

**Forum:** International Organization for Migration (IOM)

**Issue:** Providing digital accessibility and skills to displaced people and communities in Western Africa

**Student Officer:** Grace Konidari

**Position:** Deputy President



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## Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

I am beyond honored to welcome you to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) of the 8th ACG MUN conference in 2025. My name is Grace Konidari, and I am an IB'1 student (11th Grade) attending Pierce - The American College of Greece. This will be my first time serving as a deputy president and it is of great honor that I am given this position.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate you all on your participation as delegates in the Model United Nations (MUN). MUN is a great way of familiarizing yourself with current issues, expanding your knowledge on global diplomacy, and enhancing your skills in public speaking and independent research while meeting new people.

The purpose of this study guide is to provide information about the issue of providing digital accessibility and skills to displaced persons and communities in Western Africa. Remember, it is highly encouraged to further research the topic on your own and gain a holistic view of the member state's policy and stance you are representing. Having been a delegate myself I know a conference can seem intimidating, and IOM being a new addition to the ACG MUN, can be difficult to understand as a committee. Therefore, should you have any questions or need any kind of clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me via the following email: [G.Konidari@acg.edu](mailto:G.Konidari@acg.edu).

I look forward to meeting you all!

Best,

Grace

## Topic Introduction

Political instability, new and continuing conflicts, and widespread insecurity are some of the main factors which contribute to the high rates of displacement in West Africa. The number of forcibly displaced is expected to climb from 14.3 million at the end of 2024 to around 15.2 million by the end of 2025, an increase of 6%.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, it is safe to state that most countries in the region either host displaced people and communities, produce them, or both.

Providing digital accessibility to displaced people in Western Africa is a crucial hurdle to overcome due to a combination of systemic, logistical, and social barriers. The region faces a complex mix of displacement crises driven by conflict, climate change, and economic and political instability, leaving millions of individuals in need of support. It is important to know that digital access for refugees, displaced people and communities is cited as less significant than mobile phone access. Hence, poor network coverage and lack of access to the internet places displaced people in Western Africa in a situation of digital isolation, making them unable to communicate, inform and entertain themselves, especially during hard times.

Although this issue might seem minor, it directly affects society. “Technology is an equalizer, and it is crucial to develop initiatives that make it accessible to all,” said Brian Tippens, Senior Vice President and Chief Social Impact Officer at Cisco.<sup>2</sup> Equipping displaced communities with digital skills creates new job opportunities and ensures a brighter future in a technology-driven world. Therefore, the economic and social problem of poverty can be alleviated in Western Africa.

Addressing the pressing needs of displaced people in Western Africa is vital for changing emergency relief to well-developed methods for long-term stability. Crucial for this transition is education and digital access, which empowers and encourages displaced communities to rebuild their lives. By focusing on digital upskilling along with educational opportunities and support, individuals will be provided with the necessary tools to sustain themselves and their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. “West and Central Africa.” *Global Focus*, 2023, [reporting.unhcr.org/operational/regions/west-and-central-africa](https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/regions/west-and-central-africa).

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Migration. “IOM and Cisco Provide Digital Skills to Displaced Persons and Communities in Northeast Nigeria.” *IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa*, [rodakar.iom.int/news/iom-and-cisco-provide-digital-skills-displaced-persons-and-communities-northeast-nigeria](https://rodakar.iom.int/news/iom-and-cisco-provide-digital-skills-displaced-persons-and-communities-northeast-nigeria)



Figure 1<sup>3</sup>: Map of countries included in Western Africa

## Definition of Key Terms

### Refugees

“Refugees are people forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country. They are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution as a result of who they are, what they believe in or say, or because of armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “West Africa / Sahel.” *Food Security Group*, [www.canr.msu.edu/fsg/countries/west-africa-sahel](http://www.canr.msu.edu/fsg/countries/west-africa-sahel).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR. “Refugees.” *UNHCR*, 2020, [www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees](http://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees).

## Cultural Barriers

“Cultural barriers prevent people from different cultures from effectively communicating and working with each other. Cultural barriers can be caused by differences in languages, beliefs, or values.”.<sup>5</sup>

## Climate Displacement

“The terms climate-related displacement and disaster displacement are specifically used to describe the involuntary movement of people as a reaction to sudden or developing changes in climate or the occurrence of a disaster, including those which are climate-related.”.<sup>6</sup>

## Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

“According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are: “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.”.<sup>7</sup>

## Digital Literacy

“Digital literacy consists of equipping people with Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) concepts, methods and skills to enable them to use and exploit ICTs. The related concept of information literacy consists of providing people with concepts and training in order to process data and transform them into information, knowledge and decisions. It includes methods to search and evaluate information, elements of information culture and its ethical aspects, as well as methodological and ethical aspects for communication in the digital world.”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Cultural Barriers: Example & Communication | StudySmarter.” *StudySmarter UK*, [www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-communication/cultural-barriers/](https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-communication/cultural-barriers/).

<sup>6</sup> Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. “Training - Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre.” *Ctk.climatecentre.org*, [ctk.climatecentre.org/downloads/modules/training\\_downloads/2g%20FactSheet%2002%20-%20Displacement%20and%20Climate%20-%20Terminology.pdf](https://ctk.climatecentre.org/downloads/modules/training_downloads/2g%20FactSheet%2002%20-%20Displacement%20and%20Climate%20-%20Terminology.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR. “IDP Definition.” *UNHCR*, 2024, [emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/idp-definition](https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/idp-definition).

<sup>8</sup> International Telecommunication Union. *MONITORING the WSIS TARGETS a Mid-Term Review*. 2010, [www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/wtdr\\_10/material/WTDR2010\\_e\\_v1.pdf](https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/wtdr_10/material/WTDR2010_e_v1.pdf).

## Gender Digital Divide

“The gender digital divide refers to the significant gap or inequalities between men’s and women’s access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This gap is driven by various factors, including economic inequalities, limited access to devices, insufficient Internet connectivity, cultural barriers, and a lack of digital skills, among others.”<sup>9</sup>

## Background Information

### Conflict and Displacement:

Armed conflicts and ethnic tensions throughout Western Africa are the main factors of forced displacement. In countries like Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burkina Faso millions of people were forced to flee their countries due to ongoing violence from Islamist groups and Jihadist activities, creating a dominant sense of insecurity and vulnerability for communities. This results in high rates of internal displacement for Western Africa, with people and communities at a loss of access to basic resources, further exacerbating their vulnerability. These basic resources refer to necessities, such is digital access, which IDPs are deprived of resulting in digital illiteracy which prevents them from pursuing an occupation and enhancing their future.

#### Armed conflict

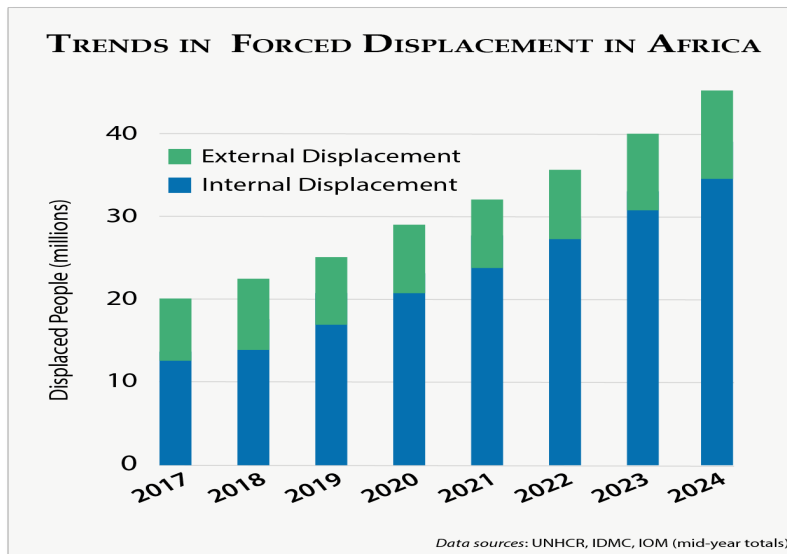
Given the persistent growth in displacement, there has been a doubling in the forcibly displaced population in Africa since 2018. Three-quarters of these people, 34.5 million, are internally displaced. With 1.9 million newly reported internally displaced since the start of 2024, Africa now hosts more than 48 percent of the world’s IDPs.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, the rise in displacement over the past year is mainly attributed to the conflict in Sudan, which recorded a 5.35-million-person increase in internally displaced people over the past year. Sudan, though, is just one of nine African countries with more than 250,000 forcibly displaced populations that had increased displacement rates during this period. In six African

<sup>9</sup> Streger, Gustavo. “What’s the Gender Digital Divide? | Internet Society Foundation.” *Internet Society Foundation*, 30 Oct. 2024, [www.isocfoundation.org/2024/10/whats-the-gender-digital-divide/](https://www.isocfoundation.org/2024/10/whats-the-gender-digital-divide/). Accessed 13 Dec. 2024.

<sup>10</sup> the. “Conflicts Causing Record Level of Forced Displacement in Africa – Africa Center for Strategic Studies.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 20 Sept. 2024, [africacenter.org/spotlight/conflicts-causing-record-level-of-forced-displacement-in-africa/](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/conflicts-causing-record-level-of-forced-displacement-in-africa/).

countries, more than ten per cent of the population is forcibly displaced, indicating the depth and significance of this instability.



**Figure 2<sup>11</sup>:** Graph of internally and externally displaced people in Africa since 2017

### Armed Conflict in Nigeria

In Western Africa, Nigeria's diverse security threats have contributed to an increase of forcibly displaced people since last year. There are almost 4 million displaced people in Nigeria caused by the actions of militant Islamist groups and organized criminal activity. The militant Islamist groups, also, account for 4.3 million people facing acute food insecurity, with almost half a million on the verge of famine. These activities indicate the internal conflicts and sense of insecurity which prevail in Nigeria, attributing to the high rates of displacement.

### Armed Conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, nearly a million people have been forced to flee their homes in the past year as a result of violence associated with various non state militias, including the M23 rebel group. The number of displaced communities in Congo is thus, over 7.1 million, a 13-percent increase over a year ago. Approximately, more than 6.1 million

<sup>11</sup> the. "Conflicts Causing Record Level of Forced Displacement in Africa – Africa Center for Strategic Studies." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 20 Sept. 2024, [africacenter.org/spotlight/conflicts-causing-record-level-of-forced-displacement-in-africa/](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/conflicts-causing-record-level-of-forced-displacement-in-africa/).

people, a staggering 86 percent, are displaced internally. Years of ongoing multilayered conflict leading to massive population displacement has reduced the resilience of Congolese residents<sup>12</sup>. Lost homes and livelihoods, rising inflation, and insufficient humanitarian assistance have also resulted in acute food insecurity in the DRC, affecting 25.8 million people. Overall, most affected are the internally displaced communities and the households hosting displaced or returned families as well as households around areas impacted by armed conflict.

### Jihadist activities in the Sahel

The Sahel region has faced substantial security, economic and development challenges in recent years. Over a decade of welfare crisis, driven by the activities of jihadist groups, that caused international security interventions, has been combined with recent political upheavals. A series of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger led, among other things, to the recalibration of their international relations, severing ties with Western partners and fostering closer alliances with Eastern countries, like Russia. Additionally, security conditions continue to deteriorate, resulting in significant civilian casualties and widespread displacement. Neighbouring countries are closely observing these developing rates, concerned about potential impacts on their own stability. Meanwhile, the war in Sudan, ongoing since April 2023, remains marked by extreme violence, creating immense hardships for its population and threatening the broader stability of the region.<sup>13</sup>

After the recent military coups in the central Sahel, peace, stability, and social cohesion have been severely strained, especially following the withdrawal of Western partners. Victim figures most likely exceed 150,000, while 11-11,5 million people are estimated to have been displaced since April 2023.<sup>14</sup> Humanitarian aid is available to the local population only through Sudan's emergency response rooms, and volunteer neighbourhood-based mutual aid groups, which apart from being under-resourced, are also targeted by both warring parties. While peace

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<sup>12</sup> Studies, the Africa Center for Strategic. "African Conflicts Displace over 40 Million People." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 22 Aug. 2023, [africacenter.org/spotlight/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people/](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people/).

<sup>13</sup> "War, Displacement and Jihadism: High Stakes for the Sahel | ISPI." *ISPI*, 22 Nov. 2024, [www.ispionline.it/en/publication/war-displacement-and-jihadism-high-stakes-for-the-sahel-191571](https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/war-displacement-and-jihadism-high-stakes-for-the-sahel-191571).

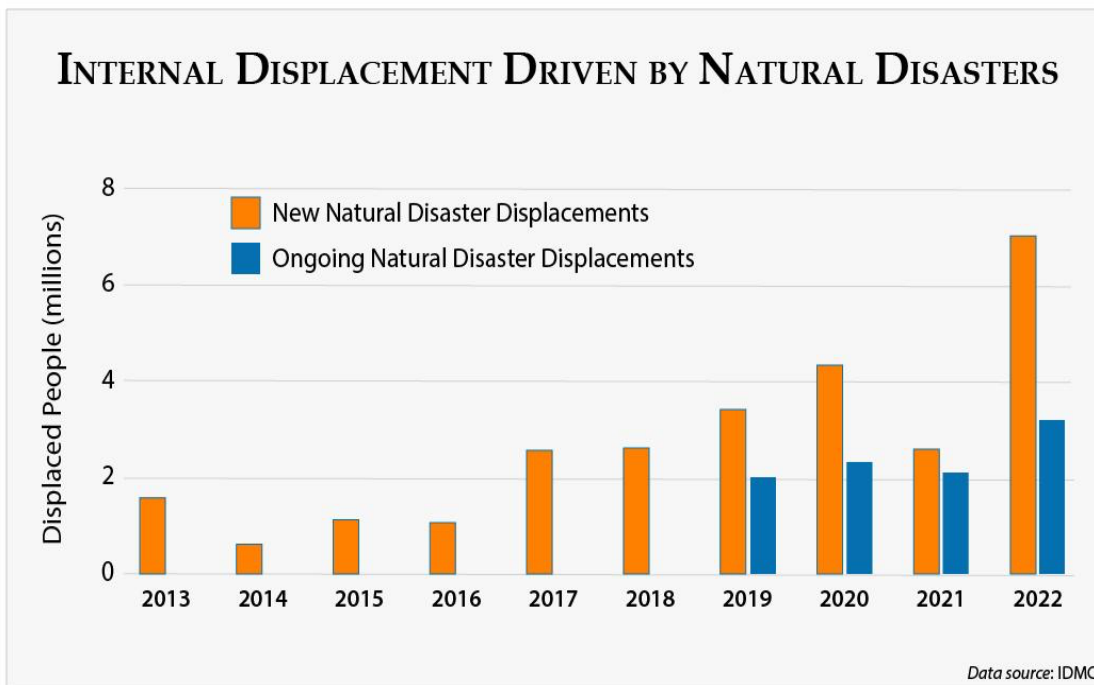
<sup>14</sup> "War, Displacement and Jihadism: High Stakes for the Sahel | ISPI." *ISPI*, 22 Nov. 2024, [www.ispionline.it/en/publication/war-displacement-and-jihadism-high-stakes-for-the-sahel-191571](https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/war-displacement-and-jihadism-high-stakes-for-the-sahel-191571).



negotiations, including the Geneva talks launched earlier this year, have so far failed, the war bears a huge destabilising potential for the entire region. The heavy refugee burden affecting neighbouring countries, like Morocco, is likely to feed local conflicts in host countries, as well as increase illegal migration towards Europe.

## Climate-induced displacement

Over the past year, the number of people displaced due to natural disasters reached 7 million. This jump follows a trend of consistently growing levels of natural disaster-related displacement in Africa since 2014. Historically, forced displacement due to climatic impacts has tended to be more temporary than displacement due to conflict, because there is an ongoing fear of safety to oneself and one's family due to violence. Specifically, almost everyone affected by a natural disaster was able to return home once the threat passed. However, this has changed in recent years. Since 2019, there have been roughly 2 million people who have been unable to return “after the storm” due to the persistence of these threats—mostly flooding, followed by drought and storms. This figure expanded to 3.2 million in 2022.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 3<sup>16</sup>:** Graph indicating internally displaced people due to new natural disasters and/or ongoing natural disasters

<sup>15</sup> International Organization for Migration. “Conflict Drives Displacement amidst Rising Climate Shocks: New Africa Migration Report.” *International Organization for Migration*, 26 Mar. 2024, [www.iom.int/news/conflict-drives-displacement-amidst-rising-climate-shocks-new-africa-migration-report](https://www.iom.int/news/conflict-drives-displacement-amidst-rising-climate-shocks-new-africa-migration-report).

<sup>16</sup> Studies, the Africa Center for Strategic. “African Conflicts Displace over 40 Million People.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 22 Aug. 2023, [africacenter.org/spotlight/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people/](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-conflicts-displace-over-40-million-people/).



Across the world, the changing climate has exacerbated existing challenges. Sixteen countries are caught in the intersection of climate vulnerability and armed conflict, representing a staggering 44% of people impacted by natural disasters and 79% of those in humanitarian need<sup>17</sup>. One in four of those countries are in West Africa: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. These communities often lack the resources to adapt or recover, bearing the brunt of climate-induced displacement.

Countries in West Africa are particularly vulnerable to sudden onset events such as floods, alongside ongoing issues like land degradation, water scarcity, and coastal erosion, which have increased in occurrence and severity due to the adverse effects of climate change. In 2022, for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, climate-related disasters caused almost as many internal displacements as conflicts. For instance, in Nigeria, last year most internal displacements were due to natural disasters. The country experienced the worst floods in a decade, resulting in 2.4 million people displaced which is the highest number of people displaced due to disasters in Sub-Saharan Africa in the past ten years.

## Digital Divide

Countries across Africa have experienced massive internet connectivity disruptions this year due to cuts in the undersea fiber cables in the Red Sea and along Africa's east and west coasts and lack of infrastructure. Specifically, only 28% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population had internet access in 2022.<sup>18</sup> This has left much of the continent disconnected from the digital world that many rely on for essential services, e-commerce, business and daily life. Disruptions caused by the repeated undersea cable failures – in February, March and May – have sparked debates about the continent's readiness to embrace the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) and fortify it as an economic catalyst.

The lack of internet access is an already existing issue in Western Africa which directly affects the displaced communities. Having little to no digital access forbids displaced individuals from seeking opportunities, particularly professions, informing themselves and being included in a technology-driven

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<sup>17</sup> UNHCR. "Climate Change and Disaster Displacement | UNHCR Africa." *UNHCR Africa*, 2018, [www.unhcr.org/africa/what-we-do/how-we-work/environment-disasters-and-climate-change/climate-change-and-disaster](https://www.unhcr.org/africa/what-we-do/how-we-work/environment-disasters-and-climate-change/climate-change-and-disaster).

<sup>18</sup> Rudaz, Jérôme Chenal, Chiara Ciriminna, Rémi Jaligot, Karine Ginisty, Florian. "The Impact of Digitalisation on West African Cities: The Example of Mobile Money." *Exafepfl.shorthandstories.com*, [exafepfl.shorthandstories.com/the-impact-of-digitalisation-on-west-african-cities/index.html](https://exafepfl.shorthandstories.com/the-impact-of-digitalisation-on-west-african-cities/index.html).

world. A lack of digital skills and knowledge makes one feel disconnected and unable to be integrated into a technologically advanced society. Therefore, the issue of digitalization in Western Africa makes the concept of displacement more difficult for an individual or a community on the grounds that they will be struggling to adapt and rebuild their lives to hosting countries which may be advanced technologically.

## **Gender-based violence (GBV) and displacement**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue in Western Africa, profoundly influencing patterns of displacement and instability in the region. Rooted in deeply entrenched gender inequalities, GBV manifests in various forms, including sexual violence, forced marriages, and domestic abuse, disproportionately affecting women and girls. These acts of violence are often exacerbated by armed conflicts, economic instability, and climate-induced crises, forcing survivors to flee their homes in search of safety. Displacement further exposes individuals to heightened risks of exploitation and abuse, creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability and marginalization. Addressing GBV in Western Africa is essential to mitigating its role in displacement and ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of those affected. Ensuring the safety and dignity of those affected is critical to protecting their human rights, preventing trauma and long-term health issues, and enabling survivors to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

## **Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria**

Boko Haram is an Islamic sectarian movement, founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in northeastern Nigeria, that since 2009 has carried out assassinations and large-scale acts of violence in that country. The group's initial proclaimed intent was to uproot the corruption and injustice in Nigeria, which it blamed on Western influences, and to impose Islamic law. Later the group vowed to avenge the deaths of Yusuf and other group members, who were killed by security forces in 2009. In 2015 the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and took the name Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP; also known as Islamic State in West Africa, or ISWA).

Boko Haram's rise and insurgency have dramatically changed the lives of thousands of women and girls, often casting them voluntarily or by force into new roles outside the domestic sphere. Some joined to escape their social conditions; others were abducted and enslaved. Thus, seven years of war have caused gender-specific suffering. While men have also disproportionately been killed, women are an overwhelming majority among the estimated 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the North East. As former wives, slaves or fighters, many bear the stigma of association with the insurgents and are barred from reintroduction into their communities, particularly because the lines between militant, sympathiser and forced accomplice are blurred. Although Boko Haram faces strong pushback, it remains capable of launching attacks and conducting multiple suicide bombings. Understanding how women experience the conflict, not only as victims but also as actors, needs to directly implement policies and programs to tackle the roots of the insurgency and strategies for reducing it, as well as facilitate women's contribution to lasting peace.

## **Economic Challenges**

The digital divide can seriously impact economic opportunities for disconnected individuals. Individuals who do not have acquired digital skills may be unable to obtain higher-paying jobs. Additionally, countries without stable broadband access can face challenges to economic development. By investing in widespread infrastructure and digital access, however, the digital divide can begin to narrow and economic opportunities may increase.

As of 2021, people were in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This stage describes the ongoing automation and implementation of advanced technology in manufacturing and other industrial practices. As a result, more and more jobs require employees to hold digital skills. The digital divide can make it more difficult for disconnected users to obtain employment. This gap is apparent for middle-skill jobs or jobs that require some training beyond high school but do not require a bachelor's degree. Research shows that over 80 per cent of middle-skill jobs require a certain level of digital proficiency. Middle-skill and more advanced jobs often pay higher wages than low-skill positions.

As a result, individuals who do not have digital skills lose access to valuable job opportunities. Moreover, disconnected people are unable to participate fully in the global digital economy and cannot participate in remote or web-based jobs. These factors can perpetuate the cycle of economic inequality

and lead to lower earnings over time. However, digital skills training courses and internal upskilling within organizations can help improve economic outcomes and alleviate these disparities.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States of America

Today, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken announced that the United States, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, is providing nearly \$114 million in additional life-saving humanitarian assistance for populations in West and Central Africa and the Sahel, and nearly \$36 million through the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to support refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and people affected by conflict.<sup>19</sup> Through this financial support displaced people or communities as well as refugees in the region of Western Africa will receive an adequate amount of money to afford and invest in their improved welfare. Enhancing their living conditions refers to becoming digitally literate and developing skills and knowledge to adapt to a new community and broaden their horizons regarding occupation opportunities.

### Nigeria

Digitalization is rapidly emerging across Nigeria and having basic digital skills means better access to digital and smart jobs and, therefore, a better life. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Cisco have partnered to enhance digital skills among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria. Their initiative includes establishing Digital Learning Labs and providing technical education to help individuals gain socioeconomic resilience in a region where over 2.3 million people are displaced. Furthermore, The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has also initiated digital literacy programs specifically targeting displaced adolescent girls and boys in Maiduguri, equipping them with essential computer skills to improve their job prospects. This was the second edition of the Digital Literacy programme. The digital literacy training programme seeks to ensure that the most marginalized groups affected by conflict and displacement, especially internally displaced adolescent girls and boys, are not left behind in the digital era.

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development. "The United States Announces Nearly \$176 Million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for West Africa | Press Release | Africa." *U.S. Agency for International Development*, 28 May 2024, [www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-28-2024-united-states-announces-nearly-176-million-additional-humanitarian-assistance-west-africa](https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-28-2024-united-states-announces-nearly-176-million-additional-humanitarian-assistance-west-africa).

## **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has established a Connectivity Centre in Burkina Faso, which provides online courses and digital skills training for both displaced individuals and host communities. This center aims to bridge the digital divide and empower participants through education and connectivity. The 'Connectivity Centre' opened its doors for the first time in 2022, enabling host communities and displaced people to access online and in-person courses on a variety of subjects, including information technology, digital literacy and responsible social media use, as well as agriculture and business. The courses are conducted by UNHCR staff together with members of WakatLab, a Burkinabe organization specializing in digital training for youth. Beyond educational opportunities and a space to learn new skills, the Connectivity Centre also provides free 24-hour internet access for all via its Wi-Fi network. Beyond business skills and opportunities to connect digitally with the world, the centre also hosts classes on social issues such as gender-based violence, sexual health, and positive masculinity, attracting over 1,845 participants so far.

## **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

Humanitarian funding requirements for UNICEF's humanitarian action in West and Central Africa have steadily increased over the past five years, from US\$ 949.5 million in 2017 to US\$1.4 billion in 2022, due to multiple humanitarian crises, including armed conflict, displacement, natural disasters, and disease outbreaks, which have put the lives and well-being of millions of children at risk. The increase in funding requirements indicates the growing needs of children and families in the region who require lifesaving assistance. Moreover, UNICEF, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), has established Learning Labs aimed at developing digital skills for refugees and host communities. These labs provide training that emphasizes both digital and soft skills, which are essential for improving employability and fostering economic resilience among displaced youth. Furthermore, UNICEF has launched the Nigeria Learning Passport (NLP), a digital tool designed to enhance educational outcomes for students, including displaced children. This platform offers interactive learning experiences through quizzes, videos, and animations, making education more accessible and engaging. Overall, UNICEF highlights the importance of digital literacy, having launched various tools and donating generous amounts of money in order to eradicate the digital divide in Western Africa and provide a better future for displaced people and communities, enabling them to transition from learning to earning.

## Blocs Expected

### Alliance 1:

Member States advocating for the provision of resources and aid to address the digital divide in Western Africa emphasize the critical role of technology in fostering sustainable development, economic growth, and social inclusion. By providing targeted resources and aid, these Member States aim to expand internet connectivity, enhance digital skills, and promote access to technology for underserved populations. Such initiatives not only empower individuals and communities but also strengthen regional resilience, improve access to education and healthcare, and enable more inclusive governance.

E.g. Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, Germany, France, The Netherlands, United States, Canada, UNICEF, Australia, Mexico, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Kenya, Rwanda

### Alliance 2:

For economically constrained nations, limited fiscal resources prioritize immediate issues such as food security, healthcare, and infrastructure, leaving insufficient funding for investments in digital technology and related initiatives. Political instability compounds these issues, as governments dealing with internal conflicts, corruption, or fragile state institutions often lack the stability or long-term vision required to implement comprehensive digital development strategies. In such environments, digital initiatives risk being underfunded or mismanaged, limiting their effectiveness. Some Member States oppose certain digital initiatives due to regulatory barriers or concerns over sovereignty and control. Governments may also be hesitant to embrace open Internet policies due to concerns about online dissent or misinformation, leading to restrictive regulations that inhibit widespread digital access.

E.g. Cameroon, Chad, Mali, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Russia, China

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
30 July 2009	The founder of Boko Haram Mohammed Yusuf and other members of the group are killed by security forces.
2010s	Escalation of Boko Haram conflict, increasing displacement in Nigeria and neighboring countries. Rise of jihadist groups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.
March 2015	Boko Haram pledges allegiance to ISIL, taking on the name of Islamic State West African Province.
25 September 2015	Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the UN General Assembly, including Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)
2018	UNHCR introduces Connectivity for Refugees, a multi-stakeholder initiative to advance the availability and affordability of connectivity for 20 million forcibly displaced people and their host communities by 2030. <sup>20</sup>
2020	The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for digital access globally, especially for vulnerable populations.
August 18th, 2020	Start of the rise to coups in the central Sahel region, with the ousting of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali.

<sup>20</sup>UNHCR. "Connectivity for Refugees." *UNHCR Innovation*, [www.unhcr.org/innovation/connectivity-for-refugees/](http://www.unhcr.org/innovation/connectivity-for-refugees/).



2021	UNHCR partners with Coursera to provide free online courses for refugees. Launch of Google's Africa Digital Skills Initiative, targeting displaced youth.
2022	For the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, climate-related disasters started causing internal displacements nearing the amount caused by conflicts.
April 15th, 2023	The Sudanese Civil War begins
20 June 2024	World Refugee Day 2024
24 August 2024	Fighters of the JNIM (An al-Qaeda-associated Jihadist group) opened fire on people digging trenches for the army in the Barsalogho region of Burkina Faso.

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

- [Report on the 3rd Workshop on Multiculturalism in Africa : Peaceful and Constructive Group Accommodation in Situations involving Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Gaborone, 18-22 February 2002](#)
- [Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons](#)
- [Report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 27th session \(4-13 September 2017\), 28th session \(9-20 April 2018\)](#)<sup>21</sup>
- [IOM Migrant E-nclusion Project](#)

<sup>21</sup> Committee, UN., and UN. Committee. "Report of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 27th Session (4-13 September 2017), 28th Session (9-20 April 2018)." *United Nations Digital Library System*, UN, 2018, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/1633466?ln=en&v=pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1633466?ln=en&v=pdf).

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### **A digital hub connects displaced people in Burkina Faso to new opportunities**

The 'Connectivity Centre' opened its doors for the first time in 2022, enabling host communities and displaced people to access online and in-person courses on a variety of subjects, including information technology, digital literacy and responsible social media use, as well as agriculture and business.

The courses are conducted by UNHCR staff together with members of WakatLab, a Burkinabe organization specializing in digital training for youth. Beyond educational opportunities and a space to learn new skills, the Connectivity Centre also provides free 24-hour internet access for all via its Wi-Fi network. The experience of visiting the centre has been life changing for many people. They were able to take courses in entrepreneurship, agriculture, computer science and data analysis, deepening their knowledge in certain fields and gaining essential information from others.

Beyond business skills and opportunities to connect digitally with the world, the centre also hosts classes on social issues such as gender-based violence, sexual health, and positive masculinity, attracting over 1,845 participants so far.

### **Western Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (WARCIP):**

The World Bank's West Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (WARCIP) represented a significant investment aimed at enhancing internet connectivity across West Africa through the deployment of fiber-optic cables. This initiative was crucial for addressing the digital divide in a region where access to reliable internet services has been historically limited. The primary goal of WARCIP was to improve the telecommunications infrastructure in West African countries, facilitating better internet access for both urban and rural populations. By enhancing connectivity, WARCIP aimed to stimulate economic development, enabling local businesses to engage in e-commerce, access global markets, and improve service delivery across various sectors. Improved internet connectivity was also expected to enhance access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and government services, particularly for vulnerable populations including displaced individuals. Countries involved in WARCIP include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and others that benefit from enhanced regional connectivity

For displaced individuals, improved internet connectivity provided access to information about humanitarian assistance, job opportunities, and educational resources. This was especially important in regions where traditional communication channels may be disrupted due to conflict or displacement. With better connectivity, there was an opportunity to implement digital literacy programs tailored for displaced populations. These programs could equip individuals with essential skills needed for the job market, thereby enhancing their employability and integration into host communities. Moreover, enhanced internet access facilitated entrepreneurship among displaced individuals by enabling them to start online businesses or engage in remote work, thus contributing to their economic independence.

### **Tech4Dev's Basic Digital Education**

Since 2016, Tech4Dev has been instrumental in providing basic digital education to over 10,000 displaced and underserved individuals in Nigeria. This initiative focuses on equipping participants with essential digital skills that are increasingly vital in today's job market. The program offered a curriculum that covers fundamental digital skills, including computer literacy, internet navigation, and basic software applications. This foundational knowledge is crucial for individuals seeking employment or further education. The initiative primarily targeted internally displaced persons (IDPs) and underserved communities who often lack access to educational resources and technology. By tracking the progress of participants, Tech4Dev could assess the effectiveness of the training and make necessary adjustments to improve outcomes.

### **African Coding Network**

The African Coding Network focuses on teaching coding and programming skills to displaced youth. This initiative aims to empower young individuals with technical skills that are in high demand in the digital economy. The program provided practical coding workshops where participants learn programming languages such as Python, JavaScript, and HTML/CSS. This hands-on approach helped solidify their understanding and application of coding concepts. Participants often had access to mentors from the tech industry who provided guidance, support, and networking opportunities, enhancing their career prospects. The program also included job placement assistance, helping graduates secure internships or employment in tech-related fields.

## Possible Solutions

### **Expand partnerships with tech organizations for affordable and sustainable infrastructure**

The delegate could propose collaboration with technology companies to create affordable and sustainable digital infrastructure in displacement areas. Further recommend utilization of the expertise of tech organizations to implement innovative solutions that cater to the specific needs of displaced populations. In addition, they could mention partnering with companies to establish internet connectivity projects. Lastly, urge to work with manufacturers to provide low-cost devices (e.g., tablets, laptops) equipped with educational software tailored for displaced communities and integrate renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, to power digital hubs, ensuring sustainability, uninterrupted access to learning and reducing reliance on unstable electricity grids. These initiatives empower displaced individuals by enhancing literacy, digital skills, and employability, enabling them to rebuild their lives, contribute to their communities, and break cycles of poverty and dependency.

### **Collaborative efforts to provide comprehensive training programs for displaced individuals**

Provision of training programs that equip displaced individuals with both technical and soft skills necessary for the job market. Collaborate with educational institutions and NGOs to design a curriculum that includes coding, digital marketing, data entry, and soft skills like communication and teamwork. Implement train-the-trainer models where local leaders or educators are trained first, enabling them to teach their communities effectively. Develop or partner with existing online learning platforms that can provide remote access to training materials. Specifically, online learning platforms can provide access to training materials by hosting a wide range of courses, and tutorials that are accessible through the internet. These platforms often include user-friendly interfaces, multilingual content, and offline capabilities to accommodate varying levels of connectivity, bridging the digital divide.

### **Implement digital literacy as part of primary education in displacement settings**

The delegate could suggest ensuring that digital literacy is included in the primary education curriculum for children in displacement settings. Collaborate with local education authorities to integrate digital literacy into the existing curriculum, ensuring it aligns with national education standards.

Provision of professional development for teachers focused on integrating technology into their teaching practices and fostering digital skills among students. The delegate could also propose equipping schools with necessary technological tools, such as computers and internet access, to facilitate effective teaching of digital skills.

## **Empower Local Organizations and Governments**

Encourage local organizations and governments to take ownership of initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide. Ensure that initiatives are sustainable by involving local stakeholders who understand community needs. Conduct workshops aimed at building the capacity of local organizations in project management, technology implementation, and community engagement strategies. Support the establishment of community-driven connectivity hubs equipped with internet access and learning resources. Assist local organizations in identifying funding opportunities from international donors or government programs to support their initiatives.

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