



Living on hope, hoping for education

The failed response to the Syrian refugee crisis

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Key messages

- Four years into the Syrian crisis, over half a million Syrian refugee children are out of school – and the numbers are rising. The education crisis is fuelling an epidemic of child labour and early marriage.
- Lost educational opportunity risks driving young people into radicalised groups, including ISIS. That risk is most severe in Lebanon, where just one in five school-age Syrian refugee children is in formal education – an enrolment rate below that of sub-Saharan Africa.
- Public schools in Lebanon cannot cope: the school-age refugee population exceeds the current intake of the country's public schools and an over-stretched and under-resourced system faces acute pressure.
- Donors have failed to act on commitments to ensure that there is 'No Lost Generation' of refugees: the UN's inter-agency, regional education response is \$235 million short of the (inadequate) funding levels requested for 2014. Less than half of the aid required for Lebanon's *Reach All Children with Education (RACE)* strategy to deliver education to refugees and vulnerable Lebanese is in place, jeopardising education prospects for up to a quarter of a million children.
- This paper calls for the full financing of education requests set out in the Regional Response Plan and of UNICEF's education programmes. The RACE strategy in Lebanon needs donor support of around \$200 million annually for the next three years. A pooled fund would provide predictable finance to support the strategy, and would demonstrate donor commitment to educational opportunity as a humanitarian imperative, and as a priority for security, social stability and economic recovery.

Introduction

The crisis in Syria has entered its fourth year. Children have been on the front-line from the outset. They have experienced or witnessed horrific acts of indiscriminate violence. Many have been killed or injured. Millions have been forced from their homes and have faced the traumas of war and displacement. Opportunities for health care, nutrition and education have been destroyed on an epic scale (UNICEF, 2013a).

Donors have recognised the urgency of the challenge posed by the crisis in Syria. High profile gatherings have produced repeated pledges of support and commitments. ‘Unless we reach these children now,’ declared the *No Lost Generation* strategy adopted in 2013, ‘the hopes of an entire generation could be lost forever’ (NLG, 2014). Unfortunately, donor action has not matched the urgency implied by such declarations.

Nowhere is the gap between rhetoric and action more evident than in education. Syria’s children have suffered a reversal in educational opportunity that is without parallel in recent history. That reversal has been largely invisible to the world’s media. Unlike bombed-out buildings and columns of refugees, an ‘education crisis’ does not provide compelling media images. Yet failure to respond effectively to the education crisis will have profound consequences for the region’s children now and throughout the coming decades. Education provides a vehicle through which children can receive support, rebuild their lives and gain the skills they need to secure jobs in the future. Closing the door on learning extinguishes hope and creates the conditions that will transmit poverty across generations, fuel social instability and undermine prospects for recovery. The alarming rise in child labour and early marriage seen among Syrian refugees is both a symptom and a cause of the reversal in education (UNHCR, 2013).

Failure to address the education crisis among Syrian refugees will have wider consequences. Robbed of opportunities to continue their schooling, young Syrians will be forced to the margins of society. Many are already fleeing the region, as witnessed by the growing number of Syrians making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to Europe. The danger is that vulnerable adolescents and young adults will be drawn into extremist political groups.

Nowhere is that danger more visible than in Lebanon. Recent months have seen an ominous deterioration of the situation for refugees in the country, as tensions with host communities rise in many areas. Forced evictions from informal settlements, posters warning Syrian refugees to leave and violent attacks against refugees are becoming increasingly common (ACAPS, 2014). At the same time, frustration is rising among Syrian refugees, notably among the young. Radical groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), among more than a dozen others, are believed to be actively recruiting in parts of Lebanon, including among disenfranchised youth. There is a real risk that

Syrian refugees will be drawn into radicalised politics and armed groups – an outcome that would have profoundly destabilising consequences for Lebanon. Education cannot provide immunisation against this threat. Yet the hope it offers can greatly diminish the appeal of groups that feed off despair and resentment.

Aid donors have been slow to respond to the education crisis facing Syrian refugees. Governments in neighbouring countries have provided support, but they lack the financial resources, the human capacity and the systems to respond on the scale required without meaningful levels of external support. Well-designed aid interventions can make a difference in key areas: resources, capacities and systems. However, there are large gaps between the resources that have been made available and those required. Only a small group of donors – led by the European Union (EU) and Germany – have made significant investments in education. Both the US and the UK have announced major initiatives, but neither country has yet disbursed resources on any scale. Support from Arab donors has been limited. With the 2014 school year now starting, there is a real and present danger that another year will be lost as a result, in no small part, of donors’ inaction. The price of that delay will be borne by the half a million Syrian refugee children now out of school.

Most troubling of all is a gathering sense of donor fatalism. International agencies appear to have given up on the vast majority of Syrian refugee children and have set their sights on helping only a small fraction of the total out-of-school population. Instead of developing a bold but practical strategy to protect the right of all Syrian refugee children to an education, donors are tailoring their ambition in the light of funding constraints and institutional obstacles. Real as the challenges are in both areas, this approach combines false economies with a failure to develop innovative delivery mechanisms.

This paper looks at the education crisis among Syrian refugees. It is divided into two parts. The first provides a brief regional overview. The second focuses on Lebanon, which hosts the largest Syrian refugee population.

Beyond the numbers – the human costs of the refugee crisis

Armed conflict in Syria has produced the largest flow of refugees and displaced people relative to population size since the Second World War. This immediate humanitarian tragedy is rapidly transmuting into a long-term development crisis that is placing immense strain on neighbouring countries, host communities and an international aid architecture that is ill-equipped to cope with the scale of the challenge.

Headline figures tell their own story. Today, some three million Syrians are living as refugees in neighbouring countries. That figure is projected to rise to 3.6 million by the end of 2014 (United Nations, 2014a), although the volatility of the situation in Syria creates a high level

of uncertainty. Over the past year alone, the size of the refugee population has almost doubled (UNHCR, 2014a).

Children and young adults figure prominently in the flow of Syrian refugees. Half of the refugees are below the age of 18 and more than one third are of school-age (5-17), according to figures published by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2014a) – more than one million in total. On average, 1,500 children have crossed into neighbouring countries every day since the start of 2014 to escape the violence in Syria, and each year approximately 100,000 existing Syrian refugees reach school age without having any school to attend.¹

Education in Syria has been thrown into reverse gear. Four years ago the country had achieved universal primary enrolment and near universal enrolment in lower secondary education (Watkins, 2013; UNESCO, 2011). Plans were in place to expand university enrolment. In terms of primary and secondary schooling, Syria was on a par with countries such as Malaysia and Thailand. Today, almost half of Syria's 4.8 million school-age children are out of school, whether within Syria itself or within neighbouring countries. The collapse in education has been most profound in the areas hit hardest by violence. In Al-Raqqa, Idleb, Aleppo, Hama and Darra'a less than half of all children today attend school. Education infrastructure has been shattered. Over 4,000 schools have been destroyed, damaged or turned into shelters for displaced people (UNICEF, 2013b).

When it comes to educational opportunity, Syria's refugee children are now among the world's most marginalised groups. Current rates of school enrolment fall well below the regional average for sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, they are below those for the worst performing countries in that region.² According to official figures from the United Nations at the end of this past school year, the rate of school enrolment is a mere 38% among Syrian refugee children (United Nations, 2014a). Up to 600,000 Syrian boys and girls – and a rising number of recently-displaced Iraqi refugee children – are out of school across the region.³ Such figures would become even starker and more troubling if data on un-registered refugees were available.

Behind the aggregate picture there are some marked variations between countries (Figure 1). The situation is most severe in Lebanon, where almost four in every five children are out of school. School enrolments are somewhat higher in neighbouring Jordan, although low school attendance rates mean that the official statistics hide a more severe education crisis. Across the neighbouring countries girls' access to education lags behind that of

boys. Secondary and post-secondary provision is almost non-existent. In Lebanon, for example, 91% of girls aged 15 to 18 are out of school (UNHCR, 2014b).

If Syria's refugees were counted as a country they would have one of the world's lowest reported school enrolment rates. Current enrolment levels are below the regional average for sub-Saharan Africa – and less than half the average for Arab States (Figure 2). Within host countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian refugees lag far behind their national counterparts – a state of affairs that is likely to exacerbate tensions and a sense of grievance.

There are marked differences in enrolment between children living in refugee camps and those living in host communities. School participation rates are generally higher in camps. Even so, one-third of the Syrian children in refugee camps in Jordan are out of school (United Nations, 2014a). Enrolment rates outside the camps are abysmal. Public school systems have been unable to cope with the surge in refugee numbers. Even with the introduction in Jordan and Lebanon of 'second-shift' systems, whereby schools provide education to one set of students early in the day and another set in the afternoon and evening, there are chronic shortages of classrooms, teachers and books (UNESCO, 2013).

Stark as they are, the data on enrolment understate the problem. Many of the children counted as 'enrolled' are not in full-time education but in more limited non-formal programmes. Drop-out rates are exceptionally high for refugee children, reflecting a combination of economic and social pressures, including stigmatisation and bullying (UNHCR, 2013). The quality of provision is often very poor, with refugee children sitting in over-crowded and under-resourced classrooms. Furthermore, many children who are formally enrolled are actually out of school because they are working in fields and factories and on the streets to support their families.

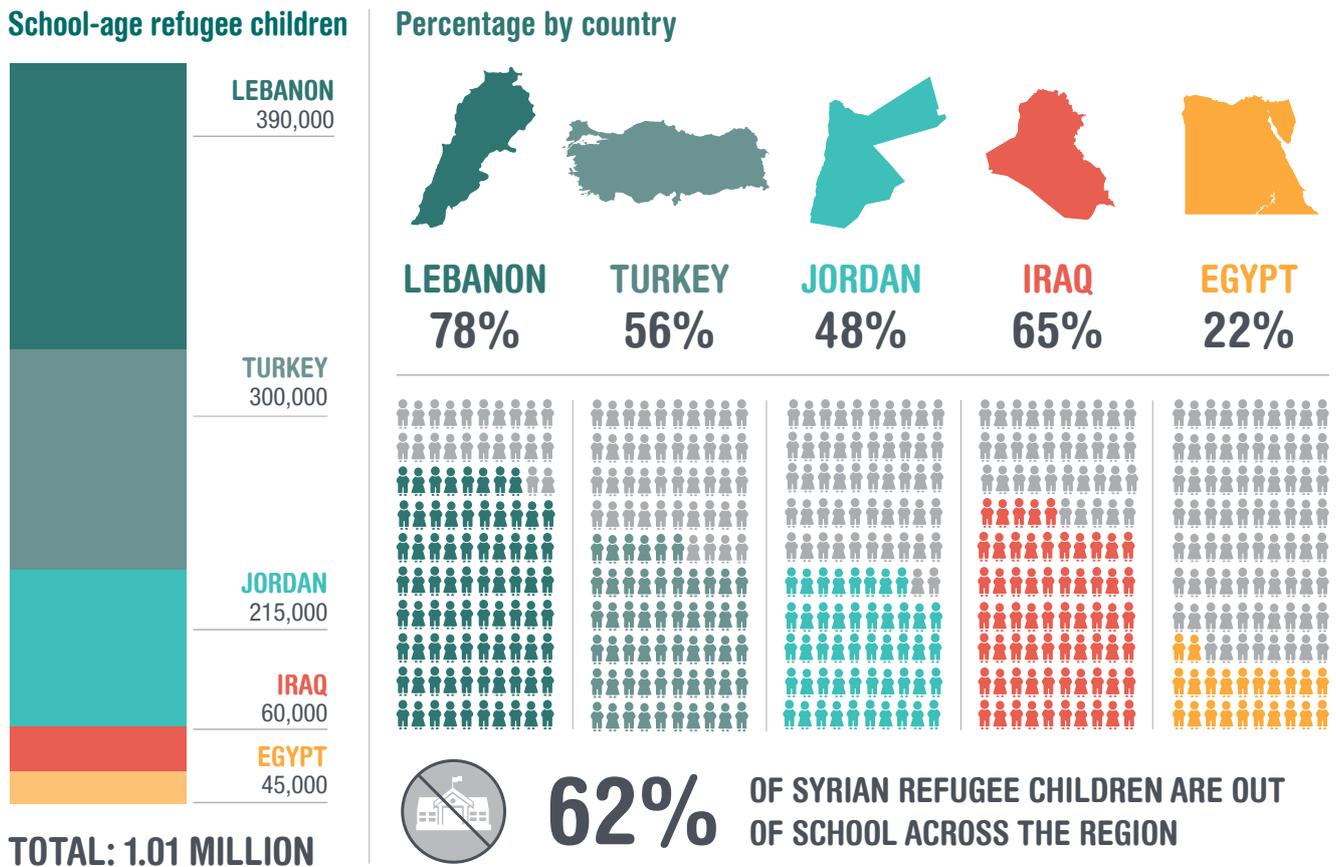
Education opportunities are inevitably influenced by wider factors. Syrian refugee families face acute financial hardship. Access to health care is limited, as is support for children traumatised by violence. One recent study of Syrian refugee children in Turkey found that almost half met the clinical criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) Disorder (Özer et al., 2013). Research by the International Medical Corps and UNICEF (2013), based on interviews with children and parents, has also documented high levels of PTS. On a conservative estimate, there may be some 200,000 Syrian refugee children in need of counselling support. This level of need far exceeds the services currently available through humanitarian organisations

1 These statistics have been calculated based on data available from the UNHCR Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal for the Syria Regional Refugee Response (UNHCR, 2014a).

2 Eritrea's gross primary enrolment ratio for 2012 was recorded at 42.5% and was the lowest reported in UNESCO databases. See UNESCO/UIS, Gross enrolment ratio by level of education, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=142> (accessed 8 September 2014).

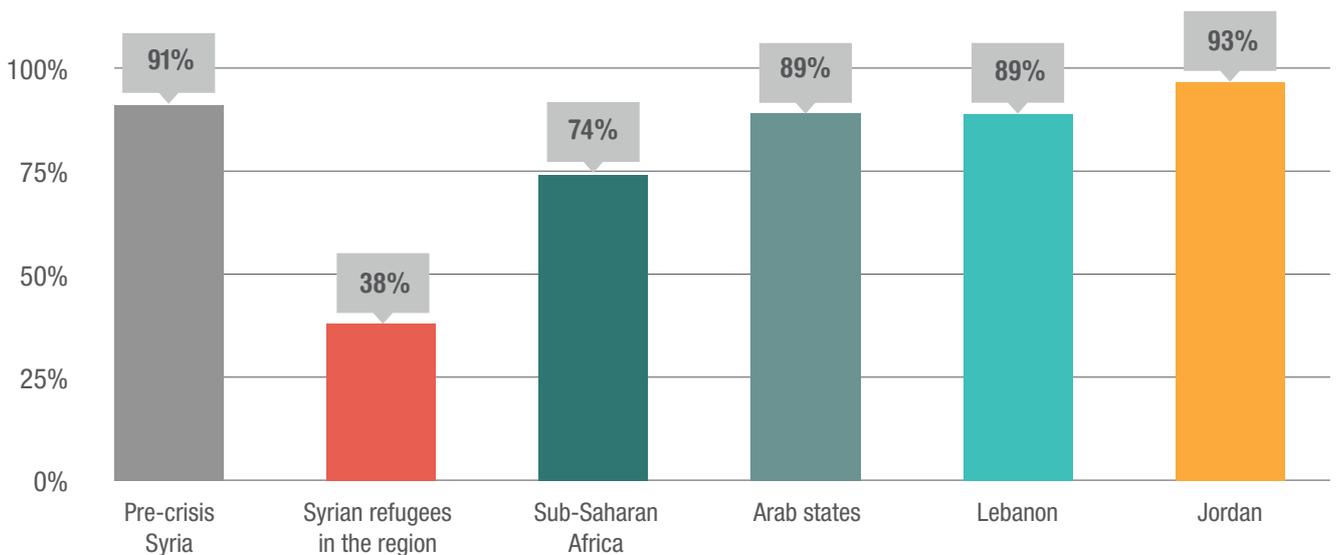
3 These figures are based on an analysis of UNHCR figures on refugee numbers and demographics against figures for students enrolled in education according to the mid-year update of the Syria Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP6) (United Nations, 2014a).

Figure 1: School's out for Syria's refugee children: refugee children out of school



Source: United Nations (2014a) and UNHCR (2014a).

Figure 2: Falling behind: enrolment rates for Syrian refugees in comparative perspective



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014) and UNESCO (2014).

and state-run mental health services in countries like Jordan and Lebanon. According to UNHCR, in 2013 there were no specialised child psychiatrists working with refugee children in Jordan, and only around 30 psychiatrists country-wide in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2013).

Child labour and early marriage

The loss of education is one element in a wider spiral of social reversal. As the refugee crisis has become more intense and protracted, the absence of learning opportunities has harmed the well-being of children in numerous ways. There is worrying evidence that the crisis in education is contributing to an epidemic of child labour. UNHCR (2013) and Save the Children (2013) assessments in Jordan found that just under half of refugee children were working. High levels of child labour have also been reported by humanitarian organisations in Lebanon and Turkey (see, for example, Letsch, 2014). Across most refuge-hosting countries, children are being drawn into the agricultural labour force and into street hawking.

While child labour in any manifestation is a cause for concern, there is distressing evidence that many children in Jordan and Lebanon are being forced into some of the worst and most exploitative forms of labour. For example, the US Department of Labor (2012) cites evidence that refugee children as young as 12 are working for over 12 hours a day in food services, sales and manufacturing in Jordan. In Lebanon, children working as street vendors selling food, toys and flowers have become a common sight in Beirut. These children, who face threats from traffickers and from criminal groups, are often earning between \$2.50 and \$5 a day (Solomon, 2013). The upshot is that the Syrian refugee crisis is undermining already inadequate national and regional plans to combat child labour (see, for example, Government of Lebanon, 2013).

Forced marriage is another cause for concern. Without the protection afforded by education, more girls are being drawn into early marriages. Save the Children (2014) reports that almost one-third of all marriages involving Syrian refugees in Jordan in the first quarter of 2014 involved girls below the age of 18 – and early marriage rates increased by 25% between 2013 and 2014. An increasing proportion of these marriages were to men more than 15 years older than their child bride (Save the Children, 2014).

There is worrying evidence that the refugee crisis is fuelling the development of an illicit market for early marriage and forced marriage. One Harvard University study describes an office in Tripoli, northern Lebanon, where foreign men – mostly from the Gulf States – could ‘choose’ from a number of Syrian refugee girls (Bartels and Hamill, 2014). There is also evidence of early marriage among Syrian refugee girls in Za’atari refugee camp and in Jordan’s urban areas. Landlords in Jordan and Lebanon,

where the refugee crisis has driven up rental prices by more than 300% in some cases, have reportedly offered to waive Syrian families’ rent if they can marry their young daughters, according to Refugees International (Batha, 2013).

There is a two-way interaction between child labour and early marriage on the one side and lost opportunities for education on the other (Siddiqi and Patrinos, 1995). Being out of school increases the risk of children being drawn in labour markets or forced into early marriage. That is why getting boys and girls into school is a vital part of any strategy to protect children’s welfare. However, children are also forced out of school by household poverty. Hence, any effort to expand educational opportunity will require wider anti-poverty interventions, including cash transfers on a far greater scale than currently provided. For this reason it is deeply troubling that even some core programmes run by the United Nations in Syria and the region are facing deep cuts in the face of restricted donor contributions.⁴

Education – a limited aid effort

To what extent have aid donors acted on their commitment to ensure that there is ‘no lost generation’ among Syrian refugee children? The start of the 2014 school year is an opportune moment to ask that question. Unfortunately, the answer provides few grounds for optimism.

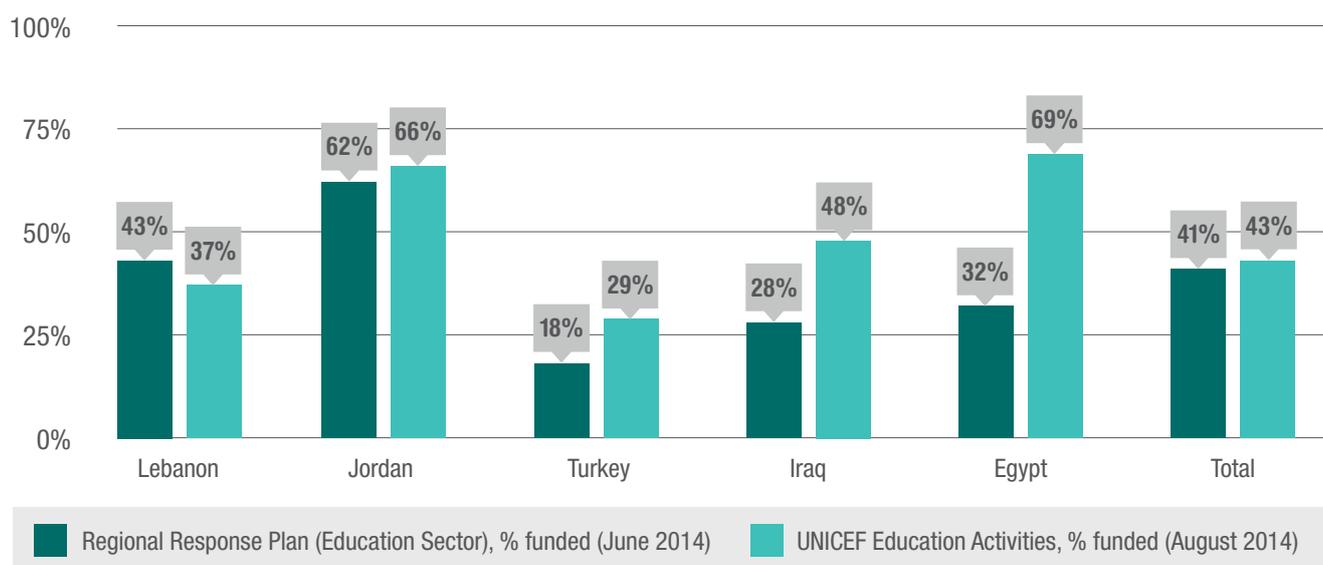
Donor commitment (or the lack of it) can be assessed in part by examining the financial status of the United Nations (2013) Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP). This is the primary resource mobilisation vehicle for the international response to the crisis, bringing together 155 actors including host governments, UN agencies, bilateral donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) under a single framework. Assessed against funding requests, the donor response has been modest (Figure 3). Just 41% of the \$398 million requested for education in the RRP had been provided by the middle of 2014 (United Nations, 2014a), and only 43% of UNICEF’s education programmes were funded as of mid-August 2014 (UNICEF, 2014). Given the large size of the out-of-school Syrian refugee population in the country, Lebanon has fared particularly badly.

Funding gaps of this order of magnitude are particularly damaging in education, given that schools require advance commitments well before the start of the school year and a predictable flow of financing. Teachers have to be recruited and trained, books provided, classrooms extended and new systems put in place to address the specific needs of refugees several months before the school year begins. It follows that funding shortfalls in 2014 will have consequences not just this year, but also in 2015 and 2016.

Unfortunately, the real picture is worse than the headline numbers for RRP financing suggest. This is because RRP requests are based not on an assessment of

4 For example, the World Food Programme’s distribution programme in Syria is set to be slashed by 40% in October 2014, according to EuroNews (2014).

Figure 3: Funding levels of multi-agency (RRP6) and UNICEF education activities, by country



Country	Regional Response Plan			UNICEF Education Activities		
	Received (\$ million)	Requested (\$ million)	Unfunded (\$ million)	Received (\$ million)	Requested (\$ million)	Unfunded (\$ million)
Lebanon	88.77	206.45	117.68	42.19	114.83	72.64
Jordan	45.74	73.77	28.03	28.09	42.46	14.37
Turkey	11.2	62.22	51.02	10.93	37.25	26.32
Iraq	10.62	37.92	27.3	6.44	13.5	7.06
Egypt	5.6	17.51	11.91	2.76	4	1.24
Total	161.93	397.87	235.94	90.41	212.04	121.63

Sources: Data on the RRP is from United Nations (2014a); figures for UNICEF are from UNICEF (2014). Because UNICEF education funding is factored into the Regional Response Plan, the two sets of numbers should not be aggregated or perceived as fully distinct from one another.

overall need, but on an approximate calculation of what aid agencies and governments might be in a position to deliver in the light of numerous constraints. For example, the RRP for 2014 aims to provide education for just 144,000 Syrian refugee children out of the 400,000 school-age Syrian boys and girls in Lebanon (United Nations, 2014a). Put differently, donors are falling short of a funding target that is itself far short of the requirements for delivering universal education for refugee children.

As the Syrian crisis enters its fourth year there is an urgent need to rethink current approaches to refugee education across the region. Contrary to the commitment made by donors at high-level meetings, a lost generation is emerging. With the public financing and service delivery capacity of host governments under stress, a strengthened donor response is vital. The first step is to assess the costs of delivering on a cost-effective basis education to all refugees, irrespective of which country they are in or whether they are in a refugee camp or living in the wider community. This is what the Government of Lebanon has

done on a national basis in its *Reaching All Children with Education* (RACE) strategy (Government of Lebanon, 2014), which we look at in the following section. The second step is to create effective delivery mechanisms at a national level, with an emphasis on building the capacity and resilience of host countries' education systems.

None of this is to suggest that finance is the only obstacle to a resolution of the education crisis facing refugees. National policies and administrative rules in neighbouring countries are inadvertently reinforcing barriers to education. While host governments have opened up their public school systems, they typically require Syrian refugee children to learn a new language of instruction – French, English or Kurdish, for example – before they enter the formal education system. Restrictions on the employment of Syrian refugee teachers have also limited educational opportunities for refugees in some countries. Refugee children have also found it difficult in many cases to secure certification or recognition for the education they received at home in Syria.⁵

Syrian refugee education in Lebanon

No country hosts more Syrian refugee children than Lebanon. The future of these children hangs in the balance. While the Government of Lebanon has adopted an ambitious strategy to deliver education to Syrian refugees, the strategy will not be delivered without a step-increase in aid. This increase needs to happen with immediate effect. Yet with the 2014 school year underway, donors have yet to act on repeated commitments to respond to the needs of Syrian refugee children and their most vulnerable Lebanese counterparts.

Refugee numbers continue to rise

It is difficult to establish the number of refugees in Lebanon with any precision. More than 1.2 million Syrians have registered for refugee status with UNHCR. Many more are unregistered. Lebanese officials and aid agencies on the ground put the overall number of Syrian refugees at between 1.5 and 2 million. In some areas refugees now outnumber host community populations. The refugee numbers include around 42,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (UNRWA, 2014). This means that at least one in four people living in Syria today – or perhaps as many as one in three – is a Syrian refugee. Few of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in camps. The refugee population is dispersed across 1,700 locations, including 1,400 informal tented settlements on relatively marginal pieces of land.⁶

The Syria conflict and rapid influx of refugees has created a vicious spiral. Economic growth has slowed to less than 1%, and the fiscal deficit has widened to 9% of GDP, largely as a result of lost revenues (World Bank, 2014). Slow growth, reduced revenue collection and spiralling refugee numbers have combined to generate stress on basic services, energy, water, sanitation and trash collection. According to the World Bank (2013), some \$2.5 billion would be required to provide public services to both Lebanese and Syrians at their pre-conflict levels of quality.

Political uncertainty has hampered the response to the crisis. The formation of a new government in February 2014 has helped to address what was a damaging political vacuum, but Lebanon continues to face a tenuous domestic political situation that is, in no small part, linked to internal divisions over the situation in Syria. Spill-over from the conflict threatens to destabilise Lebanon's already complex and delicate demography and political dispensation, and the rise of ISIS in the region poses another major security concern for the country.

The coping capacity of host communities has been overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the refugee crisis (World Vision, 2013). Syrian refugees have settled predominantly in the already deprived northern and Bekaa regions (Harb and Saab, 2014; UNDP and MoSA, 2008). Mounting

tensions are evident, with host communities fearing, and in many cases experiencing, a loss of jobs, wages and access to public services. With youth unemployment affecting over one in five young people and the labour market suffering from widespread informality and low-quality jobs, the competition created by Syrian refugees inevitably fuels social discontent and tensions between the refugee and host communities (IRC, 2013). Wages for many jobs have been halved as a result of the growing number of Syrian job-seekers.

Refugee populations themselves are highly vulnerable (United Nations, 2014c). With most being unable to find work, savings have been eroded and a growing number of families report difficulties in paying for health care, shelter and food. Some 70% of refugee households are receiving food assistance through the World Food Programme's electronic vouchers, though the amount of money added to the electronic vouchers each month is being cut by one-third in October 2014 – from \$30 to \$20 per person – in response to budget shortfalls (WFP, 2014). High levels of poverty among refugee populations create a dependence on public services, UNHCR and other agencies.

Education – limited provision for refugees and host communities under pressure

The education sector illustrates the wider pressures unfolding in Lebanon. More than half of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are under the age of 18. Children and young people urgently need access to education. Yet an already over-stretched and under-resourced public school system is under acute strain. Despite the generosity of the Government of Lebanon in opening some schools to refugees, only a minority of Syrian children are actually in school. There is also worrying evidence that provision for host communities is deteriorating as public schools take on more refugee children.

Unravelling the data available on refugee education is intrinsically difficult and made more difficult by the patchwork of current education provision. While some refugee children have entered the formal public school system, most of those in education are covered by a wide array of informal schemes, accelerated learning programmes and NGO providers. Evidence on the quality of provision for refugees in both the formal and informal systems is uneven.

Headline statistics on enrolment tell their own story. There are more than half-a-million Syrian children in Lebanon under the age of 18. Less than one-quarter of these children are in formal education. As Table 1 shows, early childhood education for those aged 3 to 5 is limited, despite the pressing need for pre-school support for very

5 For further discussion of several of these barriers, see Watkins (2013) and Cochran (2014).

6 For a map of the informal tented settlements, see http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR_LBN_SLT_MAP_2014-09-03_01_A0_InformalSettlementinLebanon.pdf.

Table 1: Syrian refugee children in formal education in Lebanon

Refugee children (age group)	Number of children	Children in formal education	Children out of school
3-5 years	134,969	28,313	79.02%
6-14 years	284,146	101,455	64.29%
15-18 years	83,557	6,464	92.26%
Total	502,672	136,232	73%

Source: UNHCR 2014 data.

young children traumatised by the conflict in Syria and their subsequent displacement. Just one third of children aged 6 to 14 are in school (covering grades 1-9). Formal provision for those aged 15 to 18 is almost non-existent, with just 8% in school. This is a particularly disturbing statistic, not least because of the concentration of refugees in areas – such as northern Bekaa – in which ISIS and other groups have a growing presence.

Enrolment figures greatly understate the scale of the crisis. Some 70% of the Syrian children entering education in Lebanon drop out before the end of the academic year. Failure rates among Syrian children are twice the national average. Drop-out rates among Lebanese children living in deprived areas are also rising, from 9% to 15% between 2011 and 2012 (UNICEF and Save the Children, 2012).

The refugee crisis has placed an immense pressure on Lebanon's public education system. Public schools in Lebanon serve only around one-third of the country's children, with the intake drawn principally from the poorest and most vulnerable socio-economic groups. The public school infrastructure is dilapidated, and learning outcomes are poor.

Lebanon's public education system has borne the brunt of the adjustment to the refugee inflow. In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) introduced a number of measures to respond to the crisis. Public schools were instructed to enrol Syrian refugee students regardless of their legal status and to waive school and book fees. This has been supplemented by the introduction of a second-shift system, supported by donor governments through UNICEF and UNHCR, which now caters for 35,000 refugee children. However, Lebanon's public school system simply lacks the capacity to cope. The Syrian school-age refugee population exceeds the total number of students in Lebanon's public education system at both primary and secondary levels.

In addition to a lack of physical classroom spaces, refugee children face wider barriers to education. These range from school-related fees (for books and transport) to curriculum requirements (including instruction in

English or French), social discrimination and registration requirements. But chronic under-financing for education among Syrian refugees – and for vulnerable Lebanese children – is at the heart of the challenge.

Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) in Lebanon – and the donor response

Aid agencies and non-governmental organisations, like the Government of Lebanon, were surprised by the astounding increase in the numbers of refugees. Neither the scale nor the duration of the crisis could have been anticipated. Nearly four years after the start of the conflict, the 'surprise factor' – and the perception that the refugee crisis will be short-lived – no longer justify the limited response to this long-term challenge. Yet there is little evidence of donors developing a coherent strategy to convert rhetoric into action.

The Government of Lebanon has adopted a strategy to get all refugee children into education: Reaching All Children with Education (RACE). The RACE strategy was developed in concert with UN agencies and other donors, building on an initiative launched by the UN Special Envoy on Education, Gordon Brown. RACE aligns the refugee response with the Lebanese Government's Education Sector Development Plan (Government of Lebanon, 2014).

One of the strengths of the RACE strategy is that it brings the humanitarian and development responses together under a single framework. In the early stages of the crisis, the effectiveness of the international response was hampered by a lack of clarity over the remits of UN agencies and associated problems in coordination. Institutional distinctions were rapidly overtaken by events on the ground, as it became evident that the crisis in education was both a humanitarian and a development emergency. The RACE plans cuts through artificial divisions, establishing well-defined goals and a vehicle to coordinate activities of a range of actors and agencies to achieve those goals. As well as addressing the needs of Syrian refugees, the strategy envisages support for some 40,000 vulnerable Lebanese children, recognising that the refugee crisis has also created a crisis for host communities. Briefly summarised, the key elements of the RACE strategy (Government of Lebanon, 2014) include:

- spending of \$600 million over three years, rising from \$177 million in 2014 to \$231 million in 2017
- reaching an average of 413,000 Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese children aged 3 to 18
- integrating investments in school infrastructure and education quality, with an emphasis on developing the teacher workforce, monitoring learning outcomes and school-based management
- expanding the second-shift system and increasing classroom availability through new construction or renting.

The costs of expanding education provision are non-linear, with the marginal cost of reaching the next child

higher than average per-pupil financing costs for a number of reasons. For example, while existing classroom space and teacher numbers may leave some scope to bring children into the public school system at a marginal increase in cost, there are limits to what can be achieved. This is reflected in the \$600 annual per pupil cost under RACE for bringing refugee children into the second-shift system, which is some three times the costs for expanding first-shift coverage (\$200) (Government of Lebanon, 2014).

Donor finance – far too little, much too late

Full, immediate and effective implementation of the RACE strategy could mark a turning point in the education crisis in Lebanon. Unfortunately, donors have a weak track record in responding to this situation. While impressive commitments have been made, real delivery has fallen far short of the pledges. The education programmes of UN agencies, the primary response mechanism, have been chronically under-financed – and donors have been slow to put their weight behind the RACE strategy.

As previously noted, requests for education financing through the RRP for Lebanon have been consistently under-funded. As of mid-2014, \$89 million had been provided for the education response in Lebanon through the RRP (United Nations, 2014a). This represents just 43% of the funding requested – leaving a deficit of \$117 million.

The profile of support to education through the RRP points to a limited donor base. Relatively few donors have made significant allocation to education through the RRP. The EU is by far the largest contributor and is the only major donor to UNHCR education programmes. UNICEF's education activities have a wider span of support. Even so, only five donors – in descending order the EU, Canada, Germany, the US and Denmark – have committed more than \$2 million (Table 2). These five donors account for 80% of UNICEF's education funding in Lebanon. Mirroring the wider RRP shortfall, as of August 2014 UNICEF had received less than half of the funding sought for its education programme (UNICEF, 2014).

Relatively small amounts of support have been delivered to education beyond UN agency-led processes. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has supported an innovative but modest £3 million programme to finance textbook provision in Lebanon's public schools (DFID, 2014). This is a critical investment that will help to equip the education system to meet increased demand. However, it is difficult to establish how much of the allocation has been directed to schools serving Syrian refugee children. Japan has declared an intention to provide an education grant as part of a wider package of measures, though disbursement has yet to occur.

One of the striking features of the crisis has been the modest involvement to date of Arab donors. Only Kuwait has provided funding (through UNICEF) to the wider UN education initiatives. Other donors – the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, the Arab Gulf Program

for Development and the Islamic Development Bank – report support for education projects involving Syrian refugees. Several philanthropic groups are also active. However, it is difficult to establish with any accuracy either the overall level of financial support from the region or its effectiveness.

Opaque donor-reporting systems make it difficult to differentiate in some cases between pledged amounts and actual contributions. USAID reports education support to Lebanon of \$74.5 million. However, the programme in question, known as D-RASATI (or 'my studies' in Arabic), was initiated in 2010 and runs until 2015 (EDC, n.d.). According to USAID some \$10 million was allocated during 2013-2014 to areas with high concentrations of Syrian refugees. As of September 2014, none of this allocation had been disbursed. D-RASATI has also suffered from wider problems. The project is managed through a Boston-based consultancy firm and implemented through a number of partners in Beirut, including the American University of Beirut and the International Orthodox Christian Charities. In April 2013, a damning report by USAID's Office of Inspector General concluded that the project would fall far short of its goals as a result of poor planning and chronic mismanagement (USAID, 2013).

Standing back from the detail of donor financing for education, a number of concerns stand out. First, current financing levels fall far short of the resource requirements needed for successful implementation of RACE. Under the proposed strategy, average annual financing of \$184 million is required for the 2014 and 2015 school years

Table 2: Current financing for UNICEF education programmes in Lebanon

Donor	Timeframe	Amount (\$)
European Commission	2012-2016	30,988,000 ^a
Canada	2015	8,890,935
Germany	2015	8,513,525
US (State Department)	ND	4,221,791
Denmark	2015	3,261,384
UK	2014	1,583,718
Norway	2015	1,558,446
Kuwait	2016	991,437
Australia	2015/16	660,000
Switzerland	2014	635,367
UNICEF Resources	2015	553,767
Italy	2014	213,869
Total		60,832,920

Note: a) Of this amount, \$24,437,454 has been allocated for 2014.
Source: UNICEF 2014 data.

(Government of Lebanon, 2014). Current financing through the RRP is running at around one-half of this level and, with the exception of the EU, no major donor has provided multi-year financing on any scale. The funding deficit for the 2014 school year has important implications. It could result in massive numbers of Syrian refugee and vulnerable Lebanese children being denied a chance to resume or continue their education. As important, it will undermine the investments needed to strengthen the quality and accessibility of the education system.

Another concern relates to uncertainty over future financing. If the objectives set out in the RACE strategy are to be achieved, the MEHE, UN agencies and other implementing partners need to plan for a phased scale-up of their operations. As well as delivering education now, MEHE needs to put in place the investments – in school rehabilitation, classroom construction and teacher training to name just three priority areas – needed to expand provision in 2015 and 2016. The gap between current funding levels and overall RACE funding requirements could leave up to a quarter of a million children without opportunities for education.

Finally, donor-reporting systems add to the uncertainties. What matters for education planning purposes – and, by extension, for refugee children – are the real resources that will be available for a school year. Unfortunately, bilateral donors and UN agencies have yet to develop a school year-based financial reporting system. They report instead on the basis of UN systems (which use the calendar year) or donor-reporting conventions (which typically use the financial year). From the perspective of education planners in the MEHE and among NGOs delivering front-line services, it would appear critical that early measures are taken to identify the finances available against RACE budgets well before the start of the school year.

The more positive news is that several major donors have pledged additional support. USAID has earmarked \$45 million for education programmes in Lebanon for the period 2014-2018. The UK has backed the *No Lost Generation* strategy with a commitment of £55 million over three years, more than £20 million of which is being front-loaded for the first year. While the precise implementation details remain uncertain, part of the UK's commitment will be delivered through a consortium of NGOs, including Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the International Rescue Committee.

Rethinking delivery mechanisms

The financing gap in education has to be considered alongside aid delivery mechanisms. Donors face a number of distinctive challenges in Lebanon. These range from the absence of an annualised budget planning process to wider

concerns over public financial management and the presence of Hezbollah, a proscribed organisation in most donor countries, in the Lebanese Government. To date, the MEHE has not received direct budget support through the RRP process. However, some donors have supported projects through special earmarked accounts – the DFID textbook project mentioned earlier is an example. Beyond the broader financial management concerns, aid delivery to education has suffered from a number of coordination problems. UNHCR and UNICEF have greatly strengthened the links with MEHE programmes through the RRP process and their own activities. Yet donor financing and NGO delivery is, at best, weakly integrated into the overall RACE strategy.

Some donors are considering the development of a new financing channel for education. The World Bank has established a multi-donor trust fund (MDTF) for Lebanon, building on an arrangement developed for Jordan.⁷ While the MDTF has not yet been deployed for education, it could be used for this purpose. At the time this report was being written, DFID was exploring the option as a delivery mechanism for part of the UK's £55 million commitment for education between 2014 and 2018.

Recourse to a World Bank-led MDTF raises concerns at a number of levels. At a time when existing initiatives are under-funded, there is a danger that an MDTF education fund could divert resources from agencies such as UNICEF. Another concern is that the facility could emerge as a parallel delivery channel alongside UN-led mechanisms, with no obvious efficiency gains and a potential for duplication with increased transaction costs. In fact, the World Bank would conceivably have to transfer funds to UN agencies involved in implementation. Aid would then go from donor governments to the World Bank, to UN agencies such as UNICEF and then onward to NGOs and individual schools, with each agency applying institutional overheads and indirect costs ranging from 7% to more than 11% along the way.

The track-record of MDTF-type arrangements in education is mixed. In South Sudan, the MDTF introduced to support education, health and other basic services registered notoriously low disbursement rates – meaning money was not actually being spent on schedule – in part because of the Government's inability to comply with World Bank requirements (Norad, 2009; Barakat et al. 2012). Other MDTFs – in Afghanistan for example – have performed better. However, in a Lebanese context there is, at the very least, a risk that World Bank accounting and reporting standards will constrain delivery. The fact that only 6% of a World Bank education-sector loan provided to Lebanon in 2010 has been disbursed is illustrative of the risk. Given the urgent need for rapid disbursement,

7 The World Bank's Lebanon Syria Crisis Trust Fund (LSCTF) was established at the end of 2013. The Fund signed its first agreement in September 2014 – a grant of \$10 million to municipal authorities. Three donors – France, Finland and Norway – have committed \$30 million. Other donors are reportedly considering contributions in the form of commitments to education.

including immediate up-front commitments for the current school year, this is an issue that merits serious consideration.

While there is an urgent need for a single, coordinated funding framework, alternatives to the MDTF should be considered. There is a strong case to build on existing arrangements, including those developed under the Education Working Group in Lebanon. In contrast to the World Bank, UNICEF – which has taken over the chair of the Working Group from UNHCR – has an established education programme in Lebanon and a track record in working with the Ministry and NGO implementing partners.

One option for reform, proposed initially by the UN Special Envoy for Education, is the creation of a new pooled fund established specifically for the education strategy. The fund could be held in a UNICEF Special Account (which carries low charges). The governance system for management, project selection, disbursement and day-to-day operations could be agreed between the Government of Lebanon and donors, potentially with a private-sector entity providing fiduciary management and overseeing delivery. Once established, the fund could be channelled to specific activities under earmarked budget lines established by MEHE. Proposals to reach refugee populations and vulnerable refugees could be submitted by a wide variety of stakeholders and assessed against a number of factors, including the applicants' capacity to deliver and the cost-effectiveness of their applications. The use of funds could be closely monitored through independent audits. In very broad terms, this is the model that was developed under the Basic Services Fund in South Sudan – the far more effective successor to the MDTF there (Brown, 2012).

There are no blueprints for resource mobilisation and effective delivery of aid to education in Lebanon. It may be that a range of financing models is required, with the elements designed to address different components of the RACE strategy. Where implementation through the public school system is vital, there may be scope to earmark support through audited government budget lines. Similarly, a pooled fund through which implementing partners are invited to tender might be appropriate in cases where only NGOs can reach isolated areas, informal tented settlements and highly dispersed populations. However, there are compelling grounds for unifying the governance, financing and fiduciary management framework under a single framework to support the RACE strategy.

Recommendations

The Syrian refugee crisis confronts all actors with immense challenges. The large numbers of children out of school, uncertainties over future refugee flows, weak governance, insecurity and underlying social, economic and political tensions combine to create an enormously complex operational environment. Yet it is clear that the current structures are not fit for the purpose of delivering support

at the scale required by the RACE strategy. A number of urgent priorities stand-out.

- **Acting with urgency.** The 2014 school year should mark a turning point in donor actions, with a target of getting 325,000 refugee and vulnerable Lebanese children into full-time education or preparatory programmes.
- **Full-funding of the RACE strategy.** Donors need to convert pledges of support into multi-year financing commitments of around \$200 million annually – more than double the current levels. Immediate action should be taken to close the financing gap in the 2014 RRP and UNICEF's education programme. As an immediate priority, donors should commit the \$111 million needed to cover the deficit in RRP funding, which would also require fully financing UNICEF's education interventions.
- **Moving to a school-year financial reporting system.** The Government of Lebanon and NGO partners need to plan for real school-year financing. UNHCR and UNICEF should develop a consolidated account that reports on donor commitments against RACE financing requirements for 2014-2017.
- **Updating needs assessment.** Finance and delivery mechanisms set out in the RACE strategy should be subject to regular review and adjustment in the light of refugee and Lebanese vulnerable population numbers and location.
- **Monitoring the MDTF.** If a World Bank-led MDTF is adopted, performance should be subjected to stringent independent scrutiny on disbursement rates. Donors should either announce pledges with immediate effect with a view to front-loaded disbursement in 2014 or earmark interventions for subsequent years. Provision of multi-year commitments is critical. Given the scale of the 2014 financing gap, the MDTF should be pushed to maintain a high disbursement rate for the 2014-2015 school year
- **Creating a pooled-financing mechanism for education as part of the RACE strategy.** Notwithstanding the debate over the use of the MDTF in education, there are strong grounds for the creation of a dedicated education facility. The facility should be designed to attract finance from existing RRP/UNICEF donors, new OECD-DAC donors and Arab donor agencies and philanthropists as well as from private businesses. Such a facility could lower transaction costs for new aid entrants by providing for effective fiduciary management, coordination and monitoring.
- **Reducing administrative barriers and indirect costs.** As highlighted earlier, rules-based arrangements relating to certification, teacher recruitment and language of instruction continue to keep many children out of school. The same is true of financial costs relating to transport to and from school each day. These are areas in which administrative reform coupled with cash transfers could lower barriers to education.

Beyond these technical arrangements, more must also be done to protect Syrian refugee children. Many of those entering school are ill-equipped to learn as a result of trauma-related stress. The RACE programmes attach insufficient weight to this problem and should be revised to provide for appropriate levels of counselling. Likewise, specific strategies should be developed to tackle early marriage and child labour, two issues that resulted from inadequate education provision in the past and that will continue to keep Syrian children out of schooling far into the future. Ultimately, the education crisis facing Syrian children and their families is not about government agencies, donors, the United Nations or NGOs. It is about Syrian children who are suffering for want of an education and whose future prospects will be curtailed for decades – and into future generations – if international and national stakeholders across the region do not take urgent and coordinated action.

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