



SUPPORTING CONTINUED ACCESS TO EDUCATION DURING COVID-19
Emerging Promising Practices
Issue 2

Efforts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the operation of education institutions around the world, with schools and universities remaining closed for three months or more in some places. UNESCO reports that as of mid-June 2020, over 67.7% (1.18 bn learners) of all those enrolled in education programmes are still affected by school closures. In many of the countries in which UNHCR works, schools and universities either continue to be closed or are not operating at full capacity. During this time refugee learners and teachers have had to adapt to new learning modalities to ensure that learning continues. At the same time, Ministries of Education and other actors are looking ahead and thinking about how to make schools safe for re-opening and how to compensate for the loss in learning time.

In this edition of “**Emerging promising practices**” we highlight the efforts that UNHCR and partners have taken to support refugee learners and students to continue their education and to support families and caregivers who have had to temporarily assume the role of teachers. Initial indications from needs assessments show that refugee families often lack the hardware needed to have meaningful access to national distance and connected education programmes implemented by governments. Continued disruption to learning and difficulties accessing services puts the gains made in refugees’ access to education at risk.

As schools begin to re-open in some countries, sometimes only for specific grades or in selected areas, many adaptations have to be made to the way in which schools are organized and operate to ensure better hygiene and implement physical distancing requirements. Schools in areas where refugees live often have poor infrastructure and are located in areas where access to water is not guaranteed and where classrooms are over-crowded. With the support of key donors and government authorities, efforts are being made to improve the quality of water and sanitation facilities at schools in refugee camps and hosting areas.

In addition, preparations for the safe re-opening of schools must also consider how to best support refugee students who may have fallen behind as a result of not being able to learn during school closures – additional classes, catch-up programmes and tailored support may be needed. The continued use of a mixed modalities for instruction that combine both in-school learning and the use of different materials and programmes for home-based learning offer an opportunity for elevating the quality of educational opportunities available to refugees.

A cornerstone of UNHCR’s education response has been its commitment to embed responses within national frameworks and work alongside other actors to ensure a harmonized response. UNHCR has contributed to the framework for the re-opening of schools issued jointly with UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the World Bank and the “[Safe Back to School Guide](#)” endorsed by the Global Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

This document is the second in a series that highlights emerging practices as UNHCR operations and their partners work to support the continuity of education for displaced and refugee students during the pandemic and support them in returning to school.

Community Outreach and Information Dissemination

One of the lessons learnt from the response to the Ebola crisis was the importance of ensuring that communities remain informed about educational opportunities, school re-opening and the epidemic. UNHCR, its partners, and DAFI (higher education) scholarship holders have been actively engaged in providing essential information to communities.

In **Cameroon**, a group of university students has come together to share information and support communities in Yaoundé. The group of 20 DAFI scholarship holders (8 women and 12 men) received training on COVID-19

prevention measures conducted by UNHCR's health partner FAIRMED and were provided with personal protective equipment. They act as community outreach facilitators and go door to door visiting refugee and host community families where they explain and translate official information printed in French and English into local languages (Sango, Arabic, Lingala, Fofouké and Haoussa), distribute hygiene items, demonstrate handwashing techniques and share information about positive hygiene behaviours that can help limit the transmission of COVID-19. House visits have been conducted to 43 families to date.

Promoting the Continuation of Learning During School Closures

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

One of the features of the COVID-19 response has been the extent to which face-to-face teaching has been suspended. Governments and schools have adopted a variety of solutions so that children and youth can continue learning while having to stay at home. These solutions have included the use of internet-based materials, online communications platforms and virtual classrooms, broadcast technologies and distribution of printed materials. Parents around the world, including refugee parents, have had to assume responsibility for supporting their children's learning. In situations where parents are not literate in the language of instruction or have themselves had limited educational opportunities, this can be especially challenging.

In **Bangladesh**, UNHCR has been working with parents and caregivers to enable them to better support their children in learning at

home. Shortly after the decision to temporarily close all schools and educational institutions nationwide was announced, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) issued a directive to also close learning centres in camps. UNHCR and its partners are sharing guidance notes with caregivers and parents that contain detailed instructions for both parents and children on ways to ensure that learning continues at home. These notes direct parents and caregivers to the pages in the workbooks used by children and cover four main subjects (Burmese, English, Mathematics and life skills) across different educational levels (Early Childhood Development (ECD), primary and secondary). The notes also contain stories and instructions for making toys using commonly available household items. Information about the learning programme and materials is also disseminated using mosque loudspeakers.

KEEPING TEACHERS INFORMED

In **Kenya**, a WhatsApp-based communications tree is used to share information about remote learning opportunities for both learners from refugee and host communities and to counter misinformation about COVID-19. The system shares information about educational resources with teachers and learners, as well as disseminating information about COVID-19. Information can be cascaded from UNHCR, the Ministry of Education (MoE), and NGO partners to head teachers and then to 1,182 teachers. These teachers, in turn,

share information and learning activities with learners and their community networks. Using this methodology, lesson notes, revision materials, and holiday assignments have been disseminated. Advice supporting and mentoring teachers and surveys for teachers have also been shared using the communications tree. The system also allows for a two-way flow of information and is also capable of receiving complaints and queries from teachers and families.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO ADAPT TO NEW WAYS OF TEACHING

In **Malawi**, UNHCR and Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) provided training to nine primary school teachers on the fundamentals of using radio broadcasting to support learning and deliver lessons using community radio. Teachers are now applying this training and are delivering revision sessions using the Yetu community radio station for 234

students in their final year of primary school who were in the process of preparing for the Primary School Leaving Examination when schools closed. The examinations were originally scheduled to take place on 10 May, but were postponed by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST).



PROVIDING HARDWARE NECESSARY TO ACCESS LEARNING PROGRAMMES

The digital divide has a profound impact on refugee students who often have the least access to the hardware and connectivity needed to access many of the learning solutions that have been put in place. A number of UNHCR operations have been working to provide refugees with the tools needed to have access to learning platforms that have been helping children and youth continue learning during institutional closures.

UNHCR **Malawi** distributed 500 radios to primary students to enable them to listen to lesson broadcasts delivered as part of the Primary Emergency Radio Education Programme initiated by the MoEST. The distribution of radios is also helping 233 secondary students – who are in the examination year – access the radio lesson programme broadcast using the community radio station.

In **Croatia**, UNHCR worked with the Ministry of the Interior to provide laptops and a television set to school children and unaccompanied and separated minors in reception centres so they can follow online lessons and education broadcasts.

With the support of a private sector partner, UNHCR in the **Russian Federation** donated 130 mobile phones for use by children in asylum-centres to support access to educational programmes.

In **Malaysia**, UNHCR partners distribute learning materials and worksheets when they deliver food assistance to refugee families. Completed worksheets are collected and replaced with new ones when the following round of assistance is delivered.



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In **Mali**, UNHCR and its partners have provided 11,000 refugee, IDP and host community children with solar powered radios and school kits. A total of 12 schools have been equipped with water pumps and 405 hand washing kits have been provided in 135 schools. Improvements to infrastructure have been made in 10 schools with the construction of 30 classrooms and 40 latrines, and 72 teachers in 12 schools are being trained in hygiene and safe sanitation, as well as Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).



ASSISTING LEARNERS PREPARE FOR EXAMS DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

In N'Djamena, **Chad**, a tutoring programme is assisting 106 refugee and Chadian students (49 girls and 57 boys) to prepare for the Chadian Baccalaureate exam. This programme started in 2019, supported by the Youth Initiative Fund. Tutoring sessions had initially taken place at the Study Centre at the UNHCR office in N'Djamena. Following the introduction of physical distancing requirements, these sessions now take place one-to-one at refugees' homes.

The 25 tutors (5 women and 20 men) received a training session via WhatsApp and are each supplied with a washable facemask, and receive a small amount of funding to cover transportation costs. Two of the tutors serve as focal points and manage dispatching candidates to their locations. Each tutor has a monitoring sheet and UNHCR Chad and JRS to ensure they get the support they need.

In **Eastern Chad**, despite a lack of radio coverage and resources in refugee camps, headmasters and teachers of lower and upper secondary classes are going the extra mile to ensure the continuity of education. With the support from UNHCR and JRS, they are providing homework and home classes to about 4,000 Sudanese and Chadian students (55% of whom are women) who are preparing for national exams. Each week, students receive exercises to complete at home and then return to their teachers. Home classes are also being organized with a small number of students gathering together to attend a lesson.

"I've always been passionate about teaching. Sharing my experience while respecting COVID-19 restrictions, is improving the chances of those young refugees to succeed in the national exam."

(Mahamat, Chadian student)



In **Cameroon**, final examinations have been delayed due to school closures. To help primary and secondary students (32 girls and 18 boys) in the examination year get ready for their return to school on June 1 and sit the examinations, the 21 youth from the "Girls Leadership Group" and the DAFI Cameroon Club have assisted them with distance learning during the quarantine period.



ENSURING THE CONTINUITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES

School closures not only disrupt learning, but also the support services that are provided through schools, such as school feeding and psycho-social support. Globally, thousands of refugee children are missing out on school meals on which their families relied, and which were an important defence against food insecurity.

In **Colombia**, UNHCR's partner "Opción Legal" adapted its existing programme, "Pedagogía y Protección de la Niñez y la Juventud Migrante y Refugiada Venezolana", to provide virtual orientation and psychosocial support to students and their families during the COVID-19 crisis. This initiative is implemented in coordination with government and educational institutions and supports refugee children, adolescents and families in Medellín and Bogotá.

A virtual platform has been set up to equip approximately 100 teachers in Cartagena

with tools and strategies to foster social inclusion and prevent xenophobia. This initiative is implemented in coordination with local authorities and 20 prioritized educational institutions and assists Venezuelan refugee children and adolescents and their families, as well as host communities.

In **Malawi**, UNHCR distributed take-home rations to the families of 300 pre-primary students and 4,633 primary students from mid-April to early June. The initiative was informed by the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology (MoEST) guidelines on distribution of school feeding during COVID-19 school closures. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) from both refugee and host communities, UNHCR partner organization and government officials from the Ministry of Health facilitated distribution.



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Preparing for the Re-Opening of Schools

UNHCR **Niger** and its partner COOPI are organizing capacity-building activities for educational staff employed in education centres in the Diffa region. Eight information sessions were carried out on the transmission of the virus and barrier measures to mitigate its spread in April and May. These discussion and information sessions were attended by 49 educational staff (39 secondary school teachers, five librarians and five tutors).

With the reopening of schools and resumption of classes in Ogoja, **Nigeria**,

UNHCR and its partners are taking precautions to make schools as safe as possible. A refugee-led community-based organization is providing students with water and locally-made soap during lessons. In addition to contributing to a safe return to school, this initiative, which is carried out within the refugee settlements and hosting communities, serves as platform to sensitize and keep community members updated on issues related to COVID-19.

Tertiary Education adapts in light of COVID-19

In **Malawi** the implementation of the Digital Inclusion Programme was disrupted by the closure of education institutions. This programme is one of several tertiary learning opportunities that helps refugee youth residing in the Dzaleka refugee camp develop digital skills and join the labour market as online freelancers. Laptops, data bundles and Wi-Fi devices were distributed to the top 15 students and six teachers to enable the remote continuation of the programme.

Shortly after universities shut their doors, UNHCR's education partner in Malawi, Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL), made available internet data and laptops for 102 university students enrolled in Regis University programmes, and 34 students enrolled in the Southern New Hampshire University AA/BA programmes to ensure they are able to access online lessons. Students are also receiving extra academic support from teachers through online platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom and electronic mail.

DAFI students support communities and use skills to enable others to continue learning

DAFI students around the world are turning solidarity into action by helping fellow refugees and host communities protect themselves and curb the potential spread of COVID-19. One of the hallmarks of the DAFI higher education scholarship programme is that community service is a key element of

the programme, with each student committing to giving back to the communities around them. During the COVID-19 pandemic many current and past scholarship holders have sought to assist others and to help younger children continue their education.



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In **Zambia**, DAFI Club members have joined forces to raise funds to combat COVID-19 and are contributing to the delivery of health and hygiene supplies. They have made available part of their savings and donated a number of items (280 face masks, three hand washing basins and three cases of soap) to refugee families who found shelter at Makeni Transit Centre in Lusaka. As social distancing is nearly impossible within Makeni Transit Centre and families lack sanitation and hygiene items, this action has made a big difference.

In **Kenya**, Adhieu, a DAFI scholarship holder, has sewed over 2,000 face masks and produced over 3,000 bars of soap for distribution in refugee camps. “I know the struggle and hardship the refugees go through” says Adhieu “I know many refugees can’t afford masks or soap. That’s why I took it upon myself to help refugees protect themselves”. Together with other South

Sudanese students who found refuge in Kenya, Adhieu is also exploring the possibility of developing medical ventilators to be distributed in refugee camps in Kenya and sent to South Sudan.



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In **Senegal**, a group of former DAFI students and UN Volunteers raised 720,000 XOF (equivalent to 1,187 USD) for vulnerable refugee families living in Dakar. The funds were used to purchase basic food items such as rice, oil and sugar, as well as health and hygiene items such as soap, masks, detergent and hand sanitizer for 25 vulnerable households (composed of 107 members), many of which are women-headed households. To support refugee-led businesses in the COVID-19 times, one third of the masks distributed were purchased from two refugee tailors.



In **Morocco**, with the support of UNHCR and its partner Foundation Orient-Occident (FOO) and in collaboration with various community networks and parents, 15 DAFI students have volunteered to conduct online courses in Mathematics, Science, Arabic, and French. Through this initiative, they reached and supported around 340 children enrolled in lower secondary and high school. DAFI students have also set up WhatsApp groups to provide peer support on language learning. Two DAFI students also participated in a radio broadcast to highlight the importance of education and promote learning during school closures due to COVID-19.

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