Education Sector Working Group Meeting, February 2026
Minutes of Meeting

Date: February 10th, 2026
Place: NRC and online
Chaired by: Isaac Makanani UNICEF, Maithree Abeyrathna NRC, and Hala Sarabi QRF.
Attendees: UNICEF, UNHCR, NRC, QRF, Save the children, ACHRS, Caritas, World Vision, UNESCO, Anera, ARDD, IMC, Arab Network for Civic Education, GFP, Jordan Coalition for Education for All, ECHO, Royal Health Awareness Society, UNRWA, IRC, World Health Awareness Society, CRP, and TDH Italy.

Agenda:

- Syrian returnee updates
- Sector coordination proposed streamlining
- MoE Guidance on School Fees for unregistered refugees and implications on ESWG members work
- GPE/ESP and ESA updates
- New ESWG members
- Update on UNICEF Future Focus initiative and streamlining of UNICEF Regional office work
- ESWG co-chair elections
- AOB

Syrian returnee updates

- The total number of UNHCR registered refugees returning to Syria since the fall of the Assad Government (8 December 2024 - 31 January 2026) is 181,823 refugees. Just over 4,500 refugees returned in January 2026, representing the second lowest month for returns since March 2025.
- 87% of refugee returnees since 8 December returned to Syria for the first time, compared to 13% who have previously visited Syria.
- women and girls representing 49% of overall returnees, while men and boys represent 51%.

- Since 8 December, more than 44,000 refugees residing in camps have returned to Syria, representing 24% of overall returnees. And 76% of the returnees were living in urban areas.
- 23% of returnees were residing in Amman, and 22% were living in Irbid – Zaatari Camp (15%), Mafraq (14%), Zarqa (7%), and Azraq Camp (6%).
- The governorates of origin of returnees are: 40% of returnees originate from Dar'a, 20% from Homs, and 11% from Rural Damascus.
- The pilot for cash assistance for voluntary return continues in Azraq and Za'atari. A total of 4,366 refugees has received cash assistance for voluntary return.

UNHCR Updates on Enrolling refugees in Sanad Application

- The refugees in Jordan are now being enrolled in the Sanad platform. Enrolling the refugees is a government-led initiative supported by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Global Financing Facility.
- UNHCR has initiated Phase 1 enrollment (not yet complete), enabling refugees to view their personal information, including certifications, degrees, hospital bills, and other documentation accumulated in Jordan—even after leaving the country.
- The initiative has been positively received by refugees, with plans for future phases to enroll more individuals and expand access to additional services.
- UNHCR also briefed on the collaboration with Bayt.com (the private employment website). The partnership seeks to enhance the linkages between the Syrian refugee job seekers and employers.

Sector coordination proposed streamlining

- Co-Chairs provided an update on the ongoing efforts to streamline coordination of ESWG.
- Initiated discussions with the Donor Partners Group (EDPG) to enhance communication between the two forums.

- Plan to roll out a short survey in the coming weeks targeting both ESWG and EDPG members for feedback on improving coordination, including pros/cons of potentially merging the platforms.
- Aim to align both forums with Ministry of Education (MoE) -level coordination to ensure smooth information flow among donors, education partners, and the ministry.
- Requested a meeting with MoE coordination focal point involving ESWG and EDPG Co-Chairs to discuss the government's perspective and strengthen collaboration.
- Noted MoE intention to align coordination with the Education Sector Plan (ESP); upcoming potential merging of MoE and Ministry of Higher Education may require adapting current mechanisms.
- Background: Idea of streamlining/merging ESWG-EDPG originated in last year's during sense-making workshop (report shared with Co-Chairs); recent developments like ESP domains and shift toward development context in Jordan heighten the need.
- Co-Chairs encouraged members to provide input via the survey, which will inform discussions with EDPG and MoE. The topic will also be raised at next EDPG meeting.

MoE Guidance on School Fees for unregistered refugees and implications on ESWG members' work

- NRC briefed on the four key benchmarks in Ministry of Education (MoE) guidance on donation fees for non-Jordanian students across primary/academic, secondary/academic, and vocational.
- On Aug 7, 2025, MoE published the updated SOP for admission and transfer of Jordanian and non-Jordanian students for the Academic Year 2025/2026 which clearly stated the exemption of the following categories from paying the donation fees: Children of Jordanian Mothers with Identification Card; Children of Gaza Strip; and Registered refugees with UNHCR card.
- The SOP included updated school donation fees of 800 JOD for Academic Primary and Secondary Education and 1,200 JOD for Vocational Secondary Education (these fees cover the full academic year).
- The SOP was associated with a letter highlighting that the new fees will be collected with the start of the second semester, while for the first semester,

the following fees will be applied: 30 JOD for Primary Education; 40 JOD for Academic Secondary Education, and 75 JOD for Vocational Secondary Education, maintaining the exemption of the three mentioned categories.

- On Dec 22, 2025, MoE issued a letter to activate the collection of the new fees rate for the second semester, nevertheless, the letter highlighted a fee of 300 JOD for the second semester not specifying primary, secondary, or vocational categories.
- The same letter emphasized on the three categories for exemption and added another one exempting all non-Jordanian students from grades 1 to 6 from paying the donation fees.
- The next EPDG meeting is scheduled soon and will be attended by the ESWG co-chairs. This topic was raised in the previous EPDG, where the discussion focused on identifying key advocacy points. However, no implementation guidance has been issued to date—not even at the directorate level. The next EDPG meeting may provide clarity on next steps.

GPE/ESP and ESA updates

- UNESCO briefed on 5-year ESP progress with MoE: finalized four domains and new systems strengthening (SST) section post-workshop; incorporated MoE feedback; shared with ESWG/partners for review. Finalizing multi-year plan and activity-based costing via 2-day workshop this week (Feb 18-19); on track for end-Feb completion and launch with His Excellency/MoE (late Feb/early Mar, dates TBC).

- Held MoE workshop on 10-year rationalization; recommendations (school rightsizing, buildings, overcrowding) to integrate into ESP's GPE systems capacity branch.

- UNESCO/GPE digitalization proposal submitted (feedback pending). Successful digitalization workshop with MoE, Queen Rania Center, private sector (Google, Microsoft), and HQ to explore integration opportunities.

New ESWG members

Brief about Anera organization. founded in 1968 in Palestine to aid Palestinian refugees and host communities, began operations in Jordan from 2004–2011, paused, and restarted in 2019 amid high needs for Jordan's large Palestinian refugee population. It now operates in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon, with potential expansion to Syria in discussion.

Key Sectors and Projects

- Livelihoods and Employability: Targets school dropouts via offline computer labs in two camps, using Palestinian/Jordanian curricula with bridging materials to rebuild foundational skills for re-entry; builds on past camp successes.
- Health: Runs a primary healthcare (PHC) unit, bolstered by a recent ~$4 million donation.
- Humanitarian Relief: Provides accommodation, hotel stays, and essentials for vulnerable refugees, coordinating with Jordan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address needs from regional crises (e.g., Gaza patients).
- Education: Delivers relief in Jordanian council areas, expanding to Aqaba; partners with Magna for greenhouses/RTGs in public schools to boost agriculture awareness, food security, and nutrition; similar efforts with SOS and LVEC promote self-sufficient produce.
- Arena aids Syrians through a "one refugee" approach but lacks Syria-specific projects.

Update on UNICEF Future Focus initiative and streamlining of UNICEF Regional office work

- UNICEF is navigating a global funding crisis, with declining development assistance heightening risks for vulnerable children.
- At least 70% of headquarters staff are being relocated to lower-cost duty stations closer to the field to enhance agility and reduce costs.
- Regional and divisional structures are being consolidated, with four new Centres of Excellence established in Amman, Bangkok, Nairobi, and Panama City to deliver tailored technical support.
- Amman has been designated as the global hub for education and child protection, with the Nairobi office transitioning to a center of excellence

headquartered in Amman, consolidating prior Europe, Asia, and Middle East functions.

- UNICEF's establishment of four major regional hubs: Nairobi, Bangkok, Panama, and Amman.
- Approximately 80 new technical personnel are expected to arrive in Amman within the next few months to provide global support for education and child protection initiatives.
- These structural reforms aim to strengthen UNICEF's ability to provide specialized, timely support across regions and time zones.

ESWG Co-chairs election.

- Brief on ESWG upcoming election. Noting that QRF term ends this February following a 2 year period.
- Self-Nomination: Any ESWG member organization meeting the TOR requirements can self-nominate. TOR will be updated and shared soon (via email and UNHCR ESWG portal) for eligibility checks.
- Candidates may present their work and suitability at the next monthly meeting.
- A voting link will be sent out to the full ESWG where each organization has just one vote.
- More guidance will follow soon.

Next Meeting

- To be scheduled, members will be informed via email.

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