

2024 GLOBAL OVERVIEW



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Front/back cover photo:

Refugee and Ecuadorian children participate in tutoring classes provided by UNHCR partner CDH in La Chala community centre, in Guayaquil. Many of the former students are now tutors. With increasing violence and insecurity across Ecuador, community centres like this one not only allows refugees and locals to keep learning, but it becomes a safe space for them to keep growing.

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are spending more than five years outside of their

home country—a full schooling cycle.

Primary Impact keeps refugee education going in times of crisis—funding teachers, learning materials, and safe classrooms so children can start, stay, and succeed in school. In 2024, the initiative supported 505,765 learners (48% girls), 7,471 teachers, and hundreds of classrooms across 26 operations, while advancing inclusion in national systems. As global funding tightens, Primary Impact is the foundation of the education pipeline—protecting progress today and enabling transitions to secondary education, vocational education and skills and higher education tomorrow.

The <u>UNHCR Education Report 2025</u> paints a stark picture: 12.4 million refugee children of school age, with 46 per cent out of school. Enrolment decreases at every step of the ladder—67 per cent at primary, 37 per cent at secondary, and just 9 per cent at tertiary. These figures highlight a simple truth: without sustained investment in primary education, ambitions to move forward with education remain out of reach for most refugees. Primary Impact therefore targets the base of the ladder, recognising that investment in primary education is the first and most critical step to unlocking opportunities at every level.

ABOUT PRIMARY IMPACT

Over the past decade, there has been a growing consensus that refugees should be included in national education systems on par with host communities, marked by breakthroughs in access, gual-

ity improvements and the establishment of sustainable financial frameworks³. Yet international aid for primary education for refugees remains insufficient, and stronger coordination among stakeholders is essential to ensure efforts are complementary and effective.

In this context, UNHCR launched Primary Impact in July 2023 to mobilise multi-year resources and align efforts to meet refugee education needs at the primary level.

Primary Impact serves as a global platform for collaboration, pooling resources from multiple donors and channelling them towards priority interventions in primary education across refugee-hosting contexts. It combines evidence-driven programming with strong coordination between UNHCR operations, governments, and partners to ensure investments respond to needs and build national capacity rather than create parallel systems.

Aligned with the <u>UNHCR Education Strategy 2030</u>, Primary Impact works to:

- Increase equitable access to primary education
- 2. Improve the quality of education
- 3. Establish and maintain a safe and supportive learning environment
- Advocate for and operationalize inclusive education policies at national and local levels

The initiative channels funding into practical, measurable activities that are needs based and adapted to local contexts, such as teacher recruitment and training, school construction and rehabilitation, provision of learning materials, psychosocial and social-emotional learning support, and strengthening of national data and Education Management Systems (EMIS).

Building on over a decade of work in refugee primary education, and seeking to expand and scale transformative approaches, Primary Impact aims





¹ Global Trends Report 2024 | UNHCR

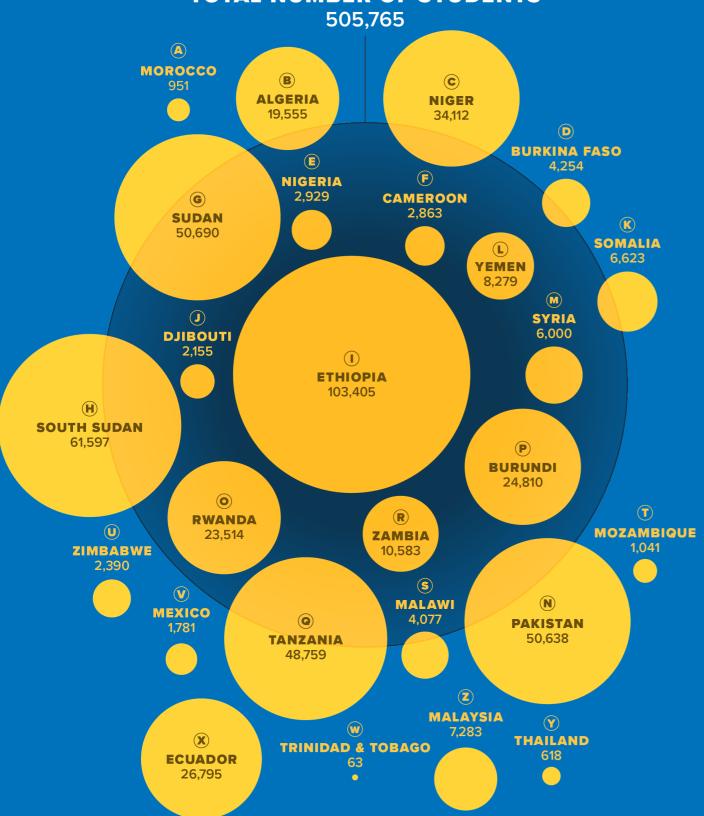
² UNHCR Education Report 2025 | UNHCR

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2024 STUDENT FIGURES

per country

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS



2024 PROGRAM MAP







to improve the lives of refugee children through accessible, inclusive, and holistic education.

Throughout 2024, primary education activities were running in 26 countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The 2024 report marks the second of a four-year initiative.

ACCESS

Access to education expanded in 2024, but persistent obstacles hindered universal enrolment. Documentation requirements, long distances to schools, and the inability of families to afford indirect costs such as uniforms and materials remain major barriers. These challenges contributed to a drop in the share of refugee children enrolled in national education systems, which fell from 51 per cent in 2023 to 46 per cent in 2024⁴.

Targeted initiatives helped mitigate these barriers. In 2024, *Primary Impact* supported **797 schools**, reaching a total of **505,765 students**—**48% girls and 52% boys**. To help children who had missed years of schooling, **5,670 students** were enrolled in **Accelerated Education Programmes**, with girls representing **63%** of participants. To promote access and retention, **330,198 students** received learning materials and **17,825 students** were supported through education-related cash assistance for items like uniform and school meals, maintaining near gender parity across all interventions.

In Algeria, 9 June Printing Center was supported to deliver 20,000 curriculum-aligned textbooks to the Sahrawi education system. In Pakistan, Accelerated Education Programmes allowed 1,126 adolescent girls who had missed years of schooling to re-enter the system, with over 70 per cent

SPOTLIGHT | • MOZAMBIQUE

Expanding EMIS coverage is key to delivering inclusion commitments

UNHCR and the Ministry of Education continue to work hard to ensure access to schooling for refugee, asylum-seeker and host children in Maratane, Mozambique's only official settlement, with learners attending both settlement and nearby public schools. The pressing gap is tracking refugee learners outside Maratane: many enrol across provinces but are not consistently captured in the national **Education Management Information System** (EMIS). Without this visibility, it is difficult to monitor attendance and progression or to plan teacher deployment, classrooms and learning materials. Expanding EMIS coverage to include all refugee and asylum-seeker children—wherever they live—will be key to delivering Mozambique's commitment to include refugees in the national system and to improving resource allocation and accountability.

of participants successfully transitioning to formal grade levels. In Morocco, cash-based support enabled vulnerable families to cover uniforms and transport, easing one of the main barriers to refugee children's enrolment, while in Thailand financial support was provided to 45 caregivers to accompany young refugee children to language classes, helping them transition into regular Thai schools.

Disability inclusion also advanced in 2024. In Burkina Faso, children with disabilities received medical assessments and assistive devices such as hearing aids and glasses, while in Niger, 25 Braille machines were distributed to support learners with vision impairments. In Rwanda, 216 refugee children joined sign language classes, and in Yemen, 95 children received prescription glasses. These efforts highlight growing recognition that

access to education must include targeted support for learners with disabilities.

Girls' education remained central to access efforts. In Cameroon, Niger, and Zimbabwe, the distribution of cash assistance, uniforms and menstrual hygiene kits helped sustain girls' attendance. Safe transport arrangements reduced dropout linked to long and unsafe journeys, while community mobilisation campaigns addressed social norms that discourage girls' schooling.

"EVEN THOUGH THE CLASSKOOMS AKE VERY FULL, THE TEACHERS WORK SO HARD AND ALWAYS ENCOURAGE US [...]"

MARIE





ESTHER

SPOTLIGHT | • MALAWI

In 2022, the Malawian government ordered all refugees and asylum seekers to return to Dzaleka camp. Esther and Marie's parents were among those who had tried to build a life outside, creating opportunities for their children where the camp could not. When forced back, they feared their daughters' futures would fade with the limited access to education.

Yet on returning, they found UNHCR and partners working to keep learning alive. Esther and Marie eagerly re-enrolled, determined to pursue their dreams. While the new classrooms were crowded, and Esther and Marie missed their friends and teachers from their former schools, with counseling, encouragement, and support received from their new teachers, the girls soon regained their footing. Esther quickly rose to consistently rank first or second in her class, while Marie returned to her place among the top five students.

"Even though the classrooms are very full, the teachers work so hard and always encourage us to come and see them outside of class if we need help,"

Marie shares, emphasizing that she now has more faith that her dream of opening an orphanage for disadvantaged children may come true.

"I think I will be a pilot after all, and my teacher supports my dream too. She calls me 'pilot' in a joking way, but it encourages me every time," says Esther.

ENVIRONMENTS ARE BUILT

NOT ONLY FOR REFUGEE

WIDER COMMUNITY."

CHILDREN, BUT ALSO FOR

TEACHERS, STAFF, AND THE

"SAFE EDUCATION

BUALITY

Getting children into school is only the first step; learning is under pressure. In low- and middle-income countries - where most refugees live - learning poverty (the share of 10-year-olds unable to read and understand a simple text) remains around 70%⁵, a stark indicator that many learners are not acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy even when enrolled. UNESCO estimates about 13 million primary teachers will be needed by 2030⁶, with the deepest deficits in sub-Saharan Africa. For refugee teachers specifically, recognition of prior qualifications, inclusion on payrolls, and access to accredited professional development remain pivotal to classroom quality and learner outcomes.

In 2024, Primary Impact supported a total of 7,471 teachers, strengthening the foundation of learning across refugee-hosting schools. However, women represented only 34% of the teaching workforce, underscoring the need to recruit and retain more female teachers as role models for girls. Of those supported, **3,415 teachers** received training in social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), while 1.571 were trained in data collection and utilisation to improve classroom planning and evidence-based decision-making. Teachers were also trained in gender-responsive pedagogy, including in South Sudan, where 514 teachers — including 401 men — received training on gender-specific topics, strengthening understanding of gender-responsive pedagogy and classroom practices.

Gaps in recruitment, training, and fair compensation persist. Refugee teachers in particular often lack recognition of their qualifications, are excluded from payrolls, or work under precarious contracts. Encouraging progress was seen in Ethiopia, where refugee teachers accessed government-run professional development programmes.

Learning assessment remains a weak point across refugee education. While many countries now include refugees in national examinations, regular monitoring of foundational learning is limited. Some progress has been made; in Burkina Faso, national literacy and numeracy testing has begun to capture results from refugee learners, while in Zambia, the Let's Read initiative measured gains in early-grade reading among both refugee and host children. Scaling up such assessments will be vital to ensure that improved access translates into improved learning outcomes.

In Mexico, the HALDO learning assessment tool has been adapted specifically for children on the move, evaluating literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning among refugee and host-community students. The assessment provides disaggregated data that helps identify learning gaps and informs targeted interventions to strengthen foundational skills and inclusion within national education systems.

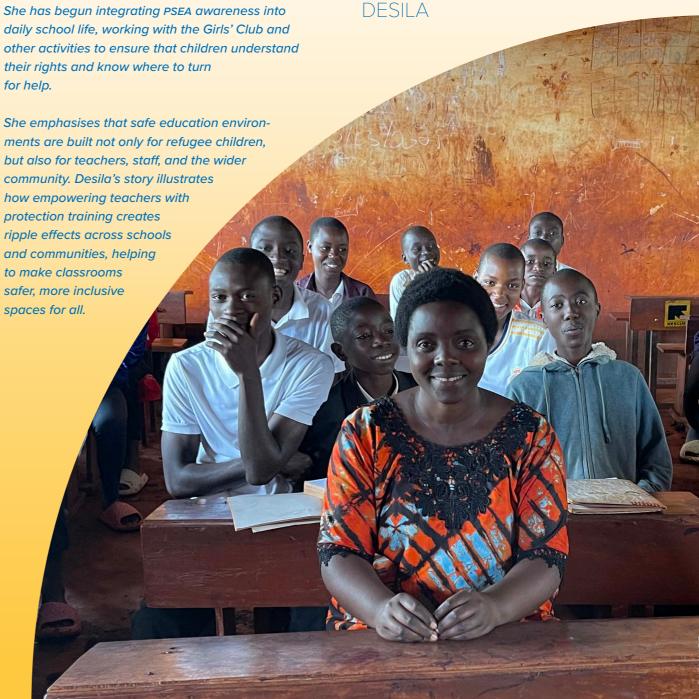
Quality and equity also depend on the availability of female teachers and the use of gender-responsive pedagogy. Availability of qualified female teachers contributes to fair and inclusive learning environment and gender-responsive pedagogy helps to foster a positive learning environment. Across Primary Impact operations, only about one-third of teachers are women, limiting the availability of role models for girls and affecting parents' confidence in sending daughters to school. Expanding recruitment, retention, and professional development opportunities for female teachers is therefore both a quality and an equity imperative. Female teacher recruitment and deployment, gender-responsive pedagogy, and language-bridging during the first months in a new system are measures that particularly benefit girls. Where these are resourced, girls' attendance and progression stabilise and learning gaps narrow—especially when paired with remedial classes or accelerated catch-up classes for those who have missed schooling⁷.

7 UNHCR Education Report 2024—Refugee education: Five years on from the launch of the 2030 refugee education strategy | UNHCR

SPOTLIGHT | TANZANIA

At Maendeleo Primary School in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania, teacher Desila Niyokwizira recently completed training on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The training strengthened her ability to recognise, prevent, and respond to risks faced by children, while reinforcing clear reporting procedures.

For Desila, the impact has been immediate: she now feels confident addressing sensitive issues and supporting both students and colleagues. She has begun integrating PSEA awareness into daily school life, working with the Girls' Club and other activities to ensure that children understand their rights and know where to turn for help.



⁵ Learning Poverty Updates and Revisions: What's New?

⁶ Global Report on Teachers | UNESCO 2024





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SPOTLIGHT | • MALAYSIA

At Blessed Zo Learning Centre in Malaysia, sport has become more than just a game—it is a pathway to building students' confidence, leadership, and a strong sense of community. Coaches are trained not only in football drills but also in child rights, gender equity, and the SportNet methodology, which links play to life skills and protection. One of the shining stars of the U10 girls' team is nine-year-old Lun Kim, who discovered her passion for football after watching a video of Lionel Messi. Now team captain, she takes great pride in her role. "Playing football makes me very happy. When we played in the Faisal Cup, we won second place. We should have won first, but we played well together, and that's what matters," she explains with a wide smile. Although Lun dreams of becoming a doctor one day, she also hopes to continue playing football for many years to come.

"PLAYING FOOT-BALL MAKES ME VERY HAPPY."



SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRON-MENTS

Schools remain critical protective environments for refugee children, but safety concerns continue to affect access and retention. Bullying, overcrowding, and exposure to violence undermine the protective role of schools, while the absence of trained staff limits the availability of psychosocial support.

In 2024, *Primary Impact* continued to strengthen community engagement and holistic learning across refugee-hosting schools. A total of **510 community structures** were trained to support school management and child protection, while **200 schools** implemented **climate-related activities**, promoting environmental awareness and resilience. In Sudan, 31 Parent-Teacher Associations were mobilised and sensitised on strategies to sustain education during conflict, reinforcing community resilience and continuity of learning.

Co-curricular and sports initiatives reached **125,059 students**, including **72,963** who participated in organised sports, maintaining near gender parity (**girls 51%**, **boys 49%**) and providing vital opportunities for wellbeing, leadership, and social inclusion.

In Tanzania, staff received training on child protection protocols, improving school responses to incidents of violence or neglect. In Ecuador, the *Respiramos Inclusión* initiative used art and sport to combat xenophobia and bullying, including training for 756 students on classroom-based strategies to address xenophobia and discrimination during school hours. Sports for Protection also played a prominent role: the Faisal Cup football tournament in Malaysia engaged nearly 1,000 children, combining matches with discussions on respect, teamwork, and conflict resolution. In Syria, more than 6,000 children attended "homework

cafés" in community centres, where they could study alongside their peers in a supportive and protective environment.

Environmental and co-curricular activities continued to enrich school life and promote wellbeing in 2024. In Ethiopia, environmental clubs operated in 57 primary schools enrolling refugees, while in Nigeria, 639 students participated in Environmental Health Clubs focused on waste management and sustainability. In Zimbabwe, an independent water supply supported environmental initiatives, including the creation of a school vegetable garden. Beyond the classroom, schools also encouraged creative and leadership activities — in Zambia, students formed a 10-member child parliament and launched a brass band, giving learners new opportunities to express themselves, build confidence, and engage with their communities.

INCLUSION

Policy inclusion continued to expand in 2024, as most host governments upheld commitments to allow refugee children access to national systems. Yet implementation gaps remain significant. In many contexts, refugees struggle with placement into age-appropriate grades, recognition of prior learning, and lack of visibility in national Education Management Information Systems (EMIS).

In 2024, *Primary Impact* invested in creating safer and more enabling learning environments. A total of **209 classrooms** and **96 WASH facilities** were built or rehabilitated, improving access to clean, safe, and inclusive spaces for teaching and learning. In Djibouti, one primary school that had been severely damaged by extreme weather was successfully rehabilitated, ensuring students could return to a safe and stable learning environment. Beyond infrastructure, **six publications** were produced and **nine policies and strategies** were developed to strengthen evidence, guide programming, and embed refugee inclusion within national education systems.

"ON THE PITCH, WE WERE ALL EQUAL."

EVANGELINE

SPOTLIGHT | SPURUNDI

At Ecofo Kabuyenge II in Burundi, football and volleyball tournaments brought together returnee and host-community students. For Evangeline, a student who had returned from Tanzania, these games were transformative: "On the pitch, we were all equal. We encouraged each other, shared moments of joy, and I realised we were no longer seen as returnees but as full members of the school and community."

Teachers and local authorities echoed her view.
The headteacher noted that attitudes in classrooms shifted after the tournaments, with greater
cooperation and mutual support among students.
These experiences show how sport can serve as
a bridge between divided groups, creating unity
and reinforcing children's sense of safety, belonging, and inclusion.



In Zambia, refugee learners participated in interschool competitions with host peers, reinforcing social cohesion. In Algeria, home visits and counselling services supported children with specific learning challenges, linking education and psychosocial care. Community-based initiatives also proved effective: in Cameroon, Parent-Teacher Associations mobilised resources for schools, bridging gaps in infrastructure and materials.

Inclusion is not only about policies and systems but also about identity and belonging. For refugee girls, the presence of female teachers, safe facilities, and targeted financial support made education not just possible, but sustainable. For children with disabilities, accessible learning materials and assistive devices transformed what was previously exclusion into genuine participation. Inclusion from the start is crucial to building refugee children's opportunities for learning and belonging. In 2024, this commitment was reflected in Trinidad and Tobago, where **63 refugee children entered national schools for the first time—a milestone for both access and integration.**

Despite remarkable efforts and clear progress, millions of refugee children are still out of school or struggling to learn. Primary Impact has shown what coordinated investment can achieve - from stronger systems and safer classrooms to trained teachers and inclusive learning environments. Yet as the impact of the 2025 funding cuts begins to be felt, sustaining these gains will require renewed commitment and collective action. The accompanying country reports provide further detail on progress and priorities across 26 operations, underscoring the urgent need for partners and donors to step up support for refugee education. Primary Impact is delivering results - but needs are outpacing resources. Only through continued investment and collaboration can we ensure that every refugee child has the opportunity to learn and have a better and brighter future.

"EDUCATION IS YOUR RIGHT, AND YOU SHOULD NEVER GIVE IT UP."

ABDULRAHMAN

at a car wash. Even while working, he never let go of his dream of returning to school. After overhearing a conversation about the power of education to change lives, he resolved to pursue a different future: "I decided that I wanted to become an accountant instead of continuing with car washing. So, I decided it was time to return to school, despite the challenges I might face." With the support of a school kit, uniform, and prescription glasses, Abdulrahman re-enrolled and quickly caught up, memorising the Qur'an at the mosque and studying English in his spare time. His teachers praised his rapid progress and determination. He now shares this advice with other children: "Education is your right, and you should never give it up. Through work you gain skills, and through education you build your future. Don't lose

SPOTLIGHT | YEMEN

In the Basateen area of Aden, Yemen, 14-year-

old Abdulrahman lives with his parents and six

siblings. Always a keen student with a love for

maths, he was forced to drop out of school in

grade seven when his father's unstable work

To help support them, Abdulrahman took a job

could no longer cover the family's needs.



