



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

in partnership with



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



concept note

mobile learning week 2017

*Education
in emergencies
and crises*

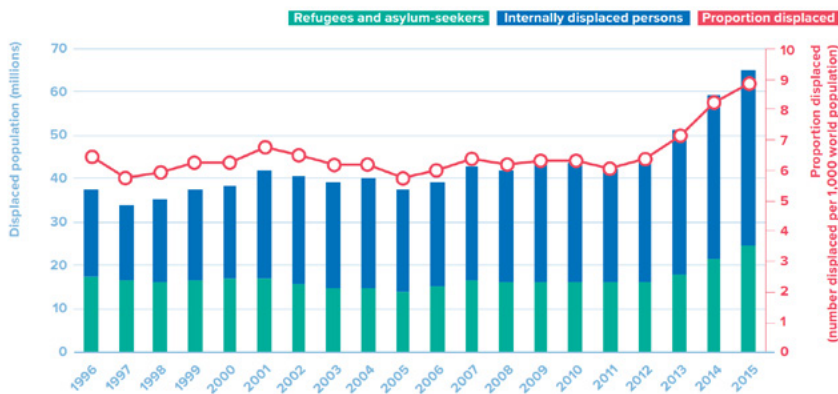
20-24 March 2017
UNESCO, Paris



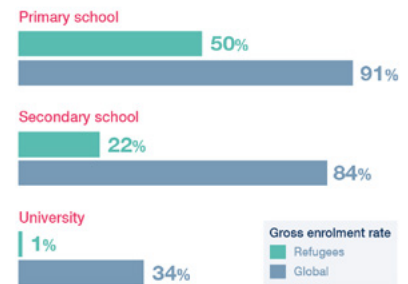
THE NEED FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES AND CRISES

The world is experiencing the highest levels of displacement ever recorded.¹ Today, 1 in every 113 people on Earth has been displaced due to conflict or persecution, a figure without modern historical precedent.² UNHCR estimates that in 2015, 24 people were forced to flee their homes every minute- 4 times more than a decade previously.³ Natural disasters increase these numbers further. Floods, earthquakes and other phenomena displaced 19.2 million people across 113 countries in 2015, due in part to the increased frequency and severity of climate-related disasters.⁴

Trend of global displacement & proportion displaced | 1996-2015 (end-year)



Refugees are educationally disadvantaged



Children and youth are among the hardest hit by displacement, regardless of its cause. They often experience prolonged interruptions to education, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Education is especially important for displaced learners; it provides a safe environment in which individuals establish productive routines, prepare to enter the workforce and make other social contributions. When displaced learners are included in national education systems, they gain the skills, knowledge and cultural understanding necessary to integrate in host communities and to rebuild communities when returning home.⁵

While media organizations often report on refugees arriving in wealthy countries, over 86% of the world’s displaced people reside in developing regions.⁶ This means that under-resourced education systems are absorbing the most people, placing strain on schools that are, in many cases, already struggling to accommodate students.

Conflict exacerbates the challenges of displacement and can prevent young people from pursuing education entirely. Of the 61 million out-of-school children globally, 35% live in conflict-affected countries where gender inequality and illiteracy are commonplace.⁷

Education can help break cycles of conflict and displacement, but it is often under-resourced. UNESCO estimates that the education sector currently receives only 2% of humanitarian aid – and the humanitarian aid system itself is underfunded.⁸

In this context, the need for innovative, low-cost and scalable educational solutions for people affected by emergencies and crises is urgent. Responding to this need is the theme for Mobile Learning Week 2017.

Meeting challenges

When used in targeted and context-responsive ways, mobile technology can address specific educational problems and improve learning opportunities in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda, specifically SDG4, the Sustainable Development Goal on education. Mobile Learning Week will examine how technology can help to address the challenges listed below, many of which are unique to emergency and crisis contexts:

1 Education planning is 'tacked on' to emergency response and rarely provides long-term solutions.

An estimated 6.7 million refugees are in protracted displacement situations that last, on average, for 20 years.⁹ This highlights the importance of education solutions that have realistic timeframes, support sequential and continuous learning, and are aligned with national curricula. However, emergency education programmes often begin as scattered and incongruous initiatives that are disconnected from national systems. Although well-intended, these initiatives can create parallel learning trajectories that complicate or compromise government accountability for refugee education. *What actions are required to align mobile learning initiatives with national education programming to enable long-term planning and ensure the certification and recognition of educational achievement?*

2 Overstretched education systems pose a challenge to learning and social cohesion.

For every refugee who finds asylum in a middle-income country, there are nine who seek protection in low-income countries.¹⁰ The majority of internally displaced people also live in poor countries with weak education systems and fragile political and economic institutions. When people who have fled disaster or crisis cannot return home quickly, resentment can develop in their host communities. Scarce educational resources are often a point of contention. Double school shifts and other temporary measures



to accommodate displaced learners tend to place new burdens on teachers and limited infrastructure, leading to a poor reception by host communities. *How can technology help to relieve some of the tensions facing overstretched education systems that absorb refugees and internally displaced persons?*

3 Teaching in the toughest classrooms in the world.

A recent UNHCR report highlights that ‘a teacher who manages a classroom that includes refugee learners will walk into perhaps the toughest classroom in the world’.¹¹ In displacement contexts, teachers routinely work in low-resource classrooms where they are responsible for large numbers of mixed-age and mixed-ability learners, many of whom have witnessed violence, have been separated from parents and other family members, and have experienced disruption to their schooling. An average refugee student has spent three to four years out of school.¹² Support and professional development opportunities for teachers can be rare, leading to fatigue and high turnover rates. *How can technology improve the capacity of educators to provide high-quality educational opportunities to displaced learners, even in low-resource environments?*

4 Displaced learners are not always welcome in new schools.

Students fleeing conflict or disaster routinely encounter discrimination in schools, especially when host communities are not adequately consulted about the influx of new learners and schools are not given sufficient time to prepare. Negative stereotyping, bullying and violence lead children to fear school and prompt some parents to remove their children from formal education systems. *How can technologies help foster positive and welcoming environments for displaced learners and alert relevant authorities to instances of abuse and discrimination?*

5 Language remains a major obstacle for inclusion in national education systems.

Insufficient knowledge of the primary spoken language in host communities puts displaced people at a serious disadvantage. This is especially true in education. Schools often restrict enrolment to learners with at least a basic understanding of an official language, and support for intensive language training tends to be low. Learners with limited or emerging language skills are regularly required to repeat school years or enter remedial subject-specific classes, even when their knowledge of the subject is advanced. Language is essential not only for school, but for employment, engaging with host communities, and personal security. *How can technologies support language acquisition to aid integration into classrooms and communities?*

6 The availability and cost of connectivity.

A recent UNHCR study found that displaced populations face serious difficulties connecting to the internet or taking advantage of mobile communications.¹³ For rural populations, networks are often slow, unreliable or unavailable, constraining their potential for education. For both urban and rural displaced populations, connectivity is expensive and the United Nations estimates that many refugees spend up to a third of their disposable income on mobile connectivity.¹⁴ In addition to demonstrating the importance of mobile technologies for displaced people, this also highlights a persistent obstacle to mobile learning: the high relative cost of using mobile networks for education and other purposes. *How can mobile learning initiatives overcome financial barriers to entry that limit their impact and constrain their scalability?*

Opportunity areas

Mobile learning offers new solutions for learners, teachers and policy-makers working in emergency and crisis settings. The opportunity areas outlined below will be discussed at Mobile Learning Week 2017.

1 Leveraging existing connectivity.

Major investments are expanding mobile connectivity to all corners of the world, through terrestrial networks, satellites, drones, balloons and TV white spaces, among other means. This expansion has influenced communities globally, changing traditional modes of communication and learning. More often than not, refugees are covered by a mobile network of some kind. A 2016 UNHCR report indicates that 93% of all refugees live in areas served by at least a 2G network, and that 62% live in locations covered by 3G networks or better.¹⁵ The Mobile Learning Week community will share strategies to leverage existing connectivity to enhance and expand educational opportunities for people affected by crisis.

2 Expanding connections to rural areas.

New UN data about the connectivity options of refugees highlights stark differences in mobile access for urban and rural communities. It shows that communities in rural or camp settings have either tenuous or no access to voice and data networks, and rarely benefit from initiatives to improve connectivity for displaced populations.¹⁶ Collaborative efforts are needed to fill this gap and open up mobile learning pathways for refugees and other displaced populations, who are often settled in sparsely populated areas.



3 Reinforcing education systems.

Although the potential of mobile technology to improve education systems remains one of the most under-explored areas of technological integration, it is one of the most viable areas to foster large-scale sustainable change. Recent research highlights opportunities to utilize technology to streamline payments to teachers, enable more timely and accurate data collection, and improve communication with students and parents about academic progress. The Mobile Learning Week community will discuss ideas to reinforce education systems through the use of new technologies.

4 Building and strengthening learning communities.

Research indicates that displaced students often receive crucial learning support from community members. Learning communities are particularly important for students affected by displacement because they tend to live in settings where traditional schooling is insufficient or of variable quality. A number of pilot projects have demonstrated some of the ways in which mobile technology can aid the establishment, retention, impact and expansion of learning communities. Additional strategies are needed to establish and expand digital learning communities that complement face-to-face approaches or exist independently.

5 Meeting the needs of all learners.

Emergencies and crises tend to exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities, further marginalizing disadvantaged groups. While increasing attention has been focused on the need to use technology to improve girls' participation in education, humanitarian response rarely addresses ethnic and religious

minorities, or learners with disabilities. A UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF report found that 'an estimated 90% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not go to school' and that this rate is likely to be significantly higher in crisis-affected countries.¹⁷ Mobile technology has a growing track record of supporting minority groups and learners with disabilities inside and outside school. The Mobile Learning Week community will examine how new technologies can help to establish participatory learning environments for all students and make schools more welcoming for marginalized groups.

6 Expanding higher education opportunities.

Currently, only 1% of refugee students are able to access accredited higher education programmes.¹⁸ This bleak statistic is particularly worrying as higher education is essential to the health and systemic recovery of communities impacted by displacement. Post-secondary education equips individuals and communities with the skills they need to disrupt previous systems of inequality and injustice. In recent years, a growing network of organizations and institutes have started to offer certified blended learning degrees and diplomas for refugee communities around the globe, expanding the number of learners able to access higher education. Unfortunately, despite significant gains, many governmental bodies question the value of tertiary qualifications acquired online, which threatens the validity and continued expansion of these programmes. Coordinated action can assure the legitimacy and recognition of online learning, and foster the expansion of mobile learning initiatives in order to make higher education more accessible to displaced people.



A TIME TO ACT & COLLABORATE

Mobile Learning Week 2017 will highlight the ways in which mobile technology can be leveraged in different contexts and across borders to help address long-standing educational challenges confronting displaced learners. Event participants will share how they are realizing new opportunities presented by technology and lessons learned from their experiences.

The event will look specifically at how mobile learning can:

- Support learners
- Support teachers
- Support systems

By holding an analytical lens to these three areas, Mobile Learning Week will facilitate the development of innovative and scalable strategies to enhance learning opportunities for displaced populations, and support teachers and others working to assure the continuity of education during and after conflict or disaster.



Mobile Learning Week structure

MONDAY & TUESDAY Symposium

The two-day symposium is the core of Mobile Learning Week 2017. The event will bring together government representatives, education specialists, mobile learning experts, project managers, researchers and industry partners to share technology-enabled solutions to enhance educational opportunities in emergency and crisis contexts.

The event will feature plenary panel discussions with thought-leaders in the field of displacement, education and technology, and keynote addresses from the Vice Minister of Education in China, the Norwegian Secretary of State, and refugee learners from Africa and the Middle East. The programme will also include 76 breakout presentations, each lasting approximately 20 minutes.

The presentations will align with the three Mobile Learning Week subthemes: supporting learners, supporting teachers and supporting systems. Collectively, they will highlight and clarify a wide range of mobile learning solutions.

WEDNESDAY Workshops

The workshops will showcase innovative mobile learning content, technology, research and projects. Workshop presenters will share practical solutions to improve education for vulnerable and displaced people.

The event will feature 16 workshops aligned with the 3 Mobile Learning Week subthemes: Supporting learners, supporting teachers and supporting systems. The workshops, each 1 hour 30 minutes in duration, will be held in medium-sized rooms to encourage interactivity and discussion.

THURSDAY Strategy Labs

Strategy labs will be hosted by UNESCO and UNHCR partner organizations to help guide the conceptualization and development of projects to strengthen education for learners in emergency and crisis contexts. A programme of eight half-day sessions will allow participants to contribute to ICT in education initiatives that are being planned by leading international and non-profit organizations.

FRIDAY Policy Forum

The Policy Forum will bring together ministers of education, ministers of ICT and senior representatives from private sector companies to examine how governments can facilitate the acquisition of essential digital skills, particularly for disadvantaged or displaced learners.

A programme consisting of four plenary panel discussions will examine how coordinated action and newly affordable mobile devices can help countries address e-skills gaps and expand learning opportunities for all. The Forum will be jointly organized by UNESCO, UNHCR and ITU, the United Nations agency for information and communication technology.

Side events

UNESCO and UNHCR will host a series of side events to complement the main Mobile Learning Week programme. Descriptions of these events are below.

Demonstrations

A series of eight mobile learning demonstrations will be organized each day in a UNHCR tent located in UNESCO Headquarters. The demonstrations will allow participants to experience mobile learning solutions in an authentic environment. They will be repeated continuously from Monday to Wednesday.

Family Tent

A UNHCR family tent will be on UNESCO grounds for the duration of Mobile Learning Week. Participants are encouraged to enter the tent and see the core relief items like blankets, mosquito nets and eating utensils provisioned by UNHCR and partners in emergency settings. The tent will be set up on the plaza outside UNESCO's Miró rooms.

Exhibition

Organizations supporting Mobile Learning Week will showcase new educational technology, content and research in the UNESCO Foyer. UNESCO and UNHCR will also exhibit information about their respective mobile learning programmes. The full exhibition will run from Monday to Wednesday; some organizations will exhibit until Friday.

Photo Gallery

UNHCR, in partnership with the German government, will display a series of photographs taken in Kenya and Jordan. The photographs will tell the stories of refugee students who are pursuing higher education in the face of considerable obstacles. The photo gallery will run from Monday until Friday.

Art Installation

Art will be produced during Mobile Learning Week to capture the outcomes of different conference sessions. The work, to be displayed in the UNESCO Foyer and Miró rooms, will let participants revisit the issues and opinions raised at the event.

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