



**WIDENING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN  
REFUGEES: THE ROLE OF PRIVATE AND NGO SECTORS IN LEBANON**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ALP: Accelerated Learning Programs

CERD: Center of Education Research and Development

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

D-RASATI: Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teachers Improvement

EFA: Education for All

FE: Formal Education

IGO: International Governmental Organization

IFE Informal Education

INEE: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

MEHE: Ministry of Education and Higher Education

MOE: Syrian Ministry of Education

NFE: Non-formal education

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PRS: Palestinian Refugees from Syria

RACE: Reaching All Children with Education

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNHCR UN High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA: United Nations Refugee Works Agency

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Syrian crisis enters the fourth year, there is a timely need to reflect on the wider implications on Lebanon. The influx of over a million and half Syrian refugees brought a total of 400,000 school age refugees to Lebanon. This dramatic demographic shift posed a formidable challenge to an education system suited to deliver education to a national student population of just over 900,000. To date, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) which only hosts 30% of the student population in Lebanon shouldered the burden of education service delivery with support from the international community and UN agencies. However, public sector limitations pointed to its inability to accommodate the total number of Syrian refugee students, and thus warranted further exploration of the role for NGOs and the private sector. While the MEHE and donors widely acknowledge – to some extent – the role of NGOs in the delivery of education, the private sector role has been overlooked to date.

This study examines access and quality of education for Syrian refugees enrolled in both the private and NGO sectors through case studies of 13 schools and NGOs with education programmes. We employed the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) standards for education in emergencies as a conceptual framework to examine access and quality of education both in the formal and non-formal education settings.

The study revealed that Lebanon, as a party to several international conventions such as the CRC, is obligated to provide compulsory education for all children younger than 15-years-old. Yet several Lebanese regulations limit the right to education to Lebanese citizens only. On the other hand, any discussion of Lebanon's legal obligations towards a refugee population of such a scale is moot, given the MEHE possesses neither the budget nor the capacity to immediately accommodate such numbers. The international community and UN agencies undoubtedly have obligations to support the MEHE, the NGOs, and the private sectors in the delivery of accessible and quality education to Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Nonetheless, several domestic legal regulations mandate the basic standards in the quality of education, such as a safe learning environment. Yet the Government of Lebanon falls short in the enforcement and fulfilment of such regulations. For instance, the majority of Syrian students enrolled in Lebanese public schools reported regular physical and verbal abuse from the teaching staff and principals, as well as bullying from their Lebanese peers. NGOs remain powerless to intervene to prevent violence against children. Similarly, Syrian parents also felt unable to protect their children due to limited and often uncertain implications for the chosen recourse. On the one hand, Syrian students faced near certain violence at Lebanese public schools, but the alternative risked the loss of place at school if abuse was reported. Moreover, disaffected Syrian parents also incorrectly believed they were barred from membership in parents' councils. Rather, internal regulations do not negate the right of children to a safe learning environment and do not deny non-Lebanese parents to membership in parents' councils. Parents' councils, present in only one surveyed school, were instrumental in managing relationships between a Lebanese school administration and the Syrian student population. Not only did parents' councils temper tensions between parents on the one hand, and administration or teachers on the other hand, but these groups crucially bridged the gap between Syrian and Lebanese communities more broadly. As a result, the dialogue and cooperation strengthened the quality of learning and contributed to student retention.

Access to quality education remains elusive to the majority of Syrian children due to minimal collaboration between the public, private, NGO, and INGO sectors in Lebanon. The public sector, hindered by an inflexible curriculum, limited capacity, and heavily regulated teaching, remains unable to meet the demands of providing education in emergency. In turn, the private and NGO sectors are increasingly indispensable fixtures required to meet the evolving demands to absorb and integrate Syrian refugees. In a single year, the population of Syrian students enrolled in education programmes at Lebanese private schools mushroomed beyond expectations. Syrian students were absorbed by a variety of private institutions not limited to private accredited Lebanese schools, free private Syrian schools with instruction based on the Syrian and Libyan curriculum, and emergent Coalition schools. Private schools served as the main education provider for older Syrian students, particularly in the secondary level. While private

Lebanese schools offered accredited and certified education, Syrian students – particularly in the secondary level – struggled with the foreign language instruction. One particular successful model was a private Lebanese school that translated the curriculum to Arabic. An arrangement between the school principal and MEHE made it possible for these students to answer the official exams in Arabic instead of English. The passing rate for secondary students in this school was the highest compared to other provisions where the curriculum was taught in English. In contrast, those enrolled in Syrian-run schools avoided the foreign language obstacles, but risked their lives for travel to Syria to complete the end of year or official exams. Parents without the financial means and who were unable to travel to Syria had no option but to register in coalition schools, accredited only in Turkey, Oman, France, and Somalia. Still another option offered by Syrian-led schools in Lebanon: the completion of the Libyan Baccalaureate. Syrian students in possession of travel documents were able to travel to Turkey to complete the Libyan Baccalaureate exams; however, this was not possible for half of them who were given the option of repeating G12 this academic coming year (2014-2015).

The study also highlighted the inadequacy of mere access to mainstream public and private schools without the provision of supplemental academic support to ease the transition to a new learning environment. The lack of supplemental resources resorted in a staggering dropout rate of 70 percent during the 2011–2012 school year. The failure rate among Syrian children is twice the national average of Lebanese children. These figures not only raise questions on the provision of education services to Syrian refugees, but also offer insights into the key services needed for success in quality of education for emergencies. The delivery of quality education in the refugee context is still an under examined area in emergency education, given the issue of access is deemed the highest priority.

The main feature of private and public sector education programmes was the limited adaptability of the learning environment to meet the needs of Syrian refugees. Most specifically, the absence of much needed remedial and language support left Syrian students without critical resources for classroom success. The non-formal sector largely filled the critical void for supplemental education. Free from the confines of a set

curriculum, the non-formal sector was able to offer a learning environment more suitable and responsive to Syrian students' needs. Yet this created pressure on NGOs to provide quality education programmes when they lacked previous experience and expertise in such support. A common feature of all sectors offering education for the refugees – with the exception of a few Lebanese NGOs with experience supporting Iraqi refugees – was the lack of expertise and preparedness of staff to offer education in emergency situations. Hence, most formal and non-formal sector programmes included in this study were improvised, without much structure, and prompted concerns of long-term sustainability.

Much is to be learned about the different sectors and crisis education delivery from three years of education delivery to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The prolonged crisis necessitates adaptation to meet changing circumstances, and the private and NGO sector institutions offered rich case studies for the continued recalibration in their approach to education programmes. While the NGO sector received support from donors in the form of expertise and funding, the private sector was left with limited support, primarily from domestic and Arab donors. Now more than ever there is a distinct need to provide expertise, to develop policies, and to support programmes that ensure the retention of vulnerable children in the education system. This includes policies related to admission, placement testing, curriculum adaptation, language instruction strategies, and bullying and violence mitigation at school, parental involvement, and teacher professional development programmes. Such policies will not only benefit Syrian students, but will also strengthen the three sectors (public, private, and NGO) catering to the most vulnerable Lebanese children. The issues outlined above represent the main challenges facing Syrian refugees, as well as disadvantaged Lebanese children.

Finally, the long-term impact of segregated education programmes for refugee children requires careful consideration and reflection. While special programmes may be needed to assist Syrian refugees in the transition and preparatory stages, inclusion rather than exclusion should be the medium term objective. Otherwise two parallel, but divided communities will grow alongside each other with little cooperation. The experience of Palestinian refugees, who fled to Lebanon as of 1948, and who had to live in segregated communities and receive education in segregated schools, offers a poignant point of

reflection. These students are the most disadvantaged in terms of education with the highest dropout rates and the lowest school completion rate in Lebanon. They are obliged to learn the Lebanese curriculum including civic education resulting in acculturation of generations. Will Syrian refugees face a similar plight in Lebanon?

Our study also punctured hollow assumptions about the negative implications of mixed classrooms. The belief that mixed classrooms of Lebanese and Syrian children resulted in the underperformance of the Lebanese students is simply not supported by any research. More research is needed on the quality of education for both Syrians and Lebanese in private and public schools in Lebanon. Finally, further research on the mainly Syrians sessions is urgently needed to inform any future education policies of consequence to Syrian refugee children.

## INTRODUCTION

The on-going tumult in Syria had an impact well beyond the national borders. More than 2 million refugees fled to neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Lebanon currently hosts over 1 million Syrian refugees, the largest number in a neighbouring nation, yet such official figures obscure the many refugees still awaiting registration. Despite the prompt response by local and international non-governmental organisations, the scale of the emergency remains significant and the emergent challenges are manifold in this small country. Lebanon, long plagued by weak infrastructure and home to a comparatively small population of approximately 4.2 million, was ill equipped to handle the mass influx of Syrian refugees. This is particularly true in the education sector.

The delivery of quality public education to Lebanese children proved a challenge well before the onset of the crisis in Syria. The total number of students in the public sector is 299,247 while those in the private are over 644, 473<sup>2</sup>. The percentage of Lebanese students enrolled in public schools dropped precipitously in recent years, in part due to perceptions of poor quality of teaching and a lack of resources. Yet issues of quality instruction fell to the wayside to cope with the influx of Syrian refugees. Lebanon currently hosts approximately 400,000 Syrian refugee school age children<sup>3</sup>. A mere 15 to 20 percent of these refugees are enrolled in Lebanese public schools, often in localities already deemed ‘vulnerable’ by a recent UNICEF report<sup>4 5</sup>. The added strain on tenuous

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Statistics: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>

<sup>2</sup> Center of Education Research and Development, (CRDP) <http://www.crdp.org/sites/default/files/التلاميذ%20التعليمية%20توزع%20على%20المراحل%20التعليمية%20بحسب%20قطاعات%20التعليم%20والجنس%20بحسب%20قطاعات.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Statistics <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

<sup>4</sup> The Lebanese Ministry Of Education and Higher Education presentation at The Sub-Regional Conference on Scaling up Quality Education Provision for Syrian Children and Children in Vulnerable Host Communities, 17-19 June 2014, Amman/Jordan.

<sup>5</sup> A composite index of concentration of vulnerable population and registered refugees was used to define five quintiles of vulnerability. Lebanese data was based on the 2004 poverty study and CDR population estimate at the locality level and refugee data from UNHCR as of 30 April 2013. See UNICEF, *UNICEF Lebanon: Equity in Humanitarian Action* (June 2013).

public schools in marginalised areas poses fundamental challenges to a fragile education system. In spite of this reality, several Lebanese public schools introduced a second shift for the 2013-2014 academic year to meet the expanded needs of Syrian refugees. According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), there are currently 29,902 students attending second shift schools.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, despite the efforts to widen access by the MEHE, UN agencies, and international donors, formal education remains attainable for only 20 percent of school age Syrians in Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> A mere 2 percent of Syrians were both enrolled in and regularly attended schools at the secondary level. Part of the issue could be attributed to the costs of enrolment. Syrian refugees, who invariably fled under a variety of circumstances, are unable to afford even the nominal tuition and transportation fees without assistance. To make matters worse, only 30 percent of Lebanese public schools offered a waiver of school fees<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, those refugees who manage to access formal education typically encounter a number of challenges that affect their capacity to integrate and remain in schools. A notable challenge lies in language. While Lebanon and Syria both speak Arabic, Lebanese public schools teach science and math in English or French after grade 7. This poses a major barrier to integration and retention of Syrian refugee students in the Lebanese education system. NGOs, private schools, and Syrian-led initiatives intervened to offer alternative education models, yet the viability of such efforts to address the needs of the out-of-school or disaffected refugee students remains largely unexplored.

Private sector institutions increasingly fill the void in the provision of education for Syrian refugees. Limitations on access and the challenges of integration in public sector education spurred private institution enrolment by Syrian refugees. There are

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<sup>6</sup> The Lebanese Ministry Of Education and Higher Education presentation at The Sub-Regional Conference on Scaling up Quality Education Provision for Syrian Children and Children in Vulnerable Host Communities, 17-19 June 2014, Amman/Jordan.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Education Needs Assessment for Syrian Refugee Children: In Schools, Communities and Safe Spaces / Education Working Group/ August 2013 (Draft Version)

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

approximately 16,500 Syrians in private schools, including free private schools.<sup>9</sup> A number of established Lebanese private schools received and integrated Syrian refugee students in small numbers. Many such private schools opened separate sections for Syrian students as an additional way to support those refugees who remain out of school.

Lastly, the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) schools in Lebanon extended services to displaced Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS). In total, UNRWA schools provide education services to 7,400 children.<sup>10</sup>

Crucially, the varied institutions offer vastly disparate curricula. Several of the institutions adopted an unmodified Lebanese curriculum, whereas others instituted a modified Lebanese curriculum, yet still some institutions employed an entirely different curriculum altogether.

The following table presents the overall number of Syrian students attending education in Lebanon for the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Table 1 Syrian students enrolled in formal schools 2012-13**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Lebanese</b>	<b>Syrian</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Public</b>	247723	43537	299245
<b>Free private</b>	119949	5207	127846
<b>Private</b>	491832	11231	516627

Table 1 summarises the different avenues offering formal education in Lebanon. Formal education follows an official curriculum, typically in a classroom setting, and may fall in the public or private sector.

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<sup>9</sup> CERD Annual Statistical Bulletin for 2012-2013

<sup>10</sup> UNRWA Response and Services to Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) in Lebanon, Bi-weekly Briefing 10 February 2014 | issue 30. <http://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unrwas-response-and-services-palestine-refugees-syria-prs-lebanon-10-february-2014>

Formal education includes a minimum of four hours; the standard is 6 or 7 hours, spent on core subjects per day (Arabic, English/French, math and science) with a clear division of classes and a set grading and assessment policy<sup>11</sup>. **Private Lebanese schools** are licensed schools with established curricula and with years of operation in Lebanon.

Although public and private schools are almost equal in number (1365 public and 1442 private and free private), the public sector accounts for only 43.8% of the 88,413 teachers employed in 2009-2010 and for only 29.2% of students enrolled in the Lebanese education system in 2011.<sup>12</sup> In comparison with other countries in the region this is considered quite low (In 2006, countries such as Jordan and Egypt had an enrollment rate of 75% and 96% respectively in public institutions).<sup>13</sup>

The percentage of students enrolled in public schools in Lebanon continues to drop due to the perception of poorer quality of teaching offered in public schools as opposed to private schools. *“Private and public education exhibit significant differences when it comes to quality [...] 9 out of 1000 students from the public schools obtain the baccalaureate without having to repeat one or more years, while as many as 255 out of 1000 from private school reach this level.”*<sup>14</sup>

Despite the increase of the number of public schools and MEHE’s attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the majority of parents continue to choose to send their children to private schools. This reveals that the majority of parents believe that the quality of education offered in private schools is still better than that offered in public ones. The following table shows the number of students in each sector.

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<sup>11</sup> There are three cycles in addition to the secondary stage. Each cycle consists of three grades. Students have to undertake an official exam in grade 9 (end of cycle 3) and grade 12.

<sup>12</sup> Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) 2012-2011 النشر الإحصائية للعام الدراسي

<sup>13</sup> Al-Masah Capital Limited (2011) *MENA: Education Sector Report*

<sup>14</sup> UNDP (2009) *Lebanon 2008-2009: The National Human Development Report – Towards a citizen’s state*, p.132

**Table 2 Percentage of students in the public and private sectors<sup>15</sup>**

	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Public %</b>	<b>Private paying %</b>	<b>Private subsidized %</b>
Pre-school	154, 159	19	66	15
Elementary	461, 715	26	47	22
Intermediate	204, 394	34	61	0
Secondary	122, 118	45	52	0
Total	942, 391	29%	54%	13%

According to CERD statistics for all levels of education in 2009-2010, the ratio of students to teachers is the lowest in the public sector (7.4:1), followed by the private sector (11.6:1) and is highest in the free private schools (18.7:1) and UNRWA schools (20.7:1). More recent findings from D-RASATI confirm that the student to teacher ratio in public schools ranges from a low of 1-5 students per teacher to a high of 20 or more students per teacher. At secondary level, out of a total of 255 secondary schools, around 28% (71 schools) have a student/teacher ratio of less than 5 students per teacher and almost 60% (153) have a student/teacher ration of between 5 and 10 students per teacher. These figures imply that the public sector has capacity to absorb students particularly in primary schools. However, it is worth noting that while this might be the cases in some schools, the majority of students in public primary schools are in Bekka and Akkar which is where the majority of Syrian refugee children are currently living.

Currently most of the private schools which offer special and subsidised programmes for the Syrian refugees are religious or have a religious affiliation, mainly Sunni. These schools typically accept a small number of Syrian students in their regular classroom for those who could afford the full-tuition fee paid by the Lebanese, but the vast majority offer separate classrooms exclusively for Syrian children. Instruction is based on the

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<sup>15</sup> النشرة الإحصائية للعام الدراسي -2010 (CERD) Center for Educational Research and Development

Lebanese national curriculum to ensure the receipt of an accredited certificate from the Government of Lebanon. **Coalition Schools**, another type of private subsidised school, teach the Syrian coalition curriculum and are only accredited in Turkey, Oman, Somalia and France. **Private Syrian Schools**, established by NGOs or individuals (mainly Syrian), teach the Syrian national curriculum. Students are registered in Syria and are expected to return in order to sit for ‘official’ government exams.

Non-formal education (NFE) provisions have become essential in addressing this issue of access. Table 2 summarises the different types of NFE provisions available in Lebanon.

**Table 3 Types of Non Formal Education Provisions in Lebanon**

Type of NFE	ALP and Catch- up program	Basic Literacy and Numeracy	Community Based Education	Remedial	Self-Learning	Recreational/ Extra-curricula
<i>Definition</i>	Assist older children to complete basic education qualifications in a reduced time to reintegrate children into formal education.	Develop literacy and numeracy skills	Formal Curriculum in Non- Formal/ community	Targets children enrolled in formal schools at risk of dropping out or falling behind.	Structured independent learning that can range from being fully independent or blended into other learning programs.	Activities within the educational program (FE, NFE) that enhances the wellbeing and holistic development of children.

<i>Demo-graphics</i>	<i>Age: ALP 9-18</i> Catch up 7-18 for any child who dropped out of school at least 2 years out of school up to cycle.	<i>Age : 6 - 18</i> Any child who cannot yet read and write.	<i>Age: 6 – 13</i> Any child who cannot have access to formal education for grades 1 – 6;	<i>Age: 6 – 18</i> Any child currently enrolled in formal schooling and at risk of dropping out.	<i>Age: 6 – 18</i> Any child seeking access to educational opportunities.	<i>Age: 6 - 18</i> Any child regardless of previous or current educational access.
<i>Schedule</i>	ALP 5 sessions per day, 5 days per week to cover 1 cycle in 12 months.  Catch up: Minimum of 9 hours a week;	At least 160 hours of continuous learning	5 hours per day, 5 days per week and follows the school calendar year.	Maximum of 3 hours per day, 2 to 3 times per week for 3 months	Flexible alternative to existing programs.	Integrated and flexible 20% of the educational program.
<i>Learning Materials</i>	ALP: CERD textbooks/activities and supplementary books.  Catch up: Lebanese curriculum Textbooks	Structured-levelled literacy programs or the Lebanese KG2 and KG3.	The Lebanese curriculum in Arabic textbooks, activity books, supplementary language books and materials.	Lebanese curriculum Textbooks, activities books and supplementary materials	Lebanese curriculum Textbooks, activities books and supplementary materials and electronic materials.	Recreational kit

Non-formal education is less confined to a set curriculum. The one exception is in the case of Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs), a programme guided and structured by a curriculum developed by the Center of Education Research and Development (CERD) in collaboration with United Nations (UN) agencies. This set curriculum aims to capture the key objectives for each cycle (a total of three years of instruction) and presents them in 12-month modules to facilitate the re-entry of students who missed more than two years of schooling.

NFEs are also neither accredited nor certified, as they are structured to serve as an avenue for reintegration to formal education, and not an end in and of themselves. The fundamental challenge then, lies in the effort to ensure the segue of students from NFEs to formal schooling. Despite the lack of accreditation, NFE provisions increased in numbers due to the magnitude of unmet educational needs. A viable education strategy for Syrian refugees in Lebanon necessitates a clear vision and a roadmap for widening access to – and better regulation of – NFE provisions.

The MEHE strategy, as outlined in “Reaching All Children with Education” (RACE), intends to drastically expand access to childhood education in public schools between 2015-2018. The effort focuses on expanding second shifts in public schools, scaling up ALP programmes, and regulating a number of NFE programmes, such as the community-based education programmes at the elementary level. NFEs, as indicated, were intended as a transitional provision to foster the reintegration of out-of-school children and those with irregular education trajectories back to the formal education setting. Yet the strategy outlined in the RACE document does not include policy adjustments for certification or accreditation of alternatives.

A number of previous studies examined the needs and opportunities of existing education provisions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Yet most studies tend to focus on formal education programmes, particularly those in the public sector. Little research engages education in the private and NGO sectors. Moreover, Syrian-led initiatives - to arise in response to gaps between public and free private institutions – are glaringly absent in almost all research. These initiatives often establish programmes in tents, rented space, or borrowed buildings and typically offer services ranging from formal school settings to non-formal education support, such as remedial learning programs, homework clubs, psychosocial support programs, and recreational activities. This study seeks to broaden the understanding of existing gaps and opportunities in education provisions. The fundamental aim is to bridge research gaps and explore existing initiatives outside the public sector.

#### SCOPE, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research questions for this study include:

- What are the current provisions of formal and **non-formal education** offered by private schools and NGOs in Lebanon?
- What are the main bottlenecks Syrian refugee children face for access to quality **formal education** in formal and non-formal settings?

The study of formal schools focused on the types of curriculum and education programmes available to Syrian refugee students. As for NFE, we investigated different types of offered programmes – such as psychosocial programmes, recreational activities, remedial classes, and more – and their stated objectives.

We adopted the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) standards for education in emergency<sup>16</sup> as a conceptual framework to examine access and quality of education both in the formal and non-formal education settings. INEE standards provide a framework for examining the admission policies and procedures, grade allocation and certification/ accreditation. Regarding the quality of education offered to Syrian children, the study examines teaching and learning practices, curriculum adaption, language(s) of instruction, school environment, bullying, discrimination, extra-curricular activities, remedial classes, and psychosocial support.

Our report is composed of five chapters. Chapter Two outlines the conceptual and methodological framework for the research. We present INEE standards for education in emergencies and explain how these standards were adapted for the purpose of this study. We briefly outline the methodology and research sample, and then present the findings in three separate chapters. Chapter Three examines the education policies in Lebanon and their implications on access and quality of education for the Syrian refugees. Chapter Four investigates current access and learning environment rights in the surveyed schools and NGOs. Chapter five then delves into teaching and learning practices offered by the private and NGOs institutions. In Chapter Six, we discuss the findings and interpret the implications on the educational future of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon.

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<sup>16</sup> INEE Minimum Standards Reference Tool <http://www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards/reference-tool>

## **CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### INTER-AGENCY NETWORK FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (INEE) MINIMUM STANDARDS

This study employs standards of educational quality and access in transitions from emergency to recovery, as developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). INEE is an open global network for collaboration between individuals and representatives from NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, governments, academic institutions, schools and affected populations. INEE fosters a forum for cooperation between the various communities to safeguard the universal right to quality, relevant, and safe education in emergencies and post-crisis recovery. The Standards were contextualized for Lebanon in 2014 to provide a context-relevant set of Standards.<sup>17</sup>

INEE was conceived at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, with the aim of developing a process to improve inter-agency communication and collaboration within the context of education in humanitarian emergencies. The INEE was officially established in the same year at a follow-up Inter-Agency Consultation meeting in Geneva. The core aim of INEE was to build upon and consolidate existing networks. All of INEE's work is premised on a variety of international legal conventions.

In 2004, INEE established minimum standards through a highly collaborative process among more than 3,500 education experts from over 52 countries. These standards, based upon international legal frameworks, confirm a commitment to the right to safe, quality, and relevant education for all children, youth, and adults, regardless of their circumstance. The INEE Minimum Standards, used in 110 countries worldwide, are the

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<sup>17</sup>[http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1154/Lebanon\\_MS\\_for\\_Education\\_v1.0\\_LowRes.pdf](http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1154/Lebanon_MS_for_Education_v1.0_LowRes.pdf)

fundamental tool for the field of education in emergencies. These standards guide programming and policy design, implementation, monitoring, as well as form the basis for evaluation and advocacy.

We employ the INEE framework to establish the minimum standards for education in emergencies. To clarify, INEE standards are composed of five domains: 1) foundational standards – such as community participation, 2) access and learning environments, 3) teaching and learning, 4) teachers and other education personnel, and finally, 5) education policies. This study focuses on three primary standards domains - educational policies, access and learning environments, and teaching and learning – due to time constraints and sample size limitations. On the other hand, aspects of the other two INEE domains, specifically community participation and teachers’ employment, were respectively examined under access and learning and teaching and learning. Table 4 presents the domains of focus for this study and the specific content examined in each domain.

**Table 4 Conceptual Framework based on INEE Minimum Standards**

<b>Domains</b>			
	<b>Education Policy</b>	<b>Access and Learning Environments Rights</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning</b>
<b>Standards</b>	Law and Policy Formulation	Equality	Curriculum
	Implementation	Protection and Well-being	Training, Professional Development, and Teacher Support
		Facilities and Services	Instruction and Learning Processes
			Assessment of Learning Outcomes
			Learning Environment
			Teachers: Recruitment and selection of teachers; Teacher Support

The findings are presented in three chapters, each corresponding to the one of the three separate domains listed in the columns above.

## METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to better contextualise emergent education initiatives for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. To this end, we adopt a qualitative methodology with a primary focus on case studies of thirteen organisations. Our qualitative design not only serves to explore existing initiatives, but also fosters a more robust understanding of key issues identified in previous research. Our approach teases out insights into the key processes in the decision-making, program design, service provision, and other aspects of each education initiative.

Our school and site visits to each of the education providers in the sample occurred between October 2013 and June 2014. Some sites involved multiple visits to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the efforts. The design involved in-depth, one-to-one interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observation. Researchers also documented the condition of classroom setting not limited to infrastructure, state of classroom, and available learning materials at each site. Finally, classroom observation fostered valuable insights for teaching and learning practices. The research tools – interview guides, focus group guides, and class observation guides – were designed based on INEE standards. We offer a more detailed description of the different instruments of the study below.

***Semi-Structured individual interviews:*** We conducted one-to-one interviews with school principals, teachers, parents and NGO education specialists. In the second stage of fieldwork, we organised additional interviews with key stakeholders, such as donors and policy makers. These additional interviews were included to better understand the wider context for the individual case studies. We selected key informants based on experience with educational issues of relevance to Syrian refugees.

**Focus group discussions:** We conducted semi-structured focus group discussions with Syrian and Lebanese students in the relevant schools and NGO institutions. Our focus group discussions explored student experience with the specific aim to highlight challenges and aspirations. We also completed focus group discussions with parents to better contextualise external challenges Syrian refugee families face. In some cases, we encountered logistical challenges to meet parents at institutions. For instance, in one case, the school administration remained extremely resistant to a focus group session with parents without the presence of administration officials.

**Classroom observations:** We carried out a number of semi-structured observations in several schools and NGOs, when possible. All organisations except for two schools, allowed us to conduct classroom observations. Classroom observations shed light on teaching and learning practices across various subjects and grade levels. The observations focused on the ways teachers adapted the curriculum, their use of different language strategies, and student interaction in the classroom.

**Document analysis:** Our study conducted a desk review and analysis of key policy documents relevant to the education system in Lebanon and of relevance to Syrian refugees. Such policy documents included government decrees, proposals, and assessments related to education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in Arabic. Interviews were audio recorded in most cases. Vigorous field notes were completed during and after all visits, particularly in cases where the respondent refused audio recording. All audio recorded data was translated to English, transcribed, and finally, analysed in NVIVO. Our first level coding relied upon the INEE framework as the starting point. A second level of coding was completed to show emergent trends in the data.

**Table 5 Number of Participants in the Sample by Stakeholder Group**

School Respondents	Number
Students	95 (49 females, 46 males)
Teachers	32

<b>Principals and Administrators</b>	15
<b>Parents</b>	95

### SAMPLING STRATEGY

We employed an initial purposive sampling method with coverage over a range of education programs currently offered in Lebanon. At the initial stage, we identified seven programs based on the following criteria:

- Previous experience: Some NGOs have significant experience in the delivery of education programs to refugee populations (e.g., Iraqis) in Lebanon. Other NGOs were without experience in the delivery of education programmes, but engaged delivery of education services due to the urgent needs of the refugees.
- Size: Large, established NGOs as well as smaller and younger organisations were selected as cases to examine the quality of the programs offered by these organisations.
- Local and Syrian NGOs

Our sample was based on the findings of an extensive literature review, specifically the identification of existing research gaps in the increased role of Syrian-led NGO initiatives. We covered both Lebanese institutional efforts and Syrian-led initiatives. Finally, our initial sample was to include both public and private sectors, however, we were not afforded adequate time to receive the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's (MEHE) permission to access public schools, and thus we were unable to visit public schools. Yet, as stated, the paucity of research on private sector education responses to the Syrian crisis encouraged a focus on the diverse array of private schools to accommodate Syrian refugee children. Schools in the sample were selected with a snowballing sampling strategy, deemed the most appropriate due to the capacity of this method to account for the rapid changes in education programs for Syrian refugees.

The final sample included thirteen separate education providers. The sample spanned (a) new private schools to offer formal programs that accommodate only Syrian refugee students, (b) pre-existing non-state schools (private and UNRWA) to offer formal

programs for Lebanese, with new programs offered for Syrian refugee students, and (c) NGOs that offered non-formal educational programs for the Syrian refugees.

**Table 6 Sample of surveyed organisations and types of offered programmes**

Sample of organisations	Sector			Type of Program		Type of curriculum		Size <sup>18</sup>
	Private	NGO	UNRWA	Formal	Non-formal	Lebanese	Syrian	
1								Small
2								Small
3								Large
4								Large
5								Large
6								Large
7								Large
8								Large
9								Small
10								Large
11								Large
12								NA
13								NA

<sup>18</sup> Size of the organization refers to the number of students receiving educational services. Small organizations have up to 150 students, medium sized organization have between 151-250 students and large organizations have more than 251 students.

The sample included programs for both the morning and afternoon shifts. Formal programs in the sample included curricula from home and host country; non-formal programs included Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs), catch up programs, remedial programs, recreational programs, and community-based education. We provide a detailed profile of the various organisations in the sample below.

#### SAMPLE PROFILING:

***Organisation 1: Local Grassroots Lebanese NGO with a history of education provision.*** The organisation has a long history of delivering non-formal education programs in the greater Beirut area. The organisation possesses experience with the delivery of education and social training for dropouts and at-risk children or youth. *Organisation 1* has two active social development centers in the greater Beirut area. These centres offer public health and education services. On the one hand, the centers provide access to public support services to those in need, including displaced families who fled violent conflict. Yet on the other hand, they offer educational support as an afternoon program for children between the ages of 7 and 18 years old. The education programmes provide supplemental support with the twin goals to either address curriculum gaps for currently enrolled students or to offer preparation for school reintegration for those students outside of the system. The center offers the programs to Syrian refugee families and to Lebanese living in vulnerable communities. Such programs combine literacy and psychosocial support objectives with a psycholinguistic approach to literacy, a proven method to foster fundamental skills, such as reading and writing. These sessions also offer instruction in basic arithmetic and other pragmatic skills. The centre provides psychosocial support through cultural and recreational activities, such as art, drama, and sports. Students come from different backgrounds including disadvantaged Lebanese, Iraqi and now mainly Syrian.

***Organisation 2: Syrian NGO with international funding and local direct delivery.*** Organisation Two runs a program for basic literacy and numeracy for students (English, math and Arabic) in Beirut. This NGO seeks to enhance the basic abilities to foster integration into the Lebanese Public schools. To date, the organisation assisted thirty

students to transition to formal public Lebanese schools. The teaching staff is a combination of Syrian and Lebanese volunteers. The volunteer turnover affected sustainability of the programme. The teachers rely on textbooks from the Lebanese National curriculum and offer three levels of instruction: Beginner, Level One, and Level Two. The organisation provides students with the requisite school supplies, including photocopied books, stationery, school bags, and pencil cases. They also offer a free school meal program that includes a juice and small snack for every student, every day. The center also occasionally distributes clothing.

***Organisation 3: Syrian NGO with Initiative for Community-Based Education.***

Organisation Three runs schools offering basic literacy and numeracy (Arabic, math and English) in tents in the Bekaa region. This organisation is set up by the Syrian affluent community in Lebanon to support the disadvantaged refugees in tented settlements. Unlike *Organisation Two*, the fundamental aim of Organisation Three is to provide education services for as many “street” children as a possible. A Syrian husband and wife with previous teaching experience in Syria are the sole teachers at this “school”. They provide two levels across two shifts. Level One is oriented toward students with little or no previous schooling. Level Two is meant for students with basic literacy and numeracy skills. There are two shifts for Level One class to accommodate the large pool of students. The shifts are divided unevenly: the first shift is offered from 8:00am to 10:00am and the second is offered from 11:00am to 12:00pm. The Level Two class is offered as a single 4-hour session from 8:00am to 12:00pm, with a short break at 10am. The books, specifically designed by a group of NGOs, include a mixture of the Lebanese and Syrian curricula. The organisation provides each student with a book, stationery, a school bag, and a pencil case. Students also receive a bottle of water, juice, and a piece of cake every day.

***Organisation 4: Local NGO with wide scale education provisions across Lebanon***

Organisation Four, a Lebanese NGO, offered a variety of education programs before the Syria crisis. The organisation responded with the expansion of services for Syrian students. Organisation Four offers a range of non-formal education programs in multiple locations across Lebanon. We visited one location in the southern suburbs of Beirut. At

the time of visit, the organisation ran two programs. One program provides remedial English and homework support for students already enrolled in school. For this program, the NGO provides buses to transport students to the center for homework assistance three times a week and remedial English once a week. The second program offers an Accelerated Learning Program designed by CERD/ UNICEF. This program is taught as an afternoon class in public schools three days a week. Each day students are taught English, Arabic, and are offered basic math lessons during the English class. Upon completion, students are admitted to Lebanese Public Schools, in accordance with their aptitude level, rather than age. The teachers who work at the organisation are a mix of Syrians and Lebanese. Every instructor has at least two years of teaching experience and a degree in Education or a related field.

***Organisation 5, Private Lebanese faith school with a Program for Syrian Refugees.***

*Organisation Five* operates an established school in North Lebanon. The comparatively large institution is part of a group of schools run by a religious institution, the primary funding source for the school. At the onset of Syria crisis, the school offered admission to Syrian students, and integrated several Syrian students in the regular morning and afternoon shifts. Yet the school adjusted policies to reflect the revised MEHE regulations – strict documentation and proper registration – after a year into the crisis. In turn, the number of male and female Syrian students declined precipitously from around 3,000 to 400. The afternoon shift runs for four hours Monday through Thursday (3:30 -7:30pm) and for five hours on Sunday (7:30am till 1:30pm) to reach a total of 27 hours of instruction per week. The school also offers supplemental Saturday classes as preparation for official exams – Brevet and Baccalaureate.

All students study the official Lebanese Curriculum, as translated to Arabic by in-house teachers. The school administrators received special MEHE permission to permit the students to answer all questions in Arabic for the standard Baccalaureate Exam questions written in English or French. The teaching staff is comprised of 100 Syrian and Lebanese both compensated around \$350-400 USD per month. Each of the teachers have Education training and at least two years of experience. Teaching staff were recruited by word of mouth and each candidate sat for interviews with administrators.

The school provides every student with stationery, but families pay for books and transportation. All students, including those in afternoon shift, are registered under the official registration of the morning school in the MEHE. All elementary students need an official ID and a United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) registry number. For students in grades 7 and above, an official ID, UNHCR registry number, and an official report card to prove completion of the previous grade level are required for all students. School placement is based upon entrance exam scores and students are distributed to grade levels by age, aptitude level.

***Organisation 6: Coalition school in Lebanon.*** Organisation Six operates several schools funded and managed by the Syrian Coalition and their donors. In North Lebanon, the organisation offers an all-female school, an all-male school, and a co-ed school. All three schools operate under the umbrella of an educational commission unit, the organisation tasked with securing funds, school locations, qualified staff, and curricula. According to the administrators, the institutions were created due to an urgent need to both keep the “Syrian children off the streets” and to provide them with an education. The choice to teach the Syrian curriculum was rooted in the relevance to the students, and the future goal to return to Syria. The Syrian national curriculum was adapted by the central coalition office in Turkey for refugee students in surrounding nations. The adaptation importantly omits any reference to the Syrian regime or the Baath Party. Crucially, political subjects in the national curriculum, such as civics, were completely removed.

The organisation administers afternoon classes in school facilities rented from other Lebanese schools with a morning schedule. The students attend classes from Saturday to Thursday with one day off, Friday. The organisation maximises the use of the facilities each Sunday with morning classes from 8am to 1:30pm. The organisation provides free books, uniforms, and stationery for all students, however, families pay for transportation. Students sit for the coalition Baccalaureate exams - the Brevet is omitted – written by the coalition and reviewed by Syrian teachers based in Turkey. Thus, students sit for exams in Lebanon, but all exams are corrected in Turkey. Certificates are stamped and validated by the coalition government; however, these certificates are only recognised in a few countries, such as Turkey, France, Mauritania, Oman, and Somalia. The lack of

recognised certificates is a great concern for parents. In fact, some regret this path for their children due to concern with future prospects. Teachers are exclusively Syrians with degrees in education or the subjects they teach. Each teacher is paid a salary of around \$350USD per month.

***Organisation 7: Syrian schools Libyan Curriculum.*** *Organisation Seven* created schools by the personal initiative of a former Syrian teacher who moved to Lebanon. The teacher recognised the fundamental challenge of accreditation – and subsequent recognition of completion in both education and higher education – in nearby Coalition schools, and thus established his own institution. His school was to fill a gap in accredited education pathways for re-entry into formal education in Lebanon. To overcome this obstacle, he adopted the Libyan curriculum at the Baccalaureate level. The students learn the Syrian National Curriculum across grade levels, but when they reach Grade 12 they are taught the Libyan curriculum for the Baccalaureate exam. In interviews, students found the curriculum easy, but also mentioned a primary challenge: if they fail one subject, they fail the entire test.

The Baccalaureate exams are administered in Turkey under the auspices of a special Libyan delegation. All students must travel to sit for exams; this presents a fundamental challenge to students without a passport. Students without a passport are unable to obtain this document outside of Syria, and thus are unable to travel to Turkey to sit for accredited exams. To date, exams administered outside of Turkey were not accredited.

The school rents an abandoned school grounds for mornings from 8:00am to 1:30pm (with Fridays and Sundays off). The school is co-ed school; however, students are segregated from Grade 5 onwards. Books are photocopied and distributed for free. All teachers are Syrian, yet many were not paid due to the lack of funds, and thus many worked for several months without pay. Nearly every teacher teaches at a different school in the afternoon, or has another afternoon job to provide income. In spite of administrative issues, the teachers show commitment to their mission and to the success of their students.

***Organisation 8: Syrian schools with official exams in Syria.*** Organisation 8 was a school established by the personal initiative of a former Syrian school principal in response to the high dropout rates of Syrian students in Lebanese Public Schools. The former principal sought to build an institution to help students cope with the language barrier in the Lebanese curriculum. A Lebanese philanthropist covered the cost to rent (\$2500 USD per month) an existing school for an afternoon shift. Quarrels between Lebanese and Syrian students occurred during the transition between shifts, and drove the principal to find an alternate location. A subsequent rent increase at the second location pushed the principal to look for yet another school premise. Finally, the school was established at an existing vocational school with morning operating hours. The owner of the building allowed the principal to use the building for only the cost of utilities for the afternoon hours of operation. The school in its current location run for a year and a half, and the co-ed student population increased to the current level of 330 students. Due to a lack of funds, the school cut offerings from a full Grade 1-12 school to currently offering elementary, Grades 1-6, and Grades 9-12 hence dropping grades 7 and 8. The principal advertised the school with posts in locations, such as mosques or offices for Syrian aid distribution. The school provides every student with books and clothing items. Students in the elementary classes must present their family ID card for registration. Students in intermediate and secondary classes must furnish validated documents to prove completion of past grade levels.

Last year, students who sat for the Official Exam paid 1,300 Syrian pounds (around 9 USD), then the school supervisor went to Syria to complete the official registration for the exam. Other parents completed the registration themselves. This academic year, the school is without Grade 12, but there are 27 students in Grade 9. The principal registered seven students for the Official Exam and the parents of the other students completed the process on their own.

Elementary level students joined classes according to age and academic performance. The school supervisor administered a placement test to better understand whether they could cope with the class at their corresponding grade level. Furthermore, students were given a two-week trial to gauge performance at a grade level. If students underperformed,

then they were distributed to a lower grade, whereas on the other hand, those students who excelled maintained their spot in the designated class. Students in Grades 8 and above do not sit for entrance exams, but are placed according to their validated documents for the Syrian Ministry of Education (MOE). Last year, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education did not recognise students at the intermediate and secondary grade levels. As a result, students at this school are currently registered in Syrian schools despite the fact they study and attend a school in Lebanon. These procedures allow the students to receive Syrian MOE certified documents. Crucially, these documents are recognised by the MEHE in Lebanon. Yet students still undergo a great risk to travel to Syria in order to sit for the exams.

**Organisation 9: A private Lebanese School.** Organisation Nine is a member of the Network of Schools of Sidon. A total of seven schools with absorption capacity within this network opened admission processes to Syrian refugees. Each of the seven schools agreed to accommodate one grade level or more, depending on capacity. The school only hired Lebanese teachers. Students' parents were exempted from the tuition fee yet had to buy the textbooks and cover transportation to and from school. Syrian students were taught the Lebanese curriculum in segregated classrooms.

**Organisation 10: A private Lebanese School.** Organisation Ten is a member of the Network of Schools of Sidon. As one of the seven schools with absorption capacity, this organisation opened admission procedures to Syrian refugees. Each of the seven schools in the network agreed to accommodate one grade level or more, depending on its capacity. This school opened four sections of Grade 1 to Syrian students, with thirty-five students in each section, and housed students in a separate building on campus. All students followed the Lebanese curriculum with books issued by CERD. The subjects taught are English, Arabic, Science (in Arabic), Math (in English), Physical Education, Art, and a course on the values taken from the Qur'an. Children were accepted according to age – for Grade 1 – and thus an Entrance Exam was not administered. Some of the students are older than 6 years old, because they were not yet enrolled in school. Families do not pay tuition, but must pay for transportation and for books. All teachers work full-

time at the school, but were asked to give their time to the Syrian students instead. The staff also collected money and was able to buy clothes and shoes for several of the students. School hours for Syrian refugees are from 8:00am to 1:30pm, whereas the rest of the students leave at 2:30pm. The Syrians also have their own break time and a separate playground. Syrian students only mingle with the other students during outings or after school activities.

***Organisation 11: Newly Built School private faith School for Syrians Only in Grades 7-12.*** Organisation Eleven, a private faith Lebanese school affiliated with a Sunni religious charity, has operated exclusively for Syrian refugee children for the past two years. The school adopted the Syrian National Curriculum in the first year; however, due to issues of accreditation reverted to a Lebanese curriculum in the second year. The school hosts a mix of Lebanese and Syrian teachers to offer a dual language approach to Syrian students in intermediate and secondary grades. All students are registered with the MEHE. The school building, funded by the State of Qatar, was initially intended to serve as a community center or a vocational school; however, it was converted to a school after the influx of Syrian refugees. The co-ed school offers instruction to 700 students with boys and girls segregated in different classrooms. The school also benefits from Saudi funding that covers tuition costs as well as books, stationery, and bags. Transportation is the only cost paid by families.

The school teaches the Lebanese curriculum. All textbooks are in English, however, all lessons are taught in Arabic with the main terms translated into English by Syrian teachers. This translation is meant to introduce common terminology to students as well as to offer preparation to understand and to eventually answer the questions in English. The primary goal is to prepare the students to sit for the Official Lebanese Exams in English or French. Geography, History, and Civics are only taught for Grades 9 and 12, because knowledge of these courses is needed for the official exams. Art and Physical Education are substituted for students in all other grades.

Students who do not have the report cards from previous schools sit for an entrance exam based on the Syrian Curriculum. Students who do not have Brevet grades need to retake

the Brevet class to enrol. The students complete seven periods per day and they do not receive official holidays off from school. Schools take advantage of these days to do complete extra work with the students. The school hired 30 trained teachers, 20 of whom are Syrian. The school kept this mix with the belief students can relate to Syrian teachers, and thus feel more comfortable in a familiar environment.

***Organisations 12&13- UNRWA schools for PRS (Palestinian Refugees from Syria)***

*Organisations Twelve and Thirteen* are two of the eighty-three UNRWA-administered schools across Lebanon, established to cater to the needs of Palestinian refugees. The onset of the Syria crisis forced Palestinian refugees living in Syria to flee to Lebanon. UNRWA schools accepted Palestinian refugees from Syria, and offered instruction at these two boys-only schools. Due to the limited absorption capacity, and the struggle of PRS with foreign language, the schools established a second shift to teach PRS students. This session, run separately from the morning shift, offers separate instruction from Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Much of the staff exclusively teaches PRS, however, a few of the teachers teach on both shifts. All the teachers are Palestinian refugees from Syria or Lebanon. Students who registered prior to the school reaching its maximum absorption capacity were integrated within the morning shift. Due to the struggle of Grade 8 students with the Lebanese curriculum, a separate section with a more differentiated approach was created with PRS students. Bullying, endemic at the beginning of the year, gradually subsided since. UNRWA follows the Lebanese curriculum and uses the Lebanese national textbooks. UNRWA covers all school expenses, including transportation.

**LIMITATION OF SAMPLE:**

The nature of the research sample limits the generalizability of findings from this report. Schools and education providers were purposively selected to provide an overview of the existing education models, but more importantly, the challenges that exist for students and administrators. Our goal was to tease out the needs and barriers, and therefore outline avenues for a more equitable and larger scale access to quality education for Syrian

refugees. In no way was our sample representative of the entire spectrum of education models offered to Syrian refugee students. This sample did not include provisions within the public sector or large-scale education programs of international NGOs.

## CHAPTER THREE: EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Lebanese government policy serves as a critical factor in the provision of education services for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This section outlines Lebanese legislation to govern education provisions, the implications on the right to education for the Syrian refugees, and the obligations of MEHE. INEE's Education Policy Standard include two dimensions: Law and Policy Formulation and planning and implementation. Under law policy formulation, INEE emphasizes free and inclusive access to a safe schooling environment. It also calls for refugees to be allowed to use curricula and language of country of origin while, non-state actors are allowed to establish education in emergency programmes. Concerning implementation, the standards call for educational activities which take into account international and national educational policies, laws, standards and plans and the learning needs of affected populations.

### LEBANON AND INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

While Lebanon did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, the government has ratified several other human rights treaties relevant to the protection and provision of basic services for refugees. Relevant treaties include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Dakar Education for All (EFA) framework, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>19</sup>. Each recognises compulsory primary education as a universal right. Article 22 of the CRC aptly explains the signatory nation duties towards refugees.

States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set

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<sup>19</sup> Convention of the Rights of the Child,  
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

To clarify, the Lebanese government withholds refugee status from Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In fact, Lebanon's most recent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNHCR (2008) declares, "Lebanon does not consider itself an asylum country" and, under its mandate, UNHCR carries out all refugee status determinations. This shift of responsibility from the State to an international agency has been criticised within the UN refugee agency, and described in the terms of UNHCR taking over "unnatural roles in order to fill gaps in the international refugee regime."<sup>20</sup> This responsibility shift is not exclusive to Lebanon, however, as similar trends are common in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

If UNHCR grants refugee status, the MOU grants UNHCR six months to identify countries to accept the refugees for resettlement. During this time, the Government issues circulation permits, renewable only once "for a final period of three months after which time the General Security would be entitled to take the appropriate legal measures." UNHCR is rarely able to complete registration, status determination, and resettlement within a year.<sup>22</sup> This MOU does not apply fully to Syrian refugees, as they are treated as a special case and several circulars have been issued by the Ministry of Internal affairs and General Security concerning travel and work arrangements for Syrian and Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS).

International officials implore the Government of Lebanon to craft a new MOU. On a 2011 visit, both the Secretary General of the High Relief Commission and the European Union Ambassador to Lebanon highlighted the importance of finalising a new Memorandum of Understanding between the Lebanese authorities and UNHCR. The aim

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<sup>20</sup> Kagan M. (2011). "We live in a country of UNHCR" *The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East, New Issues in Refugee Research Paper*, UNHCR Research Paper No. 201, p 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *World Refugee Survey 2009* <http://www.refugees.org/resources/refugee-warehousing/archived-world-refugee-surveys/2009-wrs-country-updates/lebanon.html>

is to craft a new MOU to better guarantee the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup>

In the current status regime, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are classified as “foreigners”, “displaced”, or “migrant workers” rather than as “refugees”. Such designations have significant bearing upon living conditions, basic rights, and access to services, namely to education. In fact, this legal classification sidesteps conventional legal frameworks for human rights, hinders access to basic services, such as education, and eliminates entitlement to the above rights outlined in article 22 of CRC.

In spite of the classification status, the Government of Lebanon publicly reaffirmed a commitment to the right of compulsory education for children under 15, and in turn, opened Lebanese public schools to Syrian refugee children in 2012-2013.<sup>24</sup> Yet the Government of Lebanon is signatory to several international declarations that ensure the right to education for all is until the age of 18.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, education should be:

- compulsory and free,
- aimed at developing a sense of self and place in society and
- based on the principle of equal opportunity

Hence, while article 22 of CRC may not apply to Syrian refugees in Lebanon due to the classification regime, the Government of Lebanon still maintains obligations to provide education for all the children up to age 18. Thus, the Government of Lebanon fails to meet international legal obligations – to which it is a party – in the provision of education to Syrian refugees between the ages of 15 and 18, but more crucially, maintains

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<sup>23</sup> *Civil and Political Rights in Lebanon in 2012/ Lebanese Center for Human Rights*

<sup>24</sup> However, since 2013-2014 and this coming academic year (2014-2015), MEHE began to put restrictions on registering Syrian refugees in Lebanese public schools. In 2013-2014, MEHE partially suspended the registration of Syrian students in the morning shift of public schools and requested funding from UN agencies to open afternoon shifts. In September 2014 and with the beginning of the new academic year, the Minister of Education prohibited principals of public schools from registering Syrian children until further notice. The Minister claimed that this is part of a priority policy for to Lebanese children. <http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/168707-لا-نستطيع-تلميذ-ألف-275-لالنهار-صعب-يو-الرسمية-المدارس-في-لاجئ-ألف-400-استيعاب>

<sup>25</sup> These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 14), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Article 28)

legislation that contradicts international conventions and dramatically affects the right to access quality education for all children.

## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN LEBANESE LEGISLATIONS AND THE IMPLICATIONS

Policy analysis of the right to education in Lebanon reveals both the demographics of inclusion as well as the existing policy gaps. Fundamental policy changes are required to achieve more equitable access to education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Lebanese Constitution explicitly ensures **the right to education** however the constitution does not sanctify the principles of compulsory and free education (Article 10).

**Law 686 (Date 16-3-1998)** figures prominently among legislation to govern education policy in Lebanon. The law built upon the 1997 national education reform to mandate free and compulsory education confined to the elementary level for Lebanese nationals only. In the same vein, Decree 134/59 of the 1959 was amended in 1998, following the Educational Recovery Plan (1994). These changes amended the language in the legislation from “Free elementary education for all Lebanese Children” to “Compulsory free elementary education for all Lebanese Children,” yet the government has not yet issued the legal steps necessary to enforce compulsory free education across the country.<sup>26</sup>

Law No. 686 of 1998 amended Article 49 of Decree No. 134/59 and mandates “*Public education is free and compulsory in the primary phase, and is a right for every Lebanese of primary education age.*” This designation of an obligation to exclusively Lebanese students contradicts the Government of Lebanon’s obligation in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to “*make primary education compulsory and available free to all.*” The Lebanese law does not elaborate upon provision of services to meet the needs or the challenges of non-Lebanese students.

In 2001, MEHE published new internal regulations for primary schools (those for secondary schools are still being developed). The 2001 regulations for primary schools differ little from those of 1974 with the exception of a new requirement that all students

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<sup>26</sup>ILO, (2004) *Gender Education and Child Labour in Lebanon*.

registered in public schools must have Lebanese nationality (Article 3). Again, we notice the Lebanese laws inconsistency of Lebanese laws with international agreements to which Lebanon is a signatory. Such contradictions enable the Government of Lebanon to restrict the right to education to the Lebanese nationals.

Nonetheless, MEHE currently accommodates the largest number of Syrian students in schools. Similarly, the MEHE amended several official requirements to assist Syrian children with access to Lebanese Public Schools. In the following section, we examine these modifications.

#### THE RIGHT TO A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN LEBANON

Corporal punishment is a known phenomenon in Lebanon. The penal code, specifically Article 186, permits corporal punishment of children in schools and homes. In 2001, MEHE issued a ministerial memorandum to public schools stating that corporal punishment should not be used. As for private schools, they are governed by their own internal regulations.

Under pressure from the civil society, the Lebanese parliament voted to revoke article 186 on April 9, 2014. However, the next day and following complaints by religious figures, Parliament adopted an amended version of the article to criminalize corporal punishment at school but allow “non-violent disciplinary” acts at home so long as they do not lead to physical or psychological harm. The article does not, however, clearly define “non-violent disciplinary” measures or “physical or psychological harm”<sup>27</sup>. As for private schools they follow their own regulations.

Corporal punishment was also banned in UNRWA schools for Palestinian refugee students in 1993 under the Educational Technical Instructions, but the prohibition is also contradicted by article 186 of the Penal Code. Finally, in defining youth as “endangered”, article 1 of Law 422 for the Protection of Juvenile Delinquents and Endangered Juveniles (2002) refers to “physical assault that surpasses the limits of what is deemed culturally

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.executive-magazine.com/opinion/comment/time-ban-corporal-punishment-good>

accepted as harmless corporal punishment”.<sup>28</sup> This implies that physical punishment is permitted under this law.

## MEHE REGULATIONS TO ACCOMMODATE THE SYRIAN REFUGEES

The Ministry of Education issued a series of circulars to facilitate the educational process without document registration in the wake of the Syrian crisis.<sup>29</sup> Syrian students were required to provide proof of identity (ID cards or copies) and proof of previous schooling for access to Lebanese public schools. Proof of prior schooling or transcript, if available, ensured acceptance at a commensurate grade level. In the absence of a school transcript, students were expected to sit for school placement tests to determine grade level. The MEHE offered exceptions for students at the official exam grade levels (Grades 9 and 12), whereby these students were able to register for the exams without the necessary documentation, on the condition that this documentation was to be provided before the exam. The MEHE also loosened language restrictions to allow for official exams to be completed in English, Arabic, or French in the academic year 2012-2013. A Lebanese school principal in the North hosting around 500 Syrian students confirmed. He explained:

The Lebanese law states that the student is entitled to sit for the exams in Arabic, English, or French. However, it has never been in Arabic. So in Brevet classes, they [MEHE] were able to translate the exams, but for the Baccalaureate, they could not and thus the student had to understand the question in English, but they answered the questions in Arabic.

The Syrian Grade 12 students at the aforementioned school received their exam papers in English, but were permitted to answer in Arabic. The principal explained the negotiation that took place with MEHE in order to make this possible:

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<sup>28</sup>[http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session9/LB/GIEACPC\\_EndAllCorporalPunishmentofChildren.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session9/LB/GIEACPC_EndAllCorporalPunishmentofChildren.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Circular 24/m/2013 in accordance with circulars 16//1997, 8/m/2011, 13/m/2003, and 28/m/2011

We spoke to the General Director at MEHE and at first they were not too happy about it, but we told them we are doing that to help the students, so they finally agreed and even asked us to help with the teachers who can correct the exams in Arabic.

Another important regulation that undermines access to quality education – particularly for older Syrian children removed from school for at least two years as a result of the war – relates to the eligibility to register “independently” for the official exams. At the present time, current requirements dictate that students must either have already failed once, or must be older than 18 for Grade 9 / Brevet or older than 20 for Grade 12/ Baccalaureate. If these age restrictions were not there, non-formal education providers could prepare remedial and tailor programs to help prepare Syrian children at the middle and high school level to sit for the official exams, and thus gradually find their pathway back into the formal education system for personal fulfilment and to improve prospects for employment.

#### *PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES*

The bylaws of the public or private schools in Lebanon stipulate the election of a parent’s council in each school to undertake - in coordination with the administration of the school – efforts to foster a relevant and safe educational environment. The logic of this bylaw was to build a healthy, educational cooperative and enjoyable extracurricular activity, but just as crucially, to facilitate parental involvement in the education process. Each parents’ council is elected by the parents of the students with no exceptions and there are no restrictions on non-Lebanese participation in such councils. Nevertheless, few Syrian parents participated in parent’s councils. According to the MEHE, it is preferable to form a special committee to represent Syrian students and families only when the percentage of displaced students in Lebanese schools exceeds 20 percent to ensure the workflow of the parents’ councils would not be affected in case the Syrian crisis ended, and the displaced returned back home.

## POLICY MAKING FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY

In the absence of a specialized national body, the governmental (MEHE) and non-governmental/international bodies established regionally-based working groups to collect and exchange information and the most important decisions issued regarding the Syrian students in the Lebanese schools for the purpose of circulating it. The national Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) is hosted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and comprises representative from UNHCR, UNICEF and other partners. The role of the ESWG is to support organizations working in the education sector and to strengthen the coordination capacity response of all education partners in Lebanon to deliver quality formal and non-formal education programs that provide access to quality education. The ESWG attempts to ensure a timely, coherent and effective education response by mobilizing stakeholders to respond in a strategic manner to the Syrian crisis. It also works to ensure prioritization, evidence-based actions and gap-filling as well as to enhance accountable and effective emergency education response to children and youth.

The JENA<sup>30</sup> rapid assessment study of the education response, found that coordination between local and national actors, including that between MEHE and schools, was weak. School principals were often not clear regarding the official integration policy of Syrian students, which had yet to be elaborated upon by the Government of Lebanon.

The lack of a clear policy was also a concern echoed by international donors interviewed in this study. Hence the RACE document was seen as a good step towards a longer term planning policy, however several donors felt they were not consulted widely when RACE was being developed.

One of the key barriers to more effective coordination and implementation is an effective and efficient system to collect, manage, and share information on education. There are

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<sup>30</sup> The JENA is Joint Education Needs Assessment for Syrian Refugee Children: In Schools, Communities and Safe Spaces / Education Working Group/ August 2013 (Draft Version)

many parties for collecting educational information like: central administration, educational areas, guidance and counseling, educational inspection, United Nations agencies and others; some of which circulate the information on its websites. The 3W mapping of education services (PIVOT tool) is one example. However, the absence of a shared framework makes it more difficult to track progress, identify gaps, capture best practices and plan effectively.

In conclusion, although the Government of Lebanon is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol, the government bears other international commitments, including the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Both of these conventions grant all refugees – including Syrians – in Lebanon the right to accessible education. The contradictions between these international obligations and Lebanese domestic education policy is undeniable, however, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has made efforts to provide access to increasing numbers of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. Steps to increase the flexibility in the regulations – relaxed restrictions on required registration documentation and in the language of instruction in second shifts – has fallen short of the basic needs of Syrian children, and nowhere is this more apparent than for those above the age of 15, the critical ages for official exams. However, the scale of the crisis on Lebanon and its limited financial and human capacity renders many of these regulations as irrelevant. The international community and the UN agencies have obligations towards supporting Lebanon in abiding by the various conventions and decrees concerning compulsory free education.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ACCESS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

One of the main five domains essential for securing quality education for the refugees is ‘access and learning environment.’ In this chapter we assess the learning environment with an examination of three standards: equality of access, protection and wellbeing, as well as facilities and services, as outlined below.

**Table 7 INEE Access Standards**

<b>Standard 1:</b> Equal Access: All individuals have access to quality and relevant education opportunities
<b>Standard 2: Protection and Well-being</b> Learning environments are secure, safe, and promote the protection and the psychosocial well-being of learners, teachers, and other education personnel.
<b>Standard 3: Facilities and Services</b> Education facilities promote the safety and well-being of learners, teachers, and other Education personnel. Facilities are similarly linked to health, nutrition, psychosocial, and protection services.

This chapter examines access and the learning environment currently experienced by the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The chapter is divided into three main sections, each focusing on the INEE standards.

### **1- EQUAL ACCESS**

In examining access, INEE standards stress the need for all individuals to have access to quality and relevant education opportunities. INEE standards also highlight the need to remove barriers that might undermine access, such as the admission policies that undermine access to flexible, relevant, and quality learning opportunities for students. Similarly, INEE standards call for adaptable education related to student context and emphasise the need to enter and re-enter formal education system, receive accreditation

recognised by home and host country, and to altogether avoid discrimination.

*ENROLMENT IN EDUCATION: WHAT KIND OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON*

According to statistics by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), there are currently 383,195 Syrian children between age 5 and 17 and 555,077 between the ages 0 and 17. The number of Syrian children registered in Lebanese public schools - early years to Cycle 3 – for morning and afternoon shifts combined are 88,000. Of these registered students, 58,360 attend the morning shift whereas 29,902 attend the afternoon session. In total, 11, 231 Syrian students enrolled in private paying schools and 5,207 in private free institutions (CERD, 2013).<sup>31</sup> It is also worth noting that approximately 48,287 children attended non-formal education, while around 7,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) are registered with UNRWA. The following table presents a breakdown of the number of Syrian students in Lebanese public schools by region and type of shift for the 2013-2014 academic year.

**Table 8 Number of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanese Public School in 2013-2014**

Mohafaza	Beirut	South	Nabatiyeh	Bekaa	North	Mount Lebanon	ALL LEBANON
<b>Morning 2012/2013</b>	3,185	3,645	2,946	10,342	9,150	12,912	42,180
<b>Total Morning 2013/2014</b>	4,539	6,495	4,734	10,257	13,511	18,824	58,360
<b>KG</b>	1,526	2,351	1,867	3,518	4,190	6,001	19,453

<sup>31</sup> Centre for Educational and Research Development (CERD), (2013) Annual Statistical Bulletin, Published by CERD.

<b>C1 (G1- 3)</b>	1,780	2,671	1,785	3,863	5,955	8,128	24,182
<b>C2 (G4 - G6)</b>	900	1,169	910	2,167	2,574	3,385	11,105
<b>C3 (G7- G9)</b>	333	304	172	709	792	1,310	3,620
<b>Total SYR Second shift 2013/2014</b>	1,336	2,560	2,436	8,515	9,061	5,994	29,902
<b>C1 (G1- 3)</b>	980	1,755	1,465	4,854	5,138	3,752	17,944
<b>C2 (G4 - G6)</b>	345	781	857	2,722	2,708	1,861	9,274
<b>C3 (G7- G9)</b>	11	24	114	939	1,215	381	2,684
<b>Total Syrians Morning and afternoon 2013/2014</b>	5,875	9,055	7,170	18,772	22,572	24,818	88,262

The above chart indicates the vast majority of school age Syrian children in Lebanon do not access education. Public sector access largely composed of cycle 1 with a minority in cycle 3. Secondary level students are completely absent from the figures. This trend reflects MEHE and donor priorities for compulsory basic education until age 15. The only statistic available on the percentage of Syrian refugees in public secondary schools is 2 per cent of the Syrian Refugees Children in Lebanon at the age of Secondary.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the RACE document aims to provide accelerated learning programmes for older students with the aim to draw those in this age range back to formal education.

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<sup>32</sup> UNHCR and UNICEF. Forthcoming. Education joint needs assessment for displaced Syrian children in schools, community and safe spaces. The low percentage at the secondary school level is attributed to the legal and academic constraints to enrolment in secondary education as well as socioeconomic factors forcing older children to work.

Moreover, based on the above figures the majority of students appear to study the national Lebanese curriculum in Lebanese public schools. In the morning shift, the Lebanese curriculum is taught largely unmodified, however, in the afternoon shift, the policy of public schools to teach science and math in Arabic up to grade 7 represents some flexibility to adapt to circumstances. Putting through Syrian refugee children into mainstream public schooling without providing them with any additional support resulted in a staggeringly high dropout of some 70 per cent during the 2011–2012 school year. The failure rate among Syrian children is twice the national average of Lebanese children.<sup>33</sup>

The limited capacity of the Lebanese public sector to provide the support needed for the refugee children – whether in access and quality education – created a demand for alternative education provisions from the Lebanese private sector, the local Syrian community, and NGOs. As a result, we identified the following formal education provisions for the Syrian children in Lebanon in this study.

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<sup>33</sup> UNICEF and Save the Children. 2012. Education rapid needs assessment for displaced Syrian children in schools, community and safe spaces. The actual level of school dropout during the current academic year has not yet been confirmed by MEHE but preliminary UNICEF analysis from 200 public schools benefiting from emergency education interventions across Lebanon has indicated that the dropout rates during the 2012- 2013 academic year are substantially lower at 10 percent. The decrease is attributed to a number of education and psychosocial interventions that are being provided by MEHE with the support of UNICEF, its partners and the wider humanitarian community to the students and schools. UNICEF preliminary analysis of data provided by Balamand University (UNICEF implementing partner) for 200 schools.

**Table 9 Current formal education provisions for the Syrian refugee children in Lebanon offered by the private sector**

<b>Type of curriculum</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Accredited</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Risk in getting certificate<sup>34</sup></b>
<b>Lebanese curriculum</b>	6- 17	8:00 am to 2:00pm	Accredited	All except PE, Art, IT	Not being able to obtain the required documents
<b>Syrian official Curriculum</b>	6- 17	2:30 pm- 6:30 pm	Accredited	All except activities PE, art, IT.	Safety to travel to Syria
<b>Lebanese Arabised curriculum</b>	6-17	3:30 pm– 7:30 pm	Accredited	All except activities PE, Art, IT	Not being able to obtain the required documents
<b>Libyan curriculum</b>	17 – 18	8:00 am - 1:30 pm	Accredited	All except activities and IT	Risk or inability to travel due to lack of passports
<b>UNRWA Schools</b>	6-17	8:00 am - 2:00pm	Accredited	All subjects	Not being able to obtain the required documents
<b>Coalition Schools</b>	6-17	Afternoon 4:00 pm- 7:00 pm and Sunday morning from 8:00 am-2:00 pm	Accredited in Turkey, Oman, Somalia, & France, Mauritania	All except activities PE, Art, IT	Limited accreditation, risk of going back to Syria as parents are seen as being anti-regime

As presented in the above table, the surveyed Syrian children had access to formal and non-formal education. Provisions of formal education included a variety of learning

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<sup>34</sup> The risk could be a safety one if having to travel to Syria or a risk of ability to get the required travel documents which might result in students not being able to sit for the exam.

environments, namely: 1) Lebanese unmodified curriculum, 2) Arabised Lebanese curriculum, 3) Syrian community schools offering the Syrian official curriculum with students registered in Syria, but study in Lebanon, 4) a Libyan curriculum offered for students in grade 12, and finally 5) the coalition curriculum.

Each education provision sought to not only widen access, but most importantly, to provide a suitable learning environment with a relevant curriculum that contributes to student retention in schools. As a result, all of the surveyed schools with the exception of one private school with a focus on Grade 1 instruction offered varying degrees of a modified learning environment. The majority of these schools also catered to older children either in cycle 3 or secondary stage. Several of these students are sufficiently marginalised in the Lebanese public sector, as they fall beyond the UN mandate for compulsory education. Moreover, the lack of language support (intensive English courses) compounds challenges for students in higher grades due to the study of math and science in a second language.

Private Lebanese schools that offered the Syrian national curriculum in academic year 2012-2013 were unaccredited by the Lebanese government. As the Syrian crisis wore on, these schools registered Syrian children on their official list of students for 2013-2014. Syrian students are now receiving instruction in the Lebanese national curriculum in classes exclusively reserved for them.

UNRWA schools were more willing to provide a policy of integration based on abilities and capacity. For instance, in one of the visited schools, less-abled students from both the PRS and the Palestinian community were grouped together, while more abled PRS were integrated in other classrooms. Nonetheless, as more students registered during the academic year, new classrooms were created to accommodate the increased numbers. In other cases, the small proportion of students made integration the only possible solution. In our visit to an UNRWA secondary school, we learned PRS students were too few to open exclusive classes. One accommodation for the language barrier in math and science was to register all of the students in grade 12 in the humanities section where most subjects are taught in Arabic hence it is easier for students to pass. In contrast, students who chose to register in the Math or biology section have to learn most subjects in

English or French making the success in the Lebanese baccalaureate exam a challenging task. Other private schools allowed Syrian refugees with the means to pay the standard tuition fees to register and study with their Lebanese peers, provided they could keep pace academically. Yet the number of students in such situations in private schools included in this study was extremely limited.

Private schools dealt with the language barriers in the Lebanese curriculum in a variety of ways which will be examined later in this report. One of the private schools included in this study asked teachers to translate the Lebanese curriculum from English to Arabic. This private Lebanese school opened a separate section for the Syrian children for all age groups, including secondary grade levels. Both Syrian and Lebanese teachers taught the arabised curriculum. The MEHE extended an accommodation to the school administration that allowed students to receive the Lebanese Official Exam questions in English, but to provide answers in Arabic. As a result, the school timetable included two hours per week for “terminology” courses to teach students key science and math terminology in preparation for the official exam.

On the other hand, schools established by the Syrian community continued to struggle with the issue of accreditation. The MEHE does not accredit any foreign curriculum taught in Lebanon with the exception of the French Baccalaureate. Currently, the available options for these schools are to register students in Syria, offer instruction on the Syrian national curriculum at a school in Lebanon, but for students to return to Syria to sit for the official exam.

Whilst this route addressed the issue of language, accreditation, and catered to secondary grade students, this scenario was not without significant risks. According to our findings, only eight out of twenty-nine students completed official exams in Syria, due to the escalating violence and fear for their return. Students unable to return to Syria completed the Syrian coalition exams – only certified by Turkey, France, Oman, and Somalia, Mauritania.

The number of *Syrian coalition schools* is actually increasing in Lebanon. These schools offer modified Syrian textbooks bereft of all references to Baath or the Assad regime. In

addition, the textbooks include pedagogical changes in Arabic, Math, and Science books. These schools are available free of charge and students were provided with all stationary, books, and uniforms. The curriculum was taught by Syrian teachers in Arabic. Students in Grade 12 completed the official coalition exams for completion of secondary education. Yet the Lebanese Ministry of Education does not accredit these exams, and thus the main concern for the majority of parents of students in Grade 12 was the accreditation of their students' exams. Parents expressed grievances caused by the lack of transparency from administrators over the issue of accreditation. Parents expressed concern in the post-secondary education opportunities for their children, given the coalition official exam is not accredited by any country other than Turkey, Oman, Somalia, Mauritania and France.

The other possible option for one of the interviewed principals was to offer the *Libyan baccalaureate*. This school was part of the coalition school, but because they are not recognised in most countries, including Lebanon, the principal decided that the Syrian Curriculum will be taught in all grades except for Grade 12. Grade 12 students studied the Libyan Baccalaureate. According to the students, the curriculum is easy; however, the trade-off is that the failure of one-subject results in failure of entire exam. In the Syrian official exams, the total average in all subjects decides whether the student passes or not.

The Libyan baccalaureate exam was completed under the auspices of a special Libyan delegation in an office in Turkey. The Turkey-based board administers the tests for the students in Turkey, then transports completed exams to Libya for correction. The Libyan government pays travel fees and accommodation costs for all students. The degrees are stamped from the Libyan government. According to the principal, a handful of students do not possess a passport, nor are they able to obtain one without a return to Syria, a journey due to fear of persecution to detention. As a result, these students simply do not receive a certified degree.

Main features of the surveyed private education provisions

- *Somewhat flexible* and adapted curriculum
- *High retention* and completion rate
- Caters to the older students, particularly at the *secondary* level
- *Accreditation remain a challenge* for Syrian-led initiatives
- *Not always safe* as traveling to Syria is a high risk for the students
- Not all are free or affordable
- *Segregated* learning environments for Syrian children separated from Lebanese counterparts
- *Avoids the foreign language barrier*
- *Concerns over sustainability*
- *Lack of professional development for education in emergency*

*NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IDENTIFIED IN THE NGO SECTOR*

The NGO sector in Lebanon was instrumental in the response to the Syrian refugee crisis. These organisations offered recreational activities and increasingly non-formal education programmes for displaced children. Non-formal education programmes for Syrian refugees emerged as an attempt by NGOs to respond to the lack of access to education for the majority of them living in Lebanon. Our study covered five separate NGOs offering the following education programmes.

**Table 10 Identified types of non-formal education programmes for the Syrian refugees**

Type of programme	Age group	Duration	Certified	Subjects taught
Accelerated Learning Programme	7 and 12/13 years	4:00pm- 7:00pm	Uncertified	CERD ALP curriculum
Remedial	Grade 1 – 9	4:00- 7:00 pm	Uncertified	Math, English, and Science

Literacy and numeracy + recreational activities	5- 12	8:00 am – 1:00pm	Uncertified	Math, English, and Science
After school homework clubs	6 – 14/15	4:00 to 6:00 pm	N/A	Support in all home work

The main programmes, as shown in the table above, were primarily oriented toward supplemental academic support to facilitate student reintegration and retention. Homework clubs and literacy or numeracy tutoring formed the basis of these efforts. Students received instruction and support to segue back into formal education settings, mainly remedial classes or accelerated learning programmes, or participated in homework clubs for supplemental assistance to ensure school retention. Most of the surveyed programmes catered to younger children in cycles 1 and 2, whereas comparatively few cycle 3 students participated in non-formal programmes.

NGOs recognised and adapted to the formidable challenges faced by Syrian students. Several NGOs began to offer their own literacy, numeracy, and psychosocial programmes for Syrian students. While many such programmes started as a temporarily arrangement, they soon became not only critical support for Syrian students, but in some cases, took on the role of schools due to glaringly absent services, especially in marginalised communities, such as tented settlements.

The majority of surveyed NGOs did not follow a specific instruction curriculum, but rather adapted and improvised. In the case of accelerated learning programmes, teachers were given a prescribed MEHE curriculum, however, most teachers confided the material was simply unsuitable and needed to be fundamentally restructured to suit student needs. One of the NGOs adopted literacy books developed by a Lebanese NGO, ‘Iqraa’, however, the situation proved similar to the MEHE curriculum insofar as the materials were ill suited for student needs. NGOs overwhelmingly allowed the classroom teacher to develop his/her own teaching material. This served as the principal curriculum for NGO instruction in those interviewed.

While the non-formal sector education from NGOs provided a flexible education with a high retention rate, a few students complained about the lack of certification. Their admittedly valid concerns were related to their reintegration to mainstream formal education settings either in Lebanon or another country.

Main features of the surveyed non-formal education provisions:

- *Flexible* and adapted learning environment to suit students' needs
- Offers a **transitional phase** to formal education
- Often **disconnected from formal education** due to lack of coordination
- **Improvised** curriculum
- *High retention* and completion rate
- *Uncertified*
- *Concerns over sustainability*
- *Staffing issues*
- *Addresses the language issue*

#### *WHAT SUPPORT WAS GIVEN TO CHILDREN IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?*

Equal access to education for Syrian refugees requires not only the removal of financial barriers, but also to academic obstacles. In this section, we examine the financial support provided to children in order to ensure that they are able to attend school. We also explore the additional academic support meant to students to help overcome the challenges of a vastly different curriculum in Lebanese schools.

#### **Financial**

The majority of the surveyed education programmes, whether formal or non-formal, offered financial support for students. This included payment of tuition fees or at a minimum, offering stationary and books to students. Some NGOs also provided food or snacks. Only two schools, one private Lebanese and the other Syrian, required students to contribute towards the tuition fees. The following table presents the kind of support provided to students by the different organisations.

**Table 11 Type of financial support provided for students in each school**

<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Support Provided</b>	<b>Uncovered expenses</b>
<b>Private secular Lebanese</b>	Tuition fees	Stationary, books and transport
<b>Private faith Lebanese</b>	Tuition fees	Stationary, books and transport
<b>Syrian official curriculum</b>	Tuition fees, stationary, books and transport	
<b>Private Lebanese faith</b>		Tuition fees L.L.500,000 stationary, books and transport
<b>Libyan curriculum grade 12, remaining grades Syrian curriculum</b>	Travel cost to Turkey	Tuition fees L.L. 200,000 stationary, books and transport
<b>UNRWA</b>	Tuition fees, stationary, books, transport	
<b>Coalition</b>	Tuition fees, stationary, books	Transport
<b>Non-formal</b>	Tuition fees, transport, books, stationary, and a snack	

Newly established schools set up by the local Lebanese and Syrian community struggled most with the scarcity of funds and, hence asked parents to pay fees. One particular private school provided education to almost 3,000 students through voluntary work from teachers and small donations from individuals. This academic year (2013-2014), however, the school could not continue to offer the same support. As a result, the school administration requested a tuition fee of \$300 USD from parents, and required parents to provide the documentation requested by MEHE for school registration. Due to the paucity of funds and needed papers, only 400 students remained in the school, as many of the parents either could not afford the new tuition fees or did not have the necessary

papers. In turn, several of the former families enrolled their children in coalition schools for free education. Still others did not register their children due to the lack of documents required for registration with the MEHE.

Scarcity of resources remains a challenge, particularly for the initiatives led by the Syrian community in Lebanon. The availability of textbooks is one of the main difficulties. Several schools and students resorted to photocopying textbooks often at the expense of quality or in some cases, legibility. While all of the schools we visited provided free textbooks to the students (except for one school in Sidon), the quality most textbooks was extremely poor. Several students explained it was necessary to re-write the lessons into their notebooks, because they could not read the print.

The **cost of transport** was a primary concern for both the parents interviewed and school administrators. While the cost of transport may seem like a nominal expense, over time the costs mount, particularly for refugee families in a state of uncertainty. Yet several of the surveyed private schools did not cover the cost of transport for students. A few students resort to drastic measures to avoid the cost. For instance, one interviewed student walks 10 kilometres to school every day. Several children walked late in the evening, especially those attending an afternoon shift. One school administrator explained: “She [the mother] pays for half the way to school and the rest of the way he walks, and walks all the way back home. In addition some students walk at night and in dangerous areas.” In one school in the Bekaa, a student confided that he sometimes skips school (especially in winter), because he does not want to walk for 40 minutes to get there.

In sum, limited financial resources served as a major concern and in some cases, an insurmountable obstacle for both parents and school administrators. In interviews, parents were most concerned with the cost of recurring fees, such as buses and tuition. Furthermore, financial constraints – coupled practical challenges – of enrolment and transportation prompted some parents to consider the withdrawal of their children from school altogether. The alternative is to have their children work for additional income in a time of uncertainty.

Yet financial concerns were not unique to parents. Principals similarly expressed concern over the amount of funds necessary to keep schools afloat. For instance, the principal of a school in Baalbek cut instruction to grades 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 to reduce operating expenses. Moreover, the significant cost to retain qualified teachers poses another problem for administrators. Several teachers we interviewed were owed back pay or were not paid at all. One principal in Tripoli was forced to reduce teacher salaries to keep a school operational.

### **Additional academic support**

The majority of the school age Syrian children have been out of education for at least a year. Putting them back to school to study a new curriculum in a totally new environment where they are perceived as foreigners, requires giving them a lot of additional support. Moreover, and as outlined above, the Lebanese curriculum requires a relatively strong command of a foreign language (English or French). Such language requirements place added obstacles not only for admission to Lebanese institutions, but also hinder the capacity of the Syrian students to flourish.

Despite the various challenges facing Syrian refugees upon joining school, all of the formal private did not provide any additional academic support for children beyond the hours specified in the national curriculum. None of the surveyed private Lebanese schools – following the Lebanese curriculum – with admission for Syrian refugee children offered preparatory or remedial support. UNRWA offered summer language preparation classes for Palestinian Syrian students prior to the resumption of classes in the new academic year.

**Table 12 Type of academic support offered by institutions**

<b>Type Institution</b>	<b>Additional academic support</b>
<b>Private Lebanese schools - faith and secular</b>	None
<b>Private Syrian official curriculum</b>	None

<b>UNRWA</b>	Remedial (Lebanese curriculum)
<b>Coalition schools</b>	None

The most glaring gap in support and preparation was for the foreign language requirement in the Lebanese curriculum. The foreign language requirement serves as a potent obstacle for the success of Syrian children in Lebanese institutions. While several school administrators and teachers noted the need for such programs, none of the schools included in this study offered intensive language courses for children. Rather, students unable to keep pace with language requirements were simply demoted to lower grades, as this was the conventional method school administrations use to deal with the language barrier. The issue of language obstacles will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

On the contrary, the non-formal sector offered the overwhelming majority of remedial and academic support for Syrian children both registered – and those awaiting registration – in Lebanese schools. NGOs, specifically, provided the supplemental academic programmes for Syrian students. NGO-sponsored homework clubs served as the most common support outlet for students enrolled in (mainly public) Lebanese schools.

The NGO sector was the principal provider of non-formal education programmes oriented toward improved access for Syrian children to formal schools. In fact, nearly all of the surveyed non-formal programmes took an active role to assist their Syrian refugee students with enrolment in formal public schools. Only one surveyed NGO was guided by a separate aim: to provide literacy and numeracy to keep the children off the street.

Little coordination between non-formal and formal institutions placed Syrian students at a disadvantage. Several of the visited NGOs attempted to create channels with public schools whereby they can prepare the Syrian refugee children to enrol in formal

education, however these attempts were of limited success due to the centralisation of decision making regarding MEHE whereby the latter decided the enrolment policy regarding the Syrian refugees.

NGOs unquestionably accommodate the education needs of the largest proportion of Syrian refugee children, yet such institutions are not a viable alternative to mainstream education. NGOs lack the accreditation to offer credible or widely accepted certificates of completion, and thus are largely relegated to the role of a support mechanism. For MEHE, education efforts of NGOs lack appropriate monitoring, oversight, quality control, and guidelines. The absence of clearly defined regulations prompts scepticism from officials tasked with ensuring standardised quality in education. While the relationship between most INGOs and IGOs in Lebanon have been regulated through MOU, a similar process is required with local NGOs and through regulating and accrediting non-formal and less traditional routes to education such as community schools. Other Arab countries such as Egypt have already made significant progress in this field<sup>35</sup>.

## **2- SAFETY AND PROTECTION**

INEE describes a safe learning environment as one that safeguards the physical and psychosocial well being of learners, teachers, and other education personnel. This includes safe travel to and from a school, a secure educational setting conducive to learning, as well as a supportive community and school facilities.<sup>36</sup> In this section we examine each of three areas.

### *SAFETY TO REACH THE SCHOOL*

Safety in travel to and from school was not a major challenge mentioned by students and teachers. Only one principal of a Tripoli school with afternoon shift highlighted absenteeism as an issue due to student transport to or from school in the winter months. A few parents with students enrolled at the tented school in Bekaa expressed concern for

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<sup>35</sup> Zaalouk, M. (2006) *Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. The American University in Cairo Press; New Ed edition (November 6, 2006)

<sup>36</sup> INEE Minimum Standards Reference Tool to accompany and complement the INEE Minimum Standards Hand.

the security of their children while in transit. One parent explained: “We do not send them because we are afraid that they will get hurt. The majority of the students are young.” Another added, “also there are Lebanese there and they hit our children. Some are in the afternoon but they do not go every day because it is late.” Families had concerns particularly regarding their daughters. Hence, second shifts were not popular as parents were concerned about their children walking in the night alone.

#### *SAFETY IN THE SCHOOL*

Syrian students and parents expressed significant concern with safety during school. The vast majority of students interviewed, particularly in non-formal sector institutions but also registered in public and UNRWA elementary schools mainly in Beirut, reported daily physical and verbal abuse from teachers and/or fellow students. In fact, the teachers and principals of private Lebanese schools reported bullying by the Lebanese students as a major concern.

Several Syrian students preferred to drop out of Lebanese public schools – and to subsequently enrol in a non-certified curriculum – than to endure daily harassment, abuse, and in some cases, violence. For instance, an NGO social worker explained some of her Syrian students enrolled in public schools suffered corporal punishment from teachers and principals. One of her students complained to the principal, yet the principal claimed the abuse was necessary, and threatened the student. The social worker expressed a general sense of helplessness to help students, since her complaint to official authorities met the response: “these principals are untouchable.”

For several students, the violence and abuse was difficult to discuss. In one instance, our researcher asked lower elementary students for any additional input or further questions at the close of a focus group discussion at an NGO homework club. The researcher repeated the question, yet none of the participants responded until the researcher began to leave the room. A nine-year old girl said “I have something to say. We are beaten regularly by the teachers.”

After this intervention, the remaining students disclosed similar situations. In fact, five of the six students experienced violence at the hands of their teachers. Four of the six

attended morning public schools, whereas the other two attended an UNRWA school where they reported regular beatings by teachers. Such violence compounds existing insecurity with the potential to affect student performance and overall development.

It is worth noting that several students preferred not to report instances of bullying and violence at school for fear of losing their place. As one parent noted, “students must learn to stand up for themselves, but this is affecting him staying in school, so I would rather keep him at school and ask him not to argue with the teacher in cases such as harassment.” Another parent commented “a ten year old pulled a knife on my son. I could have complained but we avoided that because we do not want them to harm us.”

The above findings highlight the urgent need to address the issues of violence, bullying, and discrimination in schools. Of course, this issue existed in Lebanese and UNRWA schools prior to the Syrian crisis. The question remains as to the overall effects both at the level of the individual student as well as that at the nation. More precisely, more information is needed on the extent discussion of drop-out rates overshadowed the existence of these issues, and possibly amplified segregation trends to further compartmentalise Lebanese students from different sects<sup>37</sup> (Shuayb, 2012, Al Hroub, 2012).

#### COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TO CREATE, SUSTAIN AND PROTECT LEARNING

In defining community participation, INEE stresses the important role of parents, children, youth, and others in the affected communities as supportive networks for schools. Yet supportive communities require human will and material resources for local communities to support teaching and learning in schools. Our study revealed that despite some grievances amongst the hosting communities, there were several successful

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<sup>37</sup> Shuayb, M. (2014), *The Art of Inclusive Exclusions: Educating the Palestinian Refugee Students in Lebanon*, (2014), *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Volume 33, Issue, 2, March, p.1- 18.

HROUB, A., “A longitudinal study of cases of dropout students in UNRWA schools in Lebanon: models of internal brain drain”, *Idafat*, 20 & 21, 2012.

examples of exemplary support offered by both Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities, as outlined below.

#### *SCHOOLS NETWORK*

Three of the private Lebanese schools in our survey were members of a regional school network active prior to the Syrian crisis. This network was to coordinate educational matters, such as logistics, pedagogy, and teacher professional development. The network widened access to Syrian refugees in the wake of the massive influx to the specific area of operations.

A survey of school age children in the region was carried out via the councils of municipalities and regional NGOs responsible for the coordination of the emergency response. Such organisations possessed all of the details on each Syrian family to settle in the region.

In turn, several schools in the network agreed to offer a grade between one and 6 while one of them offered grades from grade 7 to 12. Each school received \$120 USD per child to cover part of the cost donated by different charities. A number of existing Lebanese teachers at network schools dedicated their time and efforts to teach the additional classrooms created exclusively for Syrian children. These schools offer Arabic instruction with segregated classrooms for Syrians only. On the other hand, students who could both afford the standard tuition fee paid by Lebanese families and meet the academic standards, were offered a place in the existing classrooms.

While the network succeeded in the provision of certified education to the majority of Syrian children in this region, the network faced severe challenges not only in the short term planning in an evolving situation, but more important, to cope with indecision of the official ministries. Several members of the network complained of the complete absence of a long-term plan regarding the admission of Syrian children to schools. One school administrator summed up the official government position as: “the policy of having no clear policy.” A tangible effect of the policy was the late start of the 2013-2014 academic year. For instance, one school surveyed did not start Syrian refugee classrooms until January 2014.

Finally, the significant issues in the dearth of education provisions for students after grade nine coupled with the lack of adapted learning models for Syrian children, particular in cycle 2, created priorities for the school network to focus resources and efforts to fill gaps.

#### *PARENTS' COUNCILS*

Parents' councils, present in only one surveyed school, were instrumental in managing relationships between a Lebanese school administration and a Syrian student population. Not only did parents' councils temper tensions between parents on the one hand, and administration or teachers on the other hand, but these groups crucially bridged the gap between Syrian and Lebanese communities. This dialogue between the parents of the Syrian children on the one hand and the Lebanese administration on the other also contributed to the quality of learning and, student retention. This level of cooperation was observed in one private Lebanese school with a mainly Lebanese administrators and teachers and a significant Syrian student population. The Lebanese private school offered instruction of an Arabised Lebanese curriculum in the afternoon to 400 Syrian children. The principal claimed the parents' council was crucial to the success of both teaching and learning. One parent explained:

We were in a general meeting for all the Syrian parents and we were not able to make decisions because of different opinions. So one person suggested that we make a committee to communicate between the administration and the parent body. They asked us, who would like to be in the committee. But what we did is tried to have parents in the committee from different areas in Syria, one from Homs, one from Latakia, another from Hama, and so on. This is because there is a difference between the areas. The people displaced from Homs have a different experience than those displaced from Damascus and so on. Every school should have one. It is important. For example, we were discussing with the principal what kind of behaviour policy we can work out for the students. The administration asked for our help.

Another member of the parents' council stated:

Because we [parents council] know how to talk to them (Syrian parents). We know the way they think. So we talk to them but then the principal joins the meeting after we talk to the parents about the problem and we decide with the administration on the steps to move forward.

The council has gained the respect and creditability from both the parents and administration and most importantly laid for the foundation for an equal and respectful relationship. A teacher explained:

Because they respect our presence. And we were able to prove ourselves because we care about the students and the school. They know that we will not talk about the problems of students outside the school, and they know that we are really concerned for the students and we do not take sides, but work together with the administration for what is best for the student.

This cooperative relationship was notably absent in several schools, particularly in the public and private Syrian-led schools. Interviews with parents of children in public schools, but attending non-formal programmes revealed a belief that non-Lebanese parents are not entitled under the internal regulations for public elementary schools (amended in 2001) to join parents' councils. However, the regulations do not explicitly state exclusion of non-Lebanese, but rather the regulations stipulate that only Lebanese students are entitled to register in public schools. However, the internal regulations for secondary schools, in effect since the 1973 publication, does not state students should be Lebanese. Hence, in principle there are no legal barriers to prevent Syrian parents from joining parents' committees in Lebanese public schools.

#### *VOLUNTEERING AND DONATIONS*

Volunteer teachers were absolutely essential to both establish and run Syrian schools free of charge for refugee children. Yet questions of sustainability of such models remain unclear. For instance, the private school founded by a retired Syrian principal relied upon inexpensive facilities and donations. In 2013-2014 academic year, the school offered services to 250 students with 25 volunteer teachers. Teachers could no longer volunteer

time and efforts without pay for a second year, and thus demanded compensation. In turn, the principal reduced staff number, cancelled some grades, and offered a nominal rate of pay to the teachers.

Most of the schools we visited were only able to exist due to donations from charities and the local community. Yet over time, such models are difficult to sustain, and the result is either the introduction of a tuition fee or reduction in the number of classes. It is worth noting that most of the private Lebanese schools provided their facilities free of charge and were receiving aid that barely covers a portion of the teachers' salaries. One school principal asked us to help him in finding fees for 50 orphans who he needs to register but cannot pay the tuition fee of 70 USD which goes towards the cost of renting the school building and the running expenses.

#### GRIEVANCES FROM THE HOSTING COMMUNITY

Despite the above examples of the successful and supportive role of the local communities, our study also identified grievances among the host communities. The main concern for parents of Lebanese and Palestinian refugees student was the potential for negative impact that Syrian children could have on the quality of learning of their children. A principal of an UNRWA school commented "the Palestinians parents first refused to have the Syrian Palestinians in their class. They think they are weaker and this would affect the learning". In contrast, some Syrian parents preferred mixed schools to widen the perspective of their children.

Another principal noted "Some students see the Syrians as intruders and gang against them. When the administration is weak, students fight. Also here the Syrian parents need to teach their children that they are here as 'guests' and they should not be dragged into fights".

This resentment by parents and students resulted in bullying and harassment of Syrian children and their parents. Some Syrian parents went so far as to remove their children from public schools due to the discrimination and, in turn register their children in non-formal and non-accredited schools. One student currently attending a non-formal

education programme commented, “staying at home is better than being humiliated.”

Different school administrations dealt with discrimination in a variety of ways ranging from segregation to suspending children who bully Syrians. A principal explained, “We segregated kids even in grade 1 so that we don't have clashes”. While we saw some examples of principals addressing the issue of discrimination with some success, we did not come across any particular policies or code of conduct regarding discrimination. Nonetheless, we saw a few examples of attempts to build positive relationships between Syrians and Lebanese through joined organised school activities.

### **3- SCHOOL FACILITIES**

When writing about the school facilities, it is worth mentioning that the majority of the visited schools and NGOs offered an education programme in emergency situations. Some of these organisations were created as a result of the crisis. Hence, the human and financial resources, as well as the time were scarce commodities. The most well equipped schools to cope with the Syrian crisis were those private Lebanese sector institutions. Students had access to a proper classroom facilities, as well as playgrounds and good toilet facilities. Nonetheless, one of the private Lebanese schools which hosted Syrian children in a newly established building did not have the time to completely finish all of the construction work. As a result, the walls were not plastered at the time of our visit. Nonetheless, all the other basic school facilities, such as desks, board, playgrounds and toilet facilities were available. Also a staff room was provided. On the other hand, the facilities of Syrian schools and NGOs lacked the financial or professional resources, because most were founded by individuals, but were sustained by donors and volunteers. For instance, the Syrian school that we visited in North Lebanon rented an old deserted and run down school building. The school, located on the ground floor of the building, was plagued by broken desks. In many cases, students simply sat on the metal.

The tented school was divided into two classrooms separated by a blanket. In one of the two classes that was for kindergarten and grade one, children were singing all the time and made it difficult for the older students in the other class to study math and science. The tent had a very small window for ventilation and hence it was incredibly hot inside.

There were no toilets or running water and students had to go the communal bathrooms in the tented settlement.

## CHAPTER FIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

As noted in the prior chapter, an overwhelming majority of Syrian students are currently enrolled in Lebanese public schools, whereas a comparatively smaller number are registered in private Lebanese schools, private Syrian institutions, or non-formal education programmes offered by NGOs. In the previous chapter, we outlined the diverse formal and non-formal educational settings currently available to the Syrian children. Most settings were predominantly segregated by nationality; Syrian children studied in separate classrooms and were afforded few, if any, interaction with the Lebanese children. This chapter builds upon the prior examination of settings with the findings from our investigation into the various teaching and learning styles in these schools.

The INEE framework highlights the curriculum provisions and the capacity to respond to student needs. We apply the INEE standards to gauge the flexibility of the learning environment insofar as it is able to respond to the students' needs for grade allocation, teaching and learning, language, psychosocial support, and the teaching staff.

### ADAPTATION OF THE CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

The INEE framework stresses the importance of flexible learning settings adaptable to the context and needs of students, so as to ensure access to education in emergency situations. Our research indicated a high degree of variation in the flexibility of learning environments in the different schools.

#### **Inflexible curriculum yet some flexible outlets**

*“Miss in Syria I used to get 10/10 but here I have become stupid”.*

The above statement from a female Syrian student enrolled in a Lebanese public school aptly characterises the rigidity in the learning environment for Syrian refugees. Lebanese public schools, by and large, fail to meet the specific needs of struggling students either through supplemental programs or in-house tutoring to foster integration. In turn, the high proportion of Syrian students fall behind grade level – with the prospect of further classroom failure – but moreover, this situation renders students helpless and incapable.

The only signs of flexibility appeared in the limited adjustments to the Lebanese curriculum and the increase in supplemental support as a way to bridge gaps for Syrian students. Our research indicated that public sector education provisions were inflexible. The one notable exception to this trend was a second shift program that taught math and science to students in Arabic. On the other hand, Syrian students were not given opportunities for intensive language courses to strengthen their linguistic skills.

The MEHE did, however, offer a few accommodations for Syrian students on admission and official exams. In the 2012-2013 school year, Syrian children were permitted to register for official exams two weeks prior, even if unable to present requisite MEHE documents. However, the exception stipulated that students could not receive their results until all required documents were presented. The MEHE also offered a special arrangement to allow Syrian students to provide answers to English questions in Arabic.

The inflexibility affected the admission policies of schools, especially for grade allocation. In many cases, Syrian students were accepted to schools, but placed several grades below their age. Such situations complicated teacher classroom management. We found the significant variations in these mixed ability classrooms – compounded by the inability to develop personal learning plans – exacerbated problems for Syrian students and affected teachers. We believe the demotion strategy to place Syrian students one to three grade levels below their age did little to solve the language issue for Syrian students. There is an urgent need to tailor responses to student needs – either through academic support or special accommodations – and nowhere is this more apparent than in the language obstacle for Syrian students

### **Short-term flexible learning environment**

All of the surveyed Lebanese private schools taught math and science in Arabic, except for one secondary Lebanese school in which students studied these subjects in English. As noted earlier, one of the schools translated the whole curriculum to Arabic and managed to procure a language exemption from MEHE for their grade 9 students to answer the official exams in Arabic. It is true that schools offered math and science instruction in Arabic but they did not allocate additional hours to teach the foreign

language. Thus, although this adaptation step helps students at the lower levels, it does little to help them overcome the language barrier at the secondary level. On the contrary, students following this Arabized curriculum face an even greater challenge at later stages in education where sciences and math are taught in the foreign language. Moreover, such accommodations remain temporary and specific to individual schools and thus do little to address the wider structural challenges posed by the foreign language obstacle.

### **Inflexible curriculum and an adapted learning environment**

One private school for cycle three and secondary students offered a mixed-language approach to the issue. The school taught the Lebanese curriculum from English textbooks without modifications. To address the language gap, school administrators hired Syrian and Lebanese teachers with special consideration for the issue of limited command of English language for Syrian students. In turn, Syrian students relied primarily on their Arabic notes from classroom instruction, but rarely used the English textbooks in the classroom. The textbooks were mainly used for homework, and thus homework became particularly challenging for Syrian students, given the absence of supplemental academic resources outside of the classroom. We found no additional support or resources within the school or system to improve English language abilities beyond those mandated by the national curriculum, and thus NGOs filled the void.

### **Foreign curricula: a means for a flexible and accommodating learning environment**

One method to manage the inflexibility of the Lebanese curriculum was to introduce the curricula of other countries. Specifically, we found institutions employed the Syrian, the Coalition, and the Libyan curricula in schools in Lebanon. The reliance on other curricula offered more suitable Arabic-centred learning material reflective of Syrian students' pre-war curriculum with the certification at the end of secondary studies. Yet the logistical obstacles remained significant, given travel to Syria for related documents, to sit for exams, or even for travel documents posed fundamental security risks.

### **Non-formal education: A flexible alternative on the margin?**

The need to provide a flexible learning environment spurred improvised solutions, namely those offered to Syrian students by NGOs in the non-formal education sector. NGOs ostensibly provided immediate – albeit short-term – solutions to the gaps in the official education system. NGOs worked with individual students to bolster English language skills and to support Syrian students' efforts to cope with the English-based Lebanese curriculum. Yet the challenges extended far beyond merely the education environment. Most of the NGOs surveyed in this study provided a combination of psychosocial and recreational activities in addition to literacy and numeracy tutoring or training. Moreover, not all of the NGOs viewed their programmes as a step towards bringing children back to mainstream education. One of the NGOs provided vocational education, while another provided support for children already in mainstream education. This lack of consistency in services across the various NGOs offers a poignant portrait of the potential areas to be addressed by education policies or official accommodations for Syrian students in Lebanese schools.

Moreover, the flexibility of the non-formal curriculum resulted in the migration of students from sites of struggle, formal education settings, to the adaptable and customisable curricula at NGOs. This apparent trend was similarly highlighted by the RACE document. In it, the MEHE and the donors emphasised the need to: 1) ensure standards and quality in education are upheld in the non-formal sector as well as to 2) strengthen the cooperation between non-formal and formal education sectors. Specifically, the document expressed the need to increase the capacity of mainstream formal education settings to accommodate children from the non-formal education trajectories. ALP, one of primary catch-up programmes, was developed by MEHE and implemented by NGOs with the explicit aim to bridge the gap between the formal and non-formal education settings as a way to build a more equitable education system.

#### **GRADE ALLOCATION**

Grade allocation for incoming Syrian students offered a salient indicator for the overall integration of Syrian refugees at institutions in Lebanon. By far the most common approach to grade placement was placement tests. Placement tests – typically based on

the Lebanese curriculum – placed Syrian students at a severe disadvantage, specifically for language sections. As a result, a disproportionate number of Syrian students repeated grades or were demoted to levels well below their age and overall capabilities. The following table outlines the placement methods adopted by surveyed schools.

**Table 13 Acceptance Policy in FE and NFE programmes**

<b>Type of Programme and Curriculum</b>	<b>Acceptance Policy</b>
<b>Private Lebanese curriculum</b>	Age and placement tests or certificate of last attended grade
<b>Syrian official curriculum</b>	Age and placement test
<b>Private Lebanese Arabised curriculum</b>	Placement test
<b>Syrian and Libyan curriculum</b>	According to age, certificates and placement tests
<b>UNRWA</b>	Last grade attended
<b>ALP</b>	Placement Test
<b>Syrian NGO offering literacy and numeracy</b>	Placement tests then leveling
<b>Lebanese NGO psychosocial and life skills</b>	Placement test
<b>Coalition</b>	Certificate of last grade attended and placement test for those without report cards
<b>Private Lebanese</b>	Certificate of last grade attended

We offer a more detailed discussion of the different strategies for grade allocation below.

*PLACEMENT BASED ON AGE*

Several of the schools in our survey relied upon age as the primary factor for grade level placement for Syrian refugees. One universal requirement was the need to furnish accepted documentation to prove completion of prior grades. Yet several schools requested students to complete a placement test in the absence of required documentation. According to one principal, the reliance upon age as the main criteria for grade placement was due to the recognition and compassion for the trauma of the students. However, another principal confided that the reliance on age as the key metric exacerbates and worsens the overarching issue of underprepared students and teachers. In other words, placement based on age places students at a significant disadvantage for success in their adopted classrooms as it did not assess students' learning needs.

*PLACEMENT TESTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE*

A review of school placement tests revealed the significant variation. The majority of surveyed schools conducted a placement test based on a needs assessment of a student's command of English language. The language test varied from reading a word on a board to answering an oral question; yet, there was no consistency in the type of questions in entrance exams. The below feedback demonstrates the seemingly arbitrary and whimsical placement procedures.

“They asked me if I spoke English and I said that I did not so they placed me in a lower grade” – Syrian student in a public school.

“We made a small placement test. We wrote a word on the board. If the students could read it, then they were placed in one group and those who could not were placed in another.” - Teacher in a tented school

#### *PLACEMENT TEST IN THE SYRIAN CURRICULUM*

One private Lebanese school following the Lebanese curriculum challenged the relevance and equity of the placement test for new students to the Lebanese curriculum. In turn, this particular school offered a placement exam based on the Syrian curriculum, as interpreted by Syrian and Lebanese teachers. One principal of a Lebanese private school explained the challenge below:

To start with, I cannot give the student an entrance exam from a curriculum that is totally different than theirs. The students need a specially designed entrance exam. The examiner should know the Syrian curriculum so that the evaluation is valid. If we evaluate according to the Lebanese curriculum, it is unfair, especially if they have not studied it.

#### *REPEATING THE LAST STUDIED GRADE*

Several schools simply forced Syrian students to repeat the last grade of completion in Syria. Such a policy avoided the issues of placement exams.

#### *OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS*

Several schools with instruction of the Syrian or Lebanese curriculum required official certificates of the last completed grade to place student in a grade. Students without such documents were required to complete a placement test. A principal explained the process as follows: “to register, the students bring any kind of ID and the report of their last grade level. If the students do not have documents, then they sit for coalition entrance exam.”

#### *AUTOMATIC DEMOTION*

Several students and parents explained of what they viewed as the widespread issue of automatic demotion. Students and parents, interviewed as part of non-formal settings but affiliated with Lebanese public schools explained that students’ language abilities led to the automatic demotion to a lower grade level. One student in a Lebanese private school explained the process: “I did not sit for an entrance exam, but they put me down one grade because I was not good in English.”

In many cases, students immediately grew weary of school administration judgments. In fact, the practice inspired students to withdraw from formal education settings altogether in order to enrol in non-formal education programmes. One of the children studying in an NGO explained, “they wanted to move me down to grade 6 and I should be in grade 9. So I did not want to move down 3 years and pay. So I left school and came here.” While this female student’s decision to withdraw from a formal school to join a non-formal education programme seemed easy in retrospect, as a result she will not receive an accredited certificate upon completion.

A 15-year-old girl currently enrolled in Grade 7 at a Lebanese public school commented, “Look at me here and now my friends who are in Syria will be sitting soon for their Baccalaureate exams.”

However, not all students resented the demotion to a lower grade. One of the students stated, “it is better (that he was moved down) like that because the program here is more difficult. I wouldn't have managed.”

#### *LIMITED CAPACITY AND AVAILABILITY IN THE REQUIRED GRADES*

A few students faced the issue of over capacity grade levels at Lebanese private schools. Students were not admitted to the grade levels to which they applied due to overcrowded schools. A student in a private school explained, “there is no Grade 11, here, so I had to do Grade 10”.

#### *PLACEMENT TESTS IN MATH AND LITERACY*

Most non-formal education programmes placed students based on math and literacy results on a placement exam. Yet the majority of Syrian students had missed at least a year or more of school, and thus performed below the expected grade level based on age. On the other hand, NGOs were hard pressed not to consider age of students in the classroom. One interviewed teacher at an NGO explained the results: “the students sat for a test to see how well they read and write and they did some math. So in Grade 4 I have students who are in the right class and others who are older. The Grade 3 students are between 7 and 11 year olds. The same situation.”

### **Limitations of the placement tests**

The primary shortcoming of placement tests was the lack of remedial, catch up, or intensive language programmes meant to provide the supplemental academic support needed to reach an age-appropriate grade level. Moreover, Syrian students were placed in classrooms without education materials adapted to suit their needs. Furthermore, even when placement tests identified students' needs, many of these needs remained unaddressed as teachers delivered a fixed curriculum and textbooks without deviation. Only one surveyed school permitted the teachers to separate children within a grade level into two classrooms based on their needs.

Although the purpose of a placement test was to identify students' competencies and needs, neither schools nor teachers provided a programme to respond to the needs identified in the assessment. In contrast, placement tests in the non-formal sector were often followed with special programmes that divided students according to the levels identified in the assessment and also took age into consideration. One teacher in a private Lebanese school with instruction in the ALP noted, "the material in the ALP are not the right ones. It is better for them [the students] to be divided according to levels and not class."

Yet only one of the private schools in the survey created different levels in one grade. One teacher at the school – a Lebanese private school with instruction in the Lebanese curriculum – explained the response, "at first we divided the class into 2 levels, but now we have 2 levels in different classes. So now we have 3 & 4 together but the same grade."

In conclusion, the lack of transparency and consistency in school admission policies led to uncertainty for students and their parents. Neither parents nor students knew what to expect or how to prepare for the placement tests. Similarly, NGOs were unable to best prepare students for placement exams due to the unclear admissions procedures at Lebanese public schools. In turn, Syrian students were placed below level and little was done to address their needs.

INEE identifies two components as indicative of teaching and learning. The two include instruction as well as learning and assessment of learning. This section examines both dimensions.

#### *INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING*

INEE standards stipulate instruction and learning processes for refugees should focus on learner-centred, participatory, and inclusive education. To achieve this, appropriate teaching methods include those responsive to the needs of learners. Before we delve into the issue it is important to note that interviewed teachers and principals acknowledged a transitional and stabilisation period for the integration of a new refugee population. They collectively recognised schools needed to better account for and address the needs of refugee children.

#### **A transitional period: grappling with children's realities**

Several teachers and administrators mentioned the time and effort needed at the beginning of the academic year, to address the complex issues and trauma faced by refugee children. Most Syrian students lived in small accommodation with several other families, and were out away from school for at least a year. Parents and children alike experienced significant shock and trauma in fleeing their homes. The immediate reenrolment of children in standard school curriculum and environment seemed a premature step for some students and their parents. One principal noted, "their living conditions have changed and they have been out of school for long and so it took them time to remember how to follow rules in school and how to sit and such."

The stabilisation or transitional period was necessary for the administrators and teachers to best understand and to respond to the needs of the students and their parents. One challenge listed by a principal involved becoming accustomed to the parents and vice versa. He told our researchers,

They were still new here and the parents did not know what to do. They were lost. They asked many questions. Their life here changed a lot from their previous life. Also they had to learn that they could not come to school whenever they wanted.

There are office hours and they need to abide by the set hours of the teachers. So it was difficult.

A Syrian teacher interviewed by our researchers aptly characterised this phenomenon. “I have taught in Syria and the students have great potential, but the child is coming from a conflict or a year of no schools, so his mind is kind of turned off and it is the beginning of the year, so in a few months he might change.”

The challenge for refugee children and their parents was not only to acclimate to new surroundings, but also to new norms. School rules and regulations were often quite different in Lebanon, and time was needed for both parents and students to grow accustomed to new norms. Yet in spite of the difficulties for parents and students, it is important to note school administrators and teachers faced an equally difficult challenge to foster a stable learning environment amid a deeply personal unfolding crisis for many of their students. One teacher explained this difficulty: “once a student was sad and he told me that his cousin died in Daraa. They have condolences at home, so how can they study in such an atmosphere.”

Yet Syrian students at the secondary level faced additional hardships. Most secondary Syrian students worked in addition to completing their studies. The affect could not be more significant for their learning. One teacher explained the situation for our researchers.

Most of the students work and then they come to school and they are tired. It is too much stress on them. Because they are working they come to class tired and we as teachers need to put more effort. Teachers noted that in the Baccalaureate, there are a lot of absentees because students are often tired from working and studying.

On the other hand, teachers and school administrators told researchers they were inspired by the majority of Syrian students’ resolve and commitment to make the most of difficult circumstances. A principal of a private Lebanese school noted: “Lebanese are more spoiled and Syrian have fewer discipline issues.” Another teacher at a private Lebanese school told our researchers that “Syrian students are very well behaved.”

It is important not to overlook the psychological trauma experienced by Syrian refugee children. These visceral experiences no doubt coloured their education experience in Lebanon. In fact, several of the teachers and school administrators felt they lacked the specialised knowledge in counselling children in trauma, and most important, the time to deal with such issues in their daily routine.

### **Shifting to a child-centred education and active learning**

Teachers of Syrian refugees told researchers a problem was to shift the conventional notions of the role of a teacher. According to these teachers, Syrian students tended to view the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge rather than as a facilitator of learning and knowledge. Lebanese teachers explained that Syrian students were accustomed to rote learning rather than questions to deal with analytical thinking. These teachers viewed their role as facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge, and hence struggled to shift the learning styles of Syrian children. A Lebanese teacher explained the challenge for teachers: “They [Syrian students] just copy phrases from the book. They do not use their own words and thoughts. In Grade 3, I do not face this problem at all. Only with the older girls.” Another teacher told our researchers: “They [Syrian students] are used to direct questions, so if we ask an indirect question, they are lost.” A Syrian student at a private Lebanese school explained the situation from his point of view: “Here we need to answer and explain. The more we explain the better. In Syria we just answer straight to the point. Here they focus on understanding not memorising.”

#### TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS

We collected information on the quality of teaching and learning through different methods. We asked teachers and students about their experiences and conducted classroom observations. We identified the following teaching strategies employed by teachers.

### **The board, the notebooks, and the textbooks: overcoming an inaccessible learning environment**

The vast majority of interviewed students indicated teaching and learning at schools mostly occurred with a teacher at a blackboard in front of the class with students taking

notes. It followed: teachers explained the lesson on the board, provided translation, when needed, and students took notes, and then copied the information on the board into their notebooks. Teachers employed this approach to address the language barriers for students unable to follow the information in the English textbooks. The following quotes from students enrolled at private schools captured the classroom process:

“Teachers write on the board and write the translation. We copy that in the note books so we can study from there.”

“We study from the copy book, but the diagrams are from the book. Most teachers do that [give us notes]. We use the book only for our homework. So we study from the copybook that has a summary of the lesson.”

### **Interactive Education**

While teacher lectures served as the predominant teaching practice, a number of students in both formal and non-formal education programmes noted teachers also used a variety of interactive and applied learning methods. These methods included the use of video clips, labs, acting, and activities each of which was highly valued by interviewed students. A student at a private Lebanese school explained: “teachers show students DVDs or go to the computer lab and sometimes they use Internet to study through YouTube. Students make presentations in class.” Similar methods were employed in an English class, according to a student in a private Lebanese school: “In English class, sometimes we act out a story.”

We encountered one teacher at a private Lebanese school who offered a novel approach to the classroom. She employed the sociolinguistic approach to classroom learning. This method takes into consideration the identity of students and their knowledge of the world in language instruction. The British Council in Lebanon offered teacher-training workshops on this method for the past two years. The teachers found this method particularly effective for instruction of Syrian children.

We use the sociolinguistic approach. It has helped us and is effective. First there is no pressure on the students, which is helpful with the problems that the

refugees have. So teaching through a story or a movie, where the students can deduce the lesson. It can also be done through a play, or I might ask them to write a story collectively; this method has excellent results and the level of the children is going up. This method also helps the teacher. We test through activities. I tell them prepare the vocab words, so we can play a game. The activities teach them the words, and they begin to use them in conversations.

#### *TEACHING CHALLENGES: STRUGGLING AGAINST TIME AND A RIGID CURRICULUM*

Teachers faced number of challenges in responding to the needs of Syrian students. By and large, the most significant challenge was a lack of time to provide additional support; however, other issues included the need for extracurricular activities or supplemental support to teach a foreign language.

The majority of teachers and students emphasised language instruction as the single greatest challenge for students, and therefore this subject was isolated for further discussion below. Several teachers voiced frustration with the inability to offer children the time needed to meet the requirements for their grade. One teacher commented: “more time is needed and we have some students who have special needs. They need more help.” Teachers explained that the absence of additional out of the classroom support virtually doomed these students to repeat their grade.

Teachers and administrators also noted the need for extracurricular activities to maintain an engaged student body. Currently, such activities – be it athletics or study support – were notably absent due to a lack of resources and time. Many teachers told of situations in which students begged to engage in out of school activities, yet the aforementioned reasons hindered their capacity to fulfil such requests.

#### *Foreign Language: struggling with the lack of foundation and support*

Foreign language instruction posed a significant challenge to the education system in Lebanon for a long time. Prior to the Syrian crisis, foreign language instruction was considered one of the main challenges for Lebanese students and was deemed a major factor in the increased dropout rate. To clarify, the 1997 curriculum mandated six to

seven hours a week for English or French language instruction. Moreover, the curriculum granted schools the flexibility to teach science and math in Arabic, French, or English up to grade nine, although national Arabic science and math textbooks were only available up to Grade 7. Thus, most schools found it necessary to switch math and science instruction from Arabic to a foreign language after grade seven.

Yet the quality of English and French language teaching at public schools came under heavy scrutiny. As a result, MEHE sought to establish instruction priorities in the 2010 Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP). The plan called for building teacher capacity in the instruction of English language classes, but also prioritised English instruction of math and science. The MEHE efforts are currently well underway. The ministry administered sections of the D-RASATI, an English language proficiency test for teachers, to 3,948 public school teachers during the 2011-2012 academic year. The test revealed that 1,090 of these teachers required a basic English course, and 1,746 teachers needed an intermediate course. The remaining 1,112 teachers with mixed test scores required training courses to better provide speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

The above score records show that a big number of teachers do not sufficiently command the foreign language that they are supposed either to teach in language classes, or to properly use in Math and Science classes. This fact, coupled with poor linguistic skills among students themselves renders the issue of foreign language the most difficult challenge in Education in Lebanon. There can be little doubt that foreign language is the prime challenge for teachers of students with a very limited command of English, however, training interventions to improve foreign language instruction offers one potential solution. Several of the interviewed teachers and even students themselves admitted severe limitations in English abilities. In fact, some teachers told researchers that their students were unable read the letters or numbers in English. Such stark circumstances left schools with two primary choices: either to demote students or to avoid teaching science and math in English.

## **1- Demotion to lower grades**

Most school administrators and teachers dealt with the overall lack of English proficiency in Syrian students through demotion to lower grades. The hope was the students would better cope with language learning at lower levels. Yet despite demotions for up to two grade levels, students – particularly those in cycle 2 – needed a strong command of English in order to cope with both the English class as well as science and math instruction in English. Yet, students cannot learn in a language they do not know. As a result, grade demotion failed to solve the language obstacle. Furthermore, the absence of supplemental language support led to situations in which it was exceedingly difficult to increase English abilities outside of the classroom. A 15-year-old Syrian student summarised the inefficacy of grade demotion as a strategy. He explained:

This is my third year at grade 7... I still find it difficult. This year is better than last year. Imagine, last year I knew nothing in English. 0%. I couldn't even write my name, so last year was extremely difficult for me. The teacher used to explain in English all the time. I used to ask her to speak in Arabic, but she did not accept that. I repeated the year, but it is OK, because this way I become stronger.

Importantly, official supplemental language instruction either during or outside of the academic year was offered at only one – an UNRWA school – out of the thirteen schools. One teacher at a private Lebanese school told our researchers: “The students have one period a day of English. It is not enough. They need more.”

Instead, the majority of schools offered translation – either for individual words or for entire lessons – to help students learn the material. While this well-intentioned solution offered some relief to the immediacy of the challenge, issues of comprehension occurred in subsequent years. Some teachers mentioned students were unable to read words or numbers, as we show later in this chapter.

## **2- Reverting to math and science in Arabic**

Eleven of the thirteen schools switched science and math instruction from English to Arabic to overcome the Syrian students' English language barrier. One school, as noted

earlier, went so far as to translate the Lebanese national curriculum in science and math to Arabic. The MEHE similarly amended official exam regulations to permit students to answer English-based science and math exam questions in Arabic. As a result, teachers made concerted efforts to teach students the vocabulary of science and math as a way to understand questions. In fact, one of the schools surveyed dedicated two hours per week to science and math vocabulary. This was among the many strategies employed by teachers to address student needs. We further outline the diverse array of strategies employed by teachers in the following section.

#### *TEACHERS' CLASSROOM STRATEGIES IN ADDRESSING THE LANGUAGE ISSUE*

The most common classroom strategy to address the English language barrier was to resort to Arabic translation of the relevant English vocabulary words. Teachers typically provided students with a vocabulary word list with English words next to the Arabic translation. Such lists were ubiquitous in our school visits. We observed students carrying long scrolls of papers in most cases, whereas in other schools we found long lists of relevant English vocabulary words and the Arabic equivalent as decoration on the classroom walls. We also found complementary English worksheets were distributed to support learning comprehension of key lessons.

Different teachers exhibited different interpretations of Arabic and English instruction in our classroom observations. In a classroom observation at a private Lebanese school, we observed a Grade 10 biology lesson taught by a Syrian teacher. The teacher attempted to teach in both English and Arabic, however, the language of instruction was Arabic with the exception of translated keywords. Moreover, students took notes in Arabic, and in turn, studied these notes for exams. Yet the English textbook was rarely used with the exception of homework assignments from the textbook. The language burden, then was bore by students, who did not have help at home. As a result, students struggled to solve the homework problem set, as the questions were in English, but their notes were in Arabic.

A key limitation of the vocabulary translation approach was the inability to address the actual use of vocabulary words in sentences. Writing skills suffered from such a method. Several teachers reportedly simplified the texts and relied on simpler exercises, such as

circling the words or memorisation. One teacher explained the memorisation method as:

In English they have a lot of weakness in writing. When they have a test, I give them the topic they need to write about beforehand. I tell them that they have no choices and this is what the topic is. I write the passage and they have to memorise it, so here most of them do well.

We also observed the limited use of learning resources, such as visual or audio resources, in lessons. The main learning resource was vocabulary posters. Only one student at an NGO reported the teacher used videos and acted as a form of language instruction. While one student in a private school commented that they learned English through role-playing different actors in plays.

The above challenges and coping strategies highlight the need for further research into the issues of language instruction in Lebanon. Yet two notable observations summarise the feedback from teachers and students. First, the absence of remedial courses or intensive language support – even during the summer months – due to limited time or resources placed Syrian students at a significant disadvantage. Second, teachers and students both perceived the language barrier as a permanent disability that could not be overcome. One English teacher explained: “It is impossible to move to English after they have studied in Arabic for years. The questions are in English and the students have to answer in English, this won’t work.” One interviewed student echoed the teacher’s unwillingness to work toward a solution: “The girls find it difficult to study a foreign language at their age. They say if they were younger maybe they could cope.”

Unsurprisingly, some students developed a phobia to English language. For instance, a teacher explained, “the English is weak. We have exams now and when the students receive the Physics or Chemistry test paper, they panic and one student did not even write a word.”

It is obvious from this brief discussion of language strategies teachers need professional development in order to support students in acquiring a new language. Moreover,

students need intensive English classrooms to acquire the language and be able to study in it.

#### PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

INEE standards for education in emergencies stress the need for curricula that addresses the psychosocial wellbeing and protection needs of learners. Interestingly, the majority of the interviewed teachers, principals, and parents highlighted the need for schools to meet the psychological needs of Syrian refugees. Yet teachers raised concerns over their limited ability to fulfil this role due to a lack of experience, inadequate training, or time constraints.

A teacher noted,

“many students are depressed. The children in Grade 4 for example, look sad. We have many students who suffer from diseases from stress, such as skin disease and panic attacks. There is no counsellor at school but the teachers become counsellors and listen to the students.” Another teacher mentioned the disinterest of older students: “the older students do not participate as much as the younger ones. They are quiet and reserved.”

The following table presents the type of psychosocial support provided in the surveyed schools and NGOs.

**Table 14 Types of psychosocial support provided in the surveyed schools and NGOs**

Type of organisation	Psycho-social support provided
<b>Private Lebanese schools (morning shift)</b>	Art, Music, Life Skills, and other activities
<b>Lebanese NGOs</b>	Recreational, Psychosocial activities, Theatre, Art, Physical Education

<b>Private Lebanese school, Arabised curriculum</b>	A few classes occasionally offer Physical Education and Art in primary and intermediate levels. Drama was offered, but NGO delivering service left
<b>Syrian schools</b>	None
<b>UNRWA</b>	Physical Education and Art
<b>Coalition</b>	None
<b>Syrian NGO running a tented part-time school</b>	None

NGOs, as shown above, were the most likely to provide some form of psychosocial activities. NGOs were most likely to provide some form of psychosocial support and recreational activities. On the other hand, schools set up by the Syrian community were unable to offer such services, due to a lack of financial and human resources. As a result, students at Syrian schools complained of an over-emphasis on academic activities at the expense of all else. One student explained, “we need activities and maybe some rewards and trips.”

Local NGOs, in the same way as with supplemental academic support, stepped in to fill void in the absence of psychosocial support at schools. No doubt this form of support was absolutely necessary to the success of the students, however, questions arose over the sustainability of such a configuration. The support was wholly dependent upon NGO funding, and thus volatile. One principal summarised the challenges as: “We do have some associations that want to help out like Save the Children, but due to the situation, they had to postpone for a while, but now another group are doing that. They meet with children during PE or Art classes.”

#### TEACHING STAFF

The single most important factor to bear on teaching and learning quality is the teaching

staff. While INEE dedicates a whole section to teacher standards, our research focused on two key standards – recruitment and training. Our study revealed greater hiring flexibility in private sector schools, particularly faith-based schools. Such faith-based schools overwhelmingly employed a higher degree of Syrian and Lebanese teachers. According to the school administrators, this mixed nationality arrangement was absolutely necessary. On the one hand, Syrian teachers offered a familiar learning environment for refugee students and second, just as importantly, employment of Syrian teachers provided much needed economic opportunity for refugee teachers. Similarly, Syrian-run schools almost exclusively staffed Syrian teachers for similar reasons. As for the NGO sector, Lebanese NGOs primarily employed Syrian teachers and similarly, Syrian NGOs mainly employed Syrian teachers, but also drew upon Lebanese specialists for certain roles. The table below summarises both the nationalities of teaching staff in the surveyed schools and the type of training received.

**Table 15 The Staff in the surveyed schools**

<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Teacher training</b>
<b>Private Lebanese schools</b>	Lebanese	All Lebanese	None
<b>Private Lebanese faith schools</b>	Lebanese	Lebanese and Syrians	None
<b>Syrian schools including coalition</b>	Syrian	All Syrian	None
<b>Lebanese NGO</b>	ALP, and homework support	All Lebanese or Palestinian, except for a single NGO with one Syrian teacher	Meetings

<b>Syrian NGO</b>	Lebanese, Syrian, ALP	All Syrian	Just started
<b>UNRWA</b>	Lebanese	Palestinians in Lebanon and PRS	None

As can be seen in the above table, the teaching staff currently involved in the education of Syrian refugees is mixed and included both Lebanese and Syrian teachers. While most private Lebanese schools offered a primarily Lebanese teaching staff, the two faith-based private schools hired a mix of Syrian and Lebanese teachers. However, despite the mixed teaching staff at private Lebanese schools, Lebanese teachers exclusively taught Brevet and Baccalaureate classes due to their knowledge of the Lebanese curriculum and official exams.

The employment criteria for teachers varied, but at minimum required a bachelor's degree and preferably, prior teaching experience. The hiring process typically included interviews with principals and a possibly, a sample lesson. Recruitment of teachers included conventional posting of jobs on different web-based job boards, but also was spread by word of mouth. Most schools managed to hire teachers with at least two years – or more – of experience. All Syrian teachers taught prior to their departure in Syria, but none had prior teaching experience in Lebanese.

#### TEACHER TRAINING

None of the surveyed Lebanese schools hiring Syrian teachers offered teacher training on the Lebanese curriculum. The most common form of support available to Syrian teachers was peer support or classroom observation of their Lebanese counterparts. Subject coordinators also played a considerable role in mentoring both Lebanese and Syrian teachers. Lebanese teachers too, did not receive any support or training on how to support the refugee children and adapt the curriculum. Schools with a mixed Lebanese and Syrian teaching staff conducted infrequent meetings. According to the teachers, the lack of training stemmed from the immediate demands of the emergency and the limited funding.

Most NGOs with ALP instruction organised periodic meetings between the teachers and the coordinators. Only one of the NGOs we visited provided the teaching staff with extensive training on the use of the socio-linguistic method in the classroom or the inclusion of psychosocial activities for teaching. Furthermore, only two of the visited NGOs provided students with counsellors. In one NGO, a social worker also offered house visits to help the parents cope with their plight.

### **Support requested by teachers**

Teachers identified several types of support needed in response to the situation faced by Syrian refugee students. Teachers overwhelmingly called for a greater need of supplemental educational resources. Such resources served to better empower students with the tools needed to exceed in the classroom. Teachers similarly requested occasional access to education specialists to offer infrequent consultation. Importantly, the vast majority of teachers highlighted psychosocial support resources or training as a clear need. Several Syrian teachers requested assistance and resources for teaching students who experienced trauma and currently live in precarious circumstances. A few Lebanese teachers expressed an interest in speaking to Syrian teachers to learn more about the Syrian curriculum and content typically covered in classrooms. Remarkably, while language was identified as a major obstacle for students, only one teacher mentioned the need for additional resources or support to improve language instruction.

### **STUDENTS' END OF YEAR RESULTS**

At the end of the academic year, we contacted all of the surveyed schools to inquire about the passing rates for the Syrian students at the end of the academic year. Due to teachers' strike in the public sector and boycott of the grading of the official exams papers, MEHE abided to the teachers decisions to strike and decided to issue statements of completion based on their school's end of year results instead of official certificates. Hence in this section we are only able to report the schools' results.

In private and UNRWA (primary and secondary) schools with mixed students (Lebanese and Syrians or Palestine and PRS), the passing rate was 100%. According to the administration of private Lebanese schools, the high success rates were probably related to the fact that many of these students were placed in mixed classroom because of their

adequate academic abilities and parents' socio-economic background. For UNRWA schools, these students were considered more able and capable of coping with the expectations of the grade.

In private primary Lebanese schools where Syrians were studying the Lebanese national curriculum in segregated classrooms, the passing rate was 80%. In private secondary Lebanese schools teaching an unmodified Lebanese curriculum, the passing rate was 30 % boys & 58 % girls in secondary. The principal considered child labor as the main reason for the underperformance of boys as the majority of them were working in the afternoon. The success rate in the private school teaching the Arabised Lebanese curriculum was 95 % including in the secondary stage, which might indicate that teaching math and science in Arabic allowed students to do better in the end of year exams.

The passing rate in Syrian schools offering the Syrian curriculum was 78 % in primary. However, it is worth highlighting that only 8 out of 29 students in grade 9 and 12 were able to go to Syria to sit for the official exams in Syria due to the escalation of violence. The only choice available to them was to sit for the coalition official exams which offer a certificate which is only accredited in Turkey, Oman, Somalia, Mauritania and France. The school offering the Libyan curriculum had 80 Baccalaureate students (Grade 12). Only 40 were able to travel to Turkey to sit for the exams. This is either due to the lack of official documentation or to the lack of funding as students were asked to pay \$200 to the school to cover the travel and accommodation expenses and \$200 the visa. A good number of them were PRS who could not get residency papers in Lebanon due to the local regulations which forbid PRS from having a residency. Hence they were unable to apply to a visa. According to the principal the 40 students who were not able to travel could study the coalition curriculum next year.

As for students attending non-formal education s, the majority of them completed the programmes they were attending. In one NGO attending to over a 100 students, the majority of which are registered in public schools while a minority was attending private Lebanese schools, all of those attending the public sector passed at the end of year although they had a low average. The majority of those attending the private sector failed and had to repeat their grade. However, when the administration of this NGO conducted a

Math and English test to students who passed their grade in the public sector they realized their math and English abilities were extremely poor and certainly did not meet the requirements of their grade. To give one example, students in grad five were asked to complete a sentence in English “I like.....”. The majority of students completed the sentence in Arabic using Latin letters.

The success rates in the schools expose major gaps in the current education provisions and manifests some of the suffering Syrian and PRS students are encountering when attempting to continue their education. It is obvious that without special language support, students studying the Lebanese curriculum in English will have small chances in making it through their grades.

Teaching the Syrian, Libyan or coalition curricula in Lebanon although offering an easier and more accessible learning environment are highly risky routes to education as over half of the students were not able to sit for the Syrian or Libyan exams due to travel restricts. Those who did the coalition have a certificate that can give them limited access to higher education. With increasing travel restrictions on the Syrian and PRS refugees, doing the Libyan and Syrian curriculum options will become almost impossible except if the exams are conducted in Lebanon. This will require a political arrangement between these countries.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The provision of education for an influx of over 400,000 refugee children in Lebanon was never to be a smooth task. This is particularly true when the total capacity in both the public and private sectors amounts to 942,391. While the Government of Lebanon is party to several international conventions – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 14), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (article 28) – that mandate the provision of education to Syrian refugees, the international obligations have limited power in light of the daunting reality to respond to the crisis in a country the size and population of Lebanon. Moreover, local regulations related to the right of education were mainly restricted to Lebanese citizens only, hence conflict with the international conventions to which Lebanon is a signatory. The local laws reflect a hyper nationalist tendency to restrict the right of education to Lebanese nationals. There can be little doubt that the spill over of the Syrian crisis to Lebanon – with all of the concomitant political consequences – escalated anti-Syrian sentiments amongst several sections of the Lebanese populace. In turn, this compounded the difficulty for the Government of Lebanon to mount an effective response to the crisis. It is well known that the Government of Lebanon has long struggled with crippling debt and an inherently underperforming public education sector. Public education currently attracts less than 30 per cent of the total student population, and typically provides services to the most disadvantaged areas, namely Akkar and Bekka, of Lebanon. These areas currently host the vast majority of Syrian refugees.

Emergencies of this scale require a robust response in the form of collaboration among all sectors, public, private, and NGO. Thus far, the daunting task has far fallen to the Lebanese public sector. Despite some degree of donor support, Lebanese public schools are ill equipped to meet the formidable demand of rapidly expanded access to quality education. This burden is particularly troublesome for a public sector that needed reform prior to the Syrian crisis. The limited capacity of the MEHE to respond necessitated partnerships with the NGO sector, as reflected in the RACE strategy document.

The MEHE response strategy, as outlined in the RACE document, called for significant donations and support from the international community, specifically to the tune of \$600 million USD over a three-year period. To date, the MEHE and NGO sectors are typically thought of as the two main providers of education services for refugees, however, the role of the private education sector – actually larger than in the public sector – remains unrecognised. The MEHE and the RACE document both acknowledged the important role of NFE providers in the response to the Syrian crisis, and a significant need exists to strengthen the channels between NFE and FE to ensure that efforts of the former lead to student trajectories back to FE. Crucially, this collaboration must ensure quality standards for education programmes discussed in the following section.

There is an urgent need to explore new avenues and to build creative solutions to accommodate larger numbers of Syrian refugees. The rapidly increasing demand necessitates action, yet the increased MEHE registration restrictions for Syrian students in morning shift and afternoon shifts need reconsideration. The private sector has already embarked on experiments with different teaching methods and curricular adaptations to improve education access to Syrian children. The number of private schools for the Syrian refugees increased in recent years and the need is likely to grow further until there is an end to the crisis.

While NGOs receive funding from IGOs and INGOs, the private sector relies on a somewhat different sources, mainly donations from individuals, religious organisations (both local, regional, and international charities), and from tuition fees paid by parents. The reliance of the private sector on tuition fees and individual donations make the sustainability and long term planning at these schools a challenging task. Limited funds and last-minute planning meant schools were neither able to build teacher capacity nor able to provide a comprehensive and long-term programmes with integrated language and psychosocial support. Acknowledgment of the private sector role in the response to the crisis requires a shift in the thinking of many IGOs and INGOs whose regulations stipulate cooperation through ministries and not-for profit NGOs. While the regulations of some IGOs and INGOs prevented funding for private sector organisations, the cost of

\$650<sup>38</sup> currently required by the MEHE to offer a reduced second shift (4 hours per day) should prompt an international organisation to re-evaluate their position to collaboration with the private sector especially with the limited capacity of the public sector to absorb all the Syrian students. Currently, some private schools offers education for a much lower cost than that demanded by the MEHE, yet sometimes at the expense of teachers' contracts and salaries or due to short-term plans and volunteering by some staff.<sup>39</sup> Yet perspective is needed for long-term strategies, and each of those outlined above are simply unsustainable.

At the same time, Syrian parents face the daunting decision for the enrolment of their children. Syrian parents must often choose the lesser of evils: a school offering an unaccredited certificate (coalition) or the accredited national Syrian curriculum ), but with significant risks in the need to traveling to Syria to complete the official exam. On the other hand, the parents may opt for the extremely challenging Lebanese curriculum, but their child faces the prospect of demotion or even worse, failure and eventual withdrawal from school.

The issue of accredited education remains a significant challenge for the Syrian-led initiatives. These programs subject students to high risks in the need to either travel back to Syria or to Turkey. The alternative is to graduate with an unaccredited certificate and, hence discontinue their education. Of course, Syrian schools provide most feasible venue for older children. Older students tended to find it easier to continue their education in their mother tongue and avoided many of the language issues faced by Syrian students in the Lebanese curriculum. Yet with the prolongation of the crisis and the increasing travel restrictions on Syrians and PRS, it becomes important that Syrian children are included

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<sup>38</sup> According to the Minster of Education and Higher Education, the cost of an elementary child in the morning shift in public schools is \$1500.

<http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/168707-الرسمية-المدارس-في-لاجئ-الف-400-استيعاب-نستطيع-لا-275-لالتحار-صعب-بو-تلميذ-الف>

<sup>39</sup> The cost per child in the private schools we visited ranged from \$120 to \$350

into the Lebanese education system, as this offers the more sustainable solution with an accredited certificate at the completion of studies.

The creation of better partnerships between the three sectors, governmental, NGOs and the private Lebanese sector will not only increase access to accredited education, but will also benefit private sector institutions with the professional support offered by IGOs and INGOs. These forms of support could drastically improve the quality of education. While Syrian schools may remain the most feasible venue for older children who find it easier to continue their studies in their mother tongue, it is important that Syrian children are included into the Lebanese educational system as this is likely to be a more sustainable solution that offers the credentials needed to pursue post-secondary studies. Further support for the private Lebanese sector provides a more adaptable and supportive learning environment and stands to temper the fundamental challenges faced by Syrian students in the shift to the Lebanese curriculum.

Finally, a partnership with the private sector is essential for tackling the risk of the spread of extremism in some private schools, especially with the lack of oversight over the funds distributed to these schools. The danger of overlooking the private sector not only has implications on access and quality for Syrian refugees, but also for issues of national, regional, and international significance. The lack of accountability and oversight in the private sector opens the arena for agenda-driven donors, such as fundamentalist organisations to invest in the private sector to breeding extremism in the marginalised Syrian communities. Such private institutions posed a threat to Lebanon even prior to the Syrian crisis, but now the need for integration into oversight mechanisms is needed more than ever.

### **Quality education: the potential of the private sector**

The need for quality, relevant, and accessible education is a global challenge faced by educationalists, particularly in light of the worldwide trend to standardise school curricula in the form of national textbooks and specific learning outcomes. This rigidity imposed on teachers stunts instructional creativity and hinders their ability to provide a lively and engaging learning environment most valuable for different types of learners. While

flexibility in the classroom is essential at all times, the freedom to improvise in the classroom is even more essential for education in emergencies. Our study revealed that one challenge faced by Syrian refugee children is the tendency for many Lebanese schools to implement the Lebanese curriculum without much adaptation.

Contrary to the rigid national curriculum of the public sector, the private sector offers distinct advantages with a flexible curriculum able to better accommodate the education needs of Syrian refugees, as guaranteed in the Lebanon constitution.<sup>40</sup> As noted in the study, the private sector did not utilise this flexibility to the utmost potential, possibly due to the limited knowledge and experience of providing education in cases of emergency. Here the private education sector could benefit from the support of international agencies in order to build the capacity needed to accommodate Syrian refugees.

We saw repeated instances in both the private and public sectors of students placed in mainstream classrooms without any pre-preparations or much needed supplemental support. This trend held true for both Syrian and Lebanese students as well as for the teachers and parents. Neither the teachers we interviewed nor the schools we visited received any formal training on how to deal with traumatised students who left all of their belongings and went to live in a foreign country. Although the schools and the teachers strive to best accommodate students, there were numerous challenges for these students that required special support. The education response for the Syrian crisis primarily focused on expanded access to schools with little emphasis on the specificity of the learning environments needed to accommodate the traumatised children, both academically and emotionally. As the refugee crisis enters a stabilisation phase, now is the time to focus on the school, classroom environment, and the extent to which both are conducive to student learning.

While donors offered immense support that served the crucial need to increase access to education for Syrian refugees, we did not encounter any initiatives to offer schools the kind of specialist and professional support needed. Capacity building for professionals

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<sup>40</sup> Article 10 of the Lebanese constitution

within school administration or teachers was utterly neglected. Principals and teachers, largely without any resources or guidance, planned and delivered education to traumatised students in need of academic and special support.

The primary accommodation for students related to teaching science and math in Arabic, rather than English or French. Unsurprisingly, we still found high dropout and repetition rates amongst Syrian refugee students, whereas the majority of the interviewed teachers and administrators called for expert assistance to provide training and advice on education in emergencies. It is worth highlighting that the awareness of the professionals was focused more on the emotional support and less on the academic support. Despite the ad hoc approaches to dealing with this overarching major challenge, the difficulties of language and transition to a new educational paradigm proved problematic.

The rigidity of the curriculum hindered teachers or administrators from exploring new teaching strategies conducive to the needs of the situation. In turn, the poor student performance and struggles were attributed not to the teaching strategies, but to the ‘permanent damage which is beyond repair’ in Syrian refugee students. This sense of helplessness proved endemic and pervasive. Students as young as 12 came to believe they were too old to learn a new language. In spite of all of these shortcomings and struggling students, only one teacher asked for academic assistance in the form of additional language support. None of the schools we visited increased the number of English language classes or added tutoring or homework group sessions in spite of the overt difficulties Syrian students faced.

Despite the struggle to teach a new curriculum and a new language, most teachers felt confident enough in their teaching strategies not to demand technical support. With the lack of professional support in the emergency relief plans, several interviewed teachers struggled to keep pace. It is worth noting that in a previous study on teaching and learning in public and private Lebanese schools prior to the Syrian crisis (2009-2012); we encountered a similar defeatist attitude. Teachers believed it was too late to try new

teaching strategies with Lebanese children.<sup>41</sup> Currently, due to a lack of funding, the most common method for professional development was for Syrian teachers to attend the classrooms of their Lebanese peers in order to learn more about the Lebanese curriculum. These few classroom visits primarily occurred at the beginning of the year and were not followed with a feedback or mentoring. With the limited exposure of teachers to new educational strategies best suited to emergencies, students often felt that they were the problem due to their inability to adapt to a pace and style of teaching drastically different from their prior education experience..

Psychosocial support skills were the most requested type of professional development support by teachers and administrators. While psychosocial support was more common in NFE, such support was nearly non-existent in private schools, mainly due to lack of resources or to logistical challenges to establish such provisions. Considering the limited support given to private schools, it is probably too ambitious to expect this sector to provide psychosocial support beyond recreational activities, such as Art and PE. Here the complementary role of the non-formal sector comes to the fore with the potential to supplement on-going activities, as well as to build the capacity of the teaching staff to better address such issues in the future.

The dearth of expertise in emergency education in schools was not only restricted to the classroom, but similarly affected admission policies. Traditionally, school placement tests for Lebanese children often included English, Arabic, and math tests. Yet the majority of the interviewed Syrian children were only given a single test in English, since this was viewed as the most significant barrier for their learning. On that basis, many students were demoted or had to repeat classes without the additional support to help them succeed. Other students were placed based on age and documents, but also did not benefit from any additional support. While some private Lebanese schools offered new students short and intensive a pre-school courses in the subjects that gave students the most problems, this kind of support was notably absent for Syrian students, both during the

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<sup>41</sup> Shuayb and Makkouk (forthcoming) "Practicing Social Cohesion in Lebanese Schools: from a subject oriented approach to a whole school culture".

summer and in the school year due to a lack of resources. There is an urgent need to revisit school admission policies in the public and private sectors. Much needed changes will provide the first stone in developing a learning environment that suit students' abilities and needs, regardless of nationality.

The lack of professional support for teachers gave rise to segregated classrooms. One can only imagine the challenge to any public sector teacher faced with a classroom with a wide spectrum of abilities for Lebanese and Syrian students. Within this context, segregation between Syrian and Lebanese students is viewed as the most reasonable solution due to the absence of other support in the form of personalised learning plans or classroom assistant teachers. While the MEHE rightly emphasised that any work related to the Syrian refugee crisis needed to concur with 2010 education strategy outlined in the RACE document, significant gaps remained. Most Syrian students faced obstacles still viewed as their own individual shortcomings, rather than the inability of the Lebanese education system to cater to disadvantaged student needs or for the system to provide teachers with the expertise – or requisite support – to most appropriately deal with a mixed ability classroom and children with special learning needs. Under these circumstances, it was more reasonable for the MEHE and the leadership of teachers' syndicates in public and private schools to argue that segregation for Lebanese and Syrian children will benefit both of them.

The second shift remains under researched. One of the conditions stipulated by the MEHE when offering IGO-funded second shifts was to grant priority for full-time and contracted teachers in the public sector to teach in the afternoon shifts for a compensation of \$10 per hour. To clarify, teachers were only entitled to the pay rate, if they taught after their working hours in accordance with the anti-corruption policies of the donors. Teachers' leagues and syndicates, as well as some officials and politicians in Lebanon all claim a negative impact of mixing Syrian and Lebanese students in classrooms based on the academic achievements of the latter. Yet no concerns were raised regarding the effect of prioritising the hiring of Lebanese full-time teachers in the public sector to teach the second shift on the quality of teaching in both the morning and afternoon shifts. Some of the interviewed students complained about poor quality of teaching in the second shifts.

We also met several parents who removed their children from second shifts due to the poor quality of education at schools to in turn, enrol them in non-formal programs at free private schools. More efforts need to be focused on assessing the quality of education in the second shifts.

Finally, the study highlighted the importance of other factors that affect the quality of education, such as parents' councils. These bodies provide a voice and a formal entity with which to create a partnership between administrators and Syrian parents. Currently, such partnership is non-existent in part due to the belief on the part of some parents that they did not have a right to join a parents' council. Yet internal regulations of schools do negate this. The current school internal regulations do not consider parents' nationality as a requirement to run for parents' councils. Partnership with the local community – whether on the part of the Lebanese or Syrians – was also a significant driving force to widening access and increasing the relevance of education. The voices of Syrian parents are urgently needed to convey issues of importance to school administration. The fundamental aim is to foster channels to strengthen understanding between parents and administrations and cater to the needs of Syrian children. To do so requires cooperative and respectful attitude from the school administration. The example of the regional schools network in one of the regions of Lebanon offers a success story, despite several concerns of its sustainability. The support and the coordination that this network provided enlisted individual private schools with limited budgets to increase access even to a small number of Syrian children.

### **The quality of education in NFE**

The quality of education in NFE programmes varied considerably; yet, the homework support component proved invaluable for Syrian students enrolled in Lebanese public schools. Our interviews with students demonstrated the crucial role of such activities outside of the classroom. Students unequivocally relied on the tutoring and supplemental assistance with homework assignments to stay apace in all types of schools. Small NGOs relied on volunteers to teach these programmes. Over time, volunteers were strained by the demands of the role or grew impatient with student progress. Therefore the

sustainability of such programmes prompts significant concerns, despite the proven value to Syrian students.

Our visit to the ALP programme revealed poor organisation; the course material was described by teachers as ‘wrongly put together and demand full revision.’ On the other hand, Syrian NFE initiatives drew upon remarkable dedication to the crisis and demonstrated a deep concern for the students, yet some had limited educational expertise to assist students in the long-term. Several classroom observation sessions at many of these institutions revealed poor teaching quality. Some of the researchers remarked the classrooms seemed more like day-care, given hardly any learning took place. The instructions and the classroom arrangement (a tent consisting of two adjacent classrooms) were hardly conducive to learning. As the fourth year of the crisis approaches, Syrian NFEs continue to gain significant experience in education provision and garner funding from local and international donors. In turn, these factors enabled such institutions to recruit needed expertise in trained teachers, rather than relying on volunteers. The NGO sector also filled gaps in psychosocial support both for students and families. Therefore, NGOs are best prepared to tackle issues of bullying and discrimination. Yet NGOs met little receptivity – and in some cases, outright resistance – by school administrators to ideas to combat discrimination in mainstream schools.

NFEs were most likely to provide a more flexible learning environment for a smoother transition for Syrian students. Yet such programs tended to lack the rigours required for preparation to move back to mainstream education. While we saw many NGOs repeatedly knocking on the doors of public schools to find a place for their children, many such NGOs were still unable to do so either due to the limited abilities of the children, but mainly due to lack of capacity. To date, the bridge between NFE and FE organisations still needs to be strengthened and programs should be more complementary. Currently, all of the visited NFE programmes, except ALP were independent of – and without coordination with – the public sector.

## **Safety and discrimination**

A cursory perusal of the media in Lebanon demonstrates just how unsafe it is to be a Syrian in Lebanon. The risk of bullying and discrimination, as reported by interviewed students, was a significant factor for withdrawal from Lebanese public schools. Some demonstrated the resolve to stay in the schools, despite harassment and bullying from Lebanese students. While some NGOs tried to tackle these issues within their respective organisations, as stated earlier, the NGOs met stiff resistance from school administrators. In turn, NGOs were helpless to address these prominent issues in the mainstream schools.

The MEHE needs a transparent process of reporting and investigating into the problem of school violence. Our interviews pointed to a dearth of reporting mechanisms or protocols for filing complaints. Several of our interviewees – primarily social workers – each explained their complaints of teacher or principal violence were met with no follow-up from officials or anyone from the MEHE. Such revelations point to the need for a watchdog or an independent body – in close cooperation from the MEHE – available for students and parents to report cases of violence. At the very least, the problem calls for professional development to better establish principals and standards for management of student behaviour. Indeed, teachers – both in non-formal and formal institutions – could benefit from learning positive strategies to manage classrooms rather than to resort to corporal punishment.

Currently, one of the strategies identified in tackling discrimination by some schools was segregation. As a matter of fact, segregation offered a striking conclusion in much need of critical discussion. We dedicated the remaining section for this discussion. As educationalists, we have extreme concern for the permanent segregation education policies observed in Lebanese and Syrian schools, as well as NGOs. This is also widely expanded in the introduction of the second shift - meant to accommodate the largest number of Syrian students – in Lebanese public schools.

### **Segregation: a solution or a future problem?**

One of the features of many of learning environments sampled in this study was the adoption of a segregated learning approach- where Syrian students had separate

classrooms and/or separate schools set up for them. The impact is significant. This configuration offered minimal opportunities to mix with and to learn alongside their Lebanese counterparts. In a number of schools, there were exceptions to this – a very small number of Syrian students were integrated within the existing classrooms – for instruction of the Lebanese curriculum. These students never constituted more than 15% of the overall student population and were often those who were more capable both academically and financially. In one private school with a segregated second shift approach, activities were designed and implemented to bring together the Lebanese morning shift students and the Syrian children in the afternoon shift. Nonetheless, the main approach observed for dealing with diversity - of abilities, and backgrounds - was segregation. Several reasons were attributed to the need for segregated learning environments for Syrian students. The case of school segregation offers a salient example through which to interpret segregation practices more broadly in Lebanon. Moreover, school segregation situation remains consistent with the wider trends of dealing with diversity in Lebanon, and prompts questions as to whether the move toward segregation of refugee education is yet another example of a reactive measure to maintain a status quo, postpone dealing with existing tensions, and delaying rising conflicts. Additionally, there is a distinct need to consider the implications of the segregation approach as well as potential alternatives.

### **Segregation and the language of instruction**

Most of the organisations we visited claimed to provide an adapted Lebanese curriculum with instructions offered in Arabic. In one case the whole Lebanese curriculum was translated and taught in Arabic. Thus, segregation is directly tied to intense differences in abilities, and in turn, enables teachers to cater to the specific needs – mainly insufficient foreign language skills – of incoming Syrian refugee students. However, what stands out is that Syrian students were not mixed during Arabic language classes or social studies instruction – taught in Arabic.

Although some schools modified the curriculum to Arabic to accommodate children and avoid widespread demotion, such schools did not provide additional English language support needed to re-join mainstream education or for continuing their higher education. As such, schools tended to focus on effective, but short-term solutions without consideration for long-term implications of such methods. This trend was apparent at every level of the education system. We found little evidence to suggest a long-term plan for the reintegration and retention of Syrian students in the Lebanese educational system.

### **The economic and social background of the students**

School principals often expressed sympathy for the psychological trauma faced by Syrian refugees, and focused school efforts on the psychological aspects of integration to a new educational landscape. One principal's sympathy for Syrian children – who come mostly from rural and disadvantaged areas in Syria – was instrumentalised for a model of segregation. He explained that he preferred segregation so as to best not to expose Syrians to the Lebanese students who come from higher and more urban socio-economic backgrounds. Such logic was pervasive across the surveyed Lebanese schools. This may explain why a complete segregation model – no mixed classes in subjects like Arabic language, social studies (taught in Arabic), or even during the breaks – was adopted. The principal at a Lebanese private school aptly captured the operative rationale:

I insist on segregation, because our students have school bags, uniform, different books. Even the sandwiches are different. Because I feel for the Syrians, I did not want to expose them to that difference. Last year, I felt that they would look at the Lebanese in a sad way. Syrian students would be wearing slippers and the Lebanese would be wearing shoes. These will have a negative effect on the refugees.

Syrian parents similarly expressed concern over the issue of varying socioeconomic status at schools. Syrian parents noted that their children were forced to mix with Syrian children from very disadvantaged backgrounds with a different cultural background. For two principals of private schools, the economic background of the family had a bearing on student academic history and thus, there was indicative of their current potential to

cope with the new educational challenges. In fact, one school leveraged segregation among Syrian children due to this concern: students with parents from a middle-income background with the means to pay unsubsidised tuition were registered within the existing Lebanese programs, whereas other Syrian students were integrated into the Syrian-only classes. The principal explained that the children from stronger socioeconomic backgrounds were academically better due to a stronger education in Syria.

It is important to note as well that even students with parents who could afford the full tuition fees for the morning shift were often moved into special classrooms when their academic performance dropped. One principal explained, “Syrians in the morning shifts are those who could afford it. They are middle class and are educated. Those in the second shift we give them 50% discount.” Another principal echoed this sentiment: “These [middle class Syrian] children are different. Their mums are educated. They are well behaved, dressed well, clean and academically more able to get accustomed to the Lebanese curriculum.” Indeed, assumptions of academic ability and academic history were frequently appended to the socioeconomic status of the parents of Syrian students. Higher SES presumably allowed for better schooling, better parental support for education at home, and thus better overall capabilities to deal with academic challenges.

### **Different Academic Abilities**

Another major reason employed to segregate classrooms was academic ability. Given the overwhelming majority of Syrian students were out of school for at least a year, their ability to transition to the Lebanese curriculum becomes more difficult, particularly in light of the language barriers and external factors, such as school history and socioeconomic status. One principal expressed dismay that many of her peers in private schools were reluctant to integrate Syrian children for fear of lowering the quality of teaching and learning for the other children. She explained these principals were concerned the integration may affect the school’s overall performance and success rates on the official exams.

While almost all schools offering formal education cited the academic abilities of the students as one of the main reasons to segregating Syrian children, none of these schools offered intensive English classes or remedial programs. An UNRWA school was the only surveyed school to offer students a remedial program during the summer months to prepare students for the Lebanese curriculum. Two of the Syrian schools expressed a desire to offer preparatory and remedial support, but could not do so due to a lack of funds.

### **Capacity of the schools**

Another reason employed to rationalise segregated classrooms – mainly in a second shift – was the limited capacity of schools to accommodate the dramatic influx of Syrian students. This was particularly the case for the public education sector and was the primary reason the MEHE cited for the introduction of the second shift.

UNRWA started running a second shift when the number of PRS children fleeing to Lebanon increased. When the numbers decreased due to higher dropout rates, migration, or students transferring to Syrian curriculum schools, UNRWA merged the PRS children with their Palestinian Lebanese counterparts.

### **Discrimination and Bullying**

A few principals pointed to segregation as a solution to potential clashes between Lebanese and Syrian students. A principal noted: “We segregated kids even in grade 1 so that we don't have clashes.” It is worth noting that the majority of the Syrian children interviewed, particularly those in morning shifts at public schools reported bullying primarily by their teachers and secondarily from fellow students.

In an attempt to address bullying and discrimination, a number of the NGOs included in this study offered psychosocial programs for Syrian children. However, the provision of psychosocial activities by NGOs within the schools was very limited and ad hoc, largely due to lack of funding. The schools do not pay for these services, but rather, are approached by NGOs with the proposition of organising a number of activities for students. One school principal talked about a very positive experience he had with such

an NGO that engaged the students in several drama-therapy type activities. The NGO promised to return the following year for another bout of activity, and the principal and the school were still eagerly waiting. Even though all schools and service providers in this sample did not have explicit policies for harassment and discrimination, several schools did take serious measures – such as reprimands and in some cases, expulsion – to respond to any incidents that occurred.

### **Attempts at Integration**

For many of the reasons cited above, segregated education of Syrian children is currently the more common approach by both the private and the public sector in Lebanon. Nonetheless, a few schools and NGOs attempted to promote inclusion. Although these attempts have been modest in scope, they offer potent examples worth exploration. Due to the limited time of this study we were not able to gain access to schools that have mixed classrooms, especially in the public sector, which currently hosts the largest number of mixed classrooms where Syrians and Lebanese students learn together.

A UNRWA primary school offered both mixed and segregated classroom for the Syrians. In the beginning UNRWA adopted a policy of integration; however, as the number of Palestinian Syrians increased, UNRWA was unable to accommodate all students and, hence began an afternoon shift. However, next year (2015-2016 academic year) UNRWA is planning to open more classes to accommodate all children.

The decision to integrate the Syrians with Lebanese students came from the UNRWA central committee. While the secondary UNRWA schools integrated the Syrian children due to their small numbers, teachers noted this policy was best for their teaching. A principal noted Syrian students reported a few cases of bullying or harassment by teachers and students, but explained that the school took prompt action with the suspension of one teacher. In turn, the principal told our researchers bullying and harassment largely subsided.

### **Parents concerns and class tensions**

Whilst the refugee students and their parents preferred the morning integrated shift due to perceived quality, school administrators and teachers noted that the parents of Lebanese

and Palestinians living in Lebanon expressed concerns about the potential negative impact on integration. Specifically, the parents expressed concerns that integration would lead to a lower quality of teaching and learning. As a result, the decreased quality would affect the classroom performance of their children.

At the same time, some Syrian parents noted a preference for the mixed classes with host country students and, in turn did not want their children in Syrian-only classes, because such a situation would expose their children to those from rural areas of Syria. In their view, this stood to negatively affect the academic and behavioural standards of their children. In the morning shift, their children had a chance to mix with a more diverse group, which in their view had a better effect on the academic and social development of their children.

#### **Integration for social cohesion**

One of the surveyed NGOs focused energy and efforts on school integration as an important aspect of a more cohesive society. This NGO draws upon years of operation to foster integration and support for disadvantaged children and students who dropped out of schools in Lebanon. Hence when this NGO began to receive a flood of requests from Syrian parents to register their children in their vocation and life skills programs, the NGO insisted that these programmes be expanded to include not only Syrians, but also disadvantaged children from different nationalities. The expansion of this program was viewed as essential for the promotion of integration and cohesion within the society.

#### **Unsupported Integration and School Dropout**

Several principals of Syrian curriculum schools noted that a large population of their students enrolled after their withdrawal from Lebanese public schools due to a lack of supplemental academic support – particularly in English language instruction. One student at a private segregated school captured this phenomenon in an interview. He explained, “I was in a Lebanese school. It was very difficult and the teachers were impatient with me. They talked about me, and the classmates got annoyed because I asked a lot of questions and they did not want to slow down because of me. So I left because I could not stand it.” This lack of academic support in addition to bullying and

discrimination all remained unaddressed by school administrators. As a result, this student – like many others – dropped out of Lebanese public schools.

## **THINKING AHEAD**

Solutions are needed to the current education crisis in Lebanon. While far-reaching and expansive national initiatives are undoubtedly needed for a more just education system, solutions to the issues outlined in this paper need not be complex and could be implemented at the school or classroom level. Schools could muster simple solutions, such as induction days for school stakeholders, offer social services that facilitate refugee adjustment – notably preparatory and remedial classes and supplemental language instruction – but most of all, work to combat discrimination. Each of these would yield tremendous results in terms of access and student retention. As previous research suggests, the school can be viewed as a major source of security for students, when teachers are adequately trained to detect refugee students' needs.<sup>42</sup> Teacher-preparation programs universally stress the need to educate teachers on ways to remain attentive to the traumatic experiences refugees endured in order to be helpful and non-judgmental.<sup>43</sup> Teacher sensitisation to refugee issues unquestionably improves their understanding of challenges faced by refugee children in their classrooms, but most of all, makes teachers less prone to speaking or behaving in ways that evoke embarrassment, shame, or depression in their students.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis on institutional and classroom-level changes to improve education conditions is embedded in the larger need for wider collaboration to promote solutions to seemingly insurmountable issues. The fundamental challenge to deliver quality education under rapidly changing circumstances demands

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<sup>42</sup> Pérez, L. (2001). Growing up in Cuban Miami: Immigration, the enclave, and new generations. In R. G. Rumbaut & A. Portes (Eds.), *Ethnicities: Children of immigrants in America* (pp. 91–125). Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>43</sup> Theilheimer, R. (2001). Bi-directional learning through relationship building: Teacher preparation for working with families new to the United States. *Childhood Education*, 77(5), 284–288.

<sup>44</sup> Trueba, H. T., Jacobs, L., & Kirton, E. (1990). *Cultural conflict and adaptation: The case of Hmong children in American society*. New York: Falmer Press.

engagement from diverse actors across various fields. Most specifically, greater cooperation is needed from educational leaders across the board, from research institutions, universities, rural schools, to parents. Each of us must engage with issues of immigrant, refugee, and other minority children's education in Lebanon. We must resist the temptation to indulge reactive and simplistic narratives employed for division, and most notably segregation.

Rather, the rich texture of diverse ethnic and linguistic voices compels us to collectively foster a better educational setting for disadvantaged children, particularly since if they are unable to assimilate, then they could turn their anger and frustration inward, endangering themselves, or outward toward society.<sup>45</sup> For the stability of society as a whole, helping refugee children to succeed in school should be of importance to educators, administrators, and policymakers.

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<sup>45</sup> Delgado-Gaitan, C., & Trueba, H. T. (1991). *Crossing cultural borders: Education for immigrant families in America*. London: Falmer Press.