UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

REGIONAL BUREAU
FOR WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

APRIL-JUNE 2024

Children at school in Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso.
© UNHCR/Benjamin Loyseau

Sahel Crisis: School Closures Affect 2.2 Million Children

Sahel

Nearly 33 million people in the Sahel are grappling with a mix of crises intensified by instability, worsening security, and climate change, leading to a dire need for humanitarian aid and protection. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recently released the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview, which outlines the challenges faced, their impact on the population, and the humanitarian response efforts.

In the first quarter of 2024, 2.2 million children were deprived of their right to education due to the closure of 10,066 schools. Burkina Faso was the hardest hit, with 818,100 children unable to attend school as over 5,300 schools closed by the end of Q1 2024. These children are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which can have severe and lasting effects on their well-being and safety. Additionally, the lack of educational opportunities significantly diminishes their long-term economic prospects, limiting their potential for financial independence in the future.

Over 3.3 million people forcibly displaced in Central Sahel

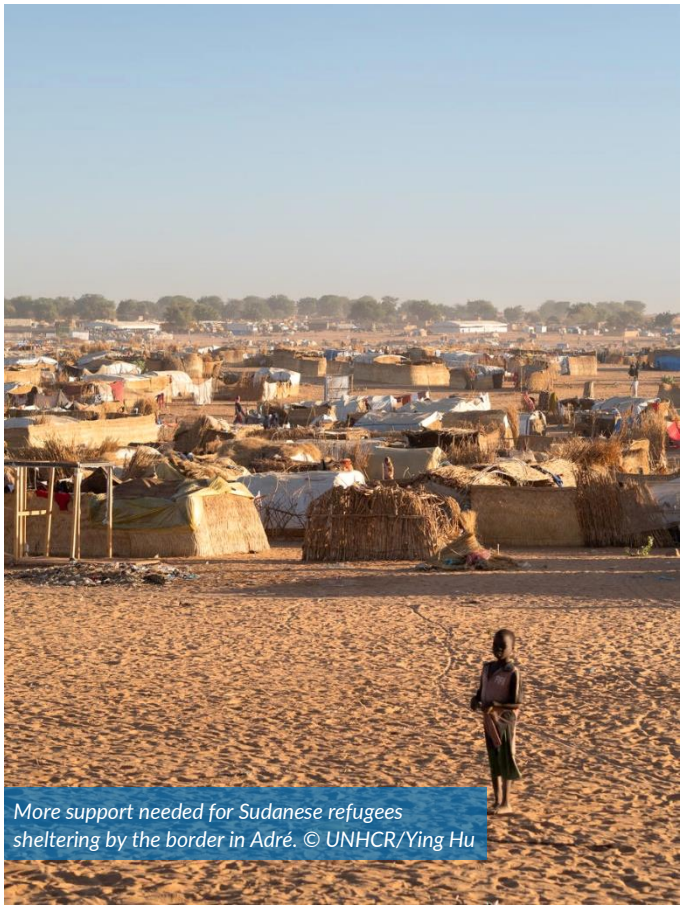
In the Central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, over 3.3 million people are displaced due to ongoing conflict and the worsening climate crisis, according to April 2024 data. The volatile security situation forces people to flee their homes, facing risks such as theft, attacks on civilians, and gender-based violence. Women and children are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Lack of adequate shelter, clean water, and sanitation worsens the conditions for the displaced, with insecurity preventing many from returning home, leading to repeated displacement within countries and, increasingly, across borders.

In the past four years, 2.8 million people have been internally displaced within these countries, while the number of refugees has reached 550,000. Burkina Faso faces a cycle of violence and inadequate living conditions, with 117,600 Burkinabe refugees arriving in nearby coastal countries as of April 2024. There are over 200,000 Malian refugees in Mauritania, 130,000 in Niger, nearly 40,000 in Burkina Faso, and 50,000 in Algeria without asylum access. Mali hosts around 94,000 refugees from neighboring countries and has 354,000 internally displaced people. Despite the insecurity and increasing pressures on local communities, neighbouring countries within the Sahel region have kept their borders open to refugees. UNHCR requires $443.5 million to cover urgent humanitarian needs in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and the Gulf of Guinea countries.

Chad

Influx of Sudanese Refugees Continues

Since April 2023, conflict in Sudan has driven nearly 623,000 refugees and 213,000 Chadian returnees—mostly women and children—into Chad, with close to 134,000 arriving in 2024 alone (as of 15 July). UNHCR and partners have expanded existing refugee settlements and established six new ones, alongside two villages for Chadian returnees, offering essential services like shelters, clinics, water points, sanitation, and learning spaces. However, these efforts fall short amidst overwhelming needs.



More support needed for Sudanese refugees sheltering by the border in Adré. © UNHCR/Ying Hu

Meanwhile, one-third of new arrivals face dire conditions in spontaneous sites along the border. The small border town of Adré is now hosting six times its original population of 40,000 and the number continue to grow. Escalating violence in Darfur and looming famine in Sudan risk forcing thousands more to flee to Chad. Already, authorities and UNHCR report an increase in numbers of arrival recorded at the border entry points, including in Wadi Fira where numbers have been multiplied by three.

The massive arrival of refugees adds pressure on already overstretched national services, including education. Sudanese refugees have arrived in the Ouaddaï, Wadi Fira, Sila and Ennedi Est provinces of eastern Chad, already home to over 400,000 Sudanese refugees before the conflict. Before the crisis, education services in these regions were limited, understaffed, and overstretched. Expanding access to education for Sudanese refugees is vital to ensure the largest number of children return and stay in school, this way also reducing protection risks. Of those who have recently arrived in Chad, Regional Refugee Response Plan partners intend to reach an estimated 250,000 school-aged children in 2024.

UNHCR'S EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS

Chad

1,985 Refugees Including Over 460 Newly Arrived Refugees from Sudan Sit the Baccalaureate Exam

The Farchana examination centre in eastern Chad welcomes 410 refugee candidates from the Gaga, Farchana, Metché and Aboutengué camps. © UNHCR/Nestor Heindaye

From war to the classroom, 467 new Sudanese refugees took the written tests for the Baccalaureate session of 2024 in June. In total, 1,985 refugees from Chad participated in the exam, with over 60% of them being girls and women. This represents an increase of 722 refugee candidates compared to 2023. This surge is primarily due to the recent conflict in Sudan, which forced many young people to seek refuge in Chad. Additionally, the motivation of families to enrol their children in schools on newly established refugee sites with improved learning conditions has contributed to the rise.

Among those newly arrived is 24-year-old Manahil. She and her family were relocated to the Aboutengué refugee site due to conflict in Sudan. Her mother, husband, baby, and she lived in harmony until a shell hit their house, injuring both her and her husband. He urged them to leave, so her mother, one-month-old baby, and she walked for hours to the border and safely reached Chad. Later, her husband joined them in Chad. In Chad, Manahil was able to resume her studies by enrolling in secondary school. "UNHCR and its partners gave us the opportunity to start a new life by creating conditions conducive to resuming classes and the chance to participate in the national exam in record time. At first, the transition from the Sudanese curriculum to the Chadian curriculum was difficult. But the accelerated courses, tutoring, and teachers made available to us were invaluable. Thanks to the tests organized by JRS, I knew I could obtain the Baccalaureate if I tried. I prepared well and hope to succeed." Manahil's mother has been a precious support, valuing education and taking care of her granddaughter while Manahil studies. Manahil plans to work in the health sector to "save lives, particularly in times of war."

The collaboration and support of the Chadian Government has been instrumental facilitating the inclusion of newly arrived refugees in the national education system. Thanks to this collaboration, young refugees in their final year, who had their schooling interrupted in Sudan and recently arrived due to the conflict, were able to take the written tests. Since the inclusion of refugees in Chad's curriculum in 2015, more than 4,750 young refugees have obtained their Baccalaureate.

Cameroon

Refugee and National Students Participate in Sixth Grade Entrance Exam

© UNHCR/Junior Zafack

With logistical support from UNHCR, 284 refugee and national students from Timangolo, Mbile, and Lolo successfully participated in the entrance exam for sixth grade held in Mboubara and Kentzou on May 14, 2024.

This initiative facilitated the transportation of 16 refugee students from Timangolo to Mboubara, 105 students (including 64 refugees and 41 nationals) from Mbile to Kentzou, and 163 students (including 76 nationals) from Lolo to Kentzou.

The results were encouraging, with 60% of the transported refugee students passing the exam: 36% from Lolo, 18% from Mbile, and 6% from Timangolo. As a result, 100 new sixth-grade students have been enrolled for the 2024-2025 academic year in secondary schools within the area of the Batouri.

Nigeria

Mastercard Foundation Offers Higher Education Opportunities for Students

Rene and Shalom are eager as they look forward to a farewell and orientation session from UNHCR at the Ogoja Sub Office, Cross River State. Once unattainable, dreams are now becoming reality. These 21-year-old Cameroonian refugees survived gunfire in their community and a harrowing journey through dense bushland. “On that fateful day, we were awakened by gunfire. While fleeing, my younger brother was shot and died. My father couldn’t handle it, so we fled to Nigeria,” Rene recounts.

Cameroonian Refugees Rene and Shalom at pre-departure orientation, River State, Nigeria. © UNHCR/Lucy Agiende

Their future looked uncertain until they found refuge in Nigeria. Adding to their challenges, their parents couldn't afford tuition fees. Among Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, only 1.4% are enrolled in higher education through scholarships. With UNHCR’s support, Rene and Shalom completed secondary education and excelled in their final exams, seeking scholarship opportunities to further their education. UNHCR also helps refugees secure scholarships through awareness sessions, information dissemination, and application support, increasing secondary enrollment from 33% to 40% and tertiary enrollment from 1% to 1.5% since 2022.

With support from the Mastercard Foundation, Shalom and Rene received scholarships to study Software Engineering and Accounting at the United States International University in Nairobi, Kenya. They departed Nigeria in April 2024 to begin their studies. "Studying Software Engineering is a dream come true. Since childhood, I've been fascinated by computers and technology," Shalom expressed. His passion began at the ICT centre set up by UNHCR in Adagom community, CRS. Rene chose Accounting due to his interest in business. "I enjoy doing business, and this course will help me develop and manage business plans," he explains.

Financial constraints force many Cameroonian refugees to depend on scholarships. Limited opportunities push refugee youths into harmful coping strategies, highlighting the need for more higher education scholarships. Upon graduation, Shalom and Rene hope to give back to their communities by mentoring youths in ICT and creating business plans to support local businesses.

Central African Republic

International Day of the African Child Brings Together Refugees and Host Communities in Vakaga

On 14 June, in the Vakaga province of the Central African Republic, UNHCR, the National Commission for Refugees, and partners celebrated the 34th International Day of the African Child. The event was held with the provincial education inspection, social affairs department, the mayor of Birao, and the provincial prefect. This year's theme, "Education for all children in Africa – the time is now!" resonated with the diverse communities in Birao, a small town on the Sudan border.

Peaceful march © INTERSOS/Martial Mafouta

In the past year, over 13,000 Sudanese refugees and 6,000 Central African returnees arrived in Birao, nearly doubling the town's population and student numbers. UNHCR has worked closely with local government and communities to improve education access for all children. With a grant from Education Cannot Wait, UNHCR and partners invested in local schools, recruiting and training teachers, constructing classrooms, latrines, and administrative buildings, organizing recreational and MHPSS activities, and strengthening child protection and gender-based violence prevention.

Celebrations began with arts and crafts at a primary school, followed by a peaceful march to the prefecture. Local authorities gave speeches and held a debate on education challenges and solutions. Key messages on education for girls and inclusivity were broadcasted on local radio. The day ended with a friendly football match involving refugees, returnees, IDPs, and host community adolescents, promoting peaceful coexistence and community building.

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Niger

Students Unite to Celebrate World Refugee Day

World Refugee Day celebrations in Cameroon © UNHCR Cameroon

Every year on 20 June, the global community honours the resilience of individuals forced to flee their countries due to conflict or persecution. This year's World Refugee Day emphasized solidarity with refugees and fostering a welcoming world. Across the region, refugee students played an active role in the celebrations:

In Burkina Faso, a student awards ceremony recognized thirty top pupils for their academic achievements, celebrating their dedication and highlighting the importance of education. In Bertoua, Cameroon, the Governor and humanitarian representatives celebrated with the DAFI Bertoua Club students. About twenty refugee students participated in a parade, and a student recited a poem on the challenges faced by refugees. In Bangui, Central African Republic, the Education Minister announced scholarships for the top six refugee students for the next academic year. In N'Djamena, Chad, 25 urban refugee students participated in an annual blood drive. In Niger, students from the DAFI club in Zinder facilitated a debate on the theme of solidarity with refugees at Andre Salifou University. Several refugee and host community students, as well as university faculty members, including teacher-researchers, attended the event. They also organized a football match to promote unity and teamwork among the students.

Niger

InZone Project Provides Certified Online Training in Niger

Students celebrate completion of the programme.

The InZone project offers professional skills through short, multidisciplinary, certified online courses. Launched in 2022 and funded by the city and University of Geneva, it aims to provide higher education for displaced individuals. The project's primary goal, establishing a digital campus for displaced and refugee students, was completed in May 2023 with the first InZone Centre in Niamey and a second in Diffa in September 2023. Managed by NLC Yara, it collaborates with the University of Diffa, the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey, and UNHCR.

In Niamey, the digital centre at NLC Yara, equipped with 12 computers and high-speed internet, opened on May 4, 2023. A team of three was trained to manage it. Following validation from evaluation missions by the University of Geneva and UNHCR, a second campus in Diffa launched on September 18, 2023. The online training program was promoted among refugees in Niamey and Diffa, with 142 students enrolled between May and December 2023, including 86 refugees. Refresher courses in French and English were introduced in Niamey, followed by Coursera programs. The University of Geneva also introduced two Open Studies Certificates (COS): one in education in emergency situations with Ecole Normale Supérieure of Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey, and another in community health with the University of Diffa. These initiatives attracted 54 students, including 25 refugees, significantly boosting their professional prospects; for example, all COS community health graduates secured employment in the field.

The partnership with the University of Geneva will continue into 2024 with renewed funding and expanded enrolment, including for Nigerien students.

Côte d'Ivoire

Empowering Refugees in the Humanitarian Sector with Bioforce Africa

Peter in his UNICEF Office
© UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire

Peter, 45, is the first refugee in Côte d'Ivoire to receive the Bioforce Institute scholarship. Peter fled the Central African Republic in 2013 after conflict broke out and his father was brutally killed. On his mother's advice, he and his siblings initially escaped to Cameroon, embarking on a long and perilous journey that ultimately brought them to Côte d'Ivoire.

Upon arrival, Peter and his brothers faced the immense challenge of rebuilding their lives in an unfamiliar country. Despite the hardships, Peter was determined to continue his education. His perseverance paid off in 2023 when he was selected from hundreds of applicants for the Bioforce training. This opportunity took him to Dakar, Senegal, where he underwent six months of intensive training. "It was a very rewarding and challenging course. I was able to push back my limits. Bioforce made me discover the best in me," he says with pride. "I learnt a lot. This experience has enabled me to understand my true worth and to apply the knowledge I've gained in practical terms."

After completing the course, Peter secured an internship with UNICEF in Côte d'Ivoire. Married with one child, he remains optimistic about his future in the humanitarian field, despite the ongoing challenges linked to his refugee status. "Being a refugee is not easy. We face housing difficulties. However, Côte d'Ivoire has adopted me and my family, and we hope that the asylum law will soon be fully applied so that we can enjoy our rights," Peter expresses.

Chad

UNHCR Renews Private Universities Agreements for 50% Tuition Reduction for Refugees

Signature ceremony in N'Djamena © UNHCR/Nestor Heindaye

On 5 April 2024, the UNHCR renewed agreements with six universities and private institutes in N'Djamena to provide a 50% reduction in tuition fees for refugees. These agreements aim to help young refugee graduates access higher education despite financial constraints and high tuition fees.

Originally signed in 2018, the agreements were initiated due to the scarcity of scholarships and high tuition costs, and they have now been renewed for another term. The six institutions involved are HEC Tchad, EMI KOUSSI University, La Francophonie University, Al-Marifa Chad Institute, COFID Chad, and ISCAM. UNHCR also has signed seven agreements with other public institutions, further broadening the opportunities for refugee students to access higher education.

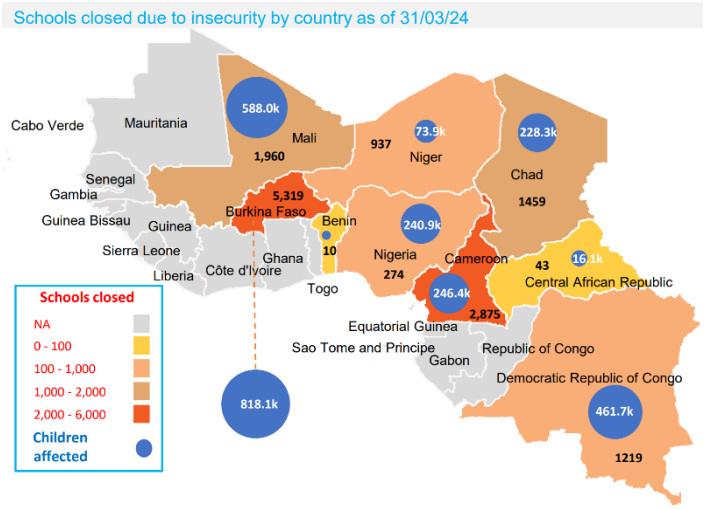
The signing ceremony was presided over by the UNHCR Deputy Representative for Protection, who praised Chad's commitment to refugee education and the contributions of private universities. Officials from EMI KOUSSI University and La Francophonie University highlighted the positive coexistence between refugees and Chadians in their institutions and the hospitality shown through these agreements.

A refugee student shared his gratitude: "After my baccalaureate, I did not get selected for any of the UNHCR scholarship programs. However, upon learning about the 50% tuition reduction agreements, I worked to save some money and, with my mother's help, decided to enrol at La Francophonie University of N'Djamena where I just completed my Bachelor."

EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Region

West and Central Africa - Education in Emergencies (EiE)
Q1-2024 Regional situation Dashboard



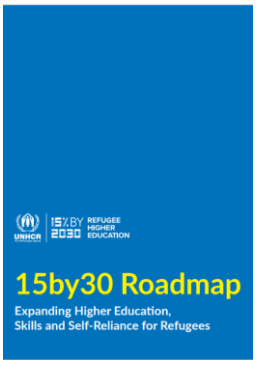
Education continues to face mounting challenges in the region amidst escalating security incidents and worsening humanitarian conditions. Compared to the same quarter last year, there has been a marked increase in education-related security incidents, rising from 55 i to 91 incidents. This surge in violence and instability has contributed to a 15% increase in school closures. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation remains dire, with a 10% rise in the number of refugees and a 4% increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs) during the first quarter of 2024, underscoring the region's urgent need for sustained support and intervention to protect and uphold the right to education for all children affected.

EDUCATION RESSOURCES

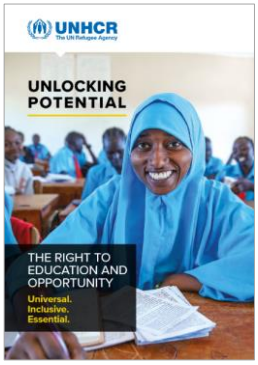
UNHCR EDUCATION

2030 Strategy

15by30 Roadmap



2023 Report

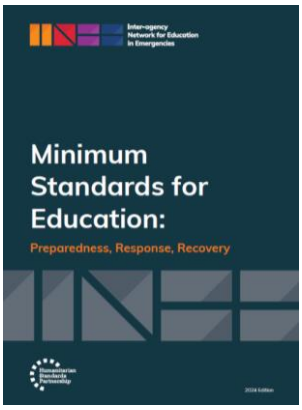


Education Pledges

- Securing Sustainable Futures: Towards a Shared Responsibility to Uphold the Right to Education and Include Refugee Children in National Education Systems
- 15% by 2030: Global Pledge on Refugee Higher Education and Self-Reliance
- Expanding Connected Education for Refugees through the Refugee Connected Education Challenge

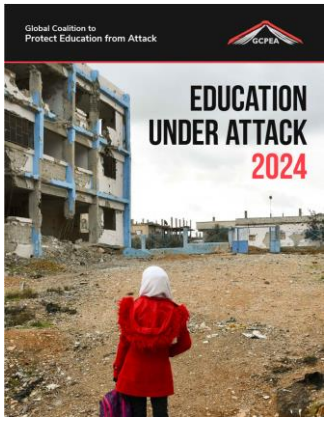
RECENT RELEASES

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INEE Minimum Standards for Education, 2024 Edition



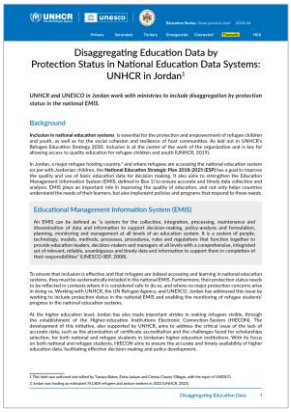
Since 2004, the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (INEE MS) have provided a framework for inclusive and equitable quality education. The handbook aims to improve education quality, increase access to safe learning opportunities, and ensure accountability. Applicable to various crises, including conflicts and climate-induced disasters, the 2024 Edition reflects new learning and evolving needs, ensuring the Standards remain relevant and adaptable for education stakeholders worldwide.

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
Education under Attack 2024



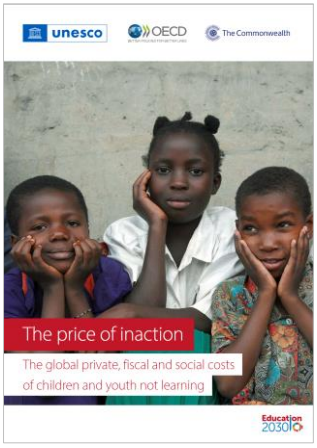
The report highlights the nearly 6,000 attacks on education occurred in 2022 and 2023, a 20% increase from the previous two years, resulting in over 10,000 students, teachers, and academics being harmed, injured, or killed. The highest numbers of attacks were recorded in Palestine, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with schools being threatened, looted, burned, or hit by shelling or airstrikes. These attacks caused significant damage to education facilities, leading to closures, lost learning time, and psychological harm, with girls and students with disabilities facing greater challenges in resuming their education.

Jordanian Ministry of Education - UNHCR - UNESCO
Disaggregating education data by protection status in national education data systems: UNHCR in Jordan



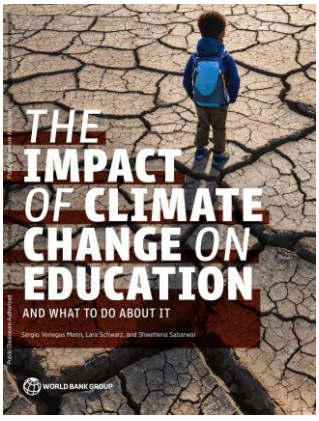
This brief lays out the rationale for the disaggregation of data by protection status and the need for higher education data on refugees. It then provides a brief overview of the EMIS in Jordan and the Higher-education Institutions Electronic Connection-System (HIECON) and details the specific steps that were taken in Jordan to ensure that refugees were visible in both systems.

UNESCO - OECD - Commonwealth Secretariat
The price of inaction: the global private, fiscal and social costs of children and youth not learning



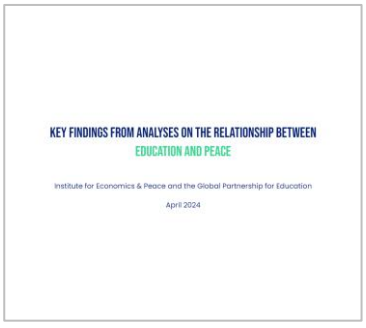
The report calculates global and regional costs of children and youth lacking school access or basic skills, with specific figures for twenty countries facing gender disparities in education. It estimates that achieving universal education and basic skills could boost annual global GDP by over US$6.5 trillion and mitigate social costs. The findings emphasize the need for prioritized investments in education and gender equality to accelerate economic development.

The World Bank
The Impact of Climate Change on Education and What to Do about It



The report stresses how education is critical for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Increasingly severe weather events such as cyclones, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires are causing widespread school closures and learning setbacks. These challenges persist despite efforts to mitigate climate change, underscoring the urgent need for resilient education strategies. Governments must prioritize resilient education management, infrastructure, and continuity plans to safeguard learning outcomes and harness education's role in fostering economic development and social cohesion.

Global Partnership for Education
Key findings from analyses on the relationship between education and peace



This report, a collaboration between the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), shares key findings from IEP's research on education outcomes and their association with peace levels measured by the Global Peace Index (GPI) and Positive Peace Index (PPI). The study consistently finds that better education outcomes align with reduced conflicts and higher peace levels, highlighting education's potential role in fostering peaceful and stable societies.

UNHCR REGIONAL BUREAU FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

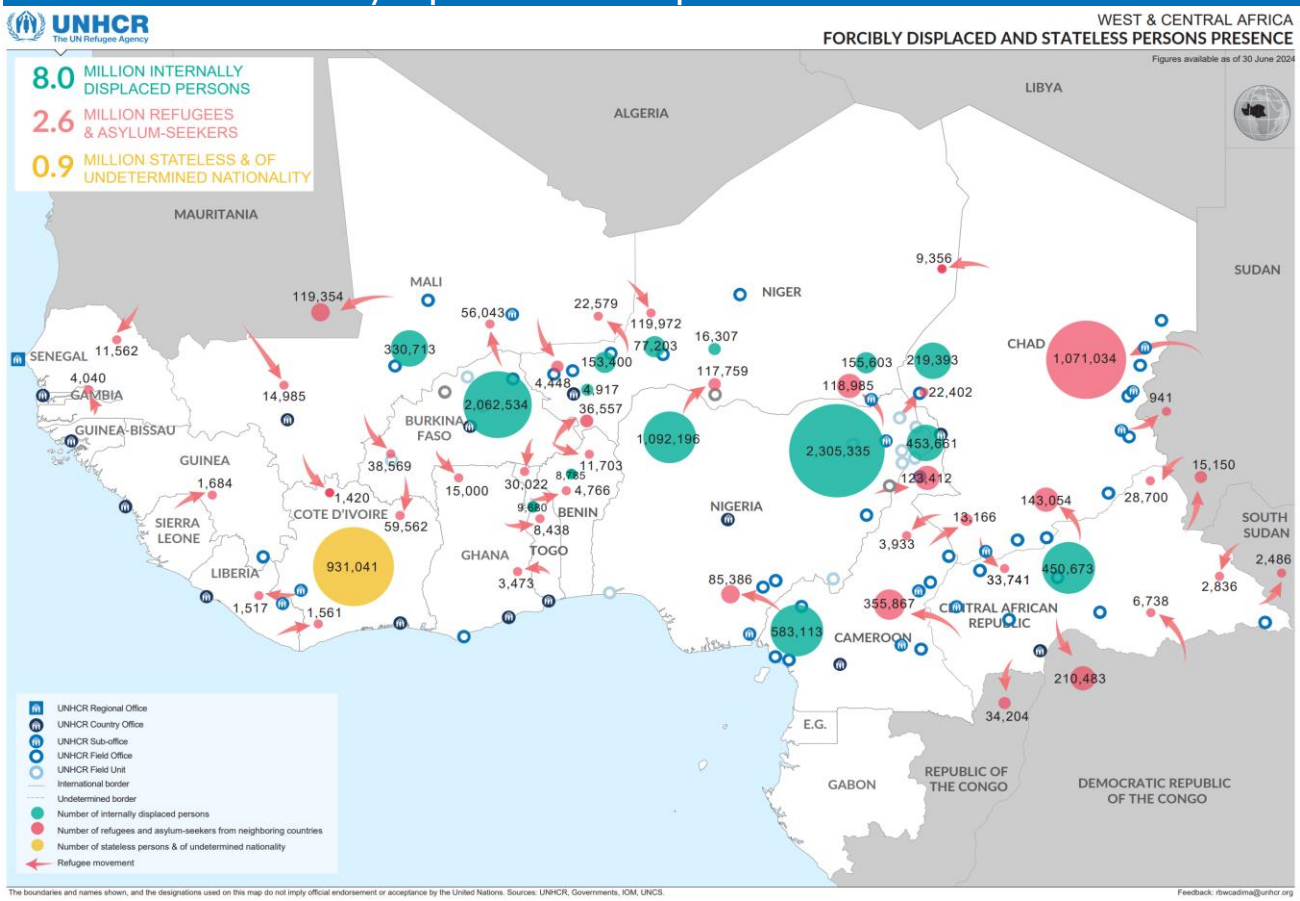
13.7 million
Forcibly displaced and stateless people

2.6 million
Refugees and asylum-seekers

54%
Of refugees are children

Over half
Of schooled aged-refugee children (6-17) are not attending school

Forcibly displaced & stateless persons as of 30 June 2024



→ More statistics

UNHCR West and Central Africa is grateful for education funding in 2024 from:

Belgium partner in development · United Nations CERF · Education Cannot Wait – The global fund for education in emergencies

Private donors from: Australia and Italy

UNHCR West and Central Africa is grateful for flexible funding in 2024 from:

Australian Aid · german humanitarian assistance · Irish Aid Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland · Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC · UKaid from the British people

Private donors from: Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea and Spain

UNHCR Regional Bureau for West & Central Africa
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