

Reaching all Children with Education in Lebanon

Opportunities for Action

September 10 2015 Update
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By Maysa Jalbout

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This report has been written by Maysa Jalbout for Theirworld and A World at School following a field visit to Lebanon and informed by discussions with many individuals in the government and in the international organizations and agencies working on education. Jalbout is an advisor and advocate on global education with a focus on the Arab world. She is a Non-resident Fellow at the Centre for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution.

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September 2015 Update

The report that follows was published in April 2015 outlining opportunities for the education of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. With the new school year just weeks way, the original report is being republished with this new foreword providing a status update.

Following the publication of the report, the Program Management Unit was set up in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to oversee the rollout of education for Syrian refugees and vulnerable children. The RACE Steering Committee continued to meet, providing technical support and guidance to the MEHE. The Minister of Education set a new target of enrolling 200,000 Syrian refugees into school in the double-shift systems if the international community agreed to provide additional support for the new school year. Additional measures were to be undertaken to expand non-formal education, particularly accelerated learning programs, to provide pathways to formal education for the children and young people having missed out on years of schooling.

Donors have come forward to achieve the ambitious goal of enrolling 200,000 Syrian refugee children into formal double-shift schools this fall. For the new school year, Germany and the EU remain significant donors; the Netherlands and UNICEF have also made contributions, with UNICEF providing a financing mechanism for donors. A World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund is also now disbursing funds for the new school year. These efforts, combined with “September Surge” of funding by UK DFID, USAID and Norway, has helped achieve 140,000 + confirmed spaces for Syrian young people in formal schools. A gap of less than \$35million remains to reach the target.

The latest figures show that 510,000 Syrian children now reside in Lebanon. This fall it is hoped the donors will help the government reach the formal enrollment targets, provide funding for accelerated learning programs and non-formal education, and bring together a broader coalition of support to scale-up the provision of education to reach all of these children over the next two years.

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Executive Summary

The Syrian conflict has caused one of the worst humanitarian disasters in modern times with an unprecedented loss of life and an increasingly long-term impact on the safety and stability of the region. The refugee crisis is the largest in 20 years with almost 4 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. The conflict has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 children, separated thousands more from their families, and left over 2 million children in need of urgent psychosocial support and treatment. The immense impact of this disaster on children should generate greater international outcry and support from the international community.

Education alone will not reverse the impact of the Syrian crisis on children. However, without education there can be little hope for the future of the more than 2.6 million Syrian children who are out of school in Syria and in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt; and for rebuilding Syria after the conflict.

Nowhere is the challenge of extending access to education graver than in Lebanon. One out of ten people in Lebanon is a child from Syria, and the majority of these children are not in school. These children are becoming trapped in child labor, early marriage and extremism at alarming rates, making their safety and the safety of Lebanon as their host country a top concern for their families, the Government of Lebanon and national and international organizations.

Without education there can be little hope for the future of the more than 2.6 million Syrian children out of school.

The Government of Lebanon is committed to providing refugee children with an education. Developed with UN agencies, international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) is leading the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) strategy, which aims to ensure that 470,000 vulnerable school-aged children — those affected by the Syria crisis as well as underprivileged Lebanese children — are able to access quality formal and non-formal educational (NFE) opportunities. RACE further seeks to improve the quality of learning for all children in Lebanon.

Although a middle-income country (MIC), Lebanon is classified as a fragile state, and is facing many serious challenges in hosting 1.2 million refugees from Syria — more than one fifth of its current population. Following decades of conflict and ongoing political turmoil, the additional pressure on Lebanon's weak infrastructure, fragile political and religious composition, and unfavorable economic and employment conditions could be extremely destabilizing. These realities prompted the Government of Lebanon in October 2014 to adopt a policy limiting UNHCR's ability to register refugees and advocate for their return to Syria or migration to other countries.

Efforts to address the educational needs of all Lebanese and Syrian children represent the best scenario for Lebanon and the region. But the refugee crisis has put Lebanon's already limited public education system under strain. Public schools provide less than 30% of Lebanon's education, a share that has been dropping over the past decade due to concerns over the quality of education.

Despite the immense pressures on its own education system, the MEHE is committed to give every child in Lebanon an education. It has made important progress in enrolling registered refugee children, underprivileged Lebanese children and Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) children in formal education, under RACE. This year, close to 110,000 Syrian school-aged children will be enrolled in Lebanese public schools, representing a 21% increase from last year. The MEHE opened 1,000 public schools to non-Lebanese students to enroll in their regular sessions. It also doubled the number of public schools offering second shifts to 160, with an expectation to reach more than 60,000 non-Lebanese students. In addition, 33,000 underprivileged Lebanese children were provided with formal and non-formal education for the 2013/14 school year. And, UNRWA has integrated 6,600 PRS children into more than 60 schools across the country.

Yet, notwithstanding more children in more Lebanese public schools, 400,000 Syrian children (3-18 years old) remain out of school.[‡] Only one out of five Syrian children are in Lebanese public schools with progress being largely limited to the primary level, in which 20,000 additional Syrian children aged 6 to 14 enrolled. A staggeringly low number of adolescents and young children have benefited from RACE. Only 2,000 Syrian adolescents aged 15 to 18 are enrolled in secondary school, and 10,000 children aged 3 to 5 are currently receiving educational support.

Refugee children in remote and rural areas face significantly higher barriers in accessing formal education due to many factors. Only 15% of refugee children in the Bekaa Valley have enrolled in school by comparison to 63% in Beirut. Fewer opportunities for their families to earn an income combined with the prohibitive cost of transportation to school are just some of the barriers to enrollment for refugee children in the Bekaa Valley and the North of Lebanon.

400,000 Syrian children remain out of school in Lebanon.

Limited progress has been made in improving the overall quality of education, weakening the public school's ability to retain students. Poor learning outcomes persist despite support to training 2,500 Lebanese teachers and providing free learning materials to all students in public schools. Dropout rates among Syrian children were as high as 70% for the 2011/12 school year (Shuayb et al., 2014).

Forming a "delivery and financing pact" between the Government of Lebanon and the international community to improve delivery capacity, meet targets and ensure predictable financing could lead to educational opportunity for hundreds of thousands of children in a matter of months. Consultations with the MEHE and its partners in Lebanon point to the importance they attach to the collective effort made to achieve the progress to date. Partners have identified seven opportunities to accelerate progress rapidly and in time for the upcoming 2015/16 school year.

Reaching all Children in Lebanon: Opportunities for Action

OPPORTUNITY 1:

Bolster MEHE's capacity to lead the education response by rallying behind the establishment of a dedicated Program Management Unit (PMU). The PMU will oversee, coordinate and manage RACE. Partners will provide financial and technical support to the PMU. In return the PMU is anticipated to deliver timely technical, organizational implementation and quality assurance support for all programs and projects under RACE. Additional support is still required for boosting MEHE's monitoring and evaluation capacity.

OPPORTUNITY 2:

Rapidly scale up access to formal education with additional financial support. The education appeal in RACE was estimated to be \$177.2 million for 2014 targets and \$191.3 million for 2015 targets. Donors have only met 57% of the appeal for 2014/15 school year. The additional 43% would open another 120 public schools for afternoon sessions and increase enrollment by 45,000. If donors doubled the current funding, it would double the number of second-shift schools, extending access to another 60,000 children. The immediate financing gap for the 2015 Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) appeal is \$163 million. Multi-year funding is required for securing timely enrollment of children. Also, more donors are needed to shoulder the burden of educating refugees in Lebanon by contributing to the already substantial support made by a small number of donors. A review of current financial mechanisms could enable more donors to engage in RACE and would contribute to stronger accountability and coherence.

OPPORTUNITY 3:

Establish a new budget for RACE with the aim of creating a more responsive donor base. While the cost of enrollment in the second-shift schools at \$600 per child is perceived to be too high, most donors would favor supporting a program-based approach that meets the needs of MEHE and creates greater accountability for all partners. Donors need to also increase their support for eliminating financial barriers for particularly vulnerable children by allocating funding for transportation and educational supplies.

OPPORTUNITY 4:

Remove the administrative and policy barriers preventing refugee children from accessing formal education in Lebanon. Partners must work with the Lebanese Government and MEHE to find practical solutions for addressing political and education concerns behind the restrictions on registration of children in formal education. Alternative methods for certifying refugee education in Lebanon and the region are essential to increase access to education and ensure refugees reap the benefits of their education. Other administrative barriers, especially the delay in releasing circulars with instructions on registration and enrollment, will be addressed with the implementation of a strong rolling operational plan, with the Minister's assurance.

OPPORTUNITY 5:

Strengthen pathways to and retention in formal education by scaling up accelerated learning programs (ALPs) and remedial learning programs (RLPs). MEHE is expected to provide 10,000 children with ALPs this year, far below the RACE target of 90,000. Additional funding and the support of partner NGOs would enable it to roll out to more children and enable them to prepare for transitioning to public schools. At the same time, more funding is needed for remedial education to support children who are already enrolled in public schools in coping with learning basic subjects in a foreign language. RLPs are essential to reducing the exceedingly high dropout rate among Syrian children who are dropping out at twice the rate of local students.

OPPORTUNITY 6:

Increase access to education for young children (aged 3 to 6) and adolescents (aged 15 to 18). Urgent funding and interventions are needed to increase access to early childhood and secondary education. Improving access to early childhood education is a smart investment that will yield high returns in improving the readiness of young children for primary school and reducing the future cost of remedial education. Supporting secondary education is essential to reducing the impact of the Syrian conflict on adolescents and on Syria. With barely any progress made in secondary school enrollments, 87,000 adolescent refugees could become disenfranchised youth in Lebanon. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are ready to work with MEHE to provide NFE programs that would prepare both cohorts to transition to formal education.

OPPORTUNITY 7:

Make schools safe for all children. Ensuring the safety of all children in school is paramount to protecting them and to enabling them to continue their education. An unacceptably high number of children are reporting incidence of violence and citing it as the reason for dropping out. More support is needed for MEHE to develop strong child protection policies for Lebanese and refugee students; to scale up programs addressing violence and bullying in schools; and to reduce children's exposure to harassment by opening up more schools in high density refugee areas or providing additional funding for transportation to distant schools.

The opportunities presented in this report suggest that achieving better education results for Lebanese and refugee children are well within reach. The current RACE strategy has served MEHE and partners well. It provided an opportunity to coordinate efforts and work towards defined targets. The progress made under RACE was achieved despite considerable challenges, many of which can be overcome with the continued goodwill of all partners, the leadership of MEHE and more financial support from the international community. The experience of implementing RACE thus far lends insight into potential medium-term goals and raises broader questions for consideration by MEHE and the international community. By way of conclusion, the report poses issues for consideration in the revision of RACE, which is scheduled to take place later this year. They include: emphasizing improving learning outcomes; strategizing how to enroll the hardest to reach children; investing in research and innovation; exploring the role of private schools in sharing the burden with public schools; engaging the private sector; mitigating the risks for Lebanon's education system and building its resilience; and contributing to shaping a new potential international architecture for education in fragile states.

Introduction

Education is about hope for refugees and the future of Syria and the region

The Syrian conflict has caused one of the worst humanitarian disasters in modern times. More than 210,000 have been killed, half of them civilians (SOHR, 2015). Another 840,000 have been injured by the ongoing conflict (SCRIP, 2015). In the past four years, 6% of the Syrian population has been killed, maimed, or wounded. Inside Syria, more than 12 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance with 7.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (OCHA, 2015). By the end of 2014, 3.8 million Syrians had been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2015), making it the worst refugee crisis since the genocide in Rwanda.

The toll on children has been devastating. The conflict has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 children (SOHR, 2015), with one out of five of these children less than 10 years old (Price et al., 2014). Thousands of children and adolescents have been separated from their parents and families, crossing borders unaccompanied and alone. They have lived through unimaginable nightmares and faced countless traumas. More than 2 million children require psychosocial support and treatment (UNICEF, 2014b). “An entire generation of children is being shaped by violence, displacement, and a persistent lack of opportunity – and could be lost forever, with profound long-term consequences for Syria, the region, and beyond” (UNICEF, 2014a).

More than 2.6 million children are out of school in Syria and neighboring countries.

Education alone will not reverse the impact of the Syrian crisis on its people, but for refugees, education is about hope. It is a form of perseverance and a bridge to a better life. Without education, there can be little hope for the future for the more than 2.6 million children who are out of school in Syria and in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt (UNICEF, 2015a). The lack of opportunity places additional burdens on host countries and communities and the future of Syria is also dependent on them having the skills to rebuild their country. As one Syrian businessperson said, “When the war is over, who will rebuild Syria if this entire generation does not have the education they need?”

Without education, the risks for children and the region are too great

Nowhere is the challenge of extending access to education graver than in Lebanon. A country of 4.5 million now hosts approximately 1.2 million additional Syrians registered as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015). Children and adolescents account for half of this population. One out of ten people in Lebanon is a child from Syria, and the majority of these children are not in school. This leaves them vulnerable to different forms of mistreatment and harm.

Education can mitigate some of the risks these children face. Safe learning environments can protect children from getting trapped in cheap labor, early marriage, or extremism. Across the region, one in ten children displaced from Syria have to work (UNICEF, 2014b), though this figure is likely to be much higher in Lebanon. A recent study suggests that three out of four children working in the streets of Lebanon are from Syria (Consultation & Research Institute, 2015).

Not only do Syrian children have to work to provide for their families, but they are also being forced into the worst forms of labor including the smuggling of goods and sexual exploitation (WVI, 2014).

Children, particularly adolescent girls, also face gender-based violence. An alarming and growing number of girls are getting married early to minimize risk of wider assault and to reduce the burden on their families of feeding and protecting them. While there was a high rate of child marriages in Syria before the crisis, the proportion of young Syrian brides in neighboring Jordan more than doubled, reaching 25% in 2013 (Save the Children, 2014). Though there are no recent estimates, incidences of child marriages have reportedly increased among Syrians in Lebanon as well (Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group, 2013).

Some of the most vulnerable children and youth are being recruited as workers and even as combatants in armed groups in Syria (UNICEF, 2013). This is a shared concern for members of the Government of Lebanon and the international community who understand the security ramifications of growing extremism in the country, the region, and the world. According to Martin Griffiths, Chief United Nations (UN) negotiator to Syria under the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis, Kofi Annan, providing Syrian children with education “is, for all of us, not just to do what is right but also to protect all of us, to protect Syrian families from the facile lure of radicalism, something which could easily take root in the idle discomforts of the settlements.”

Lebanon is committed to education for refugee children

Despite significant challenges, the Government of Lebanon has shown significant commitment to providing all children in Lebanon with an education. The current strategy of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) reflects this commitment. Developed with UN agencies, international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) aims to meet the educational and developmental needs of children and adolescents displaced from Syria, as outlined in the No Lost Generation strategy, while also extending access to out-of-school Lebanese children. The strategy serves as the basis for the educational component of Lebanon’s crisis response plan.

Reaching all Children in Lebanon: Opportunities for Action

Hosting refugees is destabilizing for Lebanon

While the Government of Lebanon is strongly committed to offering educational opportunities to Syrian children, pressures by the international community to provide services to a non-native population must take into account the country's own state of development and its geopolitical position.

Although Lebanon is a middle-income country (MIC), it is considered a fragile state and its infrastructure has not fully recovered after decades of conflict. The impacts of regional conflicts create political and demographic tensions and continue to have an impact on the state governance and reform agendas.

Hosting a growing number of refugees places destabilizing factors on the political and religious composition of the country. As with many governments hosting refugee populations, there are concerns about long-term settlement, implications for the provision of social services, and the international community's commitment and responsibility to providing long-term support for Syrians and the host country.

The economic impact of hosting registered refugees and educating Syrian children is significant. At 35%, Lebanon is already among the countries with the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. The country has already seen a sharp increase in the number of people seeking low-wage jobs, increasing economic competition and tensions between the Syrian population and host communities (Government of Lebanon, 2015) and the large number of children has created fear of greater future competition for jobs. The majority of Syrians are also located in the poorest and least-served communities in Lebanon, placing additional stress on already fragile infrastructure, including health, waste, water, sanitation management, and education.

Political and economic considerations prompted the Lebanese Government to release a new policy on Syrians in October 2014. The policy effectively limits UNHCR's ability to register refugees and openly advocates for return to Syria or migration to other countries. This policy has direct implications on Syrian access to education, as unregistered families cannot enroll their children into public schools.

Educating all refugees is a massive challenge to public education

In addition to political and economic considerations, the Government of Lebanon is limited by the state of its own public education system. Before the influx of displaced Syrian as well as Palestinian and Iraqi children, the MEHE was facing challenges in delivering education to children in Lebanon. While this report does not study the Lebanese education system at length, there are two crucial challenges that provide context to the country's educational sector – a high number of out-of-school Lebanese children and a low quality of education.

The RACE strategy commits the MEHE along with its partners to provide quality formal and non-formal educational (NFE) opportunities to 470,000 school-age children from Syria as well as underprivileged Lebanese children by 2016 (Government of Lebanon, 2014). Of this total, 200,000 Syrian children will gain access to public schools while the remaining will access other non-formal education opportunities. In addition to extending education, RACE seeks to improve the quality of learning and teaching with the goal of bolstering the national educational system.

Before the crisis, net enrollment rates were 91% and 70% at the primary and secondary levels, respectively. Despite a significant improvement in the number of out-of-school children at the primary level, from 52,000 in 2006 to 18,000 in 2012, the number of out-of-school adolescents at the secondary level increased from 40,000 to 50,000 during the same period (UNESCO, various years). And, learning outcomes were not meeting international standards. In 2012, Lebanon ranked 25th among 63 countries in mathematics and 39th in science, performing below the international average in both subjects (TIMSS, 2011).

Providing access to education for all registered refugee children poses significant challenges to the MEHE. The RACE strategy calls for integration of out-of-school children into public schools, yet public schools provide less than 30% of education in Lebanon, a share that has been dropping over the past decade (CERD, various years). The majority of Lebanese families enroll their children in private and semi-private schools, while schools run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provide education to Palestinian children. The quality of public education is of particular concern, as public school students score significantly lower than their private school peers (MEHE, 2010).

Although an official assessment has not yet been carried out, partners cite differences in language proficiency, class sizes and lack of teacher preparedness as key challenges.

Part I

Progress and obstacles to achieving the RACE Strategy's goals

The overwhelming number of school-age children, the sociopolitical and economic implications for the Government of Lebanon, and the preexisting challenges of the public education sector are three important considerations that must be addressed in a revamped education response. Despite this challenging context, the Government of Lebanon has shown critical leadership and important progress has been made in enrolling registered refugee children in formal education. Yet, far too many children remain out of school with limited access to alternative educational opportunities.

A greater number of children are in school

With the introduction of the RACE strategy, more children have gained access to formal education. This school year, close to 110,000 Syrian school-age children (aged 3 to 18) will be enrolled in Lebanese public schools. This is a 21% increase, compared to the 2013/14 school year, due to more children entering public school in regular and second shifts.

First Shift: The MEHE opened 1,000 public schools to non-Lebanese students, enrolling them in regular sessions. While Syrian enrollment is capped at 50% of the classroom's student population, the MEHE authorized some schools in areas with high populations of registered refugees to exceed this limit. In more than 400 public schools, the majority are non-Lebanese students.

Second Shift: The MEHE doubled the number of public schools offering second shifts to 160. Consequently, student enrollment in second shifts also doubled, with Syrian children representing the vast majority of these students. Despite delays, more than 60,000 non-Lebanese students are anticipated to enroll in second shifts - afternoon sessions held at public schools follow the usual school days. Instruction in second shifts follows the Lebanese curriculum but in a slightly condensed form with mathematics and science taught in Arabic, rather than in French or English.

More Lebanese and Palestinian children are also gaining access to schools. Formal and NFE opportunities were extended to 33,000 underprivileged Lebanese children for the 2013/14 school year, totaling over \$4.6 million (Inter Agency Coordination Lebanon, 2015). Donors covered public school enrollment fees for more than 24,000 of these children and provided them with school supplies. Most of these children were already in school prior to receiving support.

UNRWA has also integrated 6,600 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) children into more than 60 schools across the country by increasing class sizes, raising pupil-to-teacher ratios, creating additional class sections, and opening second shifts in 8 schools (UNRWA, 2014b). For the 2013/14 school year, overall enrollment rate stood at 64%, more than double that of 2012/13.

Enrollment rates for the approximately 3,500 Iraqi children registered as refugees are not available.

Yet far too many children remain out of school

Despite enrolling more children in more Lebanese public schools, 400,000 Syrian children (3-18 years old) still remain out of school.[‡] While overall enrollment has increased from 18% to 21%, the current number of Syrian children without access to formal education remains largely unchanged from last year. Only one in five Syrian children are in Lebanese public schools. This is partly due to the increase in the population of Syrian school-age children, although these figures do not account for refugee children who entered private schools. According to the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), 78,000 Syrian children were enrolled in private schools in 2013/14.

Lack of progress for young children and adolescents

Progress in formal education has been limited to the primary level. Between the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, an additional 20,000 Syrian children aged 6 to 14 enrolled in public schools. This led to an increase in primary school enrollment rates, from 31 to 37%. However, with 1,000 fewer Syrian adolescents aged 15 to 18 enrolling in school this year compared to last year, the already low secondary school enrollment rate of 4% dropped to a staggering 2%. A very small number of children aged 3 to 5 are enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) in 2014/15. Table 1 provides a breakdown of Syrian children in formal education by age groups for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years.

400,000 Syrian children still remain out of school.

Table 1: Syrian refugee children enrolled in Lebanese public schools, 2013/14 to 2014/15

Age group	2013/14 School Year			2014/15 School Year		
	Total number	Number enrolled	Percentage enrolled	Total number	Number enrolled	Percentage enrolled
3-5 years	133,000	N/A	N/A	134,000	10,000	0%
6-14 years	280,000	87,000	31%	291,000	107,000	37%
15-18 years	81,000	3,000	4%	87,000	2,000	2%
6-18 years	361,000	90,000	25%	378,000	109,000	21%
3-18 years	494,000	92,000	19%	512,000	109,000	29%

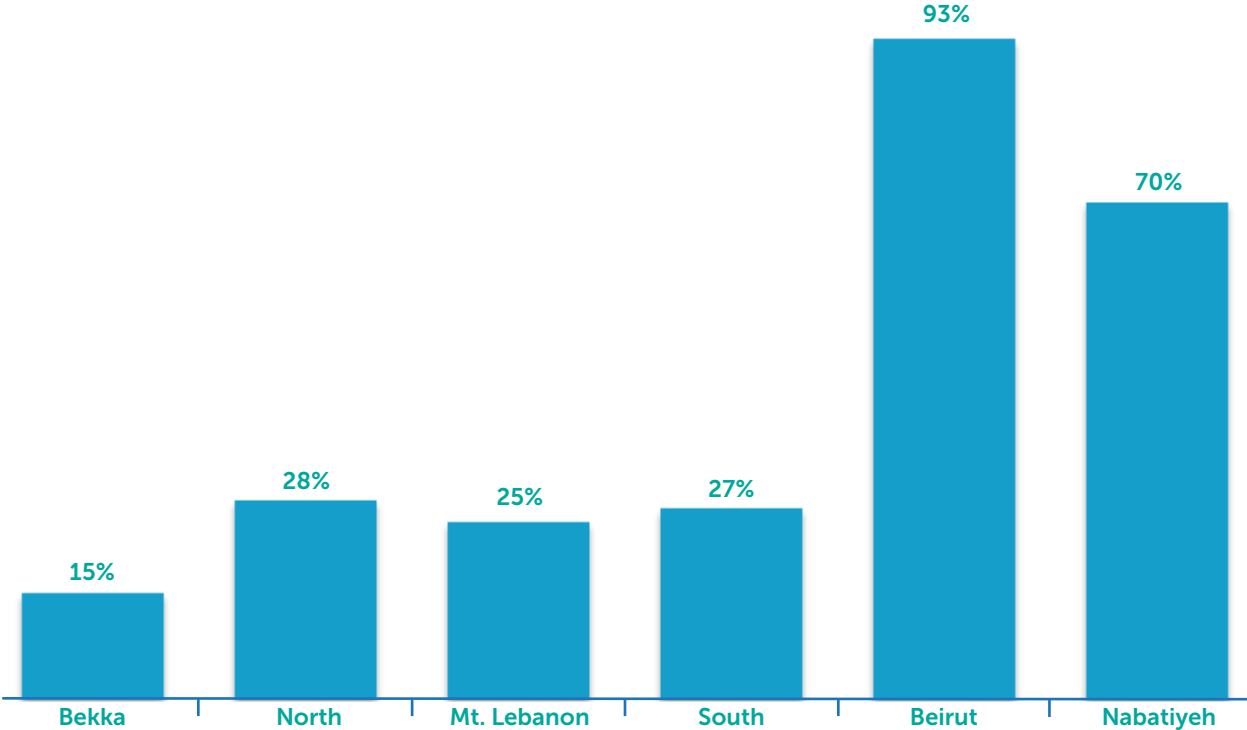
Note: Information for 2013/14 from Government of Lebanon (2015) and CERD 2014/15 from UN statistics

Reaching all Children in Lebanon: Opportunities for Action

Uneven access to education across governorates

There are significant differences in Syrian enrollment rates across Lebanon. Figure 1 depicts variation in enrollment rates across the six governorates, and Figure 2 maps the estimated number of out-of-school Syrian children in Lebanon. In urban areas, families have slightly more livelihood opportunities, and their children are more likely to attend public schools. In remote and rural areas, access to public schools is more difficult, even with provision of transportation. Attendance and enrollment are also affected by the seasonality of work, the terrain, and community dynamics.

Figure 1: Enrollment rates for Syrian refugee children in Lebanese public schools, 2014/15



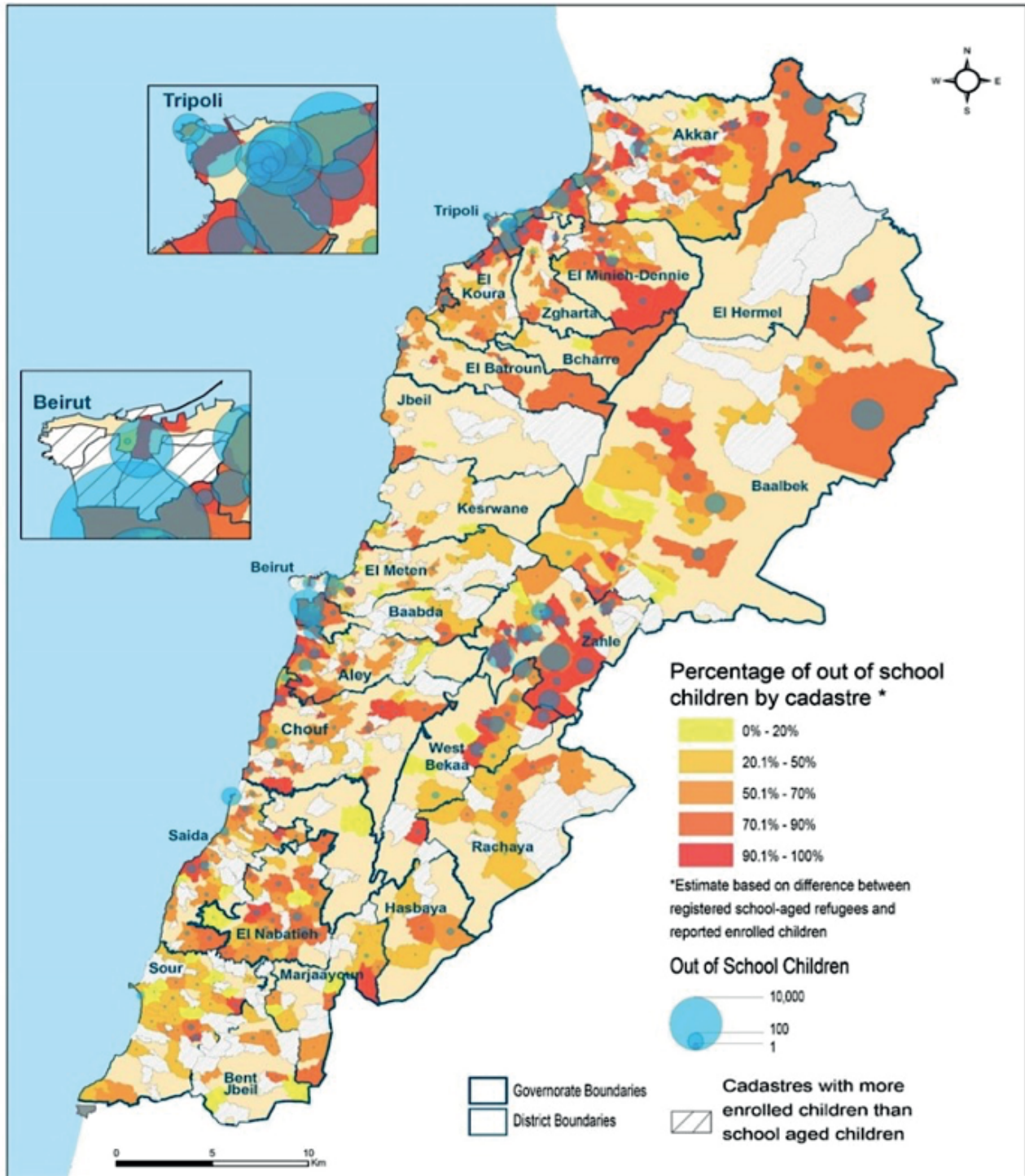
For children in school, learning has not been assessed

There has been limited progress in improving the quality of public education in Lebanon.

2,500 Lebanese teachers have benefited from professional development (Government of Lebanon, 2015). And, a grant by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) made it possible for all children in Lebanese public schools to have access to grade-specific learning materials (DFID, 2014).

While teaching and learning materials have been distributed, there is no available assessment on learning outcomes. The RACE strategy, however, calls for a monitoring and evaluating system to assess the public education system. This monitoring is particularly urgent given concerns over the quality of learning. Poor learning outcomes may be the main contributor to low retention rates. Dropout rates among Syrian children were as high as 70% for the 2011/12 school year (Shuayb et al., 2014).

Figure 2: Estimated percentage of out-of school Syrian children by geographic region, 2014



Note: From UNHCR (2014)

Part II

Immediate opportunities for accelerating progress in time for the upcoming school year

Forming a “delivery and financing pact” between the Government of Lebanon and the international community to improve delivery capacity, meet targets and ensure predictable financing could lead to educational opportunity for hundreds of thousands of children in a matter of months. Consultations with the MEHE and its partners in Lebanon point to the importance they attach to the collective effort made to achieve the progress to date. Partners have identified seven opportunities to accelerate progress rapidly and in time for the upcoming 2015/16 school year.

OPPORTUNITY 1: Bolster MEHE’s capacity to lead the education response by rallying behind the establishment of a dedicated Program Management Unit (PMU)

Partners are rallying behind the establishment of the Program Management Unit (PMU) dedicated to overseeing, coordinating, and managing RACE. In 2014, MEHE began leading the response to extend access to education for registered refugee children. Donors and NGO partners are now looking to the MEHE for direction to align their activities and resources in accordance with governmental priorities. Stakeholders have welcomed MEHE’s leadership and are ready to provide the financial and technical support to bolster the MEHE’s capacity.

The PMU will provide the MEHE and the RACE Executive Committee (REC) with technical, organizational, implementation and quality assurance support for all programs and projects under RACE. PMU staff will include MEHE personnel as well as a range of technical specialists and educational experts seconded from partners. Donors have committed to fund all 24 positions under RACE.

Additional support will be needed in the form of technical expertise for high priorities such as monitoring and evaluation – a responsibility that requires expanded capacity. Leading RACE has been unsurprisingly demanding for MEHE. Partners, under pressure to deliver on their financial commitments, have been pressuring the Ministry to speed up its response rate. The establishment of the PMU will help. The Minister of Education’s personal assurance to partners that MEHE will accord the highest level of priority to facilitating a more successful response for the coming school year is reassuring. Establishing an accountability framework with clear key performance indicators for all partners, including a clear and updated work plan with monthly targets for the school year will promote greater accountability and transparency among partners.

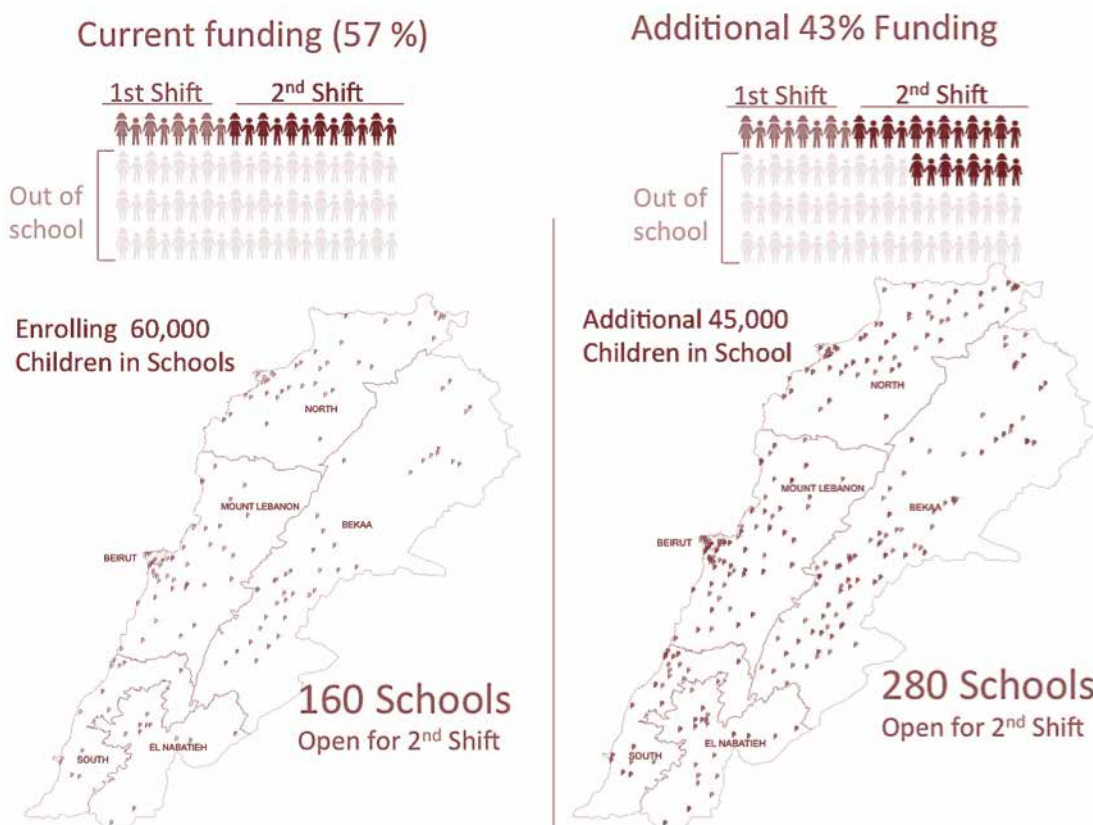
OPPORTUNITY 2: Secure funding to scale-up quickly the formal education enrollment response

Despite substantial support from a small number of donors, total financial support for refugee education in Lebanon has consistently fallen short. The RACE strategy estimated costs at \$177.2 million to meet 2014 targets and \$191.3 million for 2015. The Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) increases the 2015 appeal to \$263 million, with the majority of the funds (\$231 million) directed towards increasing access to education (Government of Lebanon, 2015). The 2016 target ranges from \$255 million to \$280 million.

According to the MEHE, donors have only met 57% of the education appeal for the 2014/2015 school year. Members of the Ministry view the lack of finances as the main challenge to the implementation of the RACE strategy. The additional 43% would allow the MEHE to open another 120 public schools for afternoon sessions and increase enrollment by 45,000. Doubling the current funding would double the number of second-shift schools, extending access to another 60,000 children, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

Donors have met only 57% of the education appeal for 2014/15 school year.

Figure 3:



Note: From MEHE 2015

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Equally important to donors pledging immediate funding to close the current gap of \$163 million is making multi-year commitments that match the school year cycle and enable MEHE and partners to plan properly. A larger number of donors must shoulder the burden. Two-thirds of funds received by UNICEF for its education programs came from only two donors - Germany and the European Union (EU). And, the vast majority (93%) of UNHCR's \$69.7 million education funds between 2012 and 2015 came from one donor - the EU. The EU has contributed \$111 million to education interventions. Table 2 lists UNICEF's education donors between 2013 and 2015.

In addition to the Regional Response Plan (RRP) which channels funding to UN agencies, donors have started to pool their funding through the Lebanon Syrian Crisis Trust Fund (LSCTF), a multi-donor trust fund managed by the World Bank, and the EU is expected to begin to administer its own fund in 2015. So far, DFID has provided \$73 million for education, which includes \$31 million to the Emergency Education System Stabilisation Programme via the LSCTF, which will begin disbursing funds to the government this year. Each of these mechanisms promotes a different approach to supporting RACE and creates an added level of complication to financial reporting and accountability against its targets. Despite the flexibility having multiple mechanisms offers, a few donors continue to prefer to provide funding for their own initiatives, channeling funding away from the Government of Lebanon. Some donors, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), prefer to channel financing to long-standing operational partners. Although having multiple financial mechanisms allows for greater flexibility to attract funds, partners are concerned about competition for funding, coordination and the high administrative costs resulting from having multiple mechanisms. A comparative assessment of the benefits of all mechanisms would assist the Government of Lebanon and donors in establishing stronger accountability and coherence.

Table 2: UNICEF Education Donors 2013-15

Country	Total (USD)
Germany	57,670,154
European Union	30,292,222
Canada	13,167,420
United States*	10,279,765
Finland	6,684,492
Denmark	4,226,480
Australia	4,174,397
Netherlands	3,592,099
United Kingdom	2,640,200
Kuwait	2,464,939
Norway	1,980,198
Italy	1,914,439
Switzerland	551,268
Japan	321,244
Estonia	135,685
TOTAL	140,095,002

Note: UNICEF data. * includes U.S. Fund for UNICEF and State Department's PRM.

OPPORTUNITY 3: Reduce the cost of getting children into formal school

The high marginal cost of enrolling children into public schools, particularly for the second-shift, is a deterrent for some potential donors and a growing concern for existing donors. Revisiting the budgeting approach of RACE could be helpful in increasing the confidence of donors and enabling more donors to contribute.

The MEHE calculated the cost of enrollment in first shift as \$363 per pupil, \$60 of which is a parental committee fee and \$100 is a school fee. \$100 of this cost is a provision for the depreciation of educational infrastructure and associated facilities, allocated to the schools for future maintenance and rehabilitation. The cost of enrolling a second-shift student is \$600. This total combines the same running costs with contributions to the salaries for school

directors, administrative staff, and teachers who must work additional hours, but many donors find this figure to be too high. For example, several donors perceive the allocation for school maintenance as an overestimation of the real marginal cost associated with each child using public school facilities.

Rather than focusing on only reducing the cost per child in public school, it would be more effective to adopt a program-based budget. The program-based budget should be informed by the World Bank's upcoming public expenditure review of education in Lebanon. NFE programs should also have to undergo the same level of financial scrutiny and follow a similar budgeting approach.

While reducing the cost of education is a priority for donors, donor funding must aim to eliminate the financial barriers for children to enroll in school. One of the biggest issues preventing children from enrolling in schools is the cost of transportation from home to school, particularly for the 120,000 Syrian children living in informal settlements (UNICEF, 2015b). More donors should cover the cost of transportation, textbooks and stationary supplies.

OPPORTUNITY 4: Remove administrative and policy barriers to enrollment

In addition to eliminating financial barriers, removing the administrative barriers preventing refugee children from accessing formal education in Lebanon is essential (UNHCR, 2014). In order to register for public schools, Syrian children must provide proof of identity and educational records. Proof of prior school along with recent transcripts allows Syrian children to enter schools at the commensurate grade level. Without transcripts, they cannot receive certification for their education. The MEHE offers some exceptions to Syrian children at the official exam grade levels (grades 9 and 12), provided that they produce the required documentation to receive the results of the exam. Children whose families are not able to return to Syria or whose schools are not able to generate the proof they require (a common challenge for refugees around the world) are denied certification of their education. Easing of these restrictions while exploring alternative methods for certifying refugee education in Lebanon and the region is essential to guarantee access to education and assure that this education is recognized.

While addressing the issues of refugee registration requires political support, other administrative issues could be resolved by MEHE. The ministerial and school-level delays in releasing circulars with instructions on registration and enrollment are of great concern to all partners. These delays made it difficult for refugee children to begin this school year on time.

Second-shifts only began recently, resulting in Syrian children missing the majority of the current school year. These delays should not be repeated in the next school year. The MEHE has recently assured the REC it will develop a rolling plan on operational issues to address these types of concerns and ensure the timely entry of all school children in the next school year.

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OPPORTUNITY 5: Strengthen pathways to, and retention in, formal schooling

RACE was developed around the goal of maximizing the number of children who are able to enter formal education and complete it successfully. Two programs – accelerated learning programs (ALPs) and remedial learning programs (RLPs) – must be scaled up rapidly to quickly enable more children to transition to and succeed in formal schooling.

ALPs are designed to help children and youth complete basic education requirements in a reduced period of time in order to prepare them for formal education, using a condensed form of the Lebanese curriculum. Older children and adolescents who have not been in school for more than 2 years but have basic literacy and numeracy skills benefit from these programs.

The Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), with support from the MEHE and UNICEF, has recently finished developing the ALP curriculum, expected to start shortly with a cohort of 10,000 children. The MEHE cites lack of funding as the primary reason for not providing ALP to a larger number of children. Another barrier is the limited capacity of MEHE to deliver without support from NGOs, however the MEHE has been reluctant to engage NGOs as it seeks to create more accountability and provide more oversight on the NFE sector. Some local NGOs, such as Ana Aqra Association, already have a long-standing relationship with MEHE and could deliver quality programs at a bigger scale. These NGOs should be tasked with scaling up access to ALPs and RLPs quickly to enable them to roll out in time for the next school year.

Case Study: A local Lebanese NGO provides NFE to Syrian children

Ana Aqra Association (officially known as Iqra' Association) is one of many local actors providing educational opportunities for Syrian children. Founded in 1994, the Lebanese non-profit, non-governmental organization aims to improve the reading skills of children while also engaging teachers, parents, and community members in the process. The organization works closely with the MEHE to advance literacy and integrate reading into the public curriculum in Lebanese elementary schools. In 2010, Ana Aqra expanded its existing work to include an NFE program to meet the educational needs of Syrian children. Implemented in the Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, the South, and the North, the program serves as a bridge to formal schooling while also raising the quality of teaching and learning. Over the past three years, Ana Aqra's program responded to the needs of 15,000 out-of-school Syrian and 5,000 Lebanese children. It also improved class management skills and teaching practices of 700 educators.

While some out-of-school children need support to prepare for entry into public schools in Lebanon, most refugee children need remedial support to cope with the differences between the Lebanese and the Syrian curriculum, especially the language of instruction. Whereas education in Syria is taught fully in Arabic, Lebanese public schools begin teaching core subjects in French or English after grade 7. The language barrier remains a huge issue affecting Syrian children. Lack of adequate language support leads to low retention rates. The MEHE has loosened language restrictions to allow students to answer official exam questions in Arabic. However, increased flexibility in the curriculum coupled with remedial education and language support is needed to ensure that Syrian children continue to attend schools.

RLPs can reduce the exceptionally high number of children who are dropping out of public school. In 2011/12 alone, the dropout rate of Syrian children reached 70% (Shuayb et al., 2014). Failure rates among Syrian children are also twice the national average of local students. NGOs that provide education support to public school students, including remedial learning programs and homework clubs, could be tapped to scale up their programs as an urgent priority.

In 2011/12 the dropout rate of Syrian children reached 70%.

OPPORTUNITY 6: Increase early learning and secondary education

While progress has been made towards getting more children into public schools, two age cohorts are at great risk of remaining out-of-school: young children (aged 3 to 6) and adolescents (aged 15 to 18). The MEHE and donors should pay urgent attention to scaling up learning opportunities for both these cohorts in the next school year.

Increasing access to early childhood education (ECE) would be an investment with high returns in the form of improving the readiness of young children for primary school and reducing the future cost of remedial education. Supporting secondary education is essential to reducing the impact of the Syrian conflict on adolescents and on Lebanon. With barely any progress made in secondary school enrollments, 87,000 adolescents refugees are likely to become disenfranchised youth in Lebanon.

The Minister of Education has signaled an openness to increase access to young children. To scale up provision quickly, the MEHE should work with NGOs who have the capacity and can support MEHE in facilitating the transition of young children and adolescents successfully to formal education.

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OPPORTUNITY 7: Make schools safe for all children

Addressing violence and bullying in schools is critical to securing education for all children. The MEHE and partners have made a commitment to address child protection issues within education. UNICEF is seconding a child protection officer to MEHE, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) will be rolling out a safe schools initiative in Bekaa. More support is needed for the MEHE in developing strong child protection policies and programs for Lebanese and refugee students.

In Lebanon, many students face verbal and physical harassment from teachers and other students in public schools. This is especially a problem for older children placed in classrooms with younger students (UNHCR, 2014). Bullying and mistreatment of refugee children in host countries is also a common phenomenon that could result in low retention rates. 30% of young male PRS students reported alarming rates of bullying as the main reason preventing them from attending school (UNRWA, 2014a). Some Syrian students drop out of Lebanese public schools and enroll in NFE so as to avoid daily harassment (Shuayb et al., 2014).

A host of other barriers revolve around issues of safety, particularly for children returning at night from second-shift schools. Some of these children have to walk several kilometers from school to home. Offering free or subsidized transportation, opening more public schools in high density areas, and targeting awareness programs are essential to continue to help alleviate safety concerns of children and parents.

Part III

Medium-Term Considerations for Revising the RACE Strategy

The previous section highlights seven operational recommendations that could rapidly expand the delivery of quality education for thousands of children in time for the start of the new school year. But as the RACE strategy will end in 2016, the experience of implementing RACE thus far lends insight into potential medium-term goals. It also raises broader questions for considerations by the MEHE and the international community in new RACE revisions moving forward. Some of the issues posed below as medium-term considerations may serve as contributions to the discussions around revising RACE.

First, the urgency to roll out RACE focused partners' efforts on access to education, with considerably less emphasis on the quality of education. The high dropout rate among Syrian students suggests they have not been able to cope without remedial education and academic support. A greater emphasis on improving learning outcomes would result in higher retention rates and contribute to a stronger public education system. More support is needed for training more teachers on student-centered pedagogy and assessment and for implementing monitoring and evaluation measures. What are the most cost-effective ways to scale up teacher training? How could rapid assessments of in-classroom teaching and learning help inform RACE programming and improve short-term learning outcomes? How could RACE partners help support a quality assurance framework for the MEHE to improve overall quality in education in Lebanon? How could implementing an Education Management Information System (EMIS) help generate the data necessary to improve learning outcomes?

Second, in assessing progress on the RACE strategy to date, it has become evident that opening schools is not a fullproof strategy for reaching all out-of-school children. Many children are not able to attend school due to poverty, safety concerns, or lack of support. A detailed mapping of out-of-school children and an analysis of the obstacles that hinder their enrollment and retention is needed. Over 200,000 children are trapped in child labor in Lebanon. Without targeted programs, child laborers and other vulnerable children will not enroll in school. What type of NFE programs could be developed to support the most vulnerable children who are unlikely to enter formal education? How could stronger parent and community engagement lead to better outreach to vulnerable children and their families? What type of incentives could be utilized to increase the enrollment of refugee and Lebanese children from low income households? Would lessons learned from utilizing conditional cash transfers (or e-cards) for other goods and services be beneficial for the education sector?

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Third, the constant state of crisis has allowed little time to reflect on how RACE could benefit from research and innovation. Some of the challenges Lebanon faces in educating a refugee population are common to other countries in the region and abroad. Investing in research focused on studying relevant strategies as well as sharing lessons learned among countries affected by the Syrian crisis could be beneficial. How might research help generate better strategies to delivering education in Lebanon? How could technology support better learning outcomes? Could RACE tap local expertise more effectively to achieve greater impact? How could research help identify existing quality education programs with potential for scale? And, how might global refugee and fragile state education policies and practices be better informed by the experiences of Lebanon and Syrian refugees?

Fourth, absorbing all refugee children into Lebanon's public education system could be debilitating to a system that is already challenged. A revised RACE strategy must evaluate the long-term implications for public education and the potential for further reductions in the number of Lebanese public school students. Might private schools, which deliver 70% of education in Lebanon, have a responsibility to share the burden of absorbing children who cannot afford their entry fees? What has been the experience of private schools in supporting education for underprivileged Lebanese and refugee children? Are there good practices to draw upon? What guiding principles and monitoring mechanisms would need to be put in place in order to engage private schools? Would there be support for school vouchers?

Fifth, one of the obstacles in achieving greater progress on RACE has been securing funds beyond a core group of traditional donors. In addition to seeking increased financial support from more donors, partners in Lebanon might consider ways in which they might engage non-traditional donors. The private sector has been minimally involved in supporting the refugee education in Lebanon and the region. Corporations and their foundations are often deterred by the challenge of determining where to invest and how to maneuver a complex set of issues they are not well positioned to manage. How could the experiences of companies currently supporting efforts in Lebanon and other neighboring countries, such as Jordan, provide useful insight? Could the Global Business Coalition for Education model be applied to create a regionally focused business task force to explore the role and mechanisms for engaging responsible businesses in Lebanon?

Sixth, as the Syrian conflict enters its fifth year, there is no sign of peace on the horizon. The ramifications for Lebanon and its education system will be felt well beyond the next several years as the humanitarian crisis gives way to a longer-term development challenge. Growing evidence from education experiences in fragile states indicates a need for a new type of response by the international community that supports mitigating risk and building resilience (Winthrop and Matsui, 2013). How could Lebanon and the international community begin to build a shared vision around mitigating the risks for Lebanon's education system and building its resilience? What would be the benefits to Lebanon's future sector education from applying a resiliency lens?

Seventh, the scale and magnitude of the refugee crisis in Lebanon and the region has contributed to bring education in fragile states more sharply into focus. As the international community finalizes the post-2015 education goals, it has brought about an even greater imperative to build a more effective global architecture to respond to the needs of conflict-affected out-of-school children. The MEHE and its partners have an opportunity to help shape this architecture so that it may be more responsive to its needs. What lessons could the international community learn from Lebanon’s experience through RACE? Are there changes in the global financial architecture that would help MEHE in leveraging longer-term planning and innovation? Could a new global humanitarian fund for education in emergencies provide more streamlined and less ad-hoc funding for the MEHE?

Conclusion

The opportunities presented in this report suggest that achieving better education results for Lebanese and refugee children are well within reach. The current RACE has served the MEHE and its partners well. It provided an opportunity to coordinate efforts and work towards defined targets. The progress made under RACE was achieved despite considerable challenges, many of which can be overcome with the continued goodwill of all partners, the leadership of MEHE and more financial support from the international community. The seven opportunities presented in this paper could serve as the basis for a “delivery and financing pact” between the Government of Lebanon and the international community to improve delivery capacity, meet targets and ensure predictable financing, in the final stretch of the RACE strategy. Moreover, lessons from the RACE experience can provide insights into the conversations about the revision of the RACE strategy for future years. The continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon and the international community to work together to prioritize education will have positive spillover effects on the Syrian refugee population but also the host communities and region for years to come.

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‡Data not available to verify how many children are enrolled in private or other education arrangements.

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