

East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region

July - September 2020



Burundian refugee children home schooling for exams in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL REOPENING

Status of school reopening across the region

In March 2020, with the exception of Burundi, nearly all schools in the 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. As these countries continued to grapple with COVID-19, the decision to close schools was revisited by some countries and by the end of September 2020, Djibouti, Somalia, and Tanzania had fully reopened schools, allowing approximately 106,000 refugee children and youth (10% of the students enrolled in the region prior to the pandemic) to return to school.

Country	Date of school reopening	Number of students expected back in school
Tanzania	29 June 2020	93,632
Somalia	15 August 2020	8,000
Djibouti	6 September 2020	4,084
Total		105,716

However, not all previously enrolled students in these three countries are returning to school. A preliminary analysis revealed re-enrolment rates of 89% in Djibouti, 60% in Somalia, and 80% in Tanzania (initially only 50%), with larger percentages of students returning at primary level than at secondary level. Observation from these returns show:

- Physical distancing is not manageable for students, especially outside of classrooms.
- Use of face masks is uneven, with some students complaining of discomfort while using a mask.
- Teachers feel overworked and need to dedicate a lot of additional time without additional support in the classroom from teaching assistants as they try to assess their students' needs; and
- The normalization of the learning process is slow as students and teachers readjust to the new normal under COVID-19.

UNHCR has observed that the low rates of return to school are due to a combination of several factors including a lack of sufficient scholastic materials; early pregnancy and early marriage; disinterest in education after long school closures; overcrowded and ill-equipped classrooms; and the opportunity cost of going to school versus being able to earn a livelihood for the family.

School Reopening: Preparedness and Response

Global discussions amongst education stakeholders and key players (UNICEF, UNESCO, INGOs) on school reopening kicked in almost immediately following a concerted effort to lobby for distance learning programmes. Important considerations need to be made to address several factors, including that the longer children stay out of school, the more they lose out on learning essential competencies and skills; children could fail to remember previously acquired knowledge, and children could generally lose interest in education, thus increasing chances of dropping out. Closure of schools also hampers the provision of essential services to children and communities including access to nutritious food, mental health and psychosocial support, and access for girls to menstrual items.

At the regional level, a number of actions were undertaken to drive and inform school reopening processes including:

- Webinars to unpack and discuss school reopening global guidelines, including the UNESCO/UNICEF/WB/WFP/UNHCR Global Guidelines on School Re-opening”, released in April 2020, “Safe back to School Practitioners Guidelines” and “Supporting teachers in back to school efforts - Guidance for policy makers”, both released in May 2020.
- WASH assessments in schools: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda carried out in-depth WASH assessments in schools and developed WASH improvement requirements for each school. All countries in the region still require additional funding to fully meet all WASH upgrading requirements in schools.
- Mobilization of funding: During this period, UNHCR in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Tanzania, received a total of USD 8.9 Million funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) to support school reopening and distance learning activities. In Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, UNHCR received a total amount of USD 4 Million from DFID to cover teacher salaries for refugee education programmes until February 2021.
- Inter-agency discussions and meetings: UNHCR and Save the Children International (SCI) co-chaired the monthly “Regional Education in Emergencies” meetings that have continued to discuss and explore ways to support safe back to school actions. Discussions with UNICEF are also ongoing at country level to provide classroom tents to address shortages in space and to enable physical distancing.

Challenges to effective and safe reopening

As more countries in the region continue to reopen schools, challenges to effective and safe reopening remain. The main needs across the region are:

- Increased water, sanitation, handwashing facilities, and soap in schools.

- Additional classrooms or learning spaces to comply with physical distancing guidelines.
- More teachers on a temporary basis to support teaching in the extra classrooms as well as in double shift systems that may be necessary as part of physical distancing regulations.
- Training teachers on catch-up classes and on the provision of MHPSS for students.
- Disinfecting of schools used as quarantine and isolation centers prior to school reopening in collaboration with Public Health and WASH staff.
- Training of the whole school community on COVID-19 guidelines.
- Thermo guns to take temperatures for each classroom.
- PPEs and disinfectants for school cleaning staff.

It is important to note that these requirements are costly and not originally planned for in the 2020 budgets and are causing major challenges for operations and the refugee hosting countries. There is concern that standards may be compromised, risking the lives of students and the entire school community, as well as limiting the ability for refugee schools to open, should the national school opening requirements not be met. Most countries are proposing a phased reopening of schools in the coming months, with priority given to the examination classes and those in vital transition years. With this proposal, distance learning programmes remain important, especially for the large proportion of students who continue to study from home.

School Reopening Plans: Regional Overview

Country	Proposed Date of School Reopening – Phase 1	Proposed Date of School Reopening – Phase 2
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
Sudan	22 November 2020	TBC

Considerations for safe school reopening for refugees:

- Ensure alignment with the Government school reopening dates and schedules.
- Explore phased school reopening programmes with some students reporting physically in school while the rest continue to study using distance learning programmes.
- Explore the use of double shift programme with some students coming to school in the morning and a separate group in the afternoon. Train teachers on catch-up classes and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for students.
- Ensure inter-sectoral linkages in preparation for school reopening including Public Health, WASH, and Child Protection.

School Reopening: Getting girls back in the classroom

In September 2020, UNHCR released the Education 2020 report “[Coming Together for Refugee Education.](#)” Part of this report included a joint analysis with the Malala Foundation conducted in 12 countries which found that a striking 50% of refugee girls would likely not return to secondary school once schools re-opened. Considering the 2019 enrollment data in the EHAGL region, approximately 68% of girls were not enrolled in secondary school pre-COVID-19. If a further 50% of those previously enrolled do not return, it will reduce any gains in girl enrollment made in previous years.

UNHCR has observed that there has been an increase in teenage pregnancies and early marriage due to girls being out of school during the pandemic, as well an increase in reported incidents of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). An important question being asked is how can practitioners ensure that as many girls as possible return to school once all schools re-open? Positive experiences in Djibouti and Tanzania were reported when concerted efforts were made using door-to-door campaigns to ensure that caretakers support girls to go back to school. It is a collective responsibility of the community to advocate and ensure that girls are sent back to school to continue learning.



Mentorship programmes support girls to stay in school in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

The Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO) regional **UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI)** Working Group was re-launched in September to discuss

key challenges around ensuring a safe return to school for girls. Led by UNICEF and co-facilitated by UNHCR, the working group discussed how to re-activate joint advocacy and activities to eliminate challenges to girls' education. Through this strong partnership network, there is a drive to ensure that together a difference is made for girls' education. During the meeting, the **Building Back Equal: Girls' Back to School Guide** was recommended as a valuable resource as it builds upon the earlier guides: the UN Framework for Reopening Schools and the Safe Back to School Practitioners Guide. "Building Back Equal" is intended to encourage practitioners to use gender responsive programming as they plan for the safe and equitable re-opening of schools.

School reopening - Tertiary Education

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected tertiary education. Most universities in the region closed entirely or suspended classes and closed student housing. The effects of these closures were immediately felt by students, particularly those studying far from home and with limited resources.

UNHCR is working to ensure that tertiary students can resume and complete their studies safely and in line with national COVID-19 guidelines. UNHCR has continued to pay student allowances to those experiencing closure of institutions during this period, supported students with transportation costs, and planned for students' access to COVID-19 testing or treatment, as necessary. UNHCR and partners also continue to support students to make up missed classes or assignments due to illnesses or closure of institutions and is also distributing materials such as laptops, data bundles, and Wi-Fi to assist with long distance learning where possible.



Berepayo, a Congolese DAFI Scholar in South Sudan.

Refugee youth claim a seat at the (virtual) table

In August, several events and webinars to mark International Youth Day took place. These various events highlighted the challenges and needs of youth across the region as they deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed the need for youth engagement in livelihood opportunities (entrepreneurship, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), innovative engagement in policy dialogue, and the positive trend towards specific programmes for youth. Such activities are critical for those out of school in order to

ensure a path to a sustainable future. Some of the webinars were co-hosted by members of the UNHCR-initiated Global Youth Advisory Council, showcasing that this council is a strong platform to advocate and raise the profile of refugee youth challenges.

Across the region, youth have expressed their desire to have a seat at the table. Particularly now, with school closures and physical distancing, the youth have demonstrated that they are key to finding solutions and have the capacity to join the virtual conversations that support and influence actions for their own futures. For this change to happen, these young people need to be included in the process. Discussions also explored how social media could be used to leverage livelihood opportunities and underscored the need for equitable education and inclusion of refugees into national education systems.

Ensuring refugees are included in national training programmes, particularly around TVET, was an important message that was echoed from the “Generation Unlimited” launch in Kenya. Similarly, the “We are Global” event (organized by the Kenyan National Youth Council and UNHCR) highlighted that cross-border programmes that target livelihood opportunities in countries of asylum and countries of origin could offer a level of hope to the youth that there are opportunities to gain a sustainable livelihood after completing the training provided to them. In Uganda, field offices marked International Youth Day by virtually bringing together refugee youth across the camps. As keen users of technology, the various events showed that youth find ways to stay connected and engaged with each other even during times of physical distancing.

These events provided UNHCR with the opportunity to reflect on how to strengthen youth engagement activities across the region.

Regional Social Cohesion Programme for Youth: Peace-building work is more urgent than ever!

Through the funding under PROSPECTS¹, the UNHCR Regional Education team has been building a regional social cohesion programme for refugee youth across four PROSPECTS countries in the region (Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda). Tensions between refugee youth of different backgrounds or refugee and host community youth existed before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, prolonged school closures, suspension of livelihoods programming, exacerbated economic hardships, pressures on natural resources, and a lack of opportunity to interact with others at markets, schools, and places of worship have intensified tensions between communities.

In addition, physical distancing protocols mean that community meetings, consultations, and religious gatherings – traditionally used to discuss and resolve conflict – had to be suspended in many settlements. This has led to violent clashes in several locations, most tragically in Northern Uganda, where a fight between youth escalated and resulted in loss of life and secondary displacement of many families.

A comprehensive conflict assessment is now underway in Palorinya Refugee Settlement in Uganda. The assessment aims to identify perceptible as well as complex factors and dynamics that have the potential to generate disorder or conflict across political and socio-economic spheres, undermining peace, and sustainable development. In Kenya, the UNHCR’s Regional Bureau and Sub-Office Kakuma are organising a 5-day curriculum co-creation workshop in early November which will involve South Sudanese and other youth in the creation of a contextually adapted peacebuilding curriculum to be rolled out across all four countries in 2021.

¹ The Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS), is a Partnership initiative launched by the Government of the Netherlands and bringing together the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.

Q3 EDUCATION TRAININGS AND WEBINARS

How else can we ensure children and youth have a smooth return to school?

As many countries are looking at the phased re-opening of primary and secondary schools we need to consider if there is an opportunity to also bring back adolescents who were not previously enrolled. As teachers deliberate on students returning with different levels of knowledge gained through the distance learning programmes, UNHCR focused its 8th monthly webinar on the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) [Guidelines for Pathways to Return to Learning](#), released in August 2020.

These guidelines provide a problem tree to ascertain whether remedial, catch-up classes, or accelerated education programmes could be the answer, for a child or adolescent once they return to or enroll in school.



Increasing UNHCR capacities for youth engagement during COVID-19

Two workshops on youth engagement were offered to staff and partners in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, with the aim to increase capacity to engage with and reach out to marginalized and out-of-school youth not usually involved in humanitarian programmes.

Of particular value was the participation of the Kakuma [Global Shapers](#), a group of young refugee leaders reaching out to their communities with projects ranging from peacebuilding to ICT, who provided a sounding board and direct feedback to UNHCR on current youth outreach and activities. A post-workshop survey will help UNHCR modify and tailor the modules based on participants' feedback before rolling out to additional UNHCR operations in the region.



Higher education scholarship opportunities platform now online



Scholarship Opportunities for Refugees

Are you a refugee striving for higher education?

This platform helps you to find accredited higher education academic or scholarship programmes verified by UNHCR to allow you to pursue advanced study, skills and professional development.

Globally, only 3% of refugees have access to higher education. UNHCR and partners are currently working towards a target of 15% of refugees attending higher education by 2030. Many refugees do not have

access to up-to-date information on tertiary education programmes available to them, either in their host country or in third countries. To fill this gap, UNHCR launched an online platform supporting refugees'

access to information on higher education opportunities. The UNHCR [Opportunities](#) site provides a global database of verified information on refugee-eligible scholarship programmes. By sharing information on scholarships both in countries of asylum and elsewhere, the Opportunities platform supports the Global Compact on Refugees' objective to expand third country solutions for refugees to alleviate the pressure on developing regions. Refugee students in the EHAGL region benefit from the platform by being able to look for global opportunities for which they are eligible to apply. The portal already features 20 programmes offered by various education providers in more than 60 countries. Therefore, it also offers a great opportunity for scholarship providers in the region to advertise their programmes. UNHCR continues to work with more universities to expand the platform. All service providers and programmes are verified by UNHCR.

FURTHER READING

This newsletter period also saw the release and publication of the [DAFI 2019 Global Report](#). In 2019, a record number of 8,347 students were supported on DAFI scholarships at 925 higher education institutions in 54 countries. 2,656 of these were newly enrolled while 1,063 of them earned their degrees in 2019. In the EHAGL region, Ethiopia hosts the most DAFI scholars while it also has one of the lowest average scholarship costs across DAFI programme countries. This, coupled with the strong capacity of the partner organisation to absorb additional students, allowed Ethiopia to grow its programme significantly during 2019. Kenya and Uganda have the next largest programmes with 619 and 515 students, respectively, slightly higher student numbers than in 2018.

Forty percent of all DAFI students in the EHAGL region in 2019 were women, and DAFI is taking concrete steps to ensure an equal representation of women in its programme. In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, men (70%) far outnumbered women (30%) in the DAFI programme. This was largely because men applied in larger numbers compared to women. However, in 2019 DAFI expanded to three new countries whose cohort compositions were all nearly half or more female students. This includes Somalia, where the DAFI programme opened with 75 students across Somaliland, South Central and Puntland.

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LINKS

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