



Knowledge hub - Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Return to Learning: Lessons across programming and advocacy

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Lebanon, Colombia, Pakistan

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Save the Children

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Learning loss, displacement, advocacy, safe back to school, social-emotional learning, internally displaced persons, refugees

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Return to Learning (RtL) is an education program designed for use in the first phase of humanitarian responses or in protracted crises to improve school readiness before out-of-school children transition into longer-term education opportunities (non-formal or formal).

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Currently, there are 84 million people who have been forced to flee their homes – more than at any other time in history. Over half of all refugees are children and the average length of displacement for a refugee is 18 years – an entire childhood. These children are consistently denied access to basic services, including education. More than half of all school-age refugee children are missing out on learning – that is 4 million children prevented from accessing their right to education.

With the Global Compact on Refugees, global leaders responded to advocacy by Save the Children and others by adopting the first-ever time-bound commitment to getting refugee children back in school within 3 months of arrival in a host country. Return to Learning (RtL) was developed to show the world how to make good on this promise, bringing an evidence-based and scalable approach that provides forcibly displaced children with rapid access to education in the first phase of an emergency.

RtL supports children (ages 4-15) in regaining access to education that addresses the needs of the whole child. It uses a play-based approach to develop basic literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills, contributing to children's school readiness, learning, and wellbeing. By providing quick access to education as longer-term opportunities are identified, RtL reduces the amount of time displaced children spend out of the classroom. The program includes a toolkit of play-based learning activities for children and the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO) that gives front-line staff an overview of children's development so they can make informed programming decisions.

The RtL program has been implemented in eight countries with positive results on children's learning and social-emotional wellbeing. This submission focuses on implementation in Lebanon, Colombia, and Pakistan. In Lebanon, SC first piloted the RtL program in Bekaa Valley, reaching 566 out-of-school Syrian refugee children. In Colombia, SC developed an innovative remote implementation to reach 467 children out-of-school during COVID-19 school closures. In Pakistan, SC further adapted RtL to a mobile application called Learning Tree and implemented with girls in Accelerated Learning Centers, reaching 250 children.

In addition to programmatic activities, RtL includes a global advocacy agenda and a training module for capacity building of SC staff and partners to ensure policies reflect the critical need for children in humanitarian crises accessing the lifesaving support education provides as soon as possible following displacement.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

*

From March 2018 to May 2019, SC implemented RtL in community centers in Bekaa, Lebanon in order to reach out-of-school Syrian refugee and Lebanese children. SC trained community facilitators, mapped out-of-school children, and identified learning gaps through HALDO in order to target programming in the short-term intervention with the end goal to (re)integrate children into schooling. Once children completed RtL, SC helped transition them into government-approved, non-formal education programs. SC reached 566 children through private funding totaling 330,000 USD. SC also trained country office staff on how best to advocate for refugee education with governments and UN agencies.

From May 2020 to March 2021, SC adapted RtL to a remote program in order to reach internally displaced, refugee, and host community children in Cali and Arauca, Colombia at home, during COVID-19 school closures. The program materials included a paper-based child activity pack for self-learning, an accompanying paper-based caregiver guide to help caregivers support children's learning at home, and a Positive Parenting Podcast series called *Yo crio con Amor/I grow with Love*, shared with caregivers via Whatsapp. In addition to positive parenting strategies, the podcasts include health and hygiene messages related to COVID-19. SC worked closely with the Ministry of Education to align the content with national standards. SC reached 467 children through private funding totaling 287,000 USD. In 2020, SC funded a joint initiative with Fundación Ideas para La Paz and the National University of Colombia tracking and campaigning on the impacts of xenophobia on children's education and in 2021, SC expanded RtL to new locations in Colombia, reaching an additional 480 children.

From October 2021 to February 2022, SC adapted RtL to a mobile application called Learning Tree to distribute interactive content directly with children participating in Accelerated Learning Centers (ALCs) in Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan. SC adapted RtL activities into interactive scripts for children and teachers, and translated the scripts before loading them onto the application. The application was piloted as a supplemental learning tool for girls enrolled in the ALCs. The project was funded by internal innovation funds, totaling 250,000 USD, including application development and content translation costs, activities, and evaluation, and reached 250 girls.

RtL's advocacy component is designed to support a policy environment that builds upon RtL's programmatic outcomes. SC developed a module to provide RtL country office staff with a six hour training on advocating for refugee education with governments and UN agencies. The module can be conducted remotely, is available in five languages and can accommodate up to 30 participants of all experience levels. Through RtL we've also published a number of policy reports on education and displacement to support our advocacy.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The first implementation of the full RtL package was in Bekaa. Through data collected in May 2019, SC found that children who participated in RtL had gains across literacy, numeracy, SEL and overall HALDO domains, with significant increases in SEL skills. SC also developed support mechanisms for first-time facilitators using RtL in low-resource and crisis contexts.

Drawing on learning from Lebanon and pivoting to remote implementation, SC developed an approach to reach 20% more children than originally planned to support children to continue to learn and grow SEL skills during lockdowns. Using phone-based data collection, SC monitored learning through a dynamic assessment with children and caregivers. SC used the Social Competence Scale to measure prosocial communication and emotional regulation outcomes, based on findings from Lebanon emphasizing SEL skills. All children had gains of 2-15% in emotional regulation skills and prosocial communication. Caregivers who engaged more regularly in children's learning at home were more likely to have children with higher social competence scores and more frequent correct answers on learning questions.

By developing the Learning Tree app using the evidence-based RtL activities, SC created an interactive, data-driven mobile application that works offline to provide tailored learning content to children during education interruptions. Using HALDO SC found that children who used the app had significantly higher literacy, numeracy, SEL, and executive functioning skills making Learning Tree an effective supplemental tool to support children's learning in emergencies. These findings will inform upcoming expansion of the app in other settings.

RtL takes the approach that its programmatic impacts must be sustained by working across silos to advocate for policies that work for children. SC hosted an advocacy training with the Lebanon country office, with more planned for 2022. To support our advocacy, SC commissioned a review of government education pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum and a survey of IDP education policies in Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine, which was cited in the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement outcome document. RtL also contributed resources to two roundtable discussions between the IDP Panel, practitioners, teachers, and children.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Lessons learnt across implementations have improved and further developed RtL to support children's learning in the onset of displacement and closes the gap in learning when schools are closed or inaccessible.

In Lebanon, SC found that supporting facilitators to identify children's skill levels and target activities to these levels, regardless of age, was essential. SC kept this in mind when developing Learning Tree, ensuring the app made it easy for implementers and facilitators to map RtL content to aggregate skill levels measured by HALDO. SC also learned to strengthen peer learning during HALDO enumerator training to improve data quality and began development of an offline version of HALDO using a paper-based assessment, which has since been used in Syria.

In Colombia, SC conducted remote implementation and found paper-based, audio, and WhatsApp communication strengthened children's SEL skills. Weekly calls with caregivers facilitated increased caregiver engagement in children's learning and provided regular opportunities for caregivers, children, and staff to learn from each other and adapt programming. With access constraints, SC was unable to say whether the program had impact compared to another/no intervention, nor were we able to measure children's literacy and numeracy skills.

Based on remote implementation in Colombia and feedback from facilitators in Lebanon, SC developed Learning Tree to include a teacher professional development portal, including teacher wellbeing activities, and child-focused interactive modules based on RtL. Recognizing that caregivers required smartphones and at least intermittent access to the internet, SC learned that not all children would be able to interact with this tool in crisis contexts. SC is now further developing digital learning centers and building on learning from mobile child-friendly spaces to better support children with low technology access or who are on the move.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

RtL is an evidence-based program designed specifically for the first phase of an emergency, when education is often neglected and to work across silos. Intentionally designed for short-term use, RtL fills a gap in education programming that exists in many emergency settings. Rather than missing out on valuable learning time while waiting for longer-term education opportunities to become available, children who participate in RtL have immediate access to learning and wellbeing activities that also provide a sense of routine and normalcy.

RtL activities are designed to be adaptable for use in in-person, remote, and blended programming and have been proven fit-for-use in diverse settings, as is evidenced by the programs in Lebanon, Colombia, and Pakistan. RtL is a proven flexible programming solution for reaching out-of-school children, and also for supporting education continuity when children who are in school are unable to access learning for various reasons (school closures, natural disaster, conflict). SC will continue sharing evidence and lessons learned from its own RtL implementation to inform the work of others and the EiE sector more generally. SC is also eager to train partners, clusters, and other education stakeholders on RtL in order to ensure that children in emergency settings, children on the move, and children impacted by school closures do not miss out on learning.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

The USAID case study on RtL in Colombia is in this document (pp. 34-35): <https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Remote-SEL-FINAL-508.pdf>

Shining a Light on Internal Displacement: A Vision for the Future - Report of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (pp. 11, 79)
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/action-towards-increased-quality-education-internally-displaced-children-recommendations/>