



Securing Bright Futures: Empowering Refugee Children & Educators with Digital Technology

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An education centre in Lebanon, run by Thaki's partner, Borderless
Photo credit: Thaki

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CASE STUDY

Securing Bright Futures: Empowering Refugee Children & Educators with Digital Technology

AT A GLANCE

Company	Thaki (Stichting Thaki Nederland)
Social theme(s)	Education/Children & Youth
Geography	Registered in the Netherlands. Operating in Lebanon, Jordan, and to a smaller extent the UAE and Netherlands
Year rounded	2015
Revenues	<€1 million annually
Legal structure	Non-profit organisation
Clients	NGO partners and schools in refugee and vulnerable host communities
Business model	Revenue from laptop sales (10-25%); Grants, government support, & donations (75-90%)
Product/services	Thaki receives second-hand devices (mostly laptops) and refurbishes and loads the devices with offline learning content to distribute to education partners. Thaki also develops digital literacy training for teachers, and has co-developed a digital social-emotional learning program for young children
Impact reach	To-date, Thaki has distributed over 5,800 devices to 157 education partners serving more than 33,000 students

Background

In 2022, the number of global refugees rose more than any year in recorded history, from 27.1 to 35.3 million.¹ Refugee children—especially girls—are far less likely to remain enrolled in school and finish their education.² Schools in these contexts are often severely under-resourced and lack access to technology and internet. Low rates of education hinder refugee families from stabilising and integrating into host communities.

At the same time, consumers and companies throw away 40 million tons of electronic waste, while purchasing 300 million new computers each year.³ Only a fraction of this waste is recycled and most of it is exported to landfills where e-waste contributes to environmental toxicity. Refurbished computers are an under-valued resource that can be converted to improved educational outcomes for children in low-resource settings.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends>

² <https://www.unrefugees.org/what-we-do/education/>

³ <https://www.theworldcounts.com/stories/electronic-waste-facts>

About the Company

Thaki was founded by **Rudayna Abdo**, an MIT and McGill University-educated urban planner from Lebanon whose parents were forcibly displaced from Palestine in 1948, and herself from Lebanon when she was eight years old. When the Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011, Abdo was motivated to find a way to contribute to education solutions in the region. Through research and multiple trips to Lebanon, she developed a model by which donated laptops could be repurposed with pre-loaded software that functioned in settings without internet access. Today, Thaki distributes thousands of content-enriched refurbished devices at subsidised rates to educational partners in Lebanon and Jordan while providing training to teachers so that they can empower children with digital literacy in the region.



Malaak learning centre, Akaar, Lebanon.
Photo credit: Thaki



Sources of Impact

Customers: Who is served?

Thaki distributes to education partners—**NGOs** that purchase the refurbished laptops at subsidised rates and set up computer labs in **refugee schools and communities**

Workforce: Who is employed?

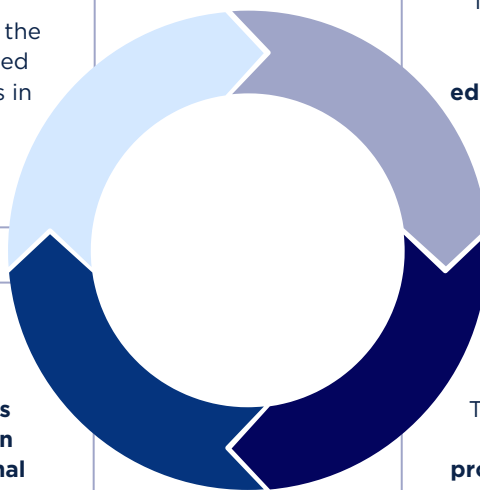
Thaki employs **12 staff members**.
Thaki also provides teacher training and digital tools so that **educators** can learn to use laptops and software effectively in the classroom

Product/Service: What is delivered?

Thaki receives **donated laptops** and refurbishes them with **open source and donated educational content** that does not require internet access

Eco-System: What relationships are developed?

Thaki connects the unconnected, including **companies and tech providers** with **education partners and educators** to deliver engaging content



Innovation Activities

Thaki engages in several activities that drive innovation, both in the communities they serve as well as the larger eco-system:

INNOVATION ACTIVITIES



Realising the value of discarded assets: Companies generally pay e-waste recyclers to dispose of old hardware. Thaki recognised that companies could instead donate this hardware for a 'second life' in refugee schools and in vulnerable communities

Planning for infrastructure challenges: Thaki designs its products to function in low-resource settings where internet connectivity is limited. Thaki also connects to educators through data-light applications such as WhatsApp which can surmount resource challenges

Continuous improvement on the user interface: Thaki employs a development team that is continuously improving the user interface to be more friendly and intuitive to students and educators

Key Innovation Challenges & Learnings

Thaki is developing an additional step in the 'circular economy', pairing donated computer hardware with donated/open source software and selling at low rates to education partners in refugee settings. This has included challenges and learnings:

- **Circumventing challenges with new products and services:** Thaki is continuously looking for new ways to overcome existing challenges. Founder Rudayna Abdo says, *"We learn. And we observe, and we see what's needed, and see how we can respond."* For example, Thaki recently received a grant to adapt an in-person, English-language social emotional learning programme into a self-guided, Arabic-language digital programme. Thaki has also partnered with solar power providers to deploy off-grid electricity solutions for schools in Lebanon where provision of steady electricity has been an ongoing issue.
- **Overcoming logistics and regulatory challenges:** In some countries in which it wants to operate in the MENA region, Thaki has found it difficult to surmount import regulations for used hardware. In Lebanon and to a lesser extent Jordan, this challenge has been overcome with multiple laptops shipments successfully mobilised from the GCC and Europe. Operations Manager Mariam Khalaf says, *"We are building a relationship with a delivery company because we are also in the logistics space and it's not easy. But we now have a shipment of 600 laptops arriving from the US soon."*

Featured Education Partner: Anera

Anera is an NGO that works in Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan to help refugees build better lives. Through its Education and Digital Literacy Project, Anera offers computer and digital literacy classes to more than 300 students.

Thaki partnered with Anera in two Jordanian refugee camps to provide laptops pre-loaded with Thaki's educational materials and resources. Anera's educators are using Thaki's Teacher Digital Toolkit to offer classes in math, science, coding, geography and more.



Student in Souf Palestinian camp, Jordan.
Photo credit: Anera and iLearn