of [2]one year (UNESCO, 2021). The learning losses are unequally distributed, with worse impacts observed in children and adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in comparison to their peers who are not as disadvantaged. It is expected that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting generational adolescent' learning proficiencies, especially in low-resourced contexts (UNESCO, 2021). **Refugee and displaced learners' loss of schooling time is further compounded by their limited participation in digital or home learning opportunities which has created more pronounced learning losses.**

Based on a recent analysis of UNHCR data, **an estimated 57 per cent of refugee or displaced learners who were enrolled in school prior to COVID-19 pandemic were not supported by any digital or home-based learning programme during school closure**[3]. When this is added to the number of refugee learners who were out of school prior to COVID-19, **it is estimated that a total of 78 per cent of school-age refugee learners had limited-to-no access to learning opportunities during school closures**[4]. Preventing further effects of this learning crisis and mitigating the learning losses from becoming a generational catastrophe should be a top priority for governments, education actors, donors and communities. The variability in the provision of digital learning solutions in different contexts is based on several factors, but some of the most influential and easy to resolve factors include the level of infrastructure, availability of technology and connectivity, as well as the digital literacy of educators, learners and parents.

2   The projection model is developed by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) which uses contact time with teachers that children have lost as a key input to project the learning loss. Evidence, both from before and during the pandemic, points to an important effect: interruptions in contact time lead to learning losses which are larger than what is suggested by the actual time lost, as learners tend to forget skills acquired even before the interruptions.
3   This estimation is based on the author's calculation using the COVID-19 multi-sector monitoring survey from quarter 1 and quarter 2 in 2021.
4   This estimation is based on the author's calculation using the COVID-19 multi-sector monitoring survey and the UNHCR education report 2021.

1   This is estimation from Malala Fund based on UNHCR data.
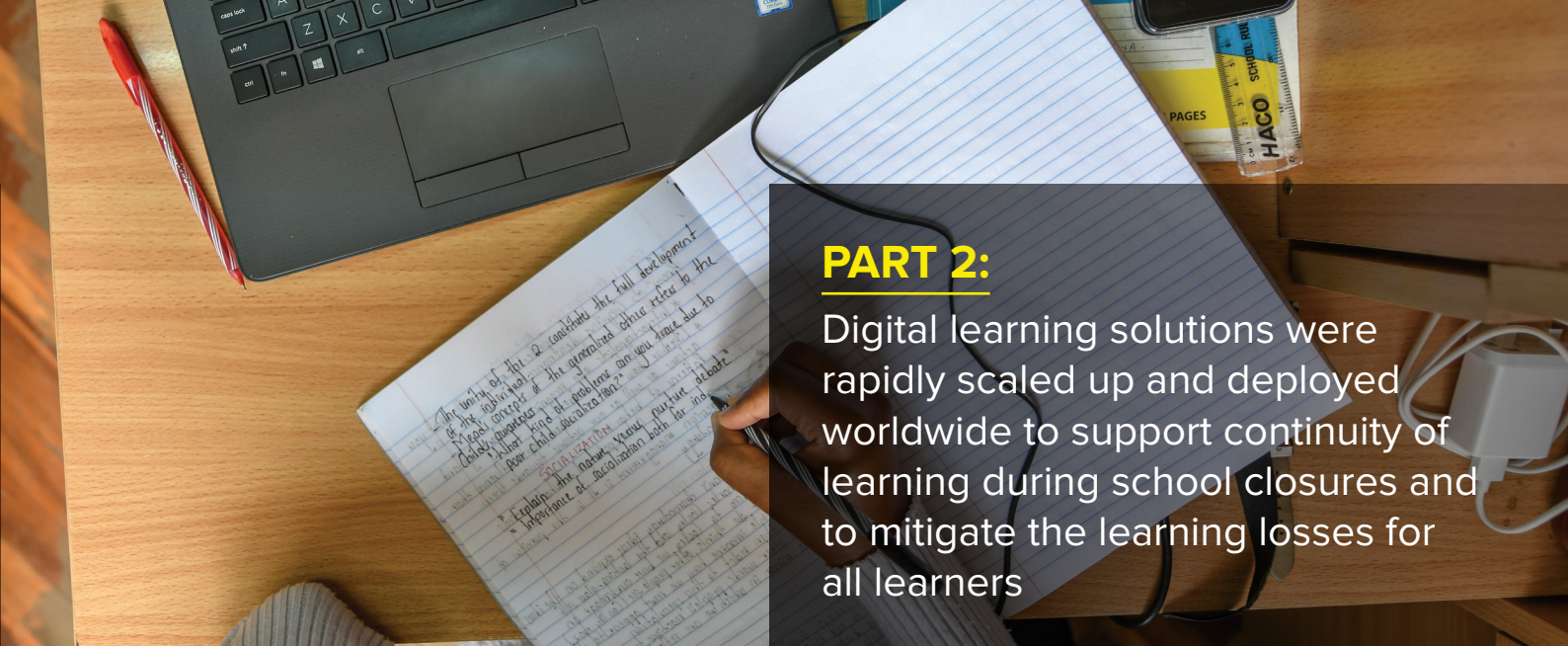
Therefore, it is vital that greater digital investments are made within refugee-hosting communities, in order to mitigate the significant learning loss experienced by these learners. Prior to COVID-19, investment and resources were made in select locations, by a wide range of actors, to help establish needed infrastructure, while also developing digital systems, creating content and materials, and improving digital literacy and competences. The existing system, platforms and programmes have enabled a timely response in these contexts, thus helping to mitigate the disruption of COVID-19 related school closure. Government, with the support of partners, have deployed a variety of high- and low-tech digital learning modalities, ranging from broadcast media (such as TV and radio) to online platforms and social media channels, along with other measures including distribution of radios, data bundles and supplementary materials to ensure continuity of learning throughout 2020 and 2021. Based on the National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures survey, covering February to April 2021 from 143 countries reported, 99 per cent of countries indicated at least one digital learning solution was provided for one or more education level (UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and OECD, 2021).

Prior to COVID-19, investment and resources at policy level, these digital learning solutions are available to refugee and forcibly displaced learners who reside in host countries that have included refugees in their national education system[5], and, therefore, also in their contingency plans for COVID-19 education responses. However, in practice, the lack of infrastructure and prior investments in the majority of settings prevented most refugee learners and parents from meaningfully accessing these resources during the response.

The variability in the provision of digital learning solutions in different contexts is based on a number of factors. Some of the most influential relate to the level of infrastructure, including investments in power, connectivity, broadcast signals, etc., along with the availability of digital devices, resources to secure internet access, and the level of digital literacy of educators, learners and parents. The results from National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures
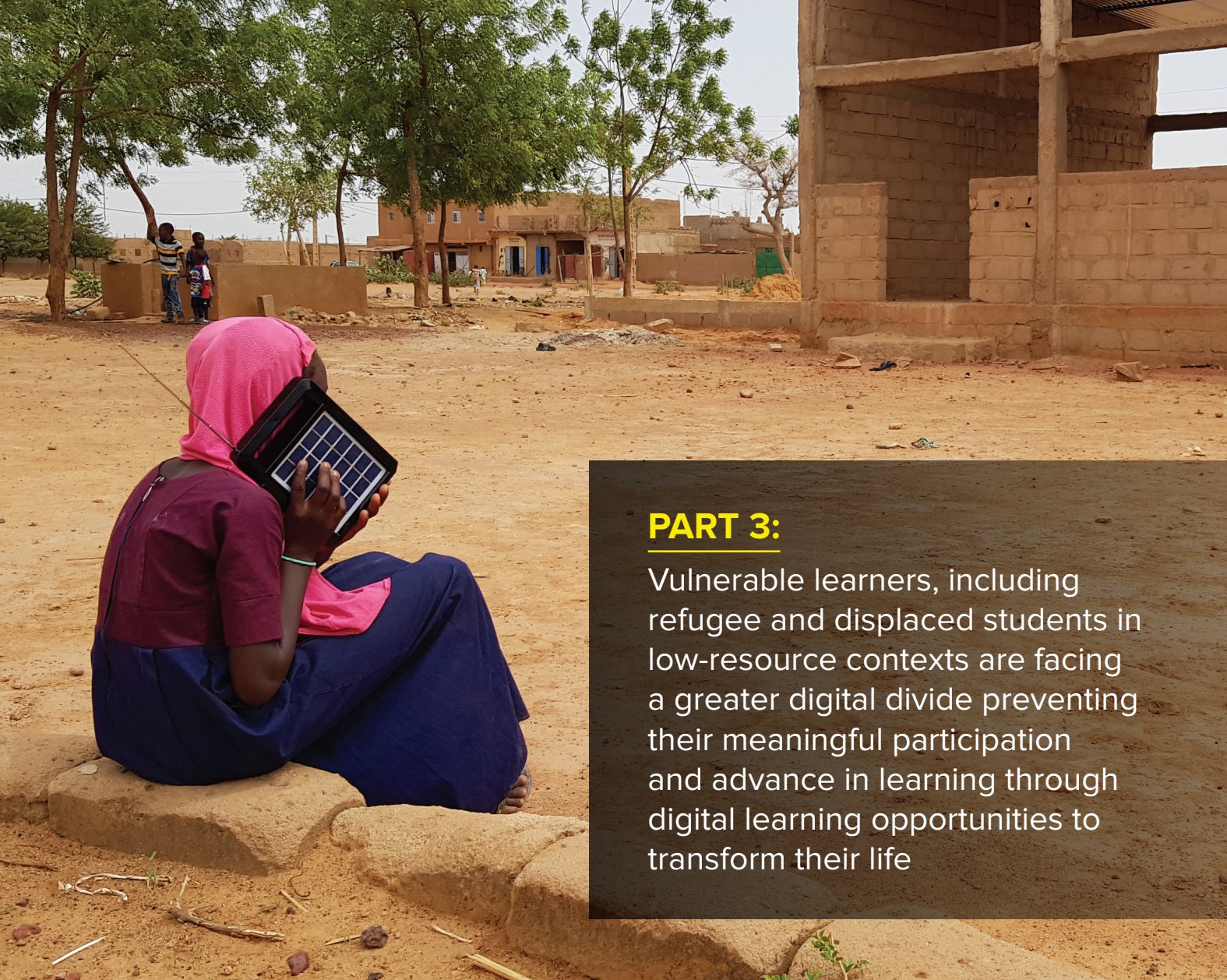
5   Countries where refugees are included within the national education systems.

Survey reveal that broadcast media such as radio and TV were more popular digital learning modalities deployed by the government in low-income countries, and online platforms were the most popular modalities deployed in high-income, lower-middle, and upper-middle income countries (UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and OECD, 2021). Given the differing level of technological access across and within communities, this further emphasizes **the need for a multimodal approach, as no single digital solution can reach all learners** and collective efforts are needed by governments, education actors, development partners, NGOs and private sectors to design and implement **multiple digital learning modalities** to effectively mitigate the learning losses. The majority of countries (94%) report using multiple digital learning modalities to support remote learning, and more than half reported using five or more digital learning modalities. The use of multiple digital learning modalities is critical for enabling children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, rural or low-income families with limited technological access, to be included in remote learning (UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). In fact, over **93 per cent** of refugee hosting countries have indicated that at least one remote learning programme was available, at least in principle, to support refugee learners during nationwide school closures[6].

Even though Governments made various digital learning modalities available with the support of partners, uptake and learning are not guaranteed. In over one third of low and lower-middle-income countries which included radio and TV broadcasting in national COVID-19 responses, less than half of primary learners were actually reached (UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and OECD, 2021). The situation is even more concerning in refugee hosting settings, as many national programmes failed to reach refugee learners. This was due not only to limited infrastructure that often prevented broadcast or internet signals from reaching these communities, but even in locations with access, the majority of learners lacked the devices, financial means and digital competencies to take advantage of these resources.

6   This estimation is based on a recent COVID-19 Education response survey conducted by UNHCR with 58 country operations reported.

© UNHCR/Leandro Andres Salazar-Lievano. Mali. Solar radios help teaching continue despite COVID-19, 09/07/2020

PART 3:

Vulnerable learners, including refugee and displaced students in low-resource contexts are facing a greater digital divide preventing their meaningful participation and advance in learning through digital learning opportunities to transform their life

It is well recognized that a digital divide is prevalent both across and within countries (UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). Even within refugee communities, there are significant variations in terms of both financial capital and access to digital resources. Globally, critical resources like the internet are commonly used in everyday life in most high and upper-middle income countries. However, in many low to lower-middle income countries, respectively more than half or three quarters of the population live without regular access to the internet, which puts online or blended learning out of reach[7]. The divide is wider for refugee learners, where it is estimated that **only 17 per cent of rural refugees live in areas with 3G coverage, compared to 29 per cent of the global rural population, while 20 per cent of rural refugees have no mobile coverage at all, which is double the proportion of the global rural population without coverage** (UNHCR, 2016). **Compared to the world as a whole, refugee households are approximately 50 per cent less likely to have an internet-enabled phone and approximately two and a half times more likely**

to be living without a phone[8]. Financial cost is often a significant barrier for refugees, who often cannot afford a device or data plan. In addition, other barriers also include network accessibility, and regulatory frameworks which can prevent refugees from registering for a SIM (UNHCR, 2016).

TV and radio ownership also varies considerably within and across countries. Based on DHS and MICS data from 88 countries, the TV ownership rate among urban households were more than double in comparison to rural households, with the largest disparities in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). Radio ownership rates varied significantly across countries and regions: Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest median of radio ownership, which explains the favourable provision of radio programmes in these contexts. Great inequalities also exist across socio-economic status, with wealthier families having greater access from electricity to digital devices, which results in disparities in digital learning access among learners

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7   Data is based on ITU's Datareportal.com (latest data from 183 countries, 2015–2019).

8   This was the most recent data found on refugee connectivity though it was outdated.

© UNHCR/Niger. Refugee children watch a video to help them learn French at the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Hamdallaye, near the Nigerien capital Niamey.

from different family backgrounds. Similar patterns are observed among refugee learners and inequalities resulting from socio-economic status have profound impacts which negatively contribute to learning practices among refugee learners.
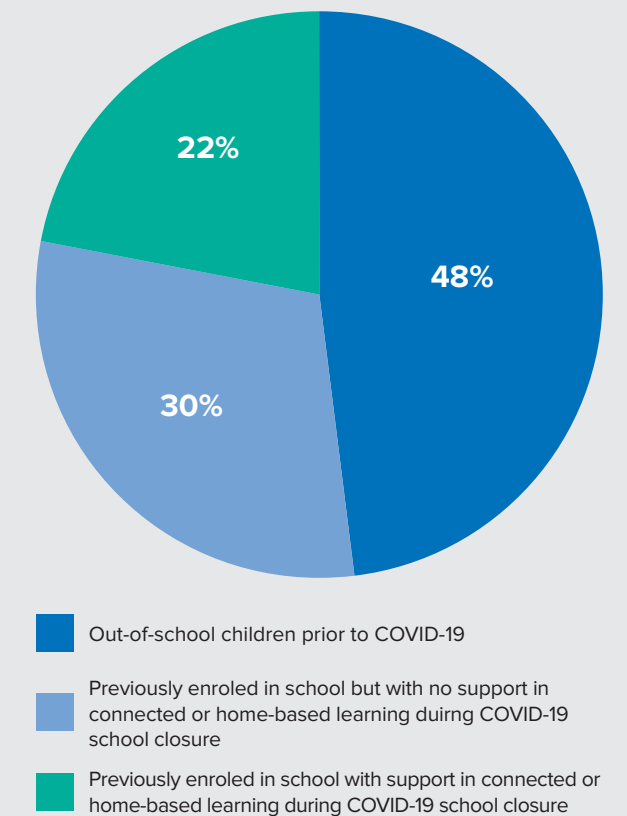
Based on UNHCR's COVID-19 multisectoral monitoring survey from the first two quarters of 2021**,** it is estimated that around 43[9] per cent of refugee children, adolescent, and youth who were enrolled in school before school-closure are supported with connected or home-based learning programmes during school closure, **leaving 57 per cent of refugee learners excluded from the learning process**.

Given that 48 per cent of school age refugees were already out of school before school closure and not learning in the pre COVID-19 era (UNHCR, 2021), and that additional 57 per cent of refugee learners were not supported by connected education or home learning programmes during school closure, it is estimated that nearly **78 per cent of school-age refugee children having limited-to-no access to learning during COVID-19**.

The magnitude of the digital divide for refugee learners has emphasized the urgent need for resource mobilization and investment to ensure that refugee learners are not left behind in the connected era and are able to achieve their transformation in life towards a prospect and successful future.

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9   This is estimated based on the multi-sectoral monitoring survey that UNHCR has been collecting during COVID-19 from country operations quarterly. The estimate is calculated based on 20 operations that reported both the children affected due to school closure and children who have been reached by CE or home learning programmes.

Figure 1: Percentage of school-age refugee children had limited-to-no access to learning during COVID-19

- 48%
- 30%
- 22%

■ Out-of-school children prior to COVID-19

■ Previously enroled in school but with no support in connected or home-based learning duirng COVID-19 school closure

■ Previously enroled in school with support in connected or home-based learning during COVID-19 school closure

Source: Author's calculation based on UNHCR COVID-19 Multisectoral survey, Q1 and Q2 2021

PART 4:
Overview of different digital learning modalities for refugee and hosting community learners

© UNHCR/Ezz Elmasry. Egypt. INS (Instant Network Schools) student, Malak, reacts to a virtual visit from Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah.
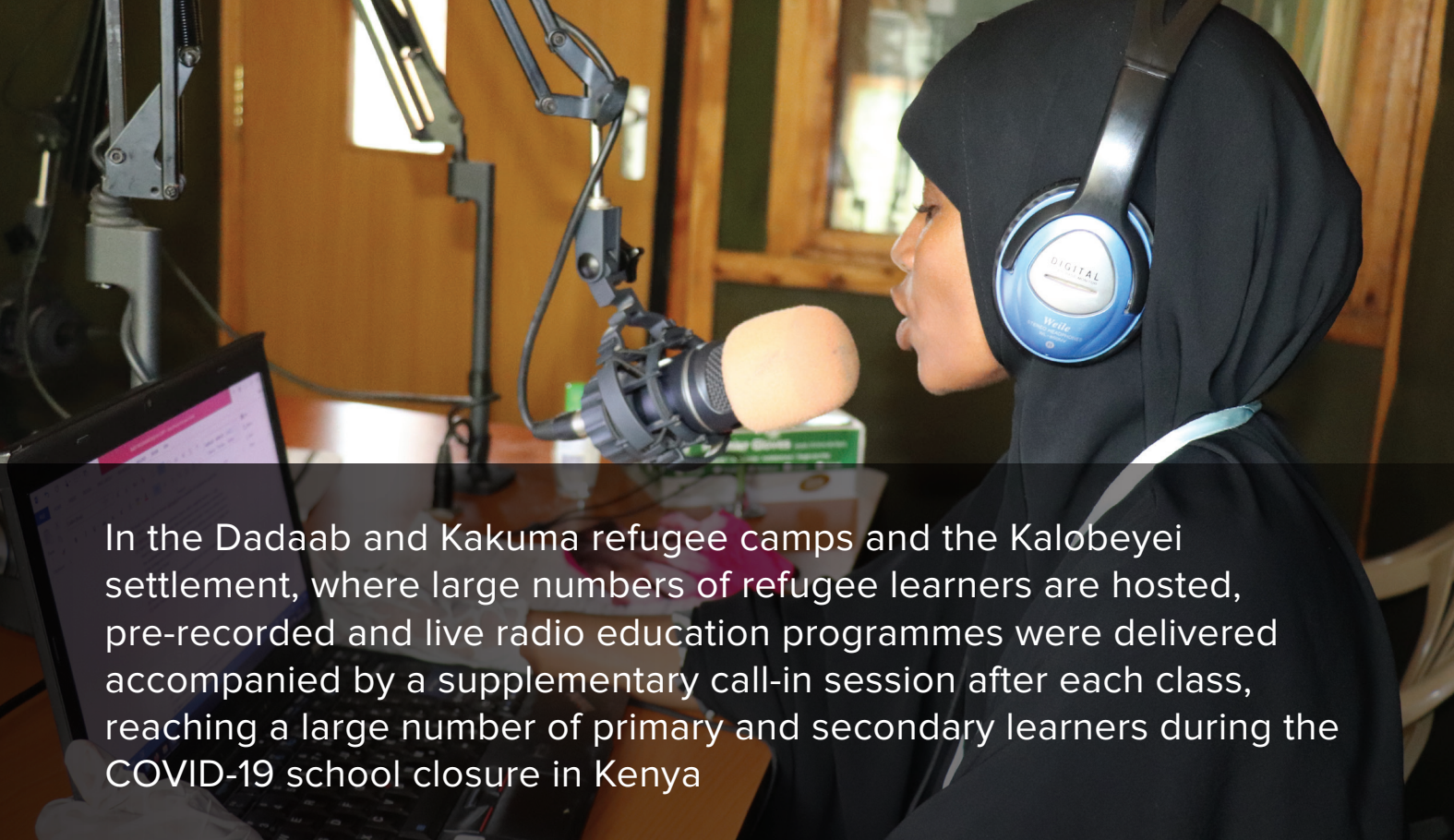
RADIO AND TV PROGRAMMES

As mentioned earlier, radio and TV programmes have been popular digital learning channels, especially in low and lower-middle income contexts where electricity and connectivity are not widely accessible. Based on the COVID-19 Education response survey, radio programmes to support refugee learners were, and are, commonly available across Africa and the Asia and the Pacific region. TV programmes are widely deployed to support refugee learners in East Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Americas. However, in several of the more remote refugee-hosting communities, the broadcast signals of national AM and FM stations providing educational programming failed to reach these locations. This required additional efforts from education actors to leverage local stations and national scripts allowing for the extension of these programmes. There are also limitations of broadcasting media as a tool for digital learning, especially in larger households with children of different ages and at different levels of education (UNICEF Innocenti, 2021). This requires coordinated efforts among communities, parents, teachers and students to ensure all learners are reached and supported through the relevant sessions.

In addition, many actors took an additional step by providing further follow-up programming, building from interactive radio instruction models, allowing students to engage with teachers on the content provided, while also leveraging communication platforms to coordinate information across education actors.

Despite the severe challenges and limitations faced by refugees and displaced learners, many actors have worked tirelessly to mobilize resources and extend digital learning solutions to refugee learners in urban and rural settings, providing last mile support to extend national programmes to refugee-hosting communities and improving the overall teaching and learning experience.

UNHCR, along with governments, sister UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNRWA and UNESCO, and several innovative partners, have started to demonstrate the viability and value of investing in digital learning, or what UNHCR refers to as Connected Education. This work has been underway for over a decade, with efforts largely targeting a select number of contexts.

Pre COVID-19 investments have included important contributions from a variety of actors, including the private sector. Private sector support remains vital in providing catalytic resources that help test new approaches, providing instrumental funding along with the provision of zero-rated platforms, free connectivity, dynamic digital learning content, solar-power systems and pivotal hardware solutions. Actors including Avanti, CISCO, Ericsson, Google.org, HP, Microsoft, and Vodafone Foundation continue to recognize the need for ensuring refugee-hosting communities and schools are also able to benefit from the latest digital resources. This has resulted in the development of holistic models and tools from the Instant Network Schools programme to the Profuturo solution, which help to transform classrooms in refugee-hosting schools into multimedia hubs, to UNRWA TV programmes, or the development of educational platforms like Learning Equality's offline-first and open

source Kolibri platform, to the recently developed Learning Passport by UNICEF and Microsoft.

While these efforts provided important groundwork and allowed for faster adaptation and deployments of digital continuous learning during COVID-19, at least within previously benefiting communities, the overall experiences with the pandemic have emphasized the need to dramatically scale up digital learning investments and initiatives to ensure that all refugees, and their host communities, are digitally included. It will only be through greater collaboration and engagements with governments, development actors, NGOs, technology, and content developers, along with the private sector, that these initial examples of inclusive digital learning can be expanded, learnt from, and scaled up to ensure greater investments and the extension of national digital learning programmes through more inclusive designs.

Important lessons can also be gained, by examining the efforts of frontline workers and educators who innovatively adapted programmes and extended the reach of national digital learning programmes through a variety of means – providing last mile accessibility even in the most remote corners of the world.

This section presents an overview of the experience with different digital learning modalities, and the efforts made to extend or enrich their access across various countries and regions. While these examples are by no means exhaustive, they provide a sample of the different digital learning modalities, presented through country examples with reflections on the success factors as well as challenges and lessons learned.

© UNHCR/Silja Ostermann. Kenya. Dadaab Refugee Camps, UNHCR- International Rescue Committee (IRC), 29/05/2015

In the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and the Kalobeyei settlement, where large numbers of refugee learners are hosted, pre-recorded and live radio education programmes were delivered accompanied by a supplementary call-in session after each class, reaching a large number of primary and secondary learners during the COVID-19 school closure in Kenya

South Sudan: Effective multi-grade radio sessions are broadcast live by qualified professional teachers with interactive sessions and toll free calls to provide supplementary support to learners

© UNHCR/Jimale Abdullahi. Kenya. Lessons on the radio as COVID-19 measures close schools in Dadaab, 03/04/2020

© UNHCR/Xavier Bourgois. Refugee teachers in FM radio station during a live broadcast of a multigrade lesson in Bunj Sub office.

In the Dadaab refugee camp (Kenya), UNHCR and Save the Children facilitated the broadcasting of the national radio education programmes over local and community radio stations to reach refugee and host community learners during the ten-month school closure in 2021. Teachers and community members further developed live sessions covering core subjects at primary and secondary levels as well providing guidance on COVID-19 mitigation and psychosocial support. These sessions were delivered in the Somali language and supported curriculum delivery during school closure. At the end of each session, there was a 20-30 minute call-back time where learners were able to engage with teachers for additional support or provide feedback on the session. Based on recent research conducted by Save the Children, 88 per cent of learners indicated that radio programmes were their form of remote teaching and learning during the school closure. Among the 72% of households that have access to radio programmes, over 66% reported that the radio lessons/classes are very useful (46%) or useful (20%) (Save the Children, 2020).

Similarly, in the Kakuma refugee camp and the Kalobeyei settlement (Kenya), education partners ensured that the national radio education programmes were available for refugee and host community learners. This was achieved by partnering with local and community radio stations to deliver radio lessons with teachers providing supplementary support in their immediate communities or via WhatsApp. A WhatsApp community tree was created to enable information to flow efficiently between UNHCR and the Ministry of Education and the education partners, head teachers and school communities. This enabled regular health-related updates as well as learning continuity.

UNHCR and partners supported participation in the national radio education programme by providing solar powered radios to refugee households. Lesson preparation and supplementary study time was also facilitated through the Kolibri platform and Instant Network Schools (INS) while observing COVID-19 protocols around social distancing. These resources also provided important tools for researching and preparing the radio lessons.

One persistent challenge experienced across the use of radio in refugee and non-refugee contexts was the limited broadcasting time by grade, which stressed the need for this approach to be complemented by other continuous learning modalities. It should also be noted that detailed monitoring of uptake and the impact of radio learning programmes was also hampered by COVID-19 restrictions, within a variety of countries. That said, radio and interactive instruction models provided important tools in the context of COVID-19 with its ability to reach a large number of learners while respecting physical distancing requirements. Radio education also presents a relatively low cost option compared to other forms of digital learning. The utilization of this radio programming could have been put into place faster, if content sharing protocols were already in place with government and national actors, or if radio lessons and scripts were openly available online. In addition, the extension of national broadcast signals to these remote locations would also have allowed for more rapid access to the national programme. However, the local connection might have been lost, or the ability to provide important supplementary sessions in local languages and two-way communication, which was pivotal in providing a connection with the content and the teacher for the learner that was lost by the school closure.

During school closures in South Sudan (March 2020-May 2021), radio programmes were made available for primary and secondary learners as the major remote learning modality. Live broadcasting lessons were delivered through the national channel and picked up by local radio stations in Bunji and Jamjang, where national FM channels are not available. In this case, pre-recorded classes were used and re-broadcast through community radio stations. The radio materials were developed jointly by MoE, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNHCR as part of national education responses, which were designed to include refugee learners.

Radio programmes were made available for all learners in core subjects (English, maths and science) via a multi-grade learning strategy, through which lessons and materials were designed to cover multiple grades. Interactive sessons were also built into each radio lesson with toll free call lines available for learners to interact with teachers and get additional support where needed.

For children with disablities, i.e. hearing impairment, targeted support was provided by teachers through home visits. To assist learners who did not have access to radios, UNHCR distributed nearly 5000 solar-charging radios to households with school-aged children to support their continuity of learning. In addition, 41,500[10] self-study materals and textbooks were distributed to learners through a multi-grade approach, aiming to reach all 83,715 learners who enrolled before the school closure. The programme has not only kept children learning at home, but also safe, resulting in the majority of children returning to school after school reopening.[11]

The radio programme has demonstrated its effectiveness by high promotion rates to the next grade by learners as well as by bringing an additional 10,000+ out-of-school children back to school through its coverage. Based on the national exam result this year, a large proportion of learners have been promoted to the next grade (87%) after following the radio lessons, supplemented by addiitional support. Another positive finding is that children who were previously out of school before COVID-19 also benefited from the availability of radio lessons. UNHCR enrollement data indicates that 10,351 out-of-school children re-entered school, having benefited from both the provision of radios from UNHCR, and the radio programme.[12]

Actors support the radio programming in South Sudan attribute the success of the programme to several key factors. First, strong and clear partnerships that led to the rapid development of nationally aligned radio lessons that were quickly approved and deployed by the Minsitry of Education. The programmes were also produced by qualified professional teachers who delivered the lessons in a quality manner, with recorded versions available for re-broadcasting in more remote locations, like those hosting refugees. In addition, refugee education partners led a series of successful community awareness and engagement campaigns to support children to take the lessons consistently, also providing radios to families in need, bridging the resource divide that typically prevented refugees from accessing radio programming in the past.

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10 Monitoring spot-checks from country office
11 Refugee Education Management Information System (REMIS), 2021

12 Data from Refugee Education Management Information System (REMIS) 2021

Peru: Aprendo en casa, a national multiplatform initiative, has provided relevant and dynamic learning content broadcasting through TV, radio and online, to supplement teaching and learning processes for refugee and host community learners

© UNHCR/Sebastian Castañeda. Peru. Venezuelan refugee student campaigns for quality education, 26/06/2021

Aprendo en casa (Learning at home), a national TV programme that was developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Peru, has served as the major digital learning programme that supplements teaching and learning during school closure. Aprendo en casa was deployed by the MoE on April 6, 2020 and offered a wide range of dynamic content and materials covering all subjects from pre-school to high school. The programme is available for all learners across all regions and teachers have the liberty to incorporate any relevant sessions into their classes or as supplementary learning materials for learners. The programme is broadcast on a few national TV channels, but it's also available through radio and online, which includes working materials to accommodate different level of infrastructure and technological access.

Although in theory the programme is available for refugee children, limited access to the internet and lack of TV and digital devices have prevented many refugee learners from benefiting from the programme. UNHCR, Plan International, Encuentros SJR and IOM have provided support on internet and digital devices to community centres and refugee households to enable meaningful participation in the programmes. Community centres have been used as learning hubs to support both refugee learners and host community Peruvian learners during school closure. Led by community leaders and volunteers, community centres have built a safe and inclusive learning environment not only to enhance learning processes but also to promote integration between refugees and hosting communities. In the absence of adequate digital conditions, UNHCR

delivered tablets, cash-based interventions and school kits. UNHCR together with community leaders supported community-based school reinforcement projects in order to support children facing learning challenges with connectivity. These resources and the strong supporting system within the communities have helped the effective uptake of the programme and contribute to learning.

Aprendo en casa has not only supported continuity of learning during school closure but has also served as an effective digital learning platform that supports newly arrived refugee learners, to mitigate the learning disruptions during the waiting period before getting a place in a national public school that hosts refugee children.

The successful coverage and uptake of the Aprendo en casa programme have been driven by strong community and parental engagement from both the refugee and refugee hosting communities, and community-led solutions to share and support each other when resources are scarce. In addition, the collective responses and collaboration among UN agencies, community-based and faith-based organizations have enabled the timely dissemination of information, learning materials and school reinforcement to reach refugee learners and their hosting communities that are in need. The humanitarian and development partners that have contributed to the timely and effective education responses in Peru include UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, IOM, Plan International, Save the Children, Action Against Hunger, etc.

ONLINE & OFFLINE PLATFORMS

As identified within COVID-19 response surveys, governments actors perceived online learning programmes as among the most effective forms of digital learning even in low and lower-middle income countries[13] (UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, 2020). However, due to the challenges previously mentioned, most online programming remained largely out of reach for refugee and displaced learners especially throughout Africa and the Americas.[14] To overcome challenges related to online accessibility, several education actors have tried to accommodate both online and offline platform options, with the latter providing an important solution for low-resource and disconnected communities. Many content platform providers (both online and offline) have also recognized the need to align digital resources to the national curriculum to allow for easier discovery of the right resources, when educators, learners, or parents are able to connect.

Educators and programme providers, have also leveraged a variety of multimodal approaches, using a variety of tools, resources and platforms to provide support, while also fostering channels of communication, with an emphasis on peer-to-peer support. This offers students important opportunities to engage with others as they navigate the use of various online learning platforms.

13 UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (2020). What have we learnt? Overview of findings from a survey of ministries of education on national responses to COVID-19. Paris, New York, Washington D.C.: UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank
14 COVID-19 Response Survey conducted by UNHCR, 2021

© UNHCR/Assadullah Nasrullah. Kenya. Juba primary school, 19/09/2017

Jordan: Supporting refugee and host community learners through enriching online and offline platform and content

South Africa: Support refugee and migrant learners to enrol on and complete an accredited higher education programme through a blended learning approach

© UNHCR/Hamzeh Al Moumani. Jordan. Refugee students study from home in Azraq Refugee Camp, 16/12/2020

© UNHCR/Antoine Tardy. Lebanon. DAFI students on campus in Beirut, 09/10/2018

During the long school closure in Jordan, which lasted for over a year, the government provided various digital learning solutions to support refugee and host community learners for continuous learning opportunities. UNHCR, Madrasati, and Learning Equality worked closely with the government to support the rollout of the e-learning programme with curriculum-aligned digital content, and the platform has integrated Kolibri as a channel to provide online and offline digital resources for teachers for improved teaching and learning.

To supplement the online materials and enrich teaching and learning practices, UNHCR worked with Madrasati, an initiative of Queen Rania Centre for Education and Information Technology, to align digital resources in STEM subjects hosted in Kolibri platform with the Jordanian curriculum and have them been approved by the Ministry of Education. This curriculum alignment was completed pre COVID-19, which enabled quick execution during COVID-19. These aligned materials were made available through the Ministry of Education channel in Kolibri platform, Learning Equality's free and adaptable open source digital platform designed for offline-first teaching and learning. In addition to the aligned materials being available offline through Kolibri, UNHCR worked with Madrasati to promote the integration of Kolibri into the Ministry website, which resulted in a wealth of online and

offline content being readily available for teachers to use to support quality teaching with digital tools and materials both during school closure and in classes.

In addition, Madrasati and UNHCR worked to ensure ministry teachers were well-versed in how to integrate these digital resources into their teaching processes as schools prepared for reopening. The training of 50 ministry teachers in September 2021 equipped teachers well with the knowledge and skills to select and utilize relevant digital resources in their classes to enhance learning for both refugee and Jordanian learners.

Jordan's example highlights the importance of strong collaboration between government, technical partners with the skills to support digital learning interventions (Madrasati, Learning Equality) and UN agencies in enabling adequate, timely and sustainable online and offline learning. The adoption of the tool and content in different learning environments, by government, and integrated support for teachers demonstrates the importance of having rich and nationally aligned content that can support both continuous learning and classroom instruction. In addition to the online and offline platforms, the government also provided alternative tools to support learners with limited connectivity. This mainly included the use of broadcast pre-recorded lessons on national TV channels.

Scalabrini Centre's UpLearn programme in partnership with Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) offers access to online degrees using a blended learning approach. During COVID-19, UpLearn and SNHU continued to support refugee and migrant learners to work towards obtaining their fully accredited competency-based Associates and Bachelor's degrees with no tuition cost for the learner.

UpLearn is part of the Global Education Movement (GEM), an initiative launched by SNHU in 2018 in four different countries: South Africa, Malawi, Kenya and Lebanon. The UpLearn programme facilitates online learning for refugee and migrant learners through a comprehensive support system including a pre-degree programme that offers academic English classes and digital literacy training, welfare support, psychosocial referrals, interactive teaching seminars, tutorials, enrichment workshops and activities, coaching sessions, internship placement and a professional development course to equip graduates with skills and competencies to land ideal employment opportunities.

During COVID-19, there were heavy restrictions around movement and as a result the programme had to shift programming mostly online. WhatsApp was used to

support the communication between students and coaches through weekly check-ins. A hybrid approach was used to deliver teaching sessions through various platforms including WhatsApp groups, Zoom and Google Classroom. A mix of high-tech and low-tech modalities (mostly smartphone-based) were deployed to make sure all learners were reached, and learners were also supported with data bundles and access to laptops and the computer labs, as well as printed resources to supplement learning.

Reflections on the key elements contributing to successful programming, despite challenges brought on by the restrictions to movement, lies in the programme's focus on a student-centred approach – wherein learners are situated as the agency of change in the programme design and implementation, where possible. The importance of building a strong student community and support system with students through peer-to-peer support groups, peer coaching, peer discussion and interest groups, which reflects the essence of connected learning, was also highlighted as a key factor of success when maintaining continuous learning through online programming.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Though various digital programmes have provided relevant platforms and content for learners to access, meaningful participation and actual learning can only happen when learners are provided holistically with adequate support from teachers, parents, peers and communities. Technology is an enabler to make learning more accessible, but it cannot replace the important supporting roles that teachers, parents and peers played through daily interaction, communication and feedback mechanisms. To enhance effective learning and teaching through various learning programmes, a variety of social media channels have been used to support teaching and learning processes, ranging from delivering lessons and teacher training using Zoom and Google Meet, to instant messaging and forming support groups among teachers, learners, parents, schools and government on WhatsApp.

Indonesia: social media channels i.e. WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Meet have been used effectively to enhance communication and delivery of lessons between teachers and learners

© UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle. Jordan. Refugees engage with Paralympic athlete Ibrahim AlHussein.

In Indonesia, with the government commitment to refugee inclusion, remote learning modalities were provided by the Ministry of Education and partners to all learners, including refugee and displaced populations. A variety of platforms were deployed in Indonesia due to the diversity and different levels of infrastructure within the country, including radio, TV, an online programme and social media channels. Among those, social media and communication channels have been among the most widely used platforms to enable teaching and learning. In particular, the WhatsApp platform was relied on for instant messaging and information dissemination, while Zoom and Google Meet were used for online delivery of lessons and virtual training for teachers. The Ministry of Education created WhatsApp groups covering more than 5 million pre-primary to tertiary teachers for official dissemination of information. In addition, there are many study and support groups created among teachers and students, teachers and parents, and even amongst learners themselves, to enhance the learning experiences and communication across peer groups. These communication channels were beneficial, especially in places where the internet was less stable and online programmes were not accessible.

Noting that across Indonesia, most refugee hosting communities benefited from strong infrastructure and connectivity, efforts were made to enable refugee learners to continue learning during school closure, through the provision of both a nutrition allowance, which replaced the transportation allowance as an adaptation due to school closure, and an internet allowance to support refugee learners to access national programmes. UNHCR also provided the option of device loans for refugee children and teachers. One of the key success factors that helped ensure refugees benefited from these digital learning offerings, was the strong governmental and interagency support for refugee inclusion. Prior to the pandemic, UNICEF and UNHCR worked closely through advocacy to ensure that refugees had formal registration to access education like their national counterparts at all levels of education. IOM also provided financial, education and medical support to refugees that reside under their accommodation.

Indonesia presents a strong example of a country that adapted quickly during the pandemic deploying a range of digital learning approaches to accommodate the widely varied contexts across the country. The transition to digital learning for their students, teachers and parents, was also aided by a largely digitally literate society who quickly embraced these alternative methods and proactively formed supporting mechanisms to enhance their learning experience. While not all learners and educators were digitally literate, including many from the refugee community, those with more limited experience were able to benefit from those within their immediate circles who had greater levels of expertise.

However, challenges remain, especially the prevalence of the digital divide, which hinders refugee learners, children from rural and under-developed regions, from accessing digital learning platforms. In addition, even with the national programme available to refugees, language has created a lot of barriers to their uptake and the learning given to most refugees who are not proficient in Bahasa Indonesian.

The above country examples are snapshots of a variety of digital learning programmes that were rolled out to support refugee and host community learners from both low-tech and high-tech solutions. For refugee learners that have no access to any digital devices, UNHCR and partners have also supported, through the provision of take-home packages, paper-based learning materials, and distribution of radios and data bundles, and also by supplementing the radio, TV and online programmes.

© UNHCR/Anahit Hayrapetyan. Armenia. Syrian-Armenian family cope with COVID-19 emergency in Yerevan, 06/05/2020

PART 5:
Recommendations and call for action

© UNHCR/Antoine Tardy. Refugee student delegation visits Free University of Berlin on World Refugee Day 2019, 20/06/2019

We are at the defining moment in reimagining education deliveries and in supporting the most marginalized children and youth, including refugee learners, in order to mitigate the learning losses and enhance learning outcomes so they can fully realize their potentials and life prospects in the digital era.

Digital learning has demonstrated its potential to serve as a complementary tool to support learning, providing options for reaching learners at scale. The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed the large digital divide for children and youth from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, including refugee and displaced learners, and emphasized the importance of investing in inclusion models and holistic approaches that include everything from infrastructure, content, capacity to systems.

A list of recommendations is summarized in the following, based on the country examples, with a focus on establishing an inclusive and holistic technology-supported ecosystem to deliver high quality education for all,

- **Building digital-enabled infrastructure**: the wide digital divide is partly driven by low social-economic status and rurality. It is critical to collaboratively improve connectivity, especially in remote schools and communities, including refugee hosting communities, to connect all teachers and learners. Global initiatives like GIGA are crucial for connecting all schools and for enabling the delivery of quality education with the support of technology in the most remote and low-resourced context, but it is vital that these initiatives include refugee-hosting schools at every phase of their rollouts, otherwise they could actually widen, rather than narrow, the digital divide.

- **Providing more than just connectivity:** Technology is an enabler rather than a solution and it is important to create a technology-supported learning ecosystem and environment through which all key components are included in the programme design and implementation, from hardware to software, digital competencies and long-term sustainability.

- **Investing in content with offline solutions**: quality content is key to improving the teaching and learning process, while enabling personalized/customized teaching and learning with the support of rich digital content that is aligned with the national curriculum is fundamental. Being able to access these resources in disconnected settings, through the use of offline platforms and solutions, is crucial, especially for learners and teachers residing in low-resource contexts. Even when connectivity is present, the use of offline platforms can assist in saving money.

- **Enhancing digital competencies for teachers, students, and parents**: the availability of the programmes does not translate into uptake and effective learning. To allow for greater engagement and agency from communities it is essential to equip students, teachers and parents with adequate digital competencies, including awareness of digital safety, to enable meaningful participation and use of these programmes.

- **Designing for inclusion from the start**: Recognizing the effectiveness of a multimodal approach to address diverse needs in various contexts, it is important to design for inclusion from the start of programme conceptualization, ensuring the initiative will be accessible to marginalized learners, including those in low-resource settings.

- **Creating a strong student community and peer support system:** the student should be at the centre of programme design and they should be provided with opportunities to act as the change agents. Communities should also be involved from the start of the programme design to ensure strong ownership and relevance of the programme. It is critical to co-design the programme and build peer support mechanisms to enable peer-to-peer discussion, coaching, sharing and learning, which is the essence of connected learning.

- **Developing strong partnership**: Achieving digital inclusion is an ambitious goal and requires expertise from many actors, it is only feasible with strong partnership and collaboration working towards the same vision. All humanitarian and development partners, including government, UN agencies, NGOs, foundations, donors and universities, are needed to bring expertise and resources to realize this vision jointly.

- **Building strong data and evidence:** there is a lack of evidence in assessing the effectiveness of the digital learning programmes for refugee learners and it is important to build high-quality evidence generation to understand how best to support refugee learners and teachers to enhance learning, especially in low-resourced context.

In order to build inclusive and effective learning environments, it is important that key actors come together and pool resources to build a holistic ecosystem that can benefit all learners, especially the most marginalized in the digital and connected world. For refugee learners and families, the digital divide is another hurdle preventing them from accessing their right to a quality education. However, this can be easily overcome.

The time to act is now. Building from the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global education community is mobilizing to bolster the initial investments in support of continuous learning, but to ensure that national education systems are built back stronger and more resilient for the future. Important global instruments are also being created such as the Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education, and bonds to help fund initiatives like GIGA. However, we will only reach education for all if these investments are designed to meaningfully include refugee and forcibly displaced communities from the start.

It is vital that, moving forward, governments, education actors, and funders are explicit and intentional in ensuring digital learning approaches that are designed first and foremost to address the needs of the most marginalized, including refugees and forcibly displaced communities. UNHCR calls on governments and partners to make clear commitments to help narrow the growing digital divide faced by displaced learners. It is only by working together that we can ensure that schools that host refugees, and forcibly displaced students, are prioritized and meaningfully included in global and national digital education and connectivity efforts. Through collaboration, we can ensure that refugee and forcibly displaced communities are no longer digitally divided from their peers, and from the globe, but are included and part of the digital transformations rewiring education.

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REFUGEE CONNECTED
EDUCATION **CHALLENGE**

**Everyone has a role to play in addressing the refugee connected
education challenge and please join us
https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-connected-education-challenge**