



©UNICEF/Colombia/2020/Romero

UNICEF EDUCATION

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

COLOMBIA

Supporting the learning and socio-emotional development of refugee and migrant children in Colombia

15 June 2021

Over [5.6 million refugees and migrants](#) have left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (“Venezuela”) since 2016, with [30 per cent](#) going to Colombia. The Colombian Government provides them with access to the formal education system. However, children continue to face many barriers. An estimated [1.11 million children \(49 per cent girls\)](#) will need education services in 2021. This case study examines two of UNICEF’s two flagship education programmes for refugee and migrant learners: Learning Circles and The Village.

The **Learning Circles programme** is embedded within the national education system and aims to help refugee students bridge back into the school system while addressing their socio-emotional and learning needs. Its flexible, multi-grade format enables migrant and refugee children to join at any time during the school year. A trained tutor provides tailored support to a group of 13 to 15 students, between the ages of 7 and 14, to catch up on learning they may have missed due to their journey. They are also responsible for tracking their own progress and are given leadership opportunities through school committees in their classrooms.

During COVID-19, UNICEF adapted Learning Circles for use during distance learning in 1,369 migrant and host communities. Adaptations consisted of the family follow-up via telephone and WhatsApp, and the provision of learning guidelines and school supplies, including six books per family, food packages, as well as a cash transfer programme for the most vulnerable.

[The Village](#), with its flexible curriculum, is aimed at building foundational learning (maths, language, social sciences, natural sciences) and socio-emotional development of refugee and migrant children aged 7 to 12. It is made up of engaging, colourful and playful pedagogical materials, including paper-based and digital storybooks, songs, activity booklets, videos and

radio content that are designed to promote empathy, conflict resolution, decision-making and emotional self-regulation.

During COVID-19, UNICEF trained teachers on use of The Village during home-based learning. It offered further teacher training on the [“Stories to stay at home”](#) to help navigate children’s feelings of uncertainty, fear, loneliness, and anger generated by COVID-19 and related school closures.

RESULTS

- To date, the UNICEF-supported Learning Circles programme has reached 2,614 learners (1,281 girls) and more than 190 teachers (158 women).
- Since March 2020, The Village has reached 87,667 learners from refugee, migrant and host communities, and UNICEF has provided 112,054 books for teachers and learners. UNICEF-supported teacher training has enabled 4,220 teachers (2,768 women) to plan and implement The Village via distance learning.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Holistic programming is vital.** Learning Circles increased access and retention among refugee, migrant and learners from host communities and improved their self-esteem and social skills. Personalised attention from tutors and small

group sizes are critical elements, along with school meals and flexibility regarding, uniforms, class schedules and school calendars. Enrolling both nationalities (Colombian and Venezuelan children) within the Learning Circles have been key to avoid cases of xenophobia in the field.

- **Quality education is child-centred, engaging and grounded in children’s daily lives.** In the Learning Circle model, learning is active, participatory and collaborative, centered on what children and adolescents want and need.
- **Mental health cannot be ignored.** Both Learning Circles and The Village prioritise learners’ mental health and the development of socio-emotional skills, which is so important for refugee and migrant learners to mitigate the effects of adversity and hardship they have experienced during their journey.

NEXT STEPS

In 2021, UNICEF aims to reach 1,600 refugee and migrant children through Learning Circles to help them transition into traditional schools. Additionally, it is scaling up The Village to be the core pedagogical strategy for school reopening among refugee learners, aiming to reach 3,500 teachers (2,100 women) and more than 100,000 children. UNICEF will conduct an evaluation to measure the learning outcomes of children enrolled in both programmes.

Cost effectiveness: Since 2019, UNICEF provided US\$4,257,684 to the Government of Colombia and reached 2,614 children and more than 190 teachers (158 women) through Learning Circles. In 2020, UNICEF’s investment of US\$1,022,046 reached more than 87,000 learners from migrant, refugee and host communities, as well as trained 4,220 teachers (2,768 women) on The Village. Funding contributions included support from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the Government of Germany, the Government of the United Kingdom, the Erik Thunes Legat Foundation and Novo Nordisk.

For more information, please contact:

UNICEF Colombia Country Office: <https://www.unicef.org/colombia/contactate-con-unicef>
© UNICEF June 2021