

Brief Read-Out: Chad Higher Education Meeting (25 Nov 2025)

Purpose:

UNHCR and partners convened universities to outline the growing higher education needs in Eastern Chad and present opportunities for partnership through newly built Digital Learning Centres (DLCs).

Context & Needs

- Eastern Chad is hosting nearly 900,000 Sudanese refugees, with 1 in 3 people in the region now a refugee.
- 86% of the displaced population are women and children, requiring strong protection-sensitive approaches.
- Many recent arrivals are highly educated Sudanese youth—some with university experience—now living in very rural areas with no higher education access.
- Key barriers include:
 - Lack of local higher education options
 - Language barriers (refugees speak Arabic/English; universities operate in French)
 - Limited connectivity, electricity and devices
 - Travel restrictions and documentation issues
 - Risk of high dropout at secondary level due to absence of higher education pathways

Digital Learning Centres (DLCs)

- First centre (Iridimi) opened mid-2025; seven more planned across Eastern Chad.
- Centres aim to provide short, targeted learning opportunities rather than 4-year online degrees.
- Current focus areas:
 - English language learning (Arizona State University; 100+ learners already enrolled)
 - Digital literacy (UNHCR ICT team)
 - Cisco Academy technical courses (pending Arabic-language facilitation)
 - Community health certificate with University of Geneva planned for early 2026
- All centre leadership roles are filled by refugees, with strong involvement from local authorities to support sustainability and formal recognition.

Opportunities for Universities

- Clear and urgent need for additional partners to offer:
 - Short courses
 - Skills credentials
 - Career-transition support
 - Soft skills and employment preparation

- Strong emphasis on contextualisation, Arabic/English-language options, and alignment with local labour realities (including remote-work pathways).
- The centres are intended as shared spaces for both refugees and host communities to promote social cohesion and sustainability.
- Early adopters: ASU (English programmes), University of Geneva (health certificate).
- The initiative aligns well with the Global University Academy, whose members are encouraged to participate.

Key Points from Q&A

- **Accessibility:** DLCs include learners with disabilities; adaptations are ongoing.
- **Prior Learning Recognition:** A major challenge; requires joint advocacy with national authorities.
- **Equitable Access:** Recruitment and participation monitored to avoid advantaging already-connected groups.
- **Employment Pathways:** Focus on soft skills, remote work feasibility, and contextual limitations (e.g., banking access, mobile money).
- **Host Community Inclusion:** Local institutes will use centres; centre framed as a *Chadian* (not solely UNHCR) asset.

Next Steps

- UNHCR to share slides and meeting notes.
- Universities invited to explore how they can provide short courses or technical support.
- Follow-up discussions to be organised with interested institutions.