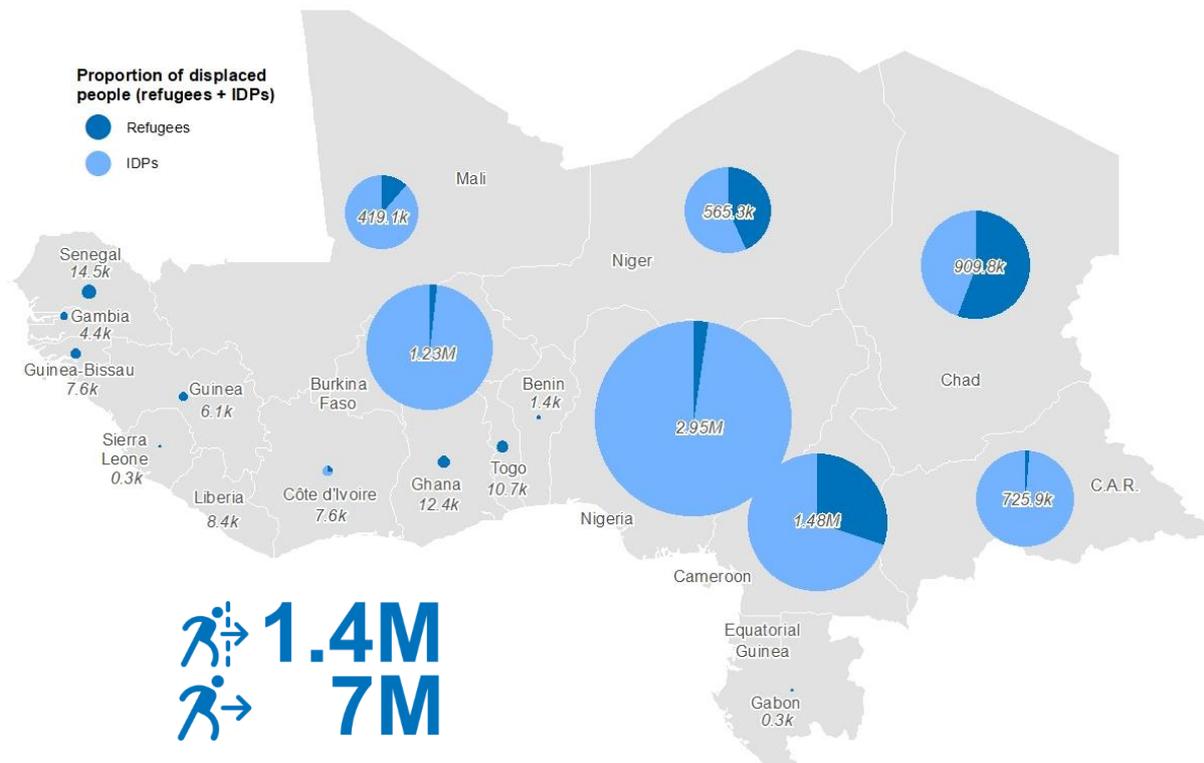


EDUCATION UPDATE

2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

Regional Overview and Education Trends

TOTAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND IDPS



A region marked by rising insecurity and large-scale displacement

The West and Central Africa (WCA) region hosts over 11 million persons of concern to UNHCR, including 7 million internally displaced people and 1.4 million refugees, of whom more than **55% are children**.

Forced displacement is on the rise as increasing violence, human right violations and armed conflicts compound existing fragility and political instability, the effects of climate change, the lack

of human development opportunities and educational attainment, and the disastrous impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on livelihoods and economic prospects.

The recurrence of humanitarian emergencies adds to already precarious contexts and prolonged crisis situations, leaving little hope and opportunities for the youth, who make up **65% of the population** in the region.

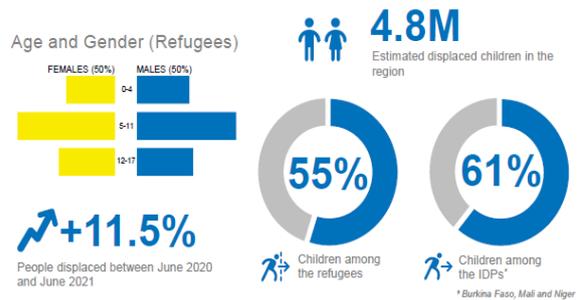
The security situation across the WCA region has been evolving in an alarming manner and children and adolescents have been severely affected by the crisis.

In particularly vulnerable regions such as the **Central Sahel** and the **Lake Chad Basin**, the right of children to education is constantly challenged. Armed groups have directly targeted school buildings, teachers and pupils through physical attacks, threats, abductions, and killings.

Fear and school closures have contributed to families' decisions to flee to safer areas, mostly urban and semi-urban centres where education capacities have become overburdened. Neither school infrastructure nor teacher recruitment has grown in pace with new arrivals of families to displacement hotspots.

The impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** has amplified these chronic challenges and aggravated existing vulnerabilities of millions of forcibly displaced children in the region, jeopardizing their access to education, shrinking safe spaces and limiting child protection activities, and potentially leaving a large number of them permanently out of school.

KEY FIGURES



Refugee children in class at the Goudebo camp school in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso. ©UNHCR/Paul Absalon

Widespread inclusion of refugees into national education systems but persistent barriers to access and continuity

Access to a safe and inclusive quality education for all girls and boys is lifesaving and life-sustaining. During emergencies and conflicts, education is the only way to provide children with hope, stability, and sense of normalcy.

In the WCA region, all refugees in school are included into the **national education systems** of their host countries, except for Nigerian refugees enrolled in secondary education in the Diffa region of Niger who, due to the language barrier, continue to follow the curriculum of their country of origin in distance learning centres.

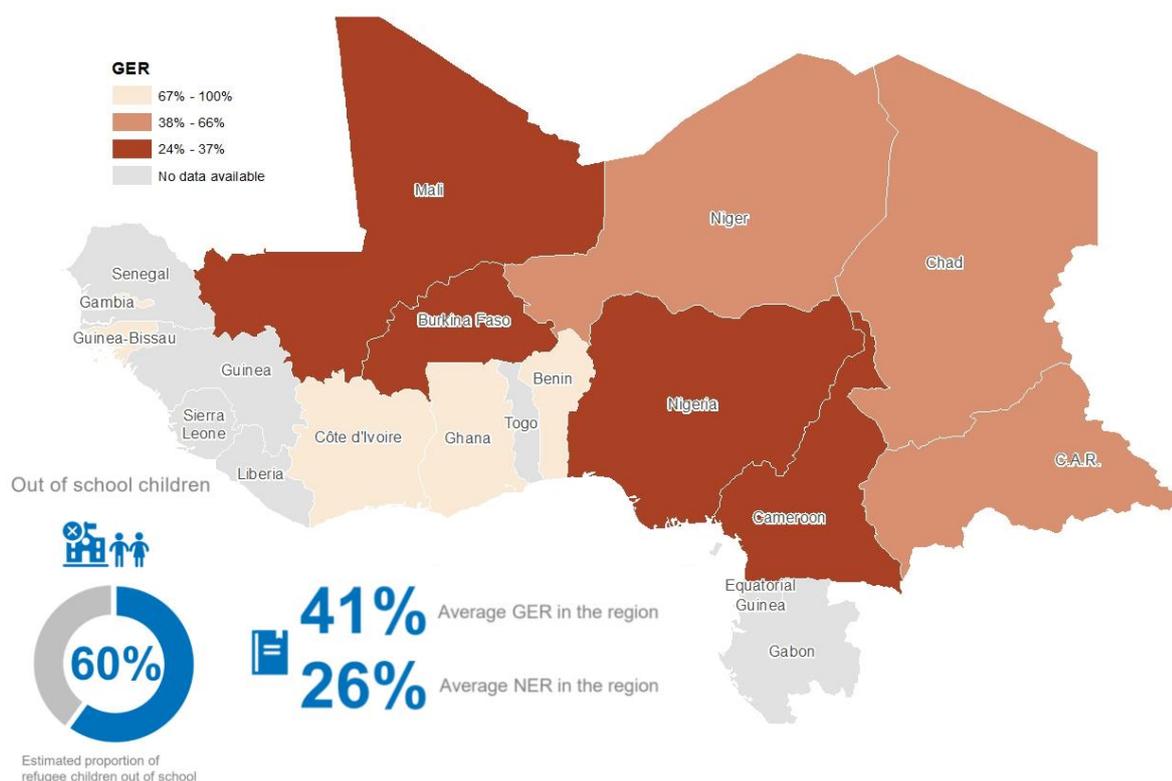
Despite the **absence of legal barriers** to refugee children's access to the national education systems of their countries of asylum in the region, forcibly displaced communities still face **significant challenges** in accessing quality early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary education, technical and vocational training, and overall, lifelong learning opportunities.

Barriers to accessing education make the situation of refugees and internally displaced children even more precarious exposing them to very serious **protection risks**: forced recruitment into armed groups, trafficking and smuggling, labor and sexual exploitations, while preventing them to acquire the essential tools to lead dignified and self-sufficient lives.

During the 2020-2021 school year, **more than half** of refugee children of primary and secondary school-age in the WCA region did not attend school, while just over **1%** of the 18-24 had access to higher education and vocational training. **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, and Nigeria** are the countries with the lowest average enrolment rates, while **Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana** are the countries with the highest ones. The average NER is significantly lower than the average GER, indicating a large proportion of **over-age children** in the classes.

[Access the full 2020-21 data dashboard here.](#)

GROSS ENROLMENT RATE (GER) – PRIMARY + SECONDARY



Main Gaps and Challenges

IN BRIEF



Attacks on education



Systemic under funding



Overcrowded classrooms in refugee and IDP-hosting areas. Student-teacher ratio up to **120:1**



Lack of qualified teachers



Socio-cultural norms impeding girls' education



Lack of comprehensive data on refugee education

Education under attack across the region

Most countries in the region are facing increased insecurity, with cross-border spillover of conflicts and intercommunal violence having a major impact on the protection of children and youth, as demonstrated by the dramatic increase in the number of reports of **grave violations against children**. West and Central Africa is the most affected region in terms of recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, sexual violence, abduction of children and attacks on schools. Not only is the frequency of violence increasing, but more and more areas are affected.

In Central Sahel, more than **4,000 schools** were still closed because of insecurity at the end of

2020. In Cameroon, attacks and kidnappings of students and teachers have increased in English-speaking regions during the last quarter of 2020. In the South-West region, less than 25% of primary and secondary schools were operational during the 2020-2021 academic year, due to the boycott of government school education by non-state armed groups. In Nigeria, at least 950 students have been abducted from their schools by gunmen since last December. In Central African Republic, attacks on schools and use of education premises for military purposes have forced many children out of school, especially in IDP-hosting areas.

National education systems face severe challenges in providing safe and inclusive quality education for all children

Challenges include low levels of funding of national education systems, lack of crisis-sensitive teacher policies preventing effective teacher management in emergencies, disparities within countries between urban and rural areas, failure to implement free primary education policies, or lack of systematic learning assessments. These challenges result in overall **low educational achievements** of learners.

Although refugee learners in primary and secondary education access schools under the same conditions as national children and adolescents, refugee learners often face significant **financial and structural constraints** hindering school enrolment and retention.

Insufficient reception capacity of schools, poor conditions of learning environments in refugee- and IDP-hosting areas, and lack of teacher training on the specific needs of forcibly displaced children have also a negative impact on learning outcomes.

In addition, **gender inequality** in education in WCA remains the highest in the world. While countries in the region have some of the highest rates of forced marriage and early pregnancies in the world, refugee girls face disproportionate risks of gender-based violence, have fewer educational opportunities and bear a huge domestic burden compared to their male peers.

Severe shortcomings at secondary and tertiary level limiting the possibilities of transition to decent employment

While the average gross enrolment rate (GER) of refugees in **primary education** in WCA is close to **60%**, only a handful of refugee children stand a chance of progressing to **secondary education**, where the regional average rate drops dramatically to **15%** (half the average rate of 31% in the global refugee population).

The reasons for this huge gap between primary and secondary education are multiple, but mainly relate to the unavailability of secondary schools in refugee-hosting areas, the lack of training and difficult employment conditions for teachers leading to frequent absenteeism, and the high cost of tuition and ancillary fees (school supplies, uniforms, etc.) as well as opportunity costs, forcing many children out of school and into employment. For girls who become brides before they have finished primary school, access to secondary school is often impossible.

At **tertiary level**, despite the existence of the [DAFI scholarship programme](#) in almost all the countries (except for Benin, CAR, and Sierra Leone), opportunities to access higher education are still very limited for young refugees, mainly due to the low number of higher education institutions (outside the capital cities and in the regions hosting the majority of refugees), the high registration and tuition fees, and the lack of electricity and connectivity making it impossible to access distance learning programmes.

The number of available higher education scholarships remain far lower than the number of secondary school graduates and the supply of quality vocational training for adults and out-of-school youth is very limited or non-existent in many areas, putting young refugees at higher risk of unemployment and hindering their opportunities to become self-reliant.



Faïda is a refugee from Rwanda who graduated among the top 3 students of her Economics class last year in Chad. She completed her Licence with a DAFI scholarship and started her Master thanks to a scholarship from the French Embassy in Chad. ©UNHCR/Antoine Tardy

UNHCR's Education Response

Supporting refugees' access to education and promoting safety and continuity of learning for all

During the 2020-2021 school year, UNHCR provided critical support to Ministries of Education in the region to achieve sustainable results and impact regarding **continued access to education** for forcibly displaced children and youth, even during the school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic or in insecure areas. Specific measures have also been taken to ensure a **safe return to school** when schools reopened, in a *build back better* perspective.

With the aim of facilitating forcibly displaced children's access to national education systems, UNHCR and its partners have undertaken activities to strengthen the **reception capacity** and **inclusiveness** of schools and learning environments in refugee-hosting areas.

For this purpose:

- **138 classrooms** were built or rehabilitated in **7 countries** (Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria), allowing thousands of refugee, internally displaced and host community children to access safer learning environments.
- **644 schools** in **11 countries** (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria) were supported with **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)** facilities, such as water points, latrines, and handwashing stations, to mitigate risks of further Covid-related school closures.
- **2,144 teachers** were financially supported, and **2,510 teachers** were trained on Education in Emergencies, Child Protection, and Psychosocial Support in **7 countries** (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria) to improve the care and learning of displaced children.
- **20,000 school kits** were distributed to children in **9 countries** (Benin, Burkina Faso, CAR, Chad, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria) and **10,500 children** were assisted with **cash-based interventions** in

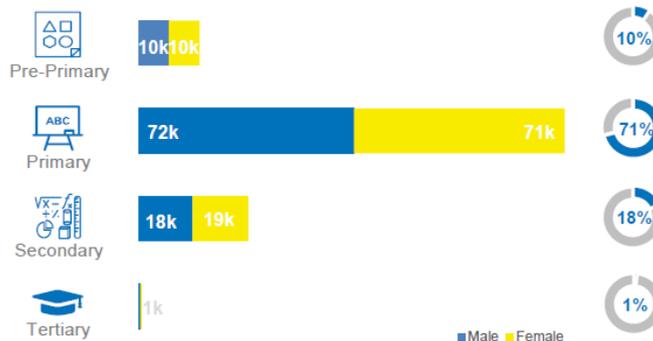
8 countries (Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal), with the aim of improving access to education for the most vulnerable.

- **1,129 refugee students** received higher education **scholarships** (including 481 DAFI scholars) to support their university studies.

Key achievements



Children/youth reached by level



As a result of these activities, a total of over **200,000 children** (145,000 refugees, 14,000 IDPs and 42,000 children from host communities) in **12 countries** (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal) were able to access or continue education, at pre-primary, primary, secondary, or tertiary level.

2020-2021 Highlights of UNHCR's Education Interventions

Ensuring that refugee boys and girls do not spend more than three months out of school when they arrive in their country of asylum is one of the main priorities of UNHCR's emergency education response. For example, during the crisis that erupted just before the December 2020 elections in the **Central African Republic** and led to the influx of thousands of refugees to neighboring countries, UNHCR immediately stepped up its education response in eastern **Cameroon** and southern **Chad**, to get refugee children back to school as quickly as possible.

In **Nigeria**, UNHCR has supported the Ministry of Education to ensure the immediate and smooth inclusion of Cameroonian refugee children and youth into the national education system throughout the school year by building additional classrooms, providing teaching and learning materials and ensuring adequate teacher training in schools located near to the refugee settlements.



A UNHCR-funded school in Adagom refugee settlement, in south-eastern Nigeria. ©UNHCR/Roland Schönbauer

During the school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, UNHCR distributed over 11,000 solar-powered radio sets, along with school kits, to displaced children in **Burkina Faso**, **Cameroon**, and **Mali** to enable them access distance education programs broadcast through national and community radios. The radio education program also enables children living in areas where schools remain closed due to insecurity to continue learning.



Displaced children who received their school kit including a solar radio to follow radio learning programmes in the Gao region of Mali. ©UNHCR/Alassane Guindo

In **Chad**, **Ghana**, and **Liberia**, UNHCR also provided 'take home' learning packages to all refugee children in camp schools, while tutoring sessions were organized for students in exam classes.

In **Chad**, UNHCR has renewed its partnership with the French Embassy to fund Master scholarships for refugee students. Initiated in 2018, this partnership has already enabled 14 young people to continue their studies in Chad after their Bachelor's degree, and 5 new scholarships will be accorded this year. This scholarship is currently the only one at Master's level accessible to refugees in Chad.

In **Ghana**, a partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has allowed five refugee students to enter the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and pursue their studies ([read more here](#)).



Bello is a Central African refugee in Chad who completed his studies in Business Law with the support of UNHCR and the French Embassy. ©UNHCR/Antoine Tardy

Regional flagship initiatives supporting national education responses

Strengthening child protection and preventing gender-based violence in schools

For schools to play their full role in protecting vulnerable children, including forcibly displaced children, infrastructure must be adequate, appropriate, and safe, children must be able to thrive in a healthy, inclusive, and **violence-free environment**, teachers and members of the educational community must be trained and supported, and parents must be encouraged to participate fully in their children's education.

In a region where gender inequalities in the education sector are glaring, a better understanding of the specific implications of gender-based violence (GBV) in schools, particularly in contexts of forced displacement, is essential to ensure the protection of children. To tackle this issue and improve the protection of girls and boys in schools, UNHCR RBWCA has developed a toolkit for teachers, parents, and community mobilisers to raise awareness, **prevent and respond to GBV in schools**.

Among the tools developed, a collaboration with the Senegalese cartoonist **Seydina Issa Sow** allowed the creation of a [series of 10 illustrations](#) (accompanied with audio) on the different forms of GBV and the reactions to adopt. These illustrations were used in digital campaigns (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.), as information posters and supports to engage in conversations, create participative stories and organize role plays. A black and white version has also been created, which can be used as coloring material for children or as graphic elements for digital platforms or social networks.

A dedicated [educational booklet](#) has also been developed with key messages and tips on how to respond to and prevent GBV in schools.

These tailored educational tools aim to build and strengthen local community-based child protection systems and support school management committees to make learning environments safer for all girls and boys.



Promoting refugee youth employment and localization of aid

Convinced that education can change lives, that lifelong learning is essential for everyone's personal and professional development, and that vocational training opens doors to employment, UNHCR RBWCA has sought new regional partnerships to **promote refugees' access to higher education, lifelong and vocational training**, with the aim of improving their autonomy and self-reliance through an effective transition to employment.

Furthermore, strengthening the **participation and representation of refugees** in decision-making processes that directly affect them is key to improving the humanitarian response while advancing the localisation agenda, in line with the global commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016.

To make these commitments concrete, the **Government of the Principality of Monaco**, UNHCR and **Bioforce** have sealed a four-year partnership (2021-2024) to improve refugees and internally displaced persons access to humanitarian and development work in West Africa. In line with the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the project aims at giving forcibly displaced youth a central role in the preparation and implementation of assistance programmes

intended for them, thanks to quality and certified vocational training designed to empowering them to respond to the humanitarian challenges faced by their host countries ([read more here](#)).

The three partners have already been working together in West Africa since early 2021 on a pilot initiative in which Bioforce has offered scholarships to refugee women in Senegal.



Signing of the MoU between the Principality of Monaco, UNHCR and Bioforce. ©Monaco/Manuël Vitali

Supporting the reintegration of Ivorian returnees into school

As part of the new roadmap for the repatriation of Ivorian refugees, UNHCR RBWCA has launched a broad **regional information and communication campaign** on the return conditions aimed, among other things, at supporting the reintegration of returnee children and youth into the Ivorian education system.



A full **guidance package** (including posters, comics, FAQ, and information leaflet) has been developed to ensure that returnee families will be properly informed on the existing procedures for **returning to school**. Continued advocacy is also conducted with the Ivorian Government and national education stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of returnees in existing support programmes when necessary (language courses, remedial classes, etc.).

DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Thanks to UNHCR's donors for supporting our education activities in West and Central Africa:



CONTACTS

For more information, please contact:
Charlotte Berquin, Education Officer, berquin@unhcr.org
 Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, Protection Service

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