Project Reconnect
Final Report

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RTI International
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NetHope, Inc.
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Executive Summary

The International Rescue Committee estimates that over 65 million people around the world have been forced from their homes because of war, natural disasters, and famine. Over half of refugees worldwide are young children. In the last six years, the Syrian war and other crises have caused the largest exodus of people since the Second World War. Over 12 million Syrians alone have had to leave their homes to other parts of Syria, neighboring countries, and beyond. Since January 2015, more than 2.4 million refugees have arrived as asylum seekers on the shores of Europe to escape conflict, persecution, or hardship, most of them coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Albania, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kosovo, Eritrea, and Iran.

Project Reconnect was a bold and ambitious effort conceived by Google Germany, Google.org, and NetHope in late 2015. The project emerged during a time of crisis, triggered by the dramatic influx of refugees and asylum seekers into Germany. By the end of 2015, the number of new refugees arriving in Germany reached an unprecedented high in the recent history of the nation - nearly 200,000 individuals per month.

Originally designed as a one-year initiative, Project Reconnect aimed to help refugees as they rebuild their lives in Germany by facilitating access to online education, language learning, culture learning, and information resources. To achieve this goal, NetHope with Google.org support, made 25,000 Chromebooks available for organizations serving the refugee community in Germany. By the end of the project, which was ultimately extended to August 2017, NetHope granted 30 to 3,500 Chromebook devices to 50 organizations. 24,952 Chromebooks were distributed. 48 devices continue to be used for testing and support by the Project Reconnect team, Google engineering team, and partners. Grantee organizations made Chromebooks accessible at over 1,000 locations across all 16 federal states of Germany, e.g., in education facilities, public libraries, and refugee homes.

The logistical and programmatic effort to launch and manage a grants program of this scale and to deploy 25,000 Chromebook devices all over Germany within this timeframe was tremendous. Grantee organizations and Chromebook locations faced at times almost insurmountable barriers due to gaps in adequate connectivity options, trained personnel, refugee-relevant online content, offline Chromebook functionality, and proven programmatic guidance. Yet, over the course of the project, NetHope, grantee organizations, and participants

1 https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis-europe-middle-east
2 https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis-europe-middle-east
5 Hereafter, both groups together will be referred to as “refugees”.

Project Reconnect – Final Report
at the Chromebook locations learned many valuable lessons and gained significant capacity in the deployment of technology, and its programmatic integration with refugee work.

A great enabler was the versatility with which Chromebooks enriched the grantee organizations’ refugee work – in education, information, counselling, communication, and leisure activities; as well as provided specific opportunities for women and children, especially unaccompanied minors. As an emergency intervention, Project Reconnect was neither designed as an education project, nor an employment intervention for refugees. Instead, the project aimed to help refugees as they rebuild their lives by facilitating access to online education and information resources. There is no doubt that Project Reconnect has been able to achieve just that – for thousands of refugees across Germany.

This is the final report for Project Reconnect, written by RTI International and based on data from 50 grantee organization reports, 320 Chromebook location managers, and 304 refugee Chromebook users, highlighting achievements and lessons learned from the program.
Project Background and Changing Refugee Context

“I am an Iraqi refugee, in Germany for two years and seven months now. During this time, I was in different cities and I learned German in different institutions. In addition, I regularly joined the study group [using Chromebooks at the library] in Bogenhausen. With this I was able to complete my language tests (B1) and the integration course. I have also done the B2 exam, but have no results yet. The language training at the computer was very useful for me, especially the program from Deutsche Welle and the practice exams from Deutsche Welle and Goethe-Institut.” – Samer, refugee Chromebook user

Samer⁶ is one of thousands of refugees who have been supported throughout 2016-2017 by Project Reconnect. Project Reconnect was conceived and funded by Google.org with the aim of helping refugees and asylum seekers⁷ in Germany gain access to critical information and education resources online. The project started in October 2015 with a small pilot initiated by the Google Engineering Center in Munich, in direct response to what the team saw happening at their door steps with thousands of refugees arriving daily.

Following the pilot initiative, the project was quickly scaled. Project Reconnect was managed and implemented by NetHope, a nonprofit organization with a mission of mobilizing public and private partnerships to deliver information technology solutions to the developing world. With a grant from Google.org, NetHope provided 25,000 managed Chromebooks to nonprofit organizations supporting refugees in Germany. To assist with monitoring and evaluation of the grants program, NetHope engaged nonprofit research institute RTI International. RTI provided advice in the design of the monitoring framework and data collection approaches, and conducted data analysis and reporting for the project’s main progress reports.

Over the course of the project, 50 grantee organizations received Chromebooks in support of education and integration activities with refugees. NetHope distributed nearly 25,000 Chromebooks which have been deployed in over 1,000 locations across Germany by these grantee organizations. Project Reconnect was initiated at the height of the refugee influx to Germany in October/November 2015. During that time, nearly 200,000 new refugees arrived in Germany each month. However, due to the European Union-Turkey Agreement and closure of the Balkan routes in March 2016, the number of newly arriving refugees to Germany drastically decreased to an average of 15,000 per month. Exhibit 1 illustrates these changes in new refugee registrations per month throughout the timeframe of the project.

⁶ Name changed.
⁷ Hereafter, both groups together will be referred to as “refugees”.
The reduction in new refugee registrations significantly impacted the nature of Project Reconnect. What was originally conceived as an emergency response to help support thousands of refugees arriving in Germany every day, changed to become a longer-term programmatic response to – at times individual – refugees’ needs. Many grantee organizations initially planned to deploy large numbers of Chromebooks in just a few locations. Notably these sites included large-scale welcome centers hosting thousands of refugees, in which the Chromebooks were to provide critical access to communication and information resources in the initial days and weeks of a refugee’s arrival. The dramatic decrease in new refugee registrations, however, led to a decommissioning of many of these welcome centers and the resettlement of refugees in smaller group homes or individual family apartments in communities across Germany. Grantee organizations had to organize new Chromebook locations and conceive of different models of support to address refugee needs as these individuals were starting to rebuild their lives in their new communities.

As a result, Project Reconnect became a grants program supporting hundreds and thousands of different initiatives across the entire country. The program provided a diverse and rich testbed...
on where and how Chromebooks may be used in support of refugee populations in Germany, as will be described in this report.

This is the final report of Project Reconnect. The report provides a summative description of the main achievements of the initiative, insight into refugees’ usage of Chromebooks and their opinions on the use of Chromebook devices for their personal goals, as well as key lessons learned and recommendations that may inform future such efforts.

**Data Collection Methodology**

The data for this report was collected throughout March - June 2017 using multiple methods. Information came from NetHope project staff, grantee organization project managers, Chromebook location managers, trainers, and other grantee team members, as well as directly from refugee users. In addition to the data collected between March - June 2017, this report refers to data collected in October 2016 for the Project Reconnect midterm report, and January 2017, for a project update. The October 2016 data included information from 27 grantee organizations, 170 location managers, and 64 refugee Chromebook users. The January 2017 data included information from 256 location manager surveys. The methods of data collection were the same for these earlier data collections as outlined below for the one for March - June 2017.

For this final report, RTI staff interviewed three NetHope project staff about their experiences and lessons learned from the project. All other data was collected by NetHope and its Project Reconnect team.

All 50 grantee organizations submitted detailed final reports via Google forms, email, or phone to NetHope. In these reports, grantee organizations shared their achievements in making Chromebooks available to refugees, descriptions of their implementation approaches and services, as well as challenges and lessons learned.

In addition, 320 Chromebook location managers responded to an online survey via Google forms. Location managers provided insight into the estimated number of refugees they serve, the activities they offer, the challenges they face in the implementation of Chromebook activities, the lessons they learned, and their achievements and success stories to date. Participation in the location survey was voluntary. The sample of participating Chromebook location managers was not statistically representative of the larger population of Chromebooks location managers.

Data on Chromebook user demographics, user adoption, and satisfaction was derived from 305 refugee users, who either responded to an online survey, via the Qualtrics Site Intercept system, or an in-person survey request at select Chromebook locations. Refugees submitting

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9 Qualtrics, USA kindly donated an unlimited usage license to its site intercept system, as well as the Qualtrics tablet-based survey platform to Project Reconnect for the duration of the grants program.
their responses via the Qualtrics Site Intercept system were presented with a pop-up request asking for their anonymous participation in the survey, while they were using Chromebooks at several grantee locations. In addition, responses from 104 of the Chromebook users were also collected by NetHope staff at accessible grantee locations in 6 out of the 16 federal states of Germany. In this case, the survey was provided to users either online via a Chromebook or offline on a tablet device. The data collection process included introduction of the NetHope data collector, clarification of the survey’s purpose, and gaining of consent. Participants then individually completed the survey on the Chromebook or tablet, maintaining the nature of the survey as a self-reporting instrument. All refugee data was collected anonymously.

Respondents were able to chose one of five languages in which to complete the survey: Arabic, English, Farsi, French, or German. In total, 51% of respondents responded to the survey in German, 26% in Arabic, 16% in English, 7% in Farsi, and none of the respondents used the French version. The survey contained 38 items; however, the actual number of items presented to respondents was based on their answer selections. Several items from the October 2016 survey were removed to better align with the needs of the final report. Of the remaining items, 92% of the items were identical to those already used for the first round of surveys in late 2016. Three new questions were added to the 2017 survey. The final online user survey took respondents an average of 6.5 minutes to complete. The sample of participating Chromebook users was not statistically representative of the larger population of Chromebooks users, or of the refugee population in Germany. Given the self-reporting nature of the survey, refugee users who may be less confident readers, or those with limited confidence or ability to speak any of the five survey languages, may have been underrepresented.

All data from the various data sources were cleaned and analyzed by an RTI statistician using Stata statistical software. Analysis was mostly descriptive. The present document, reporting results from the data collection and analysis, was written by the RTI project team.

Project Reconnect Grantees and their Perspectives

Exhibit 2 provides a list of all 50 Project Reconnect grantee organizations, the date of their grant agreement with NetHope, and the total number of Chromebooks they received. As can be seen below, NetHope granted between 30 and 3,500 Chromebook devices per grantee organization. Over half of grantee organizations (54%) received their grant agreements in the first half of 2016, over a third (32%) in the second half of 2016, and a total of 7 grantee organizations (14%) joined Project Reconnect in 2017. All but three of the participating organizations have had experience working with refugees before joining Project Reconnect. Half of the organizations have had experience working with computers in refugee work, 38% of the organization did not yet have such experience. Respondents of 6 (12%) of the grantee organizations were not sure about their organization’s experience in this regard.
### Exhibit 2: List of Project Reconnect grantees by June 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Org</th>
<th>Date of grant agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0-250 Chromebooks Granted</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADIA Erding, Zukunftsmacher gUG</td>
<td>4/3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Brandenburgische Auslandsgesellschaft e.V.</td>
<td>11/7/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritasverband Moers-Xanten e.V.</td>
<td>6/22/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConVivendum gGmbH</td>
<td>5/4/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRK Landesgeschäftsstelle</td>
<td>8/12/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelisches Bildungszentrum im Haus Birkach</td>
<td>11/23/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flüchtlingshilfe Karlsruhe- Menschenrechtszentrum Karlsruhe e.V.</td>
<td>5/20/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Förderverein GMS in der Taus</td>
<td>4/27/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future4talents gUG</td>
<td>5/30/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grone-Bildungszentren Mecklenburg-Vorpommern gGmbH</td>
<td>6/24/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haus der Wirtschaft Bildungszentrum gGmbH</td>
<td>4/25/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBZ-Siegburg</td>
<td>3/21/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immental Stiftung</td>
<td>4/14/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joblinge e.V.</td>
<td>5/4/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jugendhilfe Oberbayern, Geschäftsstelle München</td>
<td>5/2/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreisjugendring Rems-Murr e.V.</td>
<td>11/23/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannheim sagt Ja! e.V.</td>
<td>11/4/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Schleswig-Holstein e.V.</td>
<td>6/3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS-Kinderdorf e.V.</td>
<td>5/3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save the Children e.V.</td>
<td>6/29/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tür an Tür gGmbH, Integreat</td>
<td>5/3/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>251-1,000 Chromebooks Granted</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbeiterwohlfahrt Kreisverband Berlin-Mitte</td>
<td>11/23/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begegnungs-und Fortbildungszentrum muslimischer Frauen (BFmF) e.V.</td>
<td>12/2/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bir inform e.V.</td>
<td>6/14/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden für Alle e.V.</td>
<td>12/8/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRK Landesverband Rheinland-Pfalz e.V.</td>
<td>6/1/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRK-Landesverband Baden-Württemberg e.V.</td>
<td>6/3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRK-Landesverband Westfalen-Lippe e.V.</td>
<td>7/1/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRK Kreisverband Aachen</td>
<td>10/19/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freifunk im Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis e.V.</td>
<td>4/20/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grone-Schulen Niedersachsen gGmbH</td>
<td>6/17/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hephata Hessisches Diakoniezentrum e.V.</td>
<td>11/18/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Name of Org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Org</th>
<th>Date of grant agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V.</td>
<td>5/17/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiron Open Higher Education gGmbH</td>
<td>4/19/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oskar Kämmer Schule gemeinnützige Bildungsgesellschaft mbH</td>
<td>11/3/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees Emancipation</td>
<td>4/15/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees Online e.V.</td>
<td>6/26/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serlo Education e.V.</td>
<td>5/11/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS-Kinderdorf Austria</td>
<td>5/12/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiftung Sozialpädagogisches Institut Berlin »Walter May«</td>
<td>5/17/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeachCom Edutainment gGmbH</td>
<td>11/2/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS-Landesverband der Volkshochschulen Niedersachsens e.V.</td>
<td>3/24/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS-Verband der Volkshochschulen des Saarlandes e.V.</td>
<td>3/15/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland e.V.</td>
<td>3/12/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bobeq gGmbH, AWO Unterbezirk Ruhr-Mitte</td>
<td>11/3/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1,001-3,500 Chromebooks Granted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Org</th>
<th>Date of grant agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asylplus e.V.</td>
<td>3/9/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationaler Bund (IB) Freier Träger der Jugend-, Sozial- und Bildungsarbeit e.V.</td>
<td>5/27/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolpingwerk Deutschland gGmbH/ Kolping-Netzwerk für Geflüchtete</td>
<td>11/23/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V.</td>
<td>9/8/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS-Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e. V.</td>
<td>4/5/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Progress in making Chromebooks accessible to refugees

Exhibit 3 visualizes the progress with which NetHope distributed Chromebooks to grantee organizations, and grantee organizations’ progress in enrolling Chromebooks and subsequently making them accessible to refugee users at their locations. NetHope distribution of Chromebooks was particularly strong in the months of April through June 2016 (ca. 3,000 Chromebooks per month), as well as between October and December 2016 (nearly 3,500 Chromebooks per month). Grantee organizations enrolled at a slower rate, with a maximum average of 2,200 Chromebooks per

“Chromebooks provided opportunities for activities that would not have been possible without this project. In this way, they really provided added value to our work with refugees.”

– Grantee organization

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10 Only two data points were available for the number of Chromebooks that grantee organizations reported having made accessible, from October 2016, and from June 2017. The other data points to map this progress were inferred from the average ratio of enrolled to accessible Chromebooks.
month for the timeframes between June - August 2016 and October - December 2016. It can be expected that the gaps between these three processes will continue to reduce somewhat in the coming months, as some of the newer organizations continue to make their devices accessible.

Not visible in the exhibit are the variations in progress between organizations, or the fact that three organizations are planning to return some of the Chromebooks they received. Due to lower numbers of refugees served, the closing of facilities, changes in personnel, and lack of financial resources, these organizations are not able to deploy the devices. Furthermore, not all Chromebooks made accessible are being used, as will be discussed in other parts of this report.

**Exhibit 3. Number of Chromebooks that have been made accessible to date (n = 25,000)**
Perceived value of Chromebooks for organizations’ work with refugees

“For many of our locations it had been eye opening to realize that Chromebooks are not only useful for word processing and writing of job applications, but are also easily used by refugees to access relevant online resources, e.g. via the Project Reconnect Portal. I am grateful for the difficulties we have faced, and the experiences we have had. These have given us, internally, awareness about the use of computers with refugees and unaccompanied minors.” – Grantee organization

Concerning grantee organizations’ perceived value of Chromebooks for their work with refugees, nearly two thirds of the grantee organizations reported that their expectations were overall met or even perfectly met, as can be seen in Exhibit 4. Only one grantee organization reported that their expectations were not met at all. The organization indicated, however, that this was an organizational challenge and not a challenge with the project or Chromebook devices.

Those organizations whose expectations were perfectly met commented on the versatility with which Chromebooks can be used in their refugee work – for education, information, counselling, communication, and leisure activities with refugee users. Several grantees also noted how the devices appeared to attract and motivate particularly younger populations they worked with, including unaccompanied minors. Grantee organizations offering language courses highlighted how Chromebooks enriched their language classes and facilitated differentiated instruction for diverse learners. Several grantee organizations indicated that their trainers reported noticeable improvements in language acquisition among those learners who also used online language resources accessible with the Chromebooks. Grantee organizations further remarked how the Chromebooks helped provide critical media competence among refugee users.

Exhibit 4: Expectations for the value Chromebooks provide for refugee work, as reported by grantee organizations (n = 50)
At the location level, where the Chromebook programs are implemented directly with refugees, experiences were more diverse but remained overall positive. As can be seen in Exhibit 5, 61% of location managers reported that their expectations for the value Chromebooks provide for refugee work were overall, or even perfectly, met. Of the 320 reporting locations, only 21 (7%) locations felt that their expectations for the value Chromebooks provide for refugee work were not at all met. Most of these locations indicated that their main challenges were availability of sufficiently strong Internet to use the devices, and — somewhat related — the absence of sufficient offline functionality of the Chromebooks. Locations also reported a lack of demand for working with Chromebooks among their refugee population — in part because of existing personal ownership of smartphone devices, lack of experience with computers and Internet, as well as literacy and language barriers.

**Exhibit 5: Expectations for the value Chromebooks provide for refugee work, as reported by location managers in January 2017 (n = 232) and June 2017 (n = 320)**

Comparing results from location managers participating in the survey in January 2017 to those from June 2017, indicates a notable improvement in the degree to which location managers’ expectations for the Chromebooks were met. It is important to note, however, that the sample

“Participants were able to use Chromebooks to comprehensively prepare for exams, explore vocational training opportunities, and search for jobs. This was a great help for them.” — Location manager
may have included responses from different location managers in the January and June 2017 data collections as participation was voluntary. In total, nearly 19% (a 10% increase over the January numbers) of the participating organizations reported that their expectations for the value of Chromebooks in refugee work have been perfectly met, another 42% reported that their expectations were overall met – a 15% increase over January numbers.

Location managers whose expectations were met highlighted the ease of use and high mobility of the devices. They also noted how the devices provided access to online resources that facilitated differentiation in language classes, supported the acquisition of self-directed learning skills, promoted media competence, and enabled refugees to communicate with their families.

**Highlights and lessons learned in the implementation of Project Reconnect**

Location managers and grantee organizations reported many highlights and eye-opening moments from their engagement with Project Reconnect.

“My personal highlights were the success stories from Chromebook locations, the collaboration with NetHope, and especially the meetings with other project participants.” – Grantee organization

Project participants remarked on the positive feedback they received from refugee users in providing access to Chromebooks at their locations. They specifically noted the gratitude expressed by many of the refugee users and how an unsolicited “Thank you!” is what often made their day.

Several grantee organizations mentioned that they heard of specific examples of refugee users for whom access to the Internet via the Chromebooks allowed them to find a family member or stay in critical contact with family back home. As one respondent noted, “a highlight for us was the realization how important information and communication is for people – especially refugees; and how easily a Chromebook and Internet connectivity can help here.”

Kreisjugendring Rems-Murr: In a small shop refugees can borrow Chromebooks to find housing and learn German

The "Bazärle" in Weisssach im Tal near Stuttgart received Project Reconnect Chromebooks through the nonprofit Kreisjugendring Rems-Murr. In the little, cramped store, refugees can find clothes or food, take stitching or childcare courses – and borrow laptops. Martina Unold, who runs the “Bazärle”, decided to let refugees borrow the devices when it became clear that the store would not be able to provide Internet access. The laptops are used to learn German, find housing or to research and fill out forms from German authorities. “The laptop is worth gold for researching”, says Martina Unold.
When asked about what could potentially have contributed to more intensive Chromebook use at their location (Exhibit 6), location managers selected offline functionality as the factor that in their opinion would have contributed most to a more intensive use of the Chromebooks by refugees (44% of responses). Furthermore, location managers noted that better, faster, cheaper, and more stable Internet access would be critical for more intensive use (42% of responses).

Other drivers for more intensive Chromebook use selected by location managers included content for targeted employment preparation (29% of responses); the possibility for location managers to make changes in the Chromebook settings locally (this functionality was disabled by some grantee organizations; 23% of responses); Android apps that are functional on the Project Reconnect Chromebooks (21% of responses); as well as funds for personnel expenses (15% of responses).

“To me, there is no question about the usefulness of the Chromebooks for communication, information, and education. It was to be expected that such a tool will be embraced in varied ways; and facilitating acquisition of media competence is not a simple task. What we were not prepared for were the external factors that complicated our efforts. However, this does not diminish the value Chromebooks provide to our work.”
– Grantee organization

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**Gemeinschaftsschule in der Taus: Age appropriate language portals help children in the refugee class learn German**

The students at ‘Gemeinschaftsschule in der Taus’, a school in Backnang with kids age 6 to 16, come from 27 different countries, including Pakistan, Tunisia and Kazakhstan. In addition, the school hosts two classes dedicated to preparing refugee students to participate in regular classes. Many of the students are from Syria. The refugee classes bring together kids from different age groups. Their knowledge of German varies. That’s why Matthias Mayer, the German language teacher for the refugee classes, decided to use multiple online language portals, so every student can learn at the level at which s/he actually is and in an age-appropriate approach. The younger children play the game “Lern Deutsch – Stadt der Wörter” of the Goethe-Institut, which guides them through everyday situations and in which the children can play against each other. Older students use the language course of Deutsch-Akademie. There they find tasks from the beginner level up to approaching fluency in German.
**Exhibit 6: Factors that would have most contributed to the Chromebooks being used more intensively, as reported by location managers (n = 231; multiple responses allowed)**

The factors noted by location managers mirrored many of the factors grantee organizations mentioned in their final reports. Internet connectivity was the number one challenge cited by grantee organizations. Over 60% of grantee organizations indicated that better, faster, cheaper, and more accessible Internet would facilitate more intensive use of the Chromebooks. Grantee organizations also highlighted the need for personnel funding (40% of responses); Android apps that are functional on the Chromebook devices (36% of responses); and a curriculum on the use
of Chromebooks in German lessons (20% of responses). As one grantee organization remarked, “communication, information, and media competence are central components of a global society, in addition to an individual need – non-regarding country of origin. For this reason, I am convinced that with this project, Google.org and Project Reconnect took a step in the right direction. The fact that our project could not be implemented as originally planned is entirely due to external reasons (political decisions, border closings, etc.).”

Several grantee organizations indicated they were not entirely prepared for refugees’ actual abilities and needs. Some overestimated their users’ technical skills, their ability to learn how to use a device like a Chromebook, and their ability for independent learning. As one grantee organization noted, “refugee minors are largely digital illiterates. Just because one can use WhatsApp does not mean one can find an internship on an online internship portal, write a job application, or find correct and appropriately sourced facts and information for a presentation. While in theory approaches to provide such media competence can be developed, in the course of actual implementation this requires highly motivated staff and more time than is usually available. We learned to follow an approach of ‘small steps’, which has helped us register small successes, even under these circumstances.”

### Chromebook Locations and Services Offered

As previously outlined, the changes in project context led to changes in the overall nature of the grants program. Initially, NetHope anticipated giving large Chromebook allocations to 15-20 grantee organizations, who in turn, would deploy the Chromebooks across Germany and centrally manage all coordination and training with the sites. Ultimately, the grant program served 50 grantee organizations and about 1,200 locations across Germany.
Exhibit 7 highlights the number of Chromebooks deployed by state (as of June 2017), mapped against the number of asylum applications made in each state between January 2015 and May 2017. Higher numbers of Chromebooks can generally be found in federal states with a larger number of asylum applications.

*Exhibit 7: Chromebook deployment as of June 2017 and asylum applications January 2015 - May 2017, by state*
Types of Chromebook locations

The tremendous number of Chromebook locations resulted in great diversity in the types of locations at which Chromebooks were deployed. Exhibit 8 indicates the type of Chromebook locations based on data reported by the 320 participating location managers. The exhibit also shows the responses from the October 2016 data collection on this same question. While these data are likely not from the same, exact locations, they still may indicate trends in the types of locations where Chromebooks are deployed. Illustratively, there was a notable increase in the proportion of Chromebook locations reported by location managers to be in refugee group homes, guidance and information centers, as well as other locations. Among the “other” location types noted by location managers were facilities for children, business/employment preparation locations, as well as multi-generational homes with a specific focus on integrating refugees with younger and elderly populations.

At the same time, the proportion of Chromebook locations reported to be at public libraries, community centers, welcome centers, or youth migration facilities appears to have dropped. Reports from NetHope site visits and grantee interviews, however, indicate that public libraries continue to be popular and highly frequented Chromebook location sites.

The possible proportional decline in Chromebook locations at welcome centers does not come as a surprise. Hand-in-hand with the overall decrease in new refugees arriving in Germany, many welcome centers – often rapidly set up at the height of the refugee influx – have successively been decommissioned. Illustratively, one grantee organization that originally served 600 sites now only serves 100.

ADIA Erding/Zukunftsmacher: Young refugees meet senior citizens, share their experiences, and explore the Internet together

Project Learning4Integration connects twelve young refugees with twelve senior citizens. Through conversations, games, and other joint activities, they get to know each other and build respect, trust and understanding, the basis for a good relationship. The young refugees, age 12 and older, already communicate well in German. They spent time to prepare for the event. On the Chromebooks from Project Reconnect the students show their own personal journey from their home country to Germany. From the older participants they learn about growing up in Germany in the last century. The project focuses on strengthening self-esteem and expanding social and media competencies. Everybody has fun. The event helps some of the elderly to overcome their reservation against digital media.

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**Exhibit 8: Chromebook location types, as reported by location managers (October 2016, n = 170; June 2017, n = 320)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location type</th>
<th>Oct-16</th>
<th>Jun-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education facility</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee group home</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance/info center</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth center</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church facility</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome center</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community center</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public library</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth migration facilities</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In-person services offered at Chromebook locations**

The trend to more diverse and varied location types seems to underscore the changing nature of Project Reconnect. Responses from grantee organizations indicated that nearly 50% of grantees changed or expanded their program with additional activities and services since the start of Project Reconnect. Two grantee organizations reported having largely suspended Chromebook activities due to dramatic changes in context (reduction in newly arriving refugees, decommissioning of welcome centers, decrease in volunteers, etc.). Other grantee organizations observed an increase in more personalized and differentiated programs, rather than larger-scale deployments and single-purpose activities or services (e.g. just German language training). This trend seems to also include some grantee organizations loaning Chromebooks to individual refugee users for a certain amount of time, e.g. in preparation for German language exams.

"We provided additional offline activities, increased distribution to individuals, and started an initiative to hand over devices to individuals – with the overall aim to extract our organization entirely from the program." – Grantee organization

Exhibit 9 shows the in-person services offered at Chromebook locations as reported by location managers from the June 2017 and October 2016 data collection. Responses differ markedly for
the two periods; for example, in-person language classes were by June 2017 offered by 81% of
the locations participating in the survey, compared to 68% of participating locations reporting
such services in October 2016. Similarly, location managers’ responses indicated a potential
increase in the proportion of locations offering employment services. Most notable is the
proportion of “other” services location managers reported are being offered at their location
(from 4% in October 2016, to over 61% of locations participating in the June 2017 data
collection offering services other than those listed in Exhibit 9). This further indicates a trend to
more diversified programs and services provided at Chromebook locations.

Exhibit 9: In-person services offered at Chromebook locations, as reported by location
managers (October 2016, n = 170; June 2017, n = 320; multiple responses allowed)

![In-person services offered by Chromebook locations]

Over the course of the project, the type of personnel engaged by grantees in support of their
programs shifted. Exhibit 10 illustrates responses from the location managers participating in
the June 2017 data collection compared to responses from location managers during the
October 2016 data collection on the type of personnel supporting Chromebook activities. There
seems to have been a notable decrease in the proportion of locations that report engaging
volunteers and refugee volunteers in their activities. However, the proportion of locations
reporting to engage paid organization staff in the program has increased. These trends seem to
indicate an institutionalization of Chromebook programs, and a shift away from a dependency
on volunteers.
Exhibit 10: Types of personnel that support Chromebook locations, as reported by location managers (October 2016, n = 170; June 2017, n = 320; multiple responses allowed)

Chromebook usage at locations

The intensity of Chromebook usage, that is, the average number of refugee users per active Chromebook per day at Chromebook locations, averaged at the near 1:1 ratio (0.9) usage intensity that was also reported in the October 2016 data. In the June 2017 data collection, nearly 70% of locations reported having 20 or fewer Chromebooks accessible to refugee users at their locations. The same proportion of locations reported welcoming on average 10 or fewer refugee users per day.

*DRK Westfalen-Lippe: Diverse Chromebook use in a youth care center*

The Chromebooks, which were sponsored as part of “Project Reconnect,” found a good use in a youth care center for unaccompanied minors, in which up to 30 young people from different cultures meet and shape their everyday life. The Chromebooks are used regularly in German language classes. With the Chromebooks, the German lessons are more attractive and varied. Various online pages are used to improve the German language. “Only the possibility to install programs apart from the Chrome Apps, in order to work with the devices offline, would have made the work even more efficient,” says the local coordinator. In addition to the use in German lessons, the devices were used in a variety of leisure activities, like recording the results of a tournament, watching videos, or doing presentations.
An examination of visitation logs shared by some of the location managers illustrates a typical day in a Chromebook location around Germany.

*It is 4:30 pm at the Malteser Hilfsdienst headquarter in Frankenthal, in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany. The beginner’s computer course starts. Twelve male refugees, arrive. They are between 20-34 years of age. Like every week for the past six weeks, they are each going to use a Chromebook to learn basic tasks like using a German keyboard, creating and editing documents with Google Docs, and doing online research assisted by a teacher. They stay for two hours, for the duration of the course, and work with their teacher and the Chromebooks. Once the class is over, they return the Chromebooks to their teacher and help her carry them to her car so she can bring them to the weekly Internet Café in one of the biggest refugee accommodations in the area the next day. As usual the Internet Café is well frequented by young male refugees who gladly take the opportunity to use the Chromebooks and the assistance to look for flats and jobs, to practice German with online language-trainers, etc. The teacher has quite a lot to do to help write everybody’s job applications, arrange viewing appointments for flats, and explain German grammar at the same time. But it’s not all work: everybody keeps chatting and laughing with each other, sharing coffee and snacks, as well as showing videos of famous singers, national dishes, etc. in their countries.*
Around Cologne, federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Chromebook location in Grevensbroich is operated by the Kolping Bildungswerk. The location provides Chromebooks for self-study and research. Over the course of the afternoon and evening, a total of eight refugees arrive and check out one of the Chromebooks for independent work. There is one person in the room, providing supervision and support as needed. The four women and four men are between 16 and 44 years of age. Each of them has already been to the location several times. For the sixteen-year-old, it’s his 6th time there. The refugees stay between 1-2.5 hours at the location. A 17-year-old male Chromebook user spends most of his afternoon there, from 3-7:30 p.m.

It is 5 p.m. Kids are already waiting outside the door to the Internet Café at the ASB refugee home in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. The former city hall currently hosts 720 refugees; in 2016 up to 1150 were living here. Ali lives in the refugee home and volunteers to manage the Internet Café. Four times a week he opens the Internet Café from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sometimes he doesn’t make it on time, because he has to run errands or visit a government agency for his asylum application. Then the Internet Café remains closed. Kids and other Internet Café visitors will return the next day. When Ali opens the door, four kids, ages 8 to 12, swarm in right away. From the courtyard others see that the Internet Café is open and five more kids come in within the first 15 minutes after opening. The five boys and four girls have been here many times before. They take a seat at the Chromebooks, start them, and open their favorite sites: a music site, online games for girls, YouTube videos, or online research for school. While the Internet Café is open, two teenagers stroll in and a total of 11 adults come in for 30 minutes to an hour (nine men and two women); all but one have been here before, multiple times. They spread out across the two rooms and 20 Chromebooks that form the Internet Café. Two young men sit together at one laptop and fill out a webform. One of them is here for the first time. Others search information, check the news from their home countries, study German for a while with YouTube bloggers, or take an online course. The bandwidth is low. The users are used to waiting a long time for a page to load or video to continue. They bridge the time with conversations across tables. Ali points out educational pages to the kids, helps with search questions, and reminds the kids to keep their voices down when they get too excited.

The depth of engagement between grantee organizations and the locations that deploy Chromebooks varies greatly. When queried about how they support locations that received Chromebooks, the majority of grantee organizations indicated that they try to help their locations use the Chromebooks more intensively if there is low usage (54% of responses); some also re-distribute Chromebooks to other locations if there is low usage, and if necessary (48% of
responses). Other grantee organizations do not monitor actual Chromebook usage in their locations (14% of responses); or even if they do, they do not directly intervene or further engage with those locations (28% of responses).

Those organizations that do try to help locations intensify the usage of the Chromebooks reported that they try to engage in conversation with the locations to better understand what may be obstacles to more intensive use. Grantee organizations also help locations by suggesting different usage models and ideas for initiatives. Several grantee organizations commented that regular communication with the locations is a key strategy to promote engagement and commitment to the program. If Internet is the challenge, grantee organizations also remarked that they make efforts towards resolving that issue with their locations by suggesting alternative access models, or providing technical support. One grantee organization described using refugees themselves as multipliers and trainers to engage and support new refugee users at Chromebook locations.

**Estimated number of users reached**

To establish a sense of overall reach of the program, Exhibit 12 illustrates an estimation of the number of individual refugee users who benefited from the program. The model is based on (a) console data accessible to NetHope on the number of Chromebooks active in a 7-day timeframe; (b) estimates reported by location managers of the average number of users per Chromebook per week; (c) actual Chromebook distribution and enrollment rates over time, and (d) data from the user surveys that provided estimated numbers of individual (new) users. Many of the data points and multipliers in this model are estimates, thus the number of individual users reached and usage sessions completed should be considered indicative only. As can be seen in the exhibit, it is estimated that Project Reconnect will have reached over 300,000 individual users by July 31, 2017.

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11 This number is adjusted to account for Chromebooks distributed, about 14% of the total, to organizations for which NetHope does not have access to their console data. The adjustment was done by applying the calculated proportion of active versus enrolled Chromebooks obtained through the accessible console data for a given date, to the (known) number of enrolled Chromebooks with these additional organizations on that same date, and adding the result to the console-based number.

12 The average number of users per week per Chromebook, weighted to conservatively reduce the effect of relatively large responding locations, is based on data collected from Project Reconnect location surveys. This number is set in the model at 3.7 through January 2017, based on results of the November-December 2016 survey; changed to 3.5 as of January 25, 2017 based on results of the January-February 2017 survey, and to 2.7 from May 31, 2017 forward based on results of the May-June 2017 survey.

13 The proportion of enrolled Chromebooks that are active in a given week is estimated from weekly console information through Jan 12, 2017, then gradually moved to 15.6% as of June 30, 2017, based on average of observed console values for the period July 4-17, 2017 (July 1-14, 2017 for Asylplus).

14 The proportion of new (unique) users each day is held at 50% as reported in user surveys through January 12, 2016, then gradually increased to 73% at June 30, 2017, as reported in June 2017 user surveys.
Project Reconnect Chromebook Users

At the heart of Project Reconnect is the objective to help refugees gain access to critical information and education resources online. Thus, the feedback and recommendations from refugee Chromebook users is essential to examine and key in considering the overall success of the program. This section provides insight into the background, goals, challenges, and dreams of 305 refugee Chromebook users who participated in the June 2017 survey.

Demographics of Chromebook users

Most of the participating Chromebook users were between 20-29 years of age (39%), with an overall age span of under 15 years of age (10%) to 60 years or older (2%). Just over 30% of respondents were female. Concerning their country of citizenship, most respondents indicated citizenship from Syria (25%), followed by Afghanistan (12%), Iraq (10%), Eritrea (7%), Nigeria (4%), and Iran (4%), as well as several other countries.

This demographic profile appears to be similar to that of the larger refugee population in Germany. According to German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [BAMF])¹⁵, the largest age group among persons who applied for asylum in Germany throughout 2016, was between 18-30 years of age (38%). Among the 2016


Exhibit 12. Estimated numbers of individual (new) users reached, May 2016 - July 2017
asylum applicants, 34% were women, which is a slightly higher proportion (by 4%) than among survey participants. The 2016 asylum applicants to Germany were mainly from Syria (37%; notably higher than among the survey sample), Afghanistan (18%; somewhat higher than the survey sample), Iraq (13%; slightly higher than the survey sample), Iran (4%; similar to the survey sample), Eritrea (3%; somewhat lower than the survey sample), and Nigeria (2%; slightly lower than the survey sample), as well as other countries. Thus, while the main countries of citizenship among the responding refugee Chromebook users were similar to those in the larger refugee population in Germany, the relative proportions of the various home countries within the population of refugees differ slightly to those in the sample.

Concerning responding Chromebook users’ highest level of education, responses indicated a wide range of educational backgrounds, as shown in Exhibit 13. On the one hand, 16% of respondents stated that they have completed a university education while a similar percentage (15%) indicated not having had any formal education at all. Almost 30% of participating Chromebook users reported having completed secondary education as their highest level of education.

Exhibit 13. Highest level of education completed, as reported by Chromebook users (n = 227)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of education completed</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University education</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and vocational education or training</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional training</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This educational profile of responding Chromebook users appears to be similar to what is known of the larger refugee population in Germany. According to a recent study with 2,349 adult refugees\(^\text{16}\) who arrived between January 1, 2013 and January 31, 2016 in Germany and

\(^{16}\) Note that this study did not include respondents under 18 years of age, whereas there were 32% of participants aged 19 or under among the Chromebook user sample. This may lead to notable difference in the profile. No other representative study on refugees in Germany containing data on education levels seems to exist that would better match the age structure of the Project Reconnect Chromebook sample.
submitted an application for asylum\textsuperscript{17}, 13% of the responding refugees reported having completed a university degree, 22% reported having completed a secondary school equivalent (“Mittelschule”), 10% reported having completed a primary school equivalent as their highest level of education (this differs more significantly from the Chromebook users refugees, which were 20%), 6% reported having completed other professional or vocational training, and 9% reported not having completed any formal education.

These data suggest that when considering key demographics — including age, gender, and highest level of education completed — Chromebook users do not appear to differ greatly from what is known about the larger population of refugees in Germany. However, as noted earlier, it is very likely that the self-selective nature of survey participation may have favored respondents who are sufficiently competent in reading and understanding one of the survey’s five languages.

**Users’ Chromebook use and stated goals**

Among participating Chromebook users, 73% were first-time users of a Project Reconnect Chromebook device at the location they were at when taking the survey. Among those that have used a Chromebook at that location before, the majority had already done so more than 20 times (see Exhibit 14). These numbers differ greatly from those reported by the small sample of Chromebook users that participated in the October 2016 survey (n= 64). Of these, only half had reported having been first-time users at the time of the survey. Furthermore, 22% of the October participants, or nearly 13% more than in the June 2017 sample, reported having used a Chromebook already more than 20 times at the location.


“Many visitors of our learning cafes and language courses are repeat users over a longer period, and we thus do not register new users regularly.” - Grantee organization
In evaluating which goals Chromebook users choose to pursue, responses from participating Chromebook users indicated that they predominantly pursued education and training objectives (53% of responses). As Exhibit 15 illustrates, education and training are cited as the main goal, followed by doing research (19% of responses; including researching information on health, housing, refugee status, etc.) or other activities (also 19% of responses). Such other activities included entertainment, casual browsing, using Facebook, watching videos, etc. Approximately 18% of responses were communication-related objectives, and 17% of respondents specified employment as a personal goal.
Exhibit 16 compares goals and objectives of first-time Chromebook users with return users, highlighting that goals differ only slightly between those two groups. Both groups appear to be primarily focused on education and training goals.

**Exhibit 16: Comparison of Chromebook use goals for first-time users and return users (n = 259)**

![Bar chart showing goals by user group - return users compared to first-time users](chart.png)

Regarding users’ general exposure to technology, Exhibit 17 illustrates what technology respondents indicated they own now that they are in Germany. Most relevant to note may be the proportion of Smartphone ownership among the participating Chromebook users. Ownership of a Smartphone was noted as a consideration by grantee organizations and location managers who reasoned that Smartphone ownership may stifle demand for Chromebook use, although less practical for creating resumes or taking language courses.

Additional analysis indicated that respondents who own a Smartphone device did not differ significantly in the goals they pursue when using a Chromebook.

Volkshochschule Speyer: A German language course makes a girl from Syria smile again

When 18-year-old Rama from Aleppo enters the classroom for the first time together with her parents, her eyes are directed downwards and she stays close to her parents. Rama learns easily and continues to study with her smartphone outside the classroom. When the Chromebooks are introduced in class, Rama is visibly having fun. She learns easily with the Chromebook and the online content, and she soon takes care of slower students. Especially to the older Syrian women, she is a great help. Rama has become more confident and she laughs again!

“I wished I could leave a deposit and loan a Chromebook, so I could also use it at home.” - Refugee Chromebook user
Exhibit 17: Technology owned, as reported by Chromebook users (n = 229; multiple responses allowed)

Perceived value of Chromebooks to achieve personal goals

A key metric to describe the value that Chromebooks provided for Project Reconnect Chromebook users is illustrated in Exhibit 18. Responding users attributed significant importance of the Chromebooks in achieving their personal goals. Over 86% of respondents reported that the Chromebooks contributed to achieving their personal goals in education, employment, research, or communication.

Exhibit 18: Importance of Chromebook for achievement of personal goal across objectives, as reported by Chromebook users (n= 259)
When queried about the importance of the Chromebook by type of objective, over a third of the respondents (32%) indicated that they would not have been able to achieve their education and training goals without the Chromebook, as shown in Exhibit 19. Similarly, 35% of respondents remarked that they would not have been able to achieve their employment goals without the Chromebook. Only 9% of respondents indicated that the Chromebooks had not been important for achieving their employment goals. Over 85% of respondents indicated that the Chromebook had been at least somewhat important, if not extremely important, to them for communication and research. Thus, in achieving their personal goals, Chromebook users attribute a high level of importance to the Chromebooks and the resources they provide access to.

“My biggest dream for me and my family is to be granted asylum, finally being able to sleep again, find work, further improve my German, and be able to live in peace and quiet.” – Refugee Chromebook user

Exhibit 19: Importance of Chromebooks for achievement of personal goal by type of objective, as reported by Chromebook users (education n = 191; employment n = 57; communication n = 64; research n = 64)

NetHope Program Management and Support

As mentioned earlier, the changing nature of the context of Project Reconnect markedly increased the number of grantee organizations engaged, locations at which Chromebooks were deployed, and the diversity of programmatic activities and services provided with the help of Chromebooks.
This required NetHope to flexibly adjust its program management in response to the changing needs of grantee organizations and their locations. Over the course of the project, NetHope staff managed all contractual arrangements with each of the 50 grantee organizations; coordinated deployment of nearly 25,000 Chromebooks; provided monthly webinars and individual training sessions; set up and maintained a project website and Google group for knowledge sharing and collaboration among grantee organizations; set up a Project Reconnect portal with content relevant for refugees that many grantees chose to use as the default landing page on their Chromebooks; provided technical support to grantee organizations and many of their locations; and researched, aggregated, and shared apps and resources that might be of interest to grantee organizations and their Chromebook locations.

“In the implementation of Project Reconnect, NetHope received support from the Munich Google Engineering Center and the Google Cloud Support Hotline. The Munich team hosted Project Reconnect grantee meetings and volunteered time to build the technical capacity of the NetHope team. Google volunteers also drafted the initial version of the deployment tutorial, developed an interface to search and browse for content recommendations, and helped identify solutions for unique implementation scenarios. Lessons and updates from the technical experts were included in new documentation for grantees and users.

The NetHope team also maintained a Project Reconnect Insider area through which tutorials, handouts, and other documentation are accessible to location staff. A list of NetHope Project Reconnect support resources is available for the public at http://reconnect.nethope.org/support.

Information provided by the NetHope team about new documentation, functionality, or usage models, however, did not always reach staff members at individual locations. Based on their feedback in the location survey, 19% did not receive the Project Reconnect manual for location staff, and 24% did not receive information about the Project Reconnect Insider area. Grantee project managers often did not have the time to customize and distribute such information within their organization. Based on observations by NetHope staff, the monthly Project Reconnect Newsletter has gradually become an effective vehicle to reach these staff members directly, e.g. when new features become available for which site managers and trainers expressed a great need. By July 2017, the newsletter was being distributed to about 600 staff members and volunteers of grantee organizations, including at individual Chromebook locations.

Qualitative responses from grantee organizations in their final reports indicated that the sustained effort of the NetHope project team was noted. At least 12 grantee organizations provided unsolicited feedback on how responsive and supportive NetHope had been to their requests and in the resolution of many of the challenges they faced.
At the same time, grantee organizations also commented on unmet needs. Several grantee organizations noted that they had hoped for closer collaboration among grantees, including sharing of challenges, solutions, ideas, and content. Despite NetHope setting up a Google group for Project Reconnect grantees and hosting two community events, such collaboration only happened occasionally with a small group of individuals from grantee organizations contributing or actively using the group.

Grantee organizations also indicated a need for more programmatic guidance on the use of Chromebook devices, e.g. as part of German language classes. The NetHope team had responded to this need, already expressed earlier in the project, by preparing and sharing case studies and success stories, and inviting grantees to share their experience in webinars.

One grantee suggested re-thinking the overall process of enrolling and registering devices, as this required tremendous personnel effort and investment for which organizations were unprepared and some were barely able to muster. The lack of dedicated and paid personnel for this effort was a repeatedly noted issue by grantee organizations and location managers in qualitative feedback on the overall program.

“Chromebooks are super, but in and of themselves they don’t guarantee adoption and usage if personnel and Internet are not available as flexible resources.” — Grantee organization

“The use of Chromebooks has been very helpful. We have underestimated the initial effort to familiarize ourselves with the management console and configuration possibilities. As an association, we don’t have the manpower to draw upon several staff to coordinate, set up, prepare content, and provide training. That cost a lot of time, so that internally, we were relatively late in offering Chromebooks with our courses. We only had some 5 months now till Project Reconnect ended, which is not enough time.” — Grantee organization

In interviews, NetHope staff also mentioned that the novelty of using Chromebooks in the Project Reconnect context contributed to substantial effort to troubleshoot issues, explore different Chromebook configurations/settings, and overcome challenges. NetHope worked closely with Google experts, many of them volunteering their time, to help resolve various issues. Some problems were very specific to the use of Chromebook devices in Germany. Such challenges included access to Chromebook documentation in German, access to German and/or refugee-relevant content and apps, providing content locally on the devices, and creating user accounts while managing Chromebooks under the NetHope domain. NetHope further noted challenges related to Germany’s stringent data privacy laws and Wi-Fi-related legal liabilities.

The next section of this report discusses these issues in more detail, highlights emerging lessons learned from the grants program at large, and provides recommendations for future efforts of this kind.
Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

The data from grantee organizations’ final reports, location managers, and Chromebook users presented in earlier sections of this report highlighted the multifaceted and changing nature of Project Reconnect. Several overarching lessons and recommendations for future, similar efforts emerged from the program. These lessons are based on observations and interviews during site visits; grantee meetings; email exchanges; phone calls with both NetHope staff and grantee organization representatives; and the data from grantee organizations, location managers, and Chromebooks users.

Chromebook deployment models and success factors

Despite the diversity in locations, services, and activities in which Chromebooks have been deployed during Project Reconnect, four main models appear to have emerged:

1. deployment of Chromebooks in structured classes or courses;
2. deployment of Chromebooks, under supervision and guidance, for individual research and study;
3. deployment of Chromebooks in an Internet Café-type setting, including for study, research, and entertainment; and
4. deployment of Chromebooks on loan for individual, temporary use for language or professional training.

The boundaries between these models are not always clear-cut. Individual locations may deploy Chromebooks in more than one of these models, e.g. as part of structured classes in the early afternoon, and as an Internet Café-type facility in the evening.
Each of these deployment models requires facilities, personnel, and resources to implement and maintain. Depending on the readiness of the facility, capabilities and commitment of the personnel, and type and flexibility of the available financial and material resources, the location may or may not be successful in a) sustaining operation, and b) maintaining demand among refugee users. Feedback from locations and grantee organizations indicated that across models, there appear to be at least three main success conditions:

- Committed personnel, with confidence in the use and administration of Chromebooks, or immediate access to IT support
- Stable, strong Internet
- Relevant, online content and/or attractive accompanying programming for refugees.

“I see great potential in the use of Chromebooks, but implementation is difficult as we do not have trained personnel and little time for an additional initiative of this scope.” – Location manager

Asylplus: Noor Hakeem accelerated his language learning by using online content. Now he helps other refugees do the same.

Noor Hakeem is excited to be a dad. Just a few months ago, he and his wife Sumaya welcomed their first child. Shortly thereafter, Noor was officially granted asylum status in Germany. Together, Noor and Sumaya have built a new life: family, their own apartment, and a job. Noor and his wife fled from Bangladesh to Germany. Originally from Myanmar, Noor belongs to the Muslim minority group Rohingya, which is suppressed in Myanmar. In February 2016, Noor started a seven-month-long language course. After four months, Noor felt ready to tackle the final language exam – and passed it. Noor used a Google Chromebook and online language programs to deepen his knowledge, and inspired his wife to do the same. In addition, Sumaya received online language coaching from a corporate volunteer with whom she was matched by Volunteer vision. Now Noor works for the nonprofit Asylplus, a Project Reconnect grantee, where he helps with the administration of the Chromebooks and provides training to trainers and refugees.

In addition, the following appear to be important factors to maintain a well-visited Chromebook location:

- Marketing to continue to attract new refugee users
- Some form of compensation for the location staff and volunteers
- More time for implementation of the activity and to experiment with different content, models, and activities
A statistical exploration of location managers’ responses on the degree to which their expectations were met for the value Chromebooks present for their work with refugees is summarized in Exhibit 5. Comparing these data with several other variables, including access to IT support, opening hours of the location, estimated number of daily refugee visitors, type of location, type of location personnel, and length of the location’s operation with Chromebooks, provided additional insights on factors that may be particularly important for locations’ perceived value of Chromebooks.

Generally, locations’ level of satisfaction with the value Chromebooks provided for their work with refugees was higher for locations that:

- had an IT specialist at the location to support the work with Chromebooks (rather than not having IT support at the location)
- were open 7 days a week (rather than fewer days)
- were frequented by more than 20 refugees per day (rather than fewer refugees per day)
- were in youth migration centers or church facilities (rather than other location types, including community centers, guidance/information centers, public libraries, etc.)
- were supported by paid refugees (rather than paid staff, paid contractors, or volunteers)
- did not observe major changes in refugee numbers in the last year (compared to those that reported that refugee numbers had decreased or increased)
- started their Chromebook programming in 2017 (compared to in 2016)

The analysis indicated that there did not seem to be—at least statistically—a specific predictor or set of predictors to a high level of satisfaction with the overall value Chromebooks present for locations’ work with refugees. The factors listed above, however, may contribute to a positive experience and an overall appreciation of the value Chromebooks provide.

AWO Berlin-Mitte: Families become more independent and proactive

AWO Berlin-Mitte manages several refugee homes in Berlin. Residents of these homes can borrow Chromebooks at the front desk. Several Wi-Fi hotspots are available in the homes. For children the organisation offers an online German language course. The kids get familiar with the Internet and learn German at the same time. They were very cautious and timid at the beginning. Each week they became more confident using the apps and online content. They now study by themselves with the German language tools and research online what to do and where to go in their spare time. They also coach their parents on how to find information online, such as opening hours, addresses, and how to apply for kindergarten, etc. The Chromebooks give the children confidence.
From the perspective of the grantee organizations, higher levels of satisfaction were reported by organizations that reported that they:

- started their Chromebook programming in 2017
- had worked with refugees already before Project Reconnect
- had already had experience using computers in refugee work
- had Internet already accessible in some of their planned locations
- had an IT specialist on staff to support the Chromebook program

“"We want to use the Chromebooks to support refugees’ independence in writing job applications, filling in online forms, and conducting research. This is currently very difficult due to the different levels in pre-existing technology skills, as well as literacy skills [among our refugees]. It is difficult to create homogeneous study groups. We want to work on improving this further."” – Location manager

Further statistical analysis indicated that there was a significant increase in satisfaction for organizations that started with Project Reconnect in 2017, rather than 2016. This may be due to a range of factors. One, by 2017, the overall refugee context had emerged from the crisis mode it was in 2015 and early 2016. Thus, organizations joining more recently had been able to implement the activity with more consideration, forward planning, and less externally imposed stress and distractions (e.g. thousands of refugees arriving daily; or the need to decommission welcome centers, which bound staff and resources).

Next, the first year of the project had allowed NetHope to acquire significant expertise in Chromebook administration and management, to collect best practices for deployment, to invest time in optimizing trainings and materials, and to aggregate and share solutions already found by other organizations. By

Kiron Open Higher Education: Ani* studies Computer Science – online

My name is Ani, I am from Indonesia, from the island Sulawesi, and I had to leave my country because I fell in love with a woman. I came to Germany because of love. [...] We ran away together from Indonesia, because it is such a strict country, where they do not accept gay love. [...] We met at a solar eclipse event. It was very romantic. [...] However, I could not tell my family. [...] But they found out! [...] I am paranoid that my family will catch me. I am kind of “wanted” back home. My family is looking for me. If they would find me they would put me into a mental home, where I would have to undergo hypnosis and psychotherapy because they think being gay is an illness. [...] Now I study Computer Science with Kiron. I was so happy because I was able to get a sponsored computer. The laptop is very useful for my online study.

* Name changed per student’s request
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2017, NetHope was also able to invest extra effort in helping new grantee organizations register their Chromebooks and thus facilitate their overall onboarding process. This experience benefitted the organizations newly joining the project.

Further, during 2016, many government and non-government actors in Germany invested in the development of targeted content for refugees including apps, websites, and online education/internship/job portals. Thus, organizations joining later could benefit from integrating these ready-made resources into their activities. Finally, the first year of Project Reconnect also saw many software updates to the Chromebook devices that removed bugs and expanded Chromebook functionality relevant for the initiatives’ success, such as enabling more Chrome apps in public session mode and fixing problems with dropped or lost Wi-Fi network connections.

Chromebook hardware and operating system

“Most refugees are familiar with smartphones, however lack fundamental IT skills. There is great potential to reach more refugees in learning the use of computer. This would require qualified volunteer staff and structured courses.” – Location manager

Despite the large number of devices in circulation, location managers reported relatively few hardware challenges with the Chromebook hardware. The Chromebooks were produced by Medion, Germany, in early 2016. Only 3% of respondents (n = 320) reported that more than five of their allocated Chromebooks had issues with starting up or needing a new power adapter. Several locations, however, reported issues with malfunctioning trackpads and keyboards, the short duration of the battery run time, and weak signal reception of the Chromebooks’ Wi-Fi card.

Grantee organizations worked with NetHope and hardware producer Medion to solve the problems or exchange devices.

The operating system updates for the Chromebooks and the “Chrome OS missing” error were mentioned as a constraint to more intensive use, especially given Internet limitations. At least 17 of the 320 locations explicitly highlighted this as a challenge they faced with the Chromebooks. In their perception, these software updates frequently rendered Chromebooks temporarily unresponsive or even required a new Chrome OS image to be installed. The effort to recover devices that displayed the “Chrome OS damaged or missing” error, was a hardship for the organizations, even with detailed instructions, phone, or in person support from the Project Reconnect team.
Major constraints to the implementation of Project Reconnect

Over the course of Project Reconnect, access to reliable Internet has been one of the main barriers to the effective and more intensive use of the Chromebook devices. This was widely mentioned by location managers and grantee organization staff (see Exhibit 6). Two factors appeared to have played a role. First, there are general issues with affordable high-speed Internet availability in Germany, especially in rural areas.\(^\text{18}\) Germany only recently decided on a significant investment of 100 billion Euro to address the gaps.\(^\text{19}\)

Internet connectivity issues were also related to problems with network installations in historic buildings or due to landlord restrictions. Landlords of some refugee homes prohibited tenants from drilling through walls to enable Internet access, while regulations for historic buildings complicated Internet installation, and/or thick building walls inhibited alternate installation solutions.

Second, many public institutions, especially schools, have policies in place that prohibit the use of Wi-Fi. These policies appeared to have been a response to Germany’s strict provider liability laws that until recently held Internet service providers responsible for users’ online activities.\(^\text{20}\) This policy and subsequent lack of Wi-Fi created significant anxiety among Chromebook locations in making their Internet accessible to a wide range of users. A first revision to the original law came in June 2016, which, however, did not go far enough to relieve legal concerns. The law was finally abolished by the German Government\(^\text{21}\) in June 2017, at the end of Project Reconnect.

Germany’s stringent data privacy laws were also mentioned as a major hurdle for Chromebook locations, including those that wanted to personalize repeated users’ Chromebook experiences. In “public session mode,” no user data from a Chromebook session can be retained, as browser history and related data are automatically removed from the device. This was very welcome by some locations, especially those offering Chromebooks in an Internet Café-type setting or for loan in supervised rooms (e.g. public libraries). However, for those locations supporting predominantly repeat users wanting to save data offline, to personalize user experience, or access browser bookmarks (e.g. to mark progress in an online language course), this mode was not convenient. For personalized Chromebook access, users needed to use a private email

account and log in on the Chromebook for every use. Locations were concerned about this approach given Germany’s strict data privacy laws, as well as the need for sensitivity when working with vulnerable populations like refugees and especially unaccompanied minors.

In addition to the structural challenges and legal concerns with Internet, location staff, course providers, and volunteers had limited experience working in a cloud environment. Thus, critical stakeholders first had to be convinced and then trained in the use of online tools. As was highlighted in Exhibit 6 and mentioned in many qualitative comments by location managers and grantee organizations, the absence of offline word processing and spreadsheet functionality on the Chromebook devices (which in the meantime appears to have become available), presented a significant barrier for more intensive use of the devices.

Related to challenges with trained location staff and volunteers, location managers repeatedly noted the lack of time to fully realize the benefits of the project over the 18 months’ grant period. As noted earlier (Exhibit 2), nearly half of the grantees only received their Chromebooks in the latter half of 2016 or even beginning of 2017, and thus have had little time for planning, deployment, training, learning, and optimizing their programs by the time of final report data collection in June 2017.

Flüchtlingshilfe Karlsruhe: Young refugees build custom longboards

Every Tuesday, the nonprofit “jubez” invites kids and teens from Karlsruhe and refugee children to a woodworking workshop. The goal is to “create n roll”, to build a longboard and get rolling. Professional help is at hand. The young refugees use Chromebooks to look for photos and graphics, which they then transfer to the wood of their longboards. Many choose themes that remind them of their homeland. The workshop and joint interest make it easy to overcome language and age barriers and build friendship across cultures.

http://jubez.de/#/factories/holz/
Project Reconnect phases and grantee organization needs

The factor of time also emerged as a key consideration and recommendation for future, similar efforts. Looking at the project from a time-based lens, implementation of Project Reconnect in the German refugee context can roughly be divided into three main phases:

1. Crisis phase
2. Transition phase
3. Institutionalization phase

Organizations joining or operating in each of these phases appear to have had different contexts and, related to that, different needs in effectively implementing their initiatives.

During the crisis phase, in which many of the organizations joining the project in early 2016 found themselves, grantee organization’s priorities were often centered on the refugees’ immediate need for food, shelter, and medical and psychological support. For several of these organizations, Project Reconnect appeared to have been an add-on to their core activities and mission. The project presented a peripheral activity for which they had a vision, but not the time and consideration to meticulously plan. These organizations did not have the luxury to carefully estimate the level of effort required for initial set up, implementation, and maintenance of Chromebooks and Chromebook activities, elaborating and testing programmatic or pedagogic integration approaches, and securing the necessary resources in advance.

“...It would have been nice to have had a number of apps provided by NetHope that could have already been pre-installed [on the Chromebooks].” – Grantee organization

Immental Stiftung: Refugee students can borrow laptops at the University of Freiburg

In 2015, students of the University of Freiburg founded the volunteer group “Arbeitskreis Uni für Alle.” The group helps refugee guest students succeed in their studies. “Uni für Alle” has received Chromebooks from the Immental-Stiftung. At the university, refugees have the opportunity to prepare for their studies supported by an experienced student. Refugee students can borrow a Chromebook and receive access to an online German language course provided by the European Commission. The Erasmus program ‘Online Linguistic Support’ allows users to learn at their own speed and offers virtual tutoring sessions and discussion boards.
For future initiatives that plan to deploy similar hardware and resources in crisis situations, early adopters may need more ready-made packages that not only include hardware, but also an initial set of content, guidelines, or curricula that highlight programmatic integration, some funding for personnel and incidental costs, and information on anticipated level of effort, as well as tested troubleshooting guides and technical support documentation. Furthermore, carefully designed and targeted training resources for grantee organizations and location managers, as well as Chromebook facilitators, would go a long way to support and accelerate adoption.

During the transition phase, which for Project Reconnect were the summer months following the EU-Turkey agreement and closure of the Balkan routes, new grantee organizations could already experiment with a range of approaches and resources thus far developed by NetHope. By Fall, grantees could draw on NetHope’s months of accumulated experience in advising and supporting grantee organizations as they managed their Chromebook allocations while accessing the management console configurations and settings. With the help of the Google engineering team in Munich, recommendations were developed for the most common implementation scenarios. This emerging set of resources and experience in the project community at large may have helped grantee organizations joining or operating in the transition phase reduce complexity, as well as avoid pitfalls and challenges earlier grantees may have faced. Organizations, however, still struggled with limited resources as budgets were cut, locations were closed, and infrastructure, equipment, and personnel were transferred to new locations.

“Technology alone is not sufficient. It requires well-trained people with great patience that can […] motivate users.” – Location manager

Berlin-Brandenburgische Auslandsgesellschaft (BBAG): Overview for teachers about free language courses

The teachers of the language courses of the non-profit educational institution BBAG and their partners did not use any laptops before their cooperation with Project Reconnect. The BBAG team has therefore set up a website (www.hzs.help/) where teachers can find a wide range of learning resources that they can use in their classes. “For us, it was important to provide a link list by level,” explains Michael Speidel who works for the non-profit. There are learning materials for literacy courses, as well as for German courses for beginners and for advanced students. Through other links, students can learn the German language playfully or practice vocabulary. All offers are free and do not require registration. The teachers were very happy to have this link overview – and they continue to use the Chromebooks more and more in the classroom.
For deployments in the phase of institutionalization, which for Project Reconnect was the beginning of 2017, grantee organizations made use of the pre-packaged resources, and a range of implementation models and resources that had already been tried and tested by others. This gave grantees more time to focus on programmatic and pedagogic integration, and applying these resources more strategically to optimally fit their specific target group. In this phase, new grantee organizations also had more time and contextual stability to develop their own unique deployment models or content.

It may be helpful to consider these three observed phases for deployment and related differing needs of grantee organizations and their beneficiaries at different stages in the process more systematically for future, similar efforts.

**Conclusion**

Project Reconnect, conceived as it was during a time of crisis, was indeed a bold and ambitious effort. The logistical and programmatic effort to launch and manage a grants program of this scale and to deploy 25,000 Chromebook devices all over Germany within 18 months was tremendous. Grantee organizations and Chromebook locations often faced almost insurmountable barriers due to gaps in adequate connectivity options, trained personnel, refugee-relevant online content, offline Chromebook functionality, and proven programmatic guidance. Given the additional challenges emerging

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**Kolping: Daham, a young Iraqi, successfully lands an apprenticeship as a car mechanic and practices for his written driving license test**

In December 2016, Daham received the opportunity to complete an internship at KFZ Schmidt, a small car repair shop in Leverkusen, Germany. Daham had already taken part in a language course and was able to communicate in basic German. However, it quickly became clear that Daham’s knowledge of the German language was not yet sufficient to succeed in an apprenticeship. Especially free speech was difficult for him. Through his language tutor at the nonprofit Kolping in Leverkusen, Daham was able to borrow a Chromebook. This provided him the opportunity to intensify his language studies and improve and practice his language skills. Daham uses the laptop not only to study maths and German, but also to prepare for his written driving test. In particular, the constant conversation practice has been worth the effort.

Daham’s conversation skills have improved significantly. This summer, Daham starts his apprenticeship as a car mechanic at KFZ Schmidt. He has already signed the contract.

© Heinz Kappertz, Kolpingwerk Leverkusen-Opladen

**“We have finally been able to begin implementing the courses this week in Eisenhuettenstadt, and moreover were able to negotiate a cooperation with the school board in order to incorporate the media course into the school curriculum at the shelter starting from next week [July, 2017].“** – Location manager
from the crisis context, it is not surprising that not all 25,000 Chromebooks have been made accessible in the 18-month timeframe of the project, nor that the majority of Chromebooks are not used every day. Yet, over the course of the project, NetHope, grantee organizations, and participants at the Chromebook locations learned many valuable lessons and gained significant capacity in the deployment of technology, and its programmatic integration with refugee work.

A great enabler was the versatility with which Chromebooks enriched the organizations’ refugee work – in education, information, counselling, communication, and leisure activities; as well as the opportunities they provided for women and children, and especially unaccompanied minors. As an emergency intervention, Project Reconnect was neither designed as an education project, nor an employment intervention for refugees. Instead, the project aimed to help refugees as they rebuild their lives by facilitating access to online education and information resources. There is no doubt that Project Reconnect has been able to achieve just that – for thousands of refugees across Germany.

Save the Children: Digital citizenship for families in refugee homes

Although many children and youth currently residing at refugee shelters across Germany are using various technical devices for internet connectivity, the internet still bears risks for them and their data security. There is no system currently in place which coherently explains these risks to them, or even protects them. For over two years now, Save the Children has been working to strengthen and promote child protection in refugee shelters through various programs, activities, and advocacy work.

One focus in the area of child protection is in the area of digital citizenship. Through our media-educational approach, we want to relay to children and youth, but also to parents and staff at refugee shelters, how to safely use the internet and computers. Save the Children implements course cycles at different shelters, each time training one or more staff members who will remain on site to carry on the courses and provide IT support. For this purpose, some of the Chromebooks remain at each site following the successful implementation of a training cycle. Modules making up each training cycle range from “Basic Internet ABC”, where children learn how to use browsers and search engines, what the associated risks are and how they can protect their data, to “Khan Academy” educational resources for math’s, sciences and German, to “Introduction to Computer Sciences” where they are introduced to programming in a play-focused and child-friendly way.