



# Supporting our Commitment to Improve Access to Education for Refugee Children

**Progress Report**  
**April 30, 2019**

Munguiko\*, 14, at Save the Children's child friendly space in Uganda's Rwamwanja refugee settlement. "At first, I was alone because I didn't have any friends to play with and some spoke a language I didn't understand," he said. "At times, I would feel like walking but I felt as if I had wooden feet. At the center, I have found those who can speak my language, people my age who I can play with, and they teach me."

*Photo: Hannah Maule-finch/Save the Children \*names changed to protect identity*

## Why Your Support Matters

We are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. More than 68 million people have been forced to leave their homes, their friends and everything they once knew. Most people remain displaced within their home countries due to conflict, persecution and insecurity, but about 25.4 million people worldwide have fled to other countries as refugees. More than half of all refugees are children under 18.

While the Syrian conflict has contributed significantly to this increase, there have been other major displacements, notably in and from Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen.

Regardless of where they are from, displaced children are likely to be out of school for at least three to four years.<sup>1</sup> And many never find quality educational resources. The United Nations estimates that only 61 percent of refugee children have access to primary education, compared with a global average of more than 92 percent. The eight years of conflict in Syria, for example, has displaced 2.8 million children. Some have never been to school, while others have missed up to eight years of learning, making it extremely difficult for them to catch up.<sup>2</sup>

Being out of school makes these children vulnerable to exploitation including early marriage, recruitment into armed forces and child labor. The longer they are out of school, the less likely they are to return and acquire the skills and knowledge they need to rebuild their lives. Even when displaced children have access to education, they still face barriers to learning. Nearly all refugees (86 percent) live in middle-income or developing countries—with one in every three (4.9 million people) living in the least developed countries. As a result, local education systems are overwhelmed and children's participation in learning is further compromised by poor infrastructures, lack of sufficient learning space and language barriers.

With the average displacement lasting 17 years—an entire childhood—we can and must do better. Save the Children has been instrumental in advocating for, and influencing language, in the breakthrough Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) that commits countries to ensuring refugee children are able return to learning within months, and not years or never, as is so often the case. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that these commitments are upheld.

## The Impact of Your Investment

Your visionary support, pooled with that from other donors, has provided the seed funding needed to develop and pilot test **Return to Learning**, a rapid-response intervention to restore access to educational activities for forcibly displaced children during the first phase of any humanitarian response. Return to Learning enables refugee girls and boys to continue building their academic skills—and cope with the emotional effects of displacement—within weeks of arrival in a host community while long-term solutions (learning spaces, teachers, classroom supplies) are identified and procured. In this way, children can continue

### Why Return to Learning is Critical

- The number of people displaced—68.5 million—equals the population of France.
- Of the 28 million children displaced worldwide, an estimated 17 million are displaced within their own country.
- More than 3.7 million refugee children are not in school.
- Two-thirds of all refugees come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, “Missing Out: Refugee education in crisis,” 2016

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-5-million-syrian-children-accessing-education-despite-over-seven-years-war>

learning more quickly and hit the ground running when they enter formal school or other non-formal education programs.

What makes this program unique is that it closes the education gap within 30 days of displacement. Most education in emergency interventions start months after displacement, leaving children with looming gaps in their education and slim hopes of ever catching up.

To achieve this ambitious 30-day goal, we designed Return to Learning as a flexible model, one that can be rolled out in any available protective community space and is relatively easy to implement—whether by community facilitators, former teachers, experienced child and youth workers, or individuals with no previous teaching experience. The intervention includes the following components:



Children in a Save the Children early learning center in Beaqqa, Lebanon, where we have pilot tested the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes tool.

1. A comprehensive assessment tool, designed in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), provides program staff with a profile of children's literacy, numeracy, social-emotional wellbeing and executive functioning skills—and enables them to tailor activities accordingly. Since our last report, we have used the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO), in Dadaab, Kenya, home to one of the oldest and largest refugee complexes in the world, with more than 235,000 refugees currently housed there, most of whom are Somali. The sample included 852 children and we found that the assessment has strong reliability and validity when it comes to assessing the learning and development of children, 4-12 years old. Moreover, the demographic and home information that we collect with HALDO allows us to disaggregate the data by key equity factors—sex, status (internally displaced person, returnee, etc.), years of previous schooling, home learning environment, and disability. Lastly, the tool reflected the developmental trajectory of children as they grow, suggesting that we can rapidly assess a large age range of children with a single tool to provide program designers with a clear picture of the profiles of children they are working with.
2. Toolkits of learning activities designed to support early literacy and language, numeracy, and social and emotional skills. The infusion of social emotional learning activities helps children cope with the trauma of displacement and improve their overall wellbeing so they can truly participate in learning. We developed three activity toolkits, for pre-primary (children ages 4-6), primary (children ages 7-11) and post-primary (children/adolescents ages 12-15), each includes 20 guided activity plans. We have also developed a Facilitator Training Manual that provides an overview of child development, best practices for teaching literacy, numeracy, and social emotional learning; general pedagogy; and stress management techniques to support facilitator wellbeing.

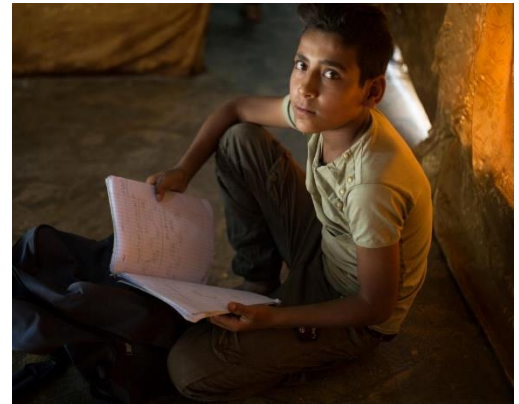
For the first time, and due to your generous support, we are able to assess and respond to children's learning needs immediately following an emergency, giving them an opportunity to thrive and reach their true potential.

## Activities Conducted during the Report Period (October 2018-March 2019)

We are proud to report that we have made significant progress on five of the six objectives outlined in our 2018 renewal proposal. We expect that by 2020, we will have the resources and time needed to preposition staff and materials in regional offices—and conduct the regional and country level trainings—necessary to support the rapid roll-out of this program in response to an influx sudden displacement to ensure children have consistent access to education (objective #5 on p.15 of 2018 proposal).

To date, activities implemented include:

- **Linking the assessment tool and toolkit of activities**, which enables community facilitators to quickly and easily select activities based on children’s existing levels of learning and wellbeing.
  - With support from our research and learning team, we have completed testing new dashboard software that links assessment results with learning activities. (See Appendix A.) Now, for instance, we can use baseline assessment results to inform which activities facilitators should use to provide more targeted instruction based on children’s varied learning levels.
- **Rolling out the full Return to Learning Program (HALDO and activity toolkit)** in two to three locations—most likely in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Uganda, South Sudan, Somalia and/or the Balkans—that already are implementing programs for displaced children.
  - In March, we began a six-month pilot of Return to Learning in the rural Beqqa Valley, Lebanon, and have already used the assessment tool with 600 Syrian refugee children.
  - We selected Lebanon due to the immense needs of the population. We are one of the few organizations providing education in emergency programming to Syrian refugee children, more than half of whom are out of school. Barriers to learning include unrelenting poverty (that causes parents to take their children out of school to marry or work full-time work to earn a living) and lack of basic services for children in resettlement camps, including schools. While public schools in informal settlements are trying to meet increased demand by double shifting, they do not have the capacity to support enrollment of all school-aged refugee children. Even when refugee students gain access to education, learning is impeded by language issues and missed school years.
  - We used feedback from previous pilots to revise, and improve, the activities in the toolkit and HALDO. For instance, we created the dashboard software based on recommendations from the HALDO pilot in Kenya.
  - We translated materials from English into Arabic; made sure activities were culturally appropriate and conflict sensitive; procured essential teaching and learning materials, such as pens, pencils, notebooks, and items needed for activities—and more. Contextualizing all materials to specific cultural norms is extremely important so that children can identify with stories, make real world connections, and more easily apply what they learn in their real lives.
  - We held a two-day workshop in Beirut for staff members and local partner organizations to introduce potential “master trainers” to the program. In addition to exploring lessons learned from the pilots, participants had the chance to learn about the stages of child development; best practices for teaching literacy, numeracy and social emotional learning; methods of



\*Siraj, 13, a Syrian refugee, lives in a settlement in the Beqqa Valley, Lebanon, with his mother and four siblings. In the mornings, he and his brother work in the fields picking and planting vegetables. In the afternoons, he goes to school—but is at risk of dropping out. Our goal is to improve outcomes for Siraj, and all refugee children.

\*name changed to protect privacy



teacher motivation; stress management techniques to improve wellbeing; and good facilitation skills.

- Julia Finder Johna, Education in Emergencies Advisor, was a key figure in organizing this workshop. She says, “For most of the people in the room, it was the first time they were exposed to social emotional learning and really thought about the connection between wellbeing and learning, and the impact a teacher’s wellbeing has on children. Many had never considered how stress could affect an individual’s ability to learn or could interfere with personal and professional relationships. They were grateful for the opportunity to be reflective about their own wellbeing, especially when thinking about how it impacts all aspects of their life, and especially their role working with children.”



A team of trained enumerators with SC US Research and Learning Specialist, Dr. Allyson Krupar in Beqqa, Lebanon.

- We trained 27 facilitators, 20 enumerators, and 10 staff and local partners on how to use the activity toolkit and HALDO. We expect to reach approximately 1,000 out-of-school refugee children in Lebanon.
- Based on a request from Save the Children’s country office in Abuja, Nigeria, the Return to Learning activity toolkit for children, ages 7-11, is being used in 150 Safe Spaces in communities in the northeastern part of the country heavily affected by Boko Haram insurgency. To support the roll out of Return to Learning here, we trained 10 master trainers who then delivered the training to 150 community facilitators serving almost 4,000 children.

- **Integrating the Return to Learning Package** into Save the Children’s child-friendly spaces—our standard and first response to the needs of children in emergencies. These safe spaces provide children with opportunities to play, learn and strengthen resiliency in a safe and stimulating environment.
  - We have worked with Save the Children’s global Child Protection teams to include Return to Learning within the Global Child Friendly Space Toolkit, which provides examples of activities and approaches that can be easily adapted for use in any child friendly space in the world. The inclusion of the Return to Learning program in this toolkit will make it easier for crisis-affected children to access education.
- **Evaluating barriers to implementation** using qualitative research approaches—like focus group discussions.
  - Once we have a full cohort in May, we will begin to assess whether the implementation of Return to Learning has an added effect on children’s learning and wellbeing beyond the foundational services children receive in other non-formal education programs or community-based education activities. The country office hired a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation, Assessment and Learning officer to work closely with our Research and Learning Senior Specialist as we compare HALDO results from students in cohort 1 who have been engaged in

Return to Learning activities to those from cohort 2 who have yet to start the program. Comparing the HALDO results of students in each cohort will show the impact the project has made on learning and wellbeing outcomes.

- **Supporting global and country-level advocacy.**

The grant supported staff time in the last quarter of 2018 to advance central objectives of our global *Every Last Child* campaign on refugee education, as well as related follow-up work in 2019. This work, which involved raising refugee education higher up on the international agenda, making the case for increased financing, policy change and new commitments by governments to provide refugees with access to safe, quality education as soon as possible after crossing a border, included:

- Completing the “[Hear it from the Teachers](#)” report. The report sheds light why the education of refugee children matters as well as the greatest challenges teachers face in supporting refugee children. We disseminated the report to U.S. policymakers and throughout Save the Children movement in order to ensure the findings and recommendations could serve as a resource to host countries and donors around the world.
- Continuing to advocate and garner support for the GCR by meeting with staff at the US UN Mission, BPRM, and with members of the US Congress. Despite the U.S. votes against a UN resolution that affirmed the GCR, we continue to work to continue US implementation.
- Engaging with crucial non-governmental partnerships related to the GCR. As part of the InterAction International Non-Governmental Organization umbrella, for example, Save the Children was able to communicate advocacy points to be raised with UNHCR at its Executive Committee meeting, thereby ensuring its largest donor was articulating our messages on the importance of return to learning.
- Working with the Lebanon Country Office to begin to plan in-country trainings to support refugee education and help implement policies related to refugee education in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). This will include two workshops on building country level capacity to advocate at the national level.



Refugee children playing at Save the Children’s child friendly space in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement in Uganda, where we pilot tested HALDO in 2018.

## Events of Significant Impact

Save the Children’s global leadership in the education in emergencies sector—specifically our position as co-lead of the global education cluster and our strong relationship with UNHCR—bolsters our ability to expand this program to other crisis and conflict affected countries. We will continue working with UNHCR to increase the number of countries using Return to Learning and hopefully, incorporate it in their programming. By the end of 2019, we will hold a regional training on the Return to Learning program to bring together members of Save the Children’s education Humanitarian Surge Team, regional education advisors, regional education cluster coordinators, and staff from several country offices to increase their capacity to implement Return to Learning and quickly provide access to education. We are planning to hold the first regional training on Return to Learning in East Africa, given how prone the area is to further displacement.

According to UNHCR, the number of out-of-school refugee children has increased by 500,000 in the last year alone. If current trends continue, hundreds of thousands more refugee children will be denied access to education—even though they are bursting with potential. We will leverage your support to roll out Return to Learning in the following regions: the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Somalia) and East Africa (Uganda and South Sudan), where children are on the move due to drought and conflict respectively; Bangladesh, where Rohingya refugees are out of school due to restrictions on their freedom and their families' livelihoods; Colombia, where migrant children are prevented from enrolling in formal schools; and the Middle East, reaching displaced or recently returned children in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

## **Looking Ahead**

To capture the impact of the program on learning and wellbeing outcomes, we had to assess students in cohort 2 twice before they received any education. As we prepare to finish activities with students in cohort 1 and prepare for the second HALDO assessment, children in cohort 2 (and their parents/caregivers) may be frustrated. These children could end up finding another education program to enroll in.

Additionally, children who complete cohort 1 need to be transitioned into formal schools or other non-formal education programs, such as an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). Given the shortage of resources in Beqqa, it may not be possible for all children who complete the Return to Learning program to transition into other longer-term education programs. Save the Children will continue to partner with local government officials and other implementing partners to identify feasible options for these students.

## **Thank You**

Refugee children have already lost so much—their home, their friends and often, their family members. The loss of learning—and the ability to fulfill their hopes and dreams—should not be another consequence of displacement.

Now, for the first time, we are able to give displaced children rapid access to learning opportunities and a strong start to their own recovery. Your visionary support is helping us give an entire generation of children the gift of education, which is a gift that lasts a lifetime. On behalf of the countless children we serve in conflict and crisis-affected settings, we are truly grateful.

## Appendix A: HALDO Dashboard

