



Digital Literacy and Skills

“Digital literacy is the ability to **access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies** for participation in economic and social life” — USAID, 2022.

The Challenge

Refugees lack foundational digital literacy and skills, reducing their ability to benefit from transformational online opportunities, while increasing their risk of exclusion and digital harm.¹

While digital inclusion can offer significant benefits to the forcibly displaced and stateless persons, **a critical barrier to adoption and use of digital technologies is a lack of foundational digital literacy and skills.** Globally, only 45 percent of the population have basic digital skills (*ITU, 2019*), and this statistic is significantly lower for displaced populations.

This **digital literacy and skills gap** threatens the viability of our digital interventions. It risks forcibly displaced communities in need of assistance being left behind and lessens the likelihood of these groups benefiting from digital dividends. Individuals risk being pigeon-holed as passive consumers of digital technology, rather than active contributors and creators within a connected society using a variety of digital technologies.

Concerted effort is needed to support the communities we work with and for in using technology effectively and safely, minimising **digital risk**. Without action, it will be the most marginalised groups (including women, persons with disabilities, older persons, LGBTIQ+ community, minority ethnic groups) who experience the **greatest risk of exclusion and digital harm**.

¹ UNHCR (2020) Connecting With Confidence Managing Digital Risks to Refugee Connectivity

Although only 5% of the world's population lives in areas without mobile network coverage, **a huge usage gap remains.** In 2022, 3.4 billion people, or 43% of the world's population, are still not using mobile internet, with many people who have coverage not having the basic digital literacy and skills to use the internet. ([GSMA, 2023](#))

The Opportunity

Enhance digital literacy and skills to maximise benefits of participating in a connected society.

Digital technology can be a catalyst for positive change for forcibly displaced and stateless persons, if individuals have the requisite **digital literacy and skills** to participate equally, meaningfully and safely in the digital world.

Benefits to individuals' lives from enhanced digital skills are diverse and extend beyond direct digital services provided by UNHCR, spanning **economic, educational, political, civic, social, and creative/leisure benefits**.

UNHCR Digital Transformation Strategy

UNHCR's Digital Transformation Strategy identifies Digital Inclusion, Digital Protection and Digital Services as priority outcome areas. Digital literacy and digital skills are prerequisites to all three – hence a critical focus of our work.

UNHCR makes a distinction between digital literacy (including foundational or essential digital skills) with more advanced digital skills geared towards more advanced uses of digital technology that inter alia lead towards enhanced livelihoods opportunities, covering anything from coding to multimedia and design. These will be addressed through a separate workstream covered under the Digital Inclusion priority outcome area of the strategy.

Digital Literacy and Digital Skills
are pre-requisite for all outcome areas

Priority outcome 1

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Communities have equitable access to digital technology and channels and can use them to pursue opportunities for lifelong learning, inclusion in the digital economy, leisure and solutions.

Priority outcome 2

DIGITAL PROTECTION

Communities can exercise their human rights online and are protected from digital risk, enabling them to have access to trusted channels, avoid harm and have agency in decision-making.

Priority outcome 3

DIGITAL SERVICES

Communities have access to high quality, efficient and safe digital services from UNHCR and its partners.

To achieve the outcome areas, digital programming will go beyond ensuring access to connectivity, digital devices, and services, to supporting the development of digital skills and digital literacy among communities we work with.

Our Vision

All forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and the communities that host them, have the requisite digital literacy and skills to safely, equally, and meaningfully participate in a connected society.

To achieve this vision, UNHCR will develop structured, long-term approaches to furthering digital literacy amongst forcibly displaced and stateless communities and meeting the ambitions of the Digital Transformation Strategy. These approaches include:

1. Integrating with national approaches

Identifying national approaches to digital literacy and skills building, in order to integrate refugee programming into development plans.

2. Building a digital literacy network

Building a network of digital literacy champions through localisation efforts and connecting to initiatives that can drive forward inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons into broader digital literacy building efforts.

3. Developing operational guidance

Developing operational guidance around digital literacy, so country operations and partners are better able to more systematically roll out interventions built off past successes.

4. Partnering with digital literacy training or service providers

Identifying and partnering with stakeholders to develop trainings and curriculums, providing refugee hosting communities with access to high quality learning opportunities in line with national strategies for digital inclusion and skills development.



We are looking for partners to help us achieve our vision. Please [get in touch](#) if you're interested in helping us build foundational digital literacy and skills among forcibly displaced and stateless persons.