

SYRIAN REFUGEE RESPONSE: LEBANON INTER-AGENCY UPDATE



28 November 2014

LEBANON



#FutureOfSyria

Agencies and the Government of Lebanon had requested US\$1.89 billion in the inter-agency funding appeal.

The mid-year review in June resulted in a downward revision of these requirements to US\$ 1.68 billion. US\$659 million - 44 per cent - has been received as of 5 November.

HIGHLIGHTS

- There are 470,000 Syrian children of school age in Lebanon;
- Nearly 386,000 of school-aged Syrians are of primary school age, compared with 275,000 Lebanese;
- Donors and UN agencies have so far committed to support the enrolment of at least 45,000 children in the morning shift school at a cost of \$363 per child.
- UNHCR and UNICEF have committed to supporting 57,000 children in the afternoon shift at a cost of \$600 per child.
- From the beginning of the year, over 108,000 Syrian, Palestinian or vulnerable Lebanese children attended non-formal education classes, psycho-social support or recreational activities.

Reaching All Children with Education - RACE

Already straining under the highest ratio of refugee students in the world, the Lebanese public school system has embarked on an ambitious three-year plan that will see up to 245,000 Syrian children in classes by 2016.

The \$600 million “Reaching All Children with Education” (RACE) strategy was launched in May by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The RACE programme also aims to provide educational opportunities for some 165,000 refugee children outside of the public school system, bringing the total number of Syrian children receiving some sort of schooling to 400,000 by 2016.

Despite the heavy burden on Lebanon’s school system, MEHE recognizes the right of all children to an education -- yet one more example of the exceptional generosity of a nation that is hosting the largest per capita population of refugees in the world – one in four. To support this initiative, UNHCR and UNICEF have seconded staff to the Ministry’s central and regional offices; provided equipment to schools and regional offices; covered enrollment costs and rehabilitated the most run-down public schools. All of these efforts are ongoing.

Why public schools?

Education partners involved in the programme work hand-in-hand with MEHE to enroll refugee children in public schools. First and foremost, this partnership with public schools enables children to pursue certified diplomas, facilitating their access to education elsewhere in the future. It also helps ensure that Syria will have an educated population of young people when refugees are able to return home to start rebuilding their country.

Equally important is the fact that the work with public schools allows partners to capacitate Lebanon’s education system through teacher training, school renovations and other initiatives that benefit local host communities and refugees alike. It can also ease tensions between the groups. So far in 2014, 93 schools have been rehabilitated, including through the installation of proper water, hygiene and sanitation facilities and access to potable water.

A \$600 million government plan aims to enroll 245,000 Syrian children in public schools by 2016

Access to public schools

There are 470,000 Syrian children of school age in Lebanon. Nearly 386,000 of them are of primary school age (grade 1 to grade 12). This compares with around 275,000 Lebanese children who are enrolled in public schools that have an estimated maximum capacity of 300,000. Meeting the needs of both populations of children would require a doubling of school capacity. To meet this huge spike in demand, MEHE and its education partners last year successfully introduced afternoon shifts within the public system, allowing the enrollment of an additional 32,000 children.

A mid-October decision by MEHE paved the way for the enrolment of up to 100,000 non-Lebanese children in the morning shift in public schools this year. Donors and UN agencies have so far committed to support the enrolment of at least 45,000 children in the morning shift at a cost of \$363 per child. Enrolment is currently underway.

On 27 November, MEHE finalized and shared a circular regarding the enrolment of Syrian children in the afternoon. Students will be able to enroll as soon as a final selection is made of public schools that will be accommodating afternoon classes. UNHCR and UNICEF have committed to supporting 57,000 children in the afternoon shift at a cost of \$600 per child.

UNHCR, UNICEF and partners are providing tuition fees, stationery and other school supplies, while MEHE is covering of the cost of school books with the support of DFID. UNHCR and UNICEF will also cover staff salaries and the running cost of afternoon shifts.

Challenges

Uneven Access

Efforts to ensure adequate access to education has faced enormous challenges. While exact statistics are not available, it is estimated that more than 50 percent of Syrian refugee children aged 5-17 are excluded from any form of education. Among these, adolescents are the most affected. Reintegrating into the school system at an older age and after having missed up to three years of education is often overwhelming for these young people.

But the challenges for the enrolment in the 2014-2015 school year stretch beyond just problems of integration and adaptation. Education partners are monitoring the process closely through ongoing meetings with refugee parents and school directors as well as through reports by refugee outreach volunteers. For example, some parents said they were confused about enrolment in the morning shift, in part because some school directors interpreted the mid-October MEHE circular differently. While some directors allowed immediate access to Syrian children in the morning shift, others requested that parents provide additional documentation which prevented the enrolment of their children. In some isolated incidents, school directors required parents to pay fees. A tight monitoring and follow-up process is underway to mitigate these discrepancies as fast as possible. Education partners are in contact with MEHE's offices centrally and in the different regions and working to streamline the enrolment process across Lebanon.

Some children who were enrolled in the morning shift last year were not able to enroll this year because a strict ratio of one Lebanese child to one non-Lebanese child per classroom was imposed. The Ministry has recently issued a list of schools in Mount Lebanon and Beirut where the ratio will not apply, and it is expected that schools in other regions will be exempted.

In some areas, children face transportation or security problems in getting to school. It is hoped that the increased number of schools providing afternoon shift classes this year will help address these issues as children get access to nearby schools that previously only offered fully booked morning shifts. Education partners are also looking to provide transportation for children living far from their schools, in informal settlements or rural/mountainous areas.

Ensuring quality education

Ensuring that the quality of education is not compromised by the rapidly increasing demand is also a challenge and a priority. Overstretched school resources not only negatively affect learning outcomes; they also have the potential to fuel discriminatory attitudes and frustration. Teachers are struggling to cope with the specific education needs of all children and to maintain some level of harmony between the various groups of students.

Vulnerable Lebanese are supported with tuition fees to complement services already provided by the government. Education partners are also supporting plans for further teacher training and capacity building.

108,000 children attended non-formal education classes, psycho-social support and recreational activities since January 2014

Monitoring school retention rates and learning outcomes for both refugee and Lebanese children remains a key challenge for 2014-2015. Real-time monitoring of attendance is planned in order to help prevent drop-outs and sustain learning progress.

Non-formal education and Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP)

There is real need for alternative learning options for children who cannot attend public schools. Solutions include non-formal education classes or the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP).

The education needs of Syrian children are not homogeneous and vary from child to child. Some refugee children have missed out on up to three years of school, while others have never been to school. Others may have specific needs, in particular children with disabilities who have limited opportunities. This makes them vulnerable to child labour, child marriage or other forms of abuse and exploitation.

With the current constraints, agencies have doubled efforts to gather more children in alternative learning classes. From the beginning of the year, over 108,000 Syrians and Palestinians, as well as Lebanese returnees and other vulnerable Lebanese children have attended non-formal education classes, received psycho-social support and enjoyed various recreational activities.

Most recently, MEHE and the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) have finalized a new formal ALP curriculum. This condensed programme will help children who have missed several years of education to make up for lost school time and re-enter the classroom with peers their age. This is a key development as not only will it fill critical gaps but it will also help formalize and certify this important pathway to formal education.

Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative

UNHCR's global tertiary education scholarship – The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI)- was launched in Lebanon to allow eligible Syrian youth to pursue or continue their university education whilst in exile.

Two orientation sessions were organized for the 60 selected DAFI scholars in Beirut and North Lebanon to encourage them to form support groups at their universities or degree levels. The scholars enrolled in public as well as private universities in Lebanon.

Mohamed, 22, has recently enrolled at the Lebanese University to continue his degree in Arabic Literature.

'I did a year of university in Syria, The situation got so bad I had to stop attending classes. Then my family and I fled to Lebanon. University in Lebanon is so expensive, so I couldn't afford to enroll. Instead I looked for work to support my family,' said Mohamed.

'My dream has always been to complete my degree and go onto further education. But as life would have it, I had to put my dream on hold. This scholarship has given me my dream back,' he added.

DONORS

Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, EU, France, Germany, Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

Contributions have also been received from the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as well as from private donors, national and international organizations.

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