

RESPONDING TO CRISIS: SYRIAN REFUGEE EDUCATION IN LEBANON

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MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ A clear collaboration plan needs to be developed between the government institutions primarily the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the MEHE in order to coordinate the efforts put forth and enhance the government’s capacity to respond to the emergency education crisis.
- ▶ A structured and centralized coordination system needs to be established between the MEHE and NGOs, and other aid organizations in order to avoid fragmentation, duplication and overlap in their work and to facilitate and enhance the access to education of Syrian refugees through normalized educational programs.
- ▶ A comprehensive framework needs to be established to further explore how non-formal programs can be aligned with formal education provisions through developing a model of accreditation that will offer Syrian children learning pathways into the formal education system.
- ▶ The MEHE needs to continue efforts to seek sustainable funding for the education sector and establish a comprehensive and transparent mechanism to manage and audit funds.
- ▶ Establish periodic, relevant and structured training for teachers and school personnel working with refugees in order to enable them to deal with the refugees’ traumatic experiences, as well as the various challenges faced by the refugees in schools, such as the language barrier.

Introduction

As the Syrian crisis continues unabated, the number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon is growing. According to the UNHCR, and as of November 2015, the number of registered refugees in Lebanon had reached 1,070,189. Around 35% of these registered refugees are children aged between 5 and 17 who are entitled to an education. The Lebanese public schools are not ready to handle the increasing influx of school-aged refugees; in fact, the public sector, which attracts less than 30% of the Lebanese student population, has been in need of reform even prior to the Syrian crisis. Recently, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) prepared a national strategy, Reach All Children with Education (RACE), which aims to deliver education to all children in Lebanon, including refugees and vulnerable Lebanese children. It may be argued that despite the fact that the MEHE has moved forward in increasing the number of children attending public schools and in achieving the RACE, this strategy has nonetheless failed to reach its target for several reasons among which is insufficient funding, weak coordination among government agencies and limited collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Syrian Refugees' Access to Education

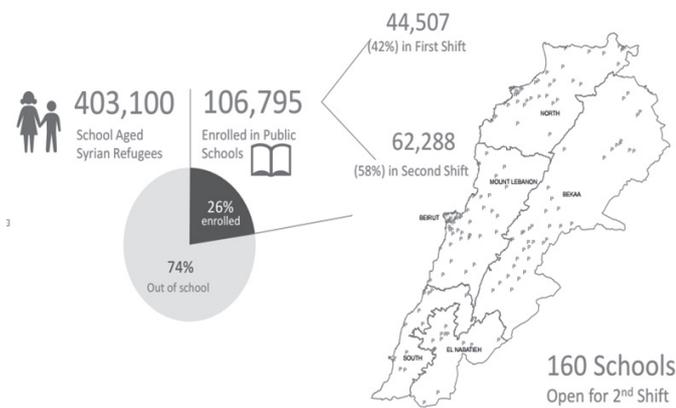


Figure 1

SYRIAN REFUGEES' ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN LEBANON

SOURCE: MEHE, SEPTEMBER 2015

To date, the MEHE and NGO sector have been the two main providers of education services for refugees in Lebanon. MEHE has tried to facilitate the access of refugees into the schools in Lebanon through mandating that all schools enroll Syrian students regardless of their legal status. Moreover, it has succeeded in waiving school and book fees. The Ministry also introduced second shift classes in order to accommodate a larger number of refugees in the country's public schools.

Despite the Ministry's efforts, the public sector was unable to accommodate the majority of school-aged

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Syrian refugees. As shown in Figure 1, for the 2014/2015 academic year, only 106,795 refugees [of the 403,100 targeted] have been enrolled in schools. Furthermore, the refugees who managed to access formal education were faced with many challenges, essentially transport cost, bullying in schools and challenges with regards to the language of instruction. These challenges, among others, caused many Syrian refugees to drop out of school, reaching a dropout rate of 70% in the 2011-2012. The situation becomes more complex when we observe that the school dropout from public schools has not been limited to the Syrian students only. It has been reported that some Lebanese parents have pulled their children out of public schools mainly because they feared the drop in the level of the quality of education due to the enrollment

of Syrian refugees in the classes. Figure 2 shows the dropout rate of Lebanese students from public schools since the beginning of the Syrian crisis.

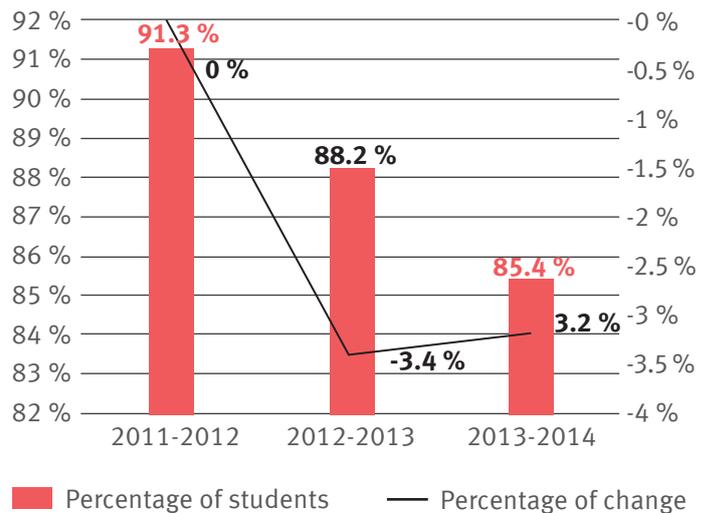


Figure 2

PERCENTAGES OF LEBANESE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Furthermore, the level of awareness among parents and the schools administrations of the “correct” registration procedures mandated by the MEHE varied across schools in Lebanon. This has turned away many refugees who came to register their children, particularly at public schools across the country.

These limitations of the public sector have validated further involvement of the NGOs in the education of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The work of the NGOs included offering remedial classes to students within the public sector, accelerated learning programs to ease the integration of the refugees in the Lebanese system, and basic literacy and numeracy for children who have never been to school. Some NGOs opened schools for the Syrian refugees, even though the MEHE has prohibited such actions as it is the only entity in charge of managing education in the country. However, it must be noted that in times of emergencies, non-formal education such as that facilitated by the NGOs in Lebanon, should be recognized and supported. The MEHE has held back accreditation and certification to the refugees enrolled in schools run by NGOs, and it continues to work to close down any of the non-accredited schools around the country.

Coordination between the government institutions and the NGO sector

An inclusive educational structure is needed to enhance access and retention of the refugees in the education system in Lebanon. The MEHE succeeded in establishing the RACE strategy to serve as a longer term planning strategy and made it possible to waive school fees [at public schools]. However, the donor financing and the NGOs' involvement have been loosely integrated into the efforts put forth by the MEHE, although the limited capacity and resources of the public sector necessitate a strong partnership with the NGO sector to enable it to effectively absorb and integrate Syrian refugees into schools. The coordination between the MEHE, INGOs

and NGOs could have benefited from an improved communication strategy that would avoid the overlap across the work of organizations and the mismanagement of donations. The better coordination could also facilitate the smooth transfer of students from informal education into the formal education system in the country. It is important for the Lebanese government to acknowledge the important role that the NGOs are playing in providing non-formal education, which in a fragile state such as Lebanon and in the presence of a protracted crisis as is the Syrian refugee crisis, it is important to have education alternatives for children who remain out of school.

Coordination across government entities in Lebanon has also been found to be quite loose. The MEHE has been working on the education of refugees in isolation of other government agencies, with very limited collaboration with other ministries such as the MoIM and the MoSA, although the latter is officially the coordinator in the refugees' emergency situation and is responsible for liaising with relevant authorities, international bodies and local NGOs. Effective inter-ministerial collaboration is critical for the success of the policy plans put forth by the MEHE for refugee education. For example, the Lebanese Law No. 150 issued in 2011 aims at providing compulsory free education in the primary education cycle, however the implementation of this law is still pending executive decrees that have not been issued yet, and which would require inter-ministerial collaboration. It is beyond the scope of the MEHE to reach out to out-of-school children, which in turn would require the engagement of the MoSA. However, the MoSA is limited in what it can do to bring these children back to school as it is not within its mandate to do so, but rather it would require the Ministry

“This lack of unified structure and cooperation hinders Syrian refugees’ access to education and slows Lebanon’s progress towards its yearly educational targets.”

of Justice and MoIM to interfere in order to legally compel the families to send their children to schools. This inter-ministerial coordination process is not yet implemented in the absence of executive decrees that would define the role of each government entity and the collaboration required. In the absence of such collaborative mechanisms, little can be done to bring in Syrian out-of-

school children in Lebanon.

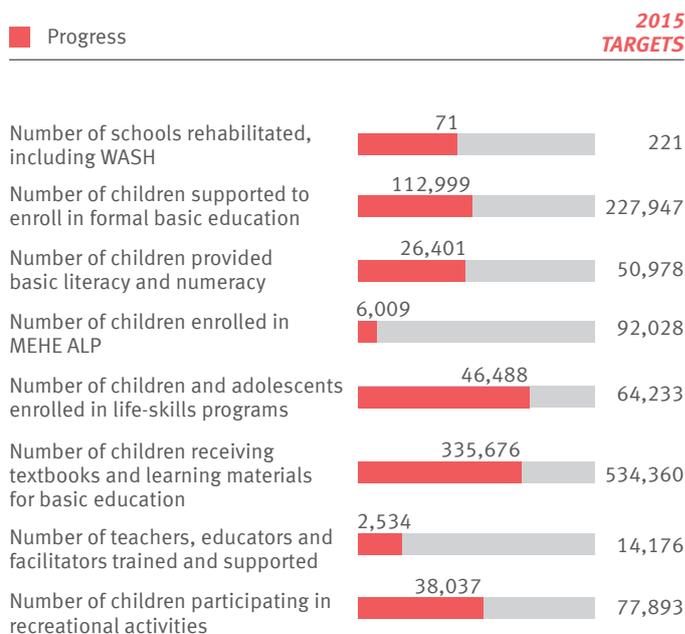


Figure 3

THE PROGRESS OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN LEBANON AGAINST THE 2015 TARGETS

SOURCE: UNHCR MONTHLY DASHBOARD SEPT-OCT 2015

This lack of unified structure and cooperation hinders Syrian refugees’ access to education and slows Lebanon’s progress towards its yearly educational targets. As shown in Figure 3, as of October 2015, only 112,999 out of the 227,947 targeted have been enrolled in public schools and only 71 schools out of the 221 targeted have been rehabilitated. Missing out on education may have detrimental consequences on the refugees, such as the increase in child labor and child marriage in the short term, and a lost generation that would not be able to rebuild Syria on the longer run.

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