

# Consultations with Youth from Refugee and Jordanian Communities

## A Vision for better education from a Youth Perspective: outcomes from World Refugee Day discussions

The MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement (MSCND) aims to strengthen the role of civil society in responding to the displacement crises; by providing a platform for civil society stakeholders in MENA to unify and amplify their voices and actions in favour of the protection and assistance of displaced persons, and in support of host communities bearing the brunt of the responsibility. The Jordan network platform includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Community-based organizations (CBOs), think tanks, academia and media with an interest in displacement across MENA.

On June 19, 2017, in commemoration of World Refugee day, the MSCND Jordan network members marked this special day by leading youth-oriented focus group discussions (FGD) with a number of Syrian, Iraqi and Sudanese refugee youth, as well as with youth members from Jordanian host communities. The founding members of the Jordan Civil Society Network for Displacement consist of key national NGO actors mainly represented by Jordan River Foundation, Noor Al Hussein Foundation/Institute for Family Health, ARDD/Legal Aid and the Jordanian National Commission For Women. Academia is represented by membership of the German Jordan University and the University Of Jordan Centre for Strategic Studies. Education is prioritized as a key theme by the Jordan network in 2017, in line with the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis (2017-2019), a comprehensive national response linking short-term coping solutions with longer-term initiatives aimed at strengthening local and national resilience capacities. The Jordan Response Platform reflects the commitments taken by Jordan and the international community in the Jordan Compact and is aligned to global, regional and national education priorities detailed in the 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, UNHCR's Global Education Strategy, and United Nations Sustainable Development - Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Taking into consideration global and national commitments to education along with needs identified through participatory assessment, refugee outreach and community-based mechanisms, the national Protection Working Group on the humanitarian level, in coordination with the Education and Child Protection Sub-Working Groups, has developed key advocacy messages in relation to education. These messages consider education for refugees not as a peripheral stand-alone service but as a core component of UNHCR's protection and durable solutions mandate.<sup>1</sup>

Participation in full-cycle quality educational programming can provide long-term, dependable, safe environments for some of the most vulnerable within refugee populations.<sup>2</sup> Focus group discussions involved refugee and Jordanian youth committee members and key informants among youth leaders from different governorates in each of Jordan's three regions: the Middle (Amman), Northern (Irbid) and Southern (Karak and Ma'an). Refugee and Jordanian higher education students of social work professional Diploma on Migration and Refugees participated in the FGDs. The

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Global Education Strategy (2012-2016)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR briefing Note on Protection and Education (2015)

FGDs addressed issues the refugee youth experience especially in the space of education, including these overriding themes:

1. Accountability by educational systems and education service providers on the progress of the education process while ensuring students' participation.
2. Linkages between formal and informal education
3. Discrimination

In line with the UNHCR core belief that educated children and youth stand a greater chance of becoming adults who can participate effectively in civil society in all contexts,<sup>3</sup> below are the key messages and recommendations identified by refugee and Jordanian youth during discussion with members of the MSCND Jordan.

## Accountability

Accountability was flagged as a concern, mainly in the communication channels between the educational institution and students. Various recommendations were made to promote accountability and transparency such as:

- Strengthen the communication channels within educational institutions, e.g. Student Council, open regular discussions with supervisors, school principals knowing that they are the interface with education policy makers.
- Evaluation of subjects should be linked to today's context and students' needs.
- Strengthen evaluation systems for teachers.
- Academic curriculum should meet the needs of the labour market and therefore an open and constructive dialogue between the MOE and MOL needs to be in place.
- Assess and evaluate student's vocational skill sets and capacity building needs through volunteering opportunities and hands on engagement.
- Invest in teacher capacity building to ensure teachers are equipped with contemporary education tools that actively engages students.
- Consider broader, more diverse and inclusive approaches to evaluating student performance beyond only grades/test results, e.g. encourage more scientific research (practical aspects of learning), encouraging internships, work experiences and Training of Trainees.
- Advocate for scholarships to ensure that students among interested different age categories (age groups) are included.
- Advocate for strengthening field specialization (sub-specialty) of different subjects at university level, in order to give more room for creativity and excellence.
- Invest in refugee young graduates and ensure their participation when developing school and university curricula.
- Contextualize the content of curricula to embrace a national perspective, as the general sense is that content is more westernized and not necessarily fitting the context of the region, which can contribute to detachment and academic disintegration.
- Civil society participation and support of the informal education programmes would help gain the trust and confidence from the students and parents in the informal education programmes being introduced.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

## *“We are partners and we will give back to countries hosting us”*

*A message from refugee youth on World Refugee Day June 2017*

## Formal and Informal Education

After the London Conference in February 2016, Jordan expressed a strong commitment to the goal of Accelerating Access to Quality Formal Education, relying on commitments of significant investment by the donor community to support the delivery of Jordan’s plan. However, challenges remain concerning access to formal educational systems, and linkages between formal and informal structures continue to be weak. The following points were identified:

- Formal and informal systems should remain separate because each system fulfils different needs and gaps, yet ensure linkages and complementary accredited programmes (to ensure acknowledgement by formal systems).
- Have pathways for linkage of informal to formal education. Encourage sharing success stories between refugees as a tool to display the importance of the informal education programmes and to rebuild the trust in the informal education system.
- There is demand for training programmes that meet the labour market needs, such as life skills training, entrepreneurship and capacity building training programmes.
- Increase the opportunities for people with disabilities to access and engage with formal and informal education programmes. Include persons with disabilities and their families in mapping of services, as they could be a wealth source of information regarding non-traditional community services for this vulnerable group.
- Provide trainings to students in the areas of critical and design thinking.
- Stress the importance of the presence of counsellors in schools and universities by ensuring the existence of a multidisciplinary team of social workers and counsellors. Gender mainstreaming among counsellors was emphasized, taking into consideration gender sensitive social, economic and physical challenges students may face.
- Encourage private sectors to support educational institutions (formal and informal programmes)

## Discrimination

Students shared that the verbal discrimination is the dominant type of discrimination among refugee and Jordanian youth. This avails in schools more than university or colleges. They explained that the level of maturity is higher among university or college students. They strongly believe that the main reason behind discrimination is the vulnerable circumstances Jordanian and refugee communities are living due to the situation in the region. They highlighted that efforts shall be exerted to decrease reasons that create discrimination while strengthening opportunities to establish cohesion. Students added that they tend not to report verbal discrimination they experience due to the lack of knowledge regarding process of reporting and sometimes fearing that their report would not be taken seriously since verbal discrimination is usually difficult to prove.

Solutions brought forward to address the culture of shame and fear in reporting discrimination included:

- Raise awareness on the importance of reporting discrimination within the education system. Start with students at a young age. Target both refugee students and host community students to learn about their rights and obligations.
- Students stressed the importance of giving attention to discrimination among refugees themselves as per the different social status and places of origin.
- Explore innovative tools and materials that address discrimination issues and works towards a solution.
- Strengthen a national legal reporting framework to ensure better justice for those with legitimate complaints of discrimination. A number of students expressed lack of knowledge of complaint mechanisms, or lack of trust in response mechanisms.
- Ensure that teachers participate in code of conduct sessions to be familiarized with COC principles while safeguarding abidance to it. Currently, a general COC manual is available for all workers in the public sector, including teachers, yet a focused COC manual is being developed targeting all concerned parties of the educational systems (teachers, students, parents, etc.). It will be launched in September 2017.
- Remove education barriers that refugees face in the education space such as the high fees, nationality and social acceptance.
- Consider double shift systems as discriminatory and prevents positive inclusion. Despite the fact that double shift schools helped reduce overcrowding and allowed for maximum use of resources while allowing greater access to students, it still has disadvantages. Concerns expressed regarding quality of education and reduced knowledge gained due to shorter school time (in the afternoon). Also, double shift schools is in limited geographical locations which limits educational access. Furthermore, they shared difficulties faced in transportation and occurrence of protection concerns, particularly among girls especially during winter since it gets dark early.
- Recommendation about effective communication tools: Video display and information sessions to refugees present at UNHCR registration area to benefit from the waiting time, which usually takes between 4-6 hours.
- Encourage compulsory joint research opportunities and vocational training activities between refugee youth and Jordanians.

*“I am a latent energy, Invest in me”*

*A message from refugee youth on World Refugee Day June 2017*

## Way Forward

While observing the challenges expressed, the Jordan members of MSCND had the “opportunities lens” on. Hence, members will develop national level advocacy messages supported by civil society actors in Jordan on behalf of refugee and Jordanian youth. An advocacy campaign is under discussion amongst network members.

The outcome of the report will be discussed with youth committee members and youth leaders as well as higher education students with the potential next step of inviting them to participate in the Child Protection Working Group meeting and Education Working Group meeting. Their participation in these meetings will offer the right place and

discussion forum to review and further discuss the outcome of the report and engage in the development of response plans for various stakeholders and actors in the education space.

MSCND Jordan members will continue working closely with youth by conducting regular discussions with refugee and Jordanian youth, highlighting each time a new theme concerning youth in Jordan. MSCND Jordan aims to help channel genuine youth voices and to ensure that through a participatory approach youth can be better understood to represent a “latent energy”, as a youth participant described himself during these discussions.

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