

The Obstacle Course: Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon

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Executive summary and key recommendations

In 2014 the Government of Lebanon, with the support of the international community, set out an ambition to ensure that all refugee children aged 3-18 would have access to quality education. Six years later, however, **the challenges to fulfil the right to education for refugee children in Lebanon remain massive, with 58% of children out of school.** In 2019, building on NRC's extensive programme experience as an education provider for Syrian refugee children, the organisation conducted in depth and extensive qualitative and quantitative research to better understand these challenges.

The research carried out by NRC' shows that the vast majority of Syrians in Lebanon, **both parents and children, see the value in education.** 52% of all surveyed children who are currently out of learning, have never learned in a formal or non-formal programme, both certified and non-certified. This means that over half of out-of-learning children have never learned in a structured environment since they arrived in Lebanon.

NRC's research identified a number of **structural barriers** to school enrolment, which children and parents cannot address themselves. These include financial constraints, class capacity and real and perceived administrative obstacles. Prior denial of access to schooling is another significant barrier. Finally, boys and girls faced their own specific obstacles, with girls more likely to report transport, care requirements and timing of second shifts, and boys referring to the need to work to support the family.

Refugees experience in schools also affected whether they stayed in school or dropped out. Children and parents often cited bullying and violence in public schools as contributing to dropping out, as well as problems with learning the Lebanese curriculum. Parents facing these difficulties found themselves torn between choosing a non-formal and non-recognised Syrian education programme, which some believe is a safer environment for their children, or opting for a learning environment that provides a school certificate.

The majority of children were not aware that there are organisations who can support them in pursuing their education. The fact that 60% of children currently out of learning stated they would register again 'if they could' (66% of out-learning-children think they cannot), shows the potential and the need for education actors to (re)engage with out-of-learning children and their families.

The main barriers to both school enrolment and retention are capacity issues and the **high costs associated with attendance, including for transportation.** With one fifth of the surveyed students stated that they had dropped out of school *during* the school year, NRC's research confirms the need for continued financial support to cover education costs.

Conversely, there are a **number of actions which are likely to influence school retention positively**, based on the conversations with children, parents and education actors. These relate mostly to the quality of education services, including child protection, learning support, constructive engagement with parents, certification, and the extent to which families engaged with Lebanese host communities.

The **impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic, combined with the ongoing economic crisis** in Lebanon is leading to new educational challenges and the exacerbation of pre-existing barriers. At the time of writing, there is uncertainty about access to education for Syrian out-of-learning children and the ability for Syrian students to return to school in fall 2020.

In order to meet the ambition to have all Syrian children in education, the complex interplay of factors influencing Syrian refugee decision-making on education must be recognised and acted upon. Action should be taken to address the **structural challenges in the education sector**, as well as **the specific enabling and blocking factors that need to be considered at the level of the household**.

Key recommendations

To the Government of Lebanon:

1. Support teachers' professional development so they can address psychosocial needs of non-Lebanese students.
2. Ensure School Directors have a common understanding and are compliant with MEHE's Standard Operating Procedures for enrolment of non-Lebanese children in public schools.
3. Ensure School Directors are compliant with MEHE's child protection policy to deal with violence in schools.
4. Review and adapt MEHE registration policies for non-Lebanese to attend the first shift and prioritising girls who have higher real and perceived safety threats on their way home from school.
5. Increase the involvement of non-Lebanese parents in the school community.
6. Where there are shortages in absorption capacity, adapt appropriate unused buildings to construct temporary public school buildings on public domain lands.

To donors to the education sector:

7. Retain and expand predictable and multi-year funding for: transportation costs and school/class capacity as well as teachers' professional development.
8. Encourage and support the MEHE, municipalities and other parts of the government of Lebanon to make the necessary policy changes required to increase enrolment and ensure retention of non-Lebanese children in public school.

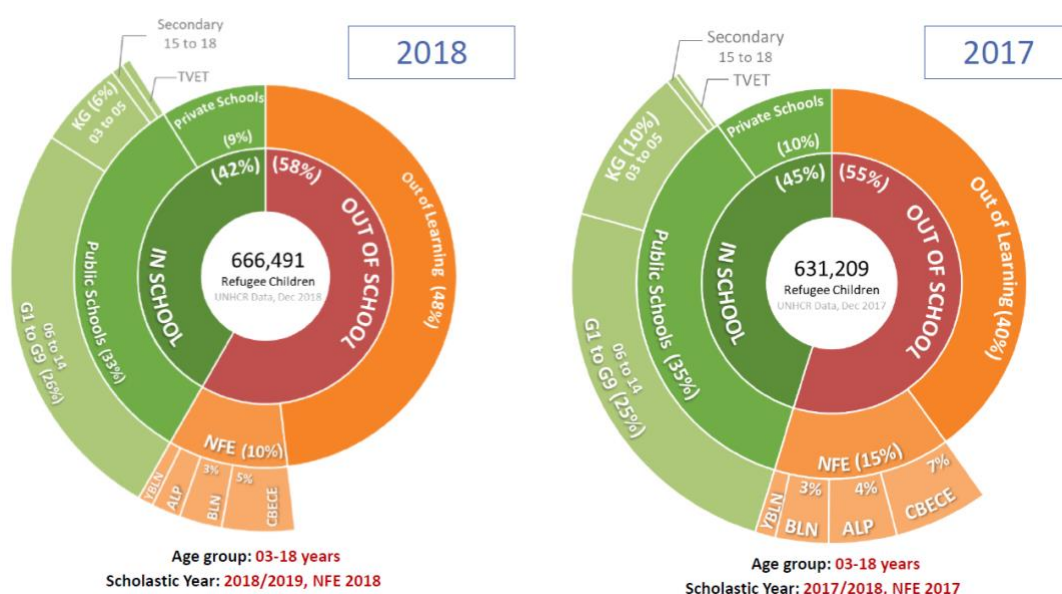
To education NGOs and the education sector:

9. Prioritise targeting of children who have never learned in a structured environment since they arrived in Lebanon.
10. Support children who work through ensuring programme timings are flexible.
11. Ensure enrolment barrier tracking and follow-up mechanisms are functioning, active and responsive.
12. Launch a broad outreach campaign to ensure all children are aware of learning opportunities and supporting interventions (e.g. transportation).

Background

Nine years into the Syria crisis, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) estimates that the country hosts 1.5 million of the 6.7 million Syrians who have fled the conflict since 2011 (including 910,256 registered with UNHCR as of end of January 2020). The Syrian refugee population in Lebanon remains the largest concentration of refugees per capita in the world.

Of the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, over half (53%) are under 18 years old.¹ UN data for the **2018-19 school year estimates that 58% of children age 3-18 (331,020) are out of school, out of which 36% (138,459) of compulsory school-aged children (age 6-14) are out of learning** – defined as not in any form of government-recognised formal or non-formal education.²



In February 2016, in its Statement of Intent at the London Conference, the GoL laid out a plan to ensure that all refugee children aged 3-18 would have access to quality education. In an effort to fulfil the right to education for the high number of vulnerable children in Lebanon, in 2014 the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) launched the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) response.³ This plan includes the establishment of a second shift of classes in the afternoon at 346 public schools that offer formal education, mainly for Syrian refugees, and

¹ Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR 2019) [hereinafter VASyR 2019], p. 24.

² UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF) and PASC Working Group, "Out-of-School-Children Mapping and Profiling 18-19," presentation, March 2019, Slides 5-7. The VASyR 2019 findings are considered complementary (given the different sampling method). These show that participation in organized learning, which is the percentage of children between 3 and 5 years of age who were attending an early education programme, slightly decreased from 16% in 2018 to 13% in 2019. As for children between 6 and 14 years of age, enrollment remains stable at 69%. The percentage of children between 15 and 17 year of age in school remained at 22%. The enrollment rate for children between 6 and 14 years of age (69%) drops to 44% when children have a disability. While this research has not looked into specific challenges for this vulnerable group of children, the education sector acknowledges that children with disabilities continue to face considerable barriers accessing education opportunities. Note: due to the school closures in fall 2019 as a result of political and economic crises, the 2019/2020 enrolment figures have not been officially shared by MEHE.

³ Lebanon's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2016, May 25). Reaching All Children with Education: Lebanon's national education response strategy to the Syria crisis. Retrieved from <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2016/05/25/reaching-all-children-with-education-lebanons-national-education-response-strategy-to-the-syria-crisis/>

60 schools offering the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP⁴).⁵ To a large extent dependent on international funding, the MEHE's strategy is one of the few ministerial plans responding to the needs of Syrian refugees while including them within the public service delivery system.⁶

The education sector in Lebanon brings together national and international NGOs which support children out of learning transition into formal education with Non-Formal Education (NFE) programmes. Under this framework, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) provides Community-Based Early Childhood Education (CB-ECE), Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) and Retention Support.

Methodology

This paper is based on research commissioned by NRC in January 2019.⁷ For the qualitative assessment, a total of **32 focus group discussions were organised with children** (age brackets 6-8, 9-12 and 13-18) **and parents** in addition to **32 in-depth interviews with boys and girls** between the age of 13 to 18, including students/non-students and children out of learning. The term 'non-students' refers to children who are engaged in learning in a structured manner, but are not attending formal school. This includes children who are attending both certified and non-certified non-formal education programmes. Finally, a total of **15 key informant interviews and 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with educators, parents, NGO and UN representatives.**

For the quantitative component of the research, **443 children between the age of 10 to 18 were surveyed.** This included students (120), non-students (97), and children out of learning (226). Approximately two-thirds of these children live in rural areas, with one-third living in urban areas.

The data covers the eight governorates in Lebanon: North Lebanon, Akkar, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, Baalbek-Hermel, Nabatieh, and South Lebanon. The selection of communities was based primarily on concentration levels of Syrian refugee populations and the need for a balanced sample from including informal tented settlements, formal neighbourhoods, rural areas, urban areas, and schools that provide afternoon shifts.⁸

Structural obstacles to school enrolment

1. Financial pressure

The findings of the survey conducted with the 226 **children that are completely out of learning** confirms primarily the **importance of family finances, both in terms of enrolment and retention.**

⁴ The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) has been developed by the Center for Education Research and Development – CERD under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education – MEHE to provide education for out of school children and accelerate their entry into the regular national curriculum in Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/qa-education-accelerated-learning-programme-out-school-children>

⁵ Minutes of National Education Partners Meeting, 1 February 2019)

⁶ Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. January 2020. "Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities." Research report: <http://dsp-syria.org/addressing-protracted-displacement-lebanon>

⁷ The consultancy firm Research & Management Team (RM) created the tools, collected the data and provided a preliminary data analysis. NRC's Monitoring and Evaluation team revised the tools and analysed the full data set.

⁸ While the sample size for both the survey and the qualitative assessment is appropriate for the research at hand, the representativeness of the findings for the overall refugee population in Lebanon cannot be confirmed.

Despite a clear desire to learn (score of 3.9/5) and support from parents (77%), 78% of all out-of-learning children cannot go to school because of financial challenges. 60% of children out of learning have worked at some point since they arrived in Lebanon. Of the children who are currently out of learning but have been in learning at some point in Lebanon, 62% state they dropped out for financial reasons.

It is also a constant concern for children who are in learning and their parents. During the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted by NRC, both children and parents expressed concerns about potentially losing access to school if at some point they would not be able anymore to pay the bills at home.⁹

The focus group discussions conducted for this research show that **families also factor in costs unrelated to schooling when they decide to deprioritise education** for financial reasons. These costs include electricity, water, rent and health expenditures and the opportunity cost of going to school (i.e. most likely not being able to bring in income for the family).¹⁰ The **conversations with parents and children confirm the stigma of child labor, and recognise the negative impact of work on education.**



Shaimaa is one of NRC's education officers in the Bekaa valley. She supports her students and makes sure they feel comfortable in the Non-Formal Education centre. Photo: Nadine Malli/NRC

"Financial problems is what makes all children leave the school. I fear being unable to pay the rent and having to leave school."

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old female students and non-students, Tal Abbass, Akkar Governorate, 18/1/2019.

⁹ Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old girls out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 16/1/2019.

¹⁰ Focus group discussion with parents, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 16/01/2019.

Out of the different types of education costs (refer to Annex I) transportation costs was the most-cited one in the NRC research. This confirms the findings from other assessments conducted in 2019 in Lebanon.¹¹

"Transportation costs and financial difficulties more generally force students to drop out of school to find a job and support their families."

NGO Programme Director, Marjaayoun, Nabatieh Governorate, 30/01/2019.

"Parents want to register their children in school, but they cannot pay for it."

NGO Education Support Coordinator and math teacher, Beirut, 17/01/2019.

"I have four school-aged children, but I only send two of them because I can't afford the bus fees."

Focus group discussion with parents in Minieh Dinnieh, North governorate 18/01/2019

2. Prior denial of access to schooling

Out of the 226 children NRC surveyed who are currently out of learning, 38% have been denied access to school *at least* once. While this information is only based on what the interviewees said¹², the **chilling effect of the real or perceived denial from accessing school, can be significant**. 66% of children out of learning think they do not have the possibility to register again, and 60% says they would register again if they could, implying that they think that they cannot enrol.

Furthermore, the findings of the survey show that **a child who has been denied enrolment previously is almost three times more likely to be out of learning than a child who has never been denied schooling**. There is also a negative relationship with siblings having been denied access previously. Out of the 443 children surveyed, 29% had *at least once* been denied access to school. Only about a quarter of those students sought help. The survey also demonstrated a **concerning low level of awareness about available support from aid organisations** in this regard. Three-quarters of the total 443 children surveyed think there are no organisations who can support them with schooling.

¹¹ Out of School Children Mapping and Profiling 2018-2019 done by UNICEF, UNHCR & UNESCO, March 2019, with transportation support found to be the first key barrier for 27% of 3-5 years old and 37% of 6-14 years old; VASyR 2019: the main reason for not being enrolled in school for 6-14 years old is inability to afford transportation (13%).

¹² Follow-up on enrolment denials is done through UNICEF's 'Education Registration Complaints Mechanism' or bilaterally with MEHE Race II PMU. The objective of the quantitative and qualitative data collection conducted for the research at hand, was to capture both real and perceived barriers without investigating individual cases of enrolment denial. Moreover, these cases might have occurred over the course of several years.

"I didn't even try to enrol in school. I don't know if they would accept me or not. It's enough for me to know how to read and write."

"I tried to register in the public school, but I was not accepted. I was told there was only a spot for one student."

"I tried to register in a public school but I was told that I'm not allowed to go to public school. We were not able to pay the fees for a private school."

Focus group discussions with 13-18-year-old girls out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 16/01/2019.

"I want my son to be in public school, but every time I try to register my son the principal asks for documents that I cannot possibly acquire."

3. Specific challenges for boys and girls

While the proportion of girls enrolled in schools in Lebanon remained almost equal to that of boys, NRCs qualitative assessment demonstrated that certain decisions regarding school enrolment or dropout are different for boys and girls.

Which factor eventually results in school dropout also depends on the gender of the student, according to the survey findings. **Boys are more likely to drop out because of financial reasons or because they need to work to support the family, while girls are more likely to drop out for issues related to transportation.**¹³

"I think my parents will not allow me to return to school next year because I'm a girl and it's dark when I'm walking back home. The same happened to my sister."

In-depth interview with 14-year-old female student (public school), Zahle, Bekaa Governorate, 20/01/2019

67% of the 443 children surveyed says they are expected to take care of their siblings. The percentage is higher amongst children out of learning (73%) than amongst the students (63%) and non-students (55%). Existing research on barriers to education for female and male Syrian youth in Lebanon, confirms that a significant education barrier for girls is that they have to stay at home to take care of their family.¹⁴

The NRC survey found that **an increase in number of siblings is associated with a decrease in likelihood of being in school, unless those siblings are going to school.** Having more siblings going to school is positively related to the child him/herself being in a certain form of learning.

¹³ Males make more mention of financial issues (55.4%) than females (35.5%) and the need to support their family financially (23.2% for males and 11.2% for females), while more females indicate transportation issues (27.4%) than males (8.9%).

¹⁴ "Barriers to education for female and male Syrian youth in Shatila and Bourj Al Barajneh", November 2017, Basmeh & Zeitooneh Relief & Development: <https://www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org/getpdf/b%26zengbarrierstoeducationforfemaleandmaleyouthinshatilaandbourjalbarajneh.pdf>



Design: Zaynab Mayladan / NRC

Another **specific obstacle to education for girls and young women it is that they are married or will get married soon**.¹⁵ According to the VASyR 2019, 27% of girls aged 15-19 were married at the time of the survey, almost the same as 2018 (29%).

“Another problem we have is that people care more about boys than girls. They allow boys to continue their education, but for girls it’s not important to learn. They just get married.”

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old girls out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 16/01/2019.

Almost half (46%) of the 443 children involved in the survey had to work at a certain point, out of which 35% working in agriculture. This sector involves tasks that are considered hazardous, dangerous, and unfit for children.¹⁶ 56% worked to support the family and the average number of years of work across the surveyed children was 2,35. These findings suggest a much higher rate of child labour than the 2,6% of children between 5 and 17 years old who are engaged in child labour according to the VASyR 2019. **Boys are still at higher risk of child labour than girls**, 4.4% and 0.6%, respectively. Of children who are engaged in labour, 27% are working in agriculture.¹⁷

Given that much of the agricultural work varies in intensity according to the season, it is common to see more child labour during the peak of the agricultural season. A 2019 survey on child labour

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Rima R. Habib (2019). Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees. Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut Press:

https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/1621/file/ChildLabourSurvey_2019.pdf

¹⁷ It must be noted that child labour may frequently be underreported and peaks during agriculture season, which did not overlap with this year’s VASyR data collection.

in agriculture in the Bekaa valley showed that children doing seasonal work were more likely to be attending school than those who had year-round work. Children who had both seasonal and year-round work were the least likely to be attending school.¹⁸

“Some children’s fathers are dead and so they have to work and look after their mothers, sisters and brothers”

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old male students and non-students, Halba, Akkar governorate, 17/01/2019.

“The biggest challenge is time. I don’t have time to study because I work and help my parents.”

The NRC survey findings show that **boys are more likely to be out of school because of work**.¹⁹ This is in line with the VASyR 2019 findings that 23.3% of the children who are reportedly working, work during school hours, with a much higher percentage for boys (25.7%) than for girls (9.7%).

4. Lack of capacity in schools

While national figures may suggest that, overall, there are enough classroom spaces to meet enrollment demand, there are **persistent capacity issues in areas where there is a high concentration of refugees**. The enrolment level is the lowest in the Bekaa (VASyR 2019).

Parents and educators expressed concerns about the high number of students in classrooms with limited capacity. Throughout the focus group discussions, the cited number of students in one classroom ranged from 20 up to 50. Educators with previous experience teaching in 2nd shift describe challenges in managing such big groups of students; often leading to a decreased focus on actual teaching slowing down the learning process as a result.

Parents recognise the capacity issues but complain about **additional quality issues such as the unavailability of drinking water and toilets at school and the dirtiness of the classroom in the afternoon shift in particular**. They feel the second shift in general is not as well cared for by the school staff.²⁰

The **age differences between students in one single class group also makes it harder for teachers to address students’ diversified needs**. The VASyR 2019 states that 54% of Syrian students in primary schools are two or more years older than their grade’s standard age. In the focus group discussions with children currently out of learning, mention is made repeatedly of the difficulties and **stigma related to being older than the rest of the students** in one’s class.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ For details, refer to chapter ‘Variables informing decision-making around education’ - ‘Families under economic pressure.’

²⁰ Focus group discussion with parents in Minieh Dennieh, North governorate, 19/01/2019.

"I know an education will help me a lot in my life. Being educated makes others respect you. But I am old now and they will put me in a class with younger students."

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old girls out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 16/01/2019.

"The number of children in the classroom in most cases is large. Children's ages vary because some of them left school due to war conditions for a period of up to three years. As a result, students of different ages may meet in the classroom, for example a 9-year-old and a 13-year-old."

NRC educator, Bekaa, April 2019

Refugee experiences in school: unsafe schools and Lebanese curriculum drive drop out

Most of the key factors hampering access to education for children that are currently out of learning and for non-students unable to access formal education, are also important drivers for school dropout.

Out of the 217 surveyed children who are currently in formal (120) or non-formal (97) education, around one fifth stated that they have previously dropped out of school during the school year (i.e. after successful registration). The survey findings for students and non-students clearly illustrate that **the most important retention factors are economic support and provision of transportation** (or coverage of transportation fees).

NRC's research shows that refugee children's experience in schools are also key factors in driving drop out.

1. Unsafe school environments: violence by teachers and bullying

"We would all go back to school if the teachers cared about us and didn't hit us. We like school. We don't want to be ignorant. When people ask us something, we want to know the answer."

Focus group discussion with 9-12-year-old male and female children out of learning, Douris, Baalbek governorate, 20-01-2019.

"The principal of the school told me that Syrians are dirty people."

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old male student and non-students, Bourj Hammoud, Beirut,

For children currently out of learning, the behaviour of the teachers were given almost equal importance as transportation costs as a reason for drop out.²¹ Students, non-students, children

²¹ 'Behaviour of teachers', 'carelessness' and 'transportation costs' were mentioned respectively 20, 17 and 18 times by children out of learning as 'reasons for drop out' in the survey.

out of learning and parents of those different groups of students across geographical areas and across age ranges report **mistreatment and discrimination at school**. The exchanges with children and parents revealed that students encounter a lot of difficulties with teachers, other school personnel and other students. Students describe harsh punishment methods, including verbal and physical violence, bullying and discrimination. Conversely, where teachers are perceived as fair and protective by students, their experience of schooling is more positive. One boy expressed "I like going to school because the principle takes care of me. When someone hits me, he defends me."²²

"I don't like to study with Lebanese students. I studied with them for one year and hated it. They were making fun of us. The Lebanese teachers were on their side also."

Focus group discussion with 13-18 years old female students and non-students, Halba, Akkar governorate, 18/01/2019.

"When the teacher leaves the classroom, the students start yelling at me and beating me."

Focus group discussion with 6-8-year-old male and female students, non-students and children out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 14/01/2019.

The **perceived lack of care and protection by the teachers and school administration** also results in parents taking their children out of school. Parents describe attempts of solving incidents with the teacher or school principal; often times failing. One parent said: "My son told me that his teacher makes fun of him and that he punishes him by letting him stand outside in the cold. I went to the school twice to complain and they told me it's my son's fault and that my children are not humans."²³

In 2018, the MEHE launched their child protection policy, which established the presence of school counsellors in schools. Their responsibility is to identify and refer children who are victims of violence at school. Additionally, the counsellor is also in charge of training all school staff on child protection.

"My father took both my brother and I out of school because there were older students who used to hit us. We didn't learn anything and the teachers didn't care about us."

Focus group discussion with 9-12-year-old male and female children out of learning, Douris, Baalbek governorate, 20/01/2019.

"They told us if you don't like it here, take your children to another school."

Focus group discussion with parents in Minieh Dennieh, North governorate, 19/01/2019.

²² Focus group discussion with 9-12-year-old male and female students and non-students, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate, 14/01/2019.

²³ Focus group discussion with parents in Saida, South Lebanon Governorate, 18/01/2019.

Violence in schools remains a clear factor influencing school dropout,²⁴ which has knock-on effects on the options Syrian parents see for their children. For example, children are often discriminated against, which is not in line with the new child protection policy implemented by MEHE in several public schools. Participants in different focus group discussions **expressed a preference for enrolment in private schools and/or unrecognized Syrian schools which they perceive as a safer environment** for their children.²⁵



Leena is a motivated educator in an NRC community-based Learning Centre. She creates a comfortable environment for her students to make the class a better place for them to study in. Photo: Elias Abu Ata/NRC

A recent research conducted by the Durable Solutions Platform and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies also found that Syrian parents whose children participate in **uncertified non-formal education programmes generally perceive them of better quality than the second shift of the Lebanese public education**. Respondents' descriptions of these programs include them being **safe and non-discriminatory learning environments**. However, a sticking point for several Syrian parents is the **lack of certification of some of these programmes**.²⁶

2. Lebanese curriculum poses challenges for Syrians

Several subjects in the Lebanese curriculum are taught in either French or English, as opposed to the all-Arabic Syrian curriculum, making it difficult for some Syrian refugee students to catch up.²⁷ **In addition to the language of instruction, the curriculum also differs from Syria's educational programme in terms of structure and content.** Throughout the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, both parents, students and non-students shared some of the challenges they face with the Lebanese curriculum. **Parents mentioned repeatedly that they**

²⁴ Focus group discussion with 9-12-year-old male and female students and non-students, Saida, South Lebanon Governorate, 31 January 2019.

²⁵ In-Depth Interview, Parents, Arsal, Baalbek-Hermel Governorate, November 2018.

²⁶ Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. January 2020. "Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities." Research report: <http://dsp-syria.org/addressing-protracted-displacement-lebanon>

²⁷ UNHCR Lebanon education programme factsheet, 2019: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/04/Education-Factsheet.pdf>

can only offer limited educational support to their children after school²⁸, especially since part of the programme is taught in languages that are foreign to them.²⁹

"I studied up to the 9th grade and yet I struggle to support my children with their school work because the curriculum is much harder here than Syria."

Focus group discussion with parents in Baalbek, 22/01/2019.

"My parents can read and write but they cannot speak English. They try to support me but they can't. I rely on myself."

In depth interview with 14-year-old female student (public school) in Zahle, 20/01/2019.

Parents' perception of the quality of education and the learning environment affects children's attendance to school directly. Several parents in the focus group discussions mentioned that they registered their children at first to take them out of school a few months later because they felt the curriculum was too difficult.³⁰ Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and MEHE provide retention support to help children adapt to the new curriculum. Interviewed staff noted that complimentary educational programmes support many students in succeeding in school.

The interviews with **NFE educators with previous experience teaching in MEHE 2nd shift** spoke positively about the educational development of Syrian students in the second shift programme. Some educators mentioned that Syrian students are adapting and learning faster than initially expected despite their different educational background.

²⁸ Focus group discussion with parents, Baalbek, 22/1/2019.

²⁹ Focus group discussion with parents, Saida, South Governorate, 18/1/2019.

³⁰ Focus group discussion with 9-12 year old male and female children out of learning, Baalbek, 20/1/2019.

Influencing school retention: parental involvement and social cohesion

1. Increasing parents' involvement

"One of my friends has a model teacher. She visited my friends' parents and convinced them to allow her to go to school. And they agreed."

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old girls out of learning, Bourj Hammoud, Matn district, Mount Lebanon governorate. 16 /01/2019.

The **importance of learning is rated highly** amongst the surveyed children currently out of learning (score of 3.9/5) and 93% of students in formal and non-formal learning have the intention to continue their education. Throughout the focus group discussions with different age groups, **children refer to their parent's encouragement and the significance of learning**. The same references to parents' involvement were made in conversations with children currently out of learning. Out of the total of 443 children surveyed (both in and out of learning), 76% said their parents support them to continue learning. Parents indicate that they want to be more involved in the education of their children, including through getting feedback about their children's performance at school.

A growing body of evidence suggests that parents' education, particularly mothers' education, influences a child's educational development.³¹ More educated parents tend to be more involved in their child's education, have higher expectations, allocate more resources to education, and have more educational materials at home, all of which could potentially support a child's learning.

"My mom and dad tell me to study well so no one will bother us when we grow up. When someone gives us a document to sign, we need to understand what it says. My mom and dad help me."

Focus group discussion with 9-12-year-old male and female children out of learning, Douris, Baalbek governorate, 20/01/2019.

"In the afternoon, I found parents were interested in their children. The students pay attention and come with their lessons prepared and memorize them well and are ready for the exam."

NFE educator, Bekaa, April 2019

The survey findings confirm that **children with literate mothers are more likely to be registered in a form of learning**. However, in the qualitative data collection, the parents' level of education did not stand out as a key factor affecting the children's education per se. Some

³¹ "Public Health Reports", US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Resources Administration, Volume 120, Number 1, January/February 2005, p 643: https://books.google.com.lb/books?id=MCMkvrXVgbsC&pg=PA643&lpg=PA643&dq=unicef+literacy+mother+influence+education+child&source=bl&ots=IKHsHdv-VS&sig=ACfU3U0a9VkvQz74fZL_c1ctR_RQBkwucw&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiliYakkuznAhUM-hQKH6UA0AQ6AEwEXoECAsQAO#v=onepage&q=unicef%20literacy%20mother%20influence%20education%20child&f=false; "An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries", UNICEF, October 2018: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/an-unfair-start-inequality-children-education_37049-RC15-EN-WEB.pdf

illiterate mothers involved in the focus group discussions were strongly encouraging their children to attend school because they themselves are illiterate.

2. Social cohesion: unlocking learning

The survey showed that **living in an urban environment,³² frequently meeting Lebanese people and having a positive perception of his/her quality of life, is also positively related to being in a certain form of learning.** These linkages were apparent in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

A number of non-formal educators interviewed stressed **the importance of social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrians**, including through school trips or sport activities. They feel that increased exchanges between Lebanese and Syrian students could mitigate existing tensions and discrimination.³³

In the focus group discussions, **children who are in a certain form of learning often tend to describe their daily lives in a more positive way than children out of learning**; even if they live in similar shelter conditions. NRC's research showed that participation in education can also generate more interaction with Lebanese children than children out of learning, creating a positive cycle, confirming existing research on the potential of education to contribute to social stability and alter negative perceptions of the 'other'.³⁴

"I have Syrian and Lebanese friends, they are my neighbours so we play, talk and laugh together. We all help each other, both Syrians and Lebanese."

"I have Christian Lebanese friends and also Syrians. In winter we spend time together and study together. My friends in school and in the neighbourhood, all love each other"

Focus group discussion with 13-18-year-old female students and non-students, Tal Abbass, Akkar governorate, 14/01/2019

The fact that children out of learning do not leave their community to go to school, could be a reason why they generally paint a more black and white picture of their daily lives. Additionally, the precise location where children live is often also critical, independently of schooling status. In certain areas, the distrust between Lebanese and Syrian communities can be higher than in others.

The focus group discussions conducted for the research at hand demonstrated that **people are generally more positive about their daily lives if they have neutral or positive interactions with the host community.** The tensions described by respondents confirm the findings from the second round of the Regular Perception Surveys (RPS),³⁵ which suggest that tensions are rather a product of popular narratives that blame Syrians for many challenges facing Lebanon than

³² Without additional data analysis it is unclear why living in an urban environment is positively related to being in a form of schooling. Reasons could include the fact that the distance to the nearby school is more likely shorter, the likelihood of being more exposed to other children going to school, parents having more access to various work opportunities and therefore more able to cover educational costs etc.

³³ The quantitative findings of survey also confirm that frequently meeting Lebanese is positively related to being in a form of schooling for Syrian children (see 'Variables informing decision-making on education').

³⁴ "School For Stability: Examining the role of education in fostering social stability in Lebanon", International Alert, April 2017: https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon_SchoolForStability_EN_2017.pdf

³⁵ "Qualitative Research on Social Tensions in Lebanon using the Reality Check Approach", Round 2, December 2019, UNDP & Empatika: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/72722>

competition over resources. The RPS also confirm that regular interaction between Syrians and Lebanese helps reduce misconceptions and rumours related to Syrians.

Only 15% of survey respondents says they have frequent contact with Lebanese neighbours. This finding should not be looked at in isolation from the qualitative information, because in some locations where the survey was conducted, there are no Lebanese people living in the immediate vicinity of the community, which makes regular interaction unlikely. The two-shift system at schools also creates barriers for Syrian and Lebanese children to mix at school or recreationally. There are few public spaces in any of the study locations and Syrian families prefer not to use them.³⁶













In addition, the opportunity to interact with neighbours, including Lebanese, could also be blocked by psychological barriers in cases where there is potential for increased social cohesion.³⁷ Some children described feelings and habits that might indicate withdrawal as a form of psychological safeguarding. NRC's quantitative and qualitative findings confirm that **many children deal with stress and anxiety related to their living conditions, immediate surroundings or school environment.** Survey questions relating to wellbeing and community showed that while 74% of children feels welcomed in their community, 24% is worried all the time and 20% have troubles sleeping. 41% of children feel happy most days, 14% feels sad most days and 45% said they don't care.

³⁶ "Qualitative Research on Social Tensions in Lebanon using the Reality Check Approach", Round 1, July 2019, UNDP & Empatika: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71214>

³⁷ "Peace education and psychosocial support for social cohesion", February 2018: <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/syria2018/simpson-r.pdf>

Variables informing decision-making on education

Based on further analysis of the survey³⁸ conducted with 443 children between the age of 10 to 18, the following factors can be considered significant in terms of the positive or negative influence they have on schooling status:

Positive factors		
<p>A child whose mother is literate</p> 	<p>Living in an urban environment</p> 	<p>Frequently meeting Lebanese</p> 
<p>Positive perception of his/her quality of life</p> 	<p>Having a school certificate from Syria</p> 	<p>Having at least one parent who is working</p> 
<p>The number of siblings going to school</p> 		
Negative factors		
<p>Having worked previously</p> 	<p>Having been denied schooling previously</p> 	<p>The older the child is, the more likely he/she will be out of learning</p> 
<p>Having older parents</p> 	<p>Increase in number of siblings</p> 	

Design: Zaynab Mayladan / NRC

³⁸ This analysis was done through a binary logistic regression considering parents' literacy, working to support family, having a school certificate from Syria, having been denied access to school previously and socio-demographic factors. Details can be provided upon request.

Emerging educational challenges in crisis-hit Lebanon

At the time of writing, **Lebanon is dealing with pre-existing economic woes** while trying to mitigate the impact of the **newly unfolding global coronavirus recession**. Although the data collection for the research at hand was conducted prior to the economic and health crisis, the findings and recommendations are even more relevant now.

As a result of growing economic hardship in Lebanon, families are increasingly forced to rely on their children to earn money, with child labour becoming an even greater barrier to school enrollment and attendance as a result. This is also clearly affecting vulnerable Lebanese families, who were not the focus of the research at hand. According to UNICEF, Lebanese families are already **relying on negative coping mechanisms today**, which might increase in the future. These include **children not going to school, marrying off younger, or being sent out to work**.³⁹

There are unconfirmed reports that there might be **a rise in numbers of Lebanese students who were previously in private schools, integrating into public schools** due to the increased economic pressure. Already during the current school year, economic pressure has led to around 16,000 students to shift from private schools into public schools which started to create pressure on the education system.⁴⁰ Considering the limited absorption capacity of formal education opportunities for Syrians, more pressure is expected on the sector. This trend could potentially negatively impact refugees' future ability to enroll or maintain their current place in schools.

Despite the growing demand, UNICEF is currently unable to increase the share allocated to transportation support through the UNICEF "Reaching School Program" due to several equally pressing sector priorities.⁴¹

While it is difficult to measure the full impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic, combined with the ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon, it is clear that the stakes are even higher now. In addition to the exacerbation of pre-existing barriers, new educational challenges result in **uncertainty about access to education for Syrian out-of-learning children and the ability for Syrian students to return to school in fall 2020**.

³⁹ Sarah Hague, UNICEF's chief of policy for Lebanon, in « Lebanon's economic crisis threatens the most vulnerable children », The Daily Star, 21/02/2020: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Feb-21/501550-lebanons-economic-crisis-threatens-the-most-vulnerable-children.ashx?fbclid=IwAR0jy6s8GzU5F4h5YeEt6GjtMcDtwLuLxKVM71pY9_Yt2dB88Y3Ke0IRk8; reconfirming earlier findings on negative coping strategies harmful to children: Impact Evaluation Endline Report, No Lost Generation (NLG) or "Min Ila", 2018: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/reports/min-ila-cash-transfer-program-displaced-syrian-children-lebanon-unicef-and-wfp>

⁴⁰ According to CERD the preliminary data for 2019-2020 says there are 289,698 Lebanese children in public schools [link](#). In 2018-2019, according to the Statistics Bulletin for that year, it was 273,634, [link](#).

⁴¹ In order to be eligible for UNICEF's assistance a refugee child must be enrolled in 2nd shift schools and meet one of the eligibility criteria: 1) be enrolled in pre-ECE in any 2nd shift school; 2) be a child with disabilities in any 2nd shift school; 3) be enrolled in Cycle 1 (Grades 1,2 & 3) in selected Hard to Reach 2nd shift schools. Refer to guidelines; 'UNICEF Reaching School Program 2019-2020 Q&A': https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/uploads/poster/poster_157840863399.pdf.

Recommendations

In order to meet the ambition to have all Syrian children in education, the complex interplay of factors influencing Syrian refugee decision-making on education must be recognised and acted upon by aid organisations, donors and the Government of Lebanon. Action should be taken to address the **structural challenges in the education sector** that discourage or simply prevent parents from enrolling or retaining their children in school, as well as **the specific enabling and blocking factors that need to be considered at the level of the household**.

Recommendations for the Government of Lebanon:

➤ **The Ministry of Education and Higher Education:**

1. Support teachers' professional development so they can address the psychosocial needs of non-Lebanese students.
2. Ensure School Directors have a common understanding and are compliant with MEHE's Standard Operating Procedures for enrolment of non-Lebanese children in public schools.
3. Ensure School Directors are compliant with MEHE's child protection policy in terms of appropriate response measures to deal with violence in schools.
4. Review and adapt MEHE registration policies for non-Lebanese to attend the first shift, and prioritise girls who have real and perceived safety threats on their way home from school
5. Increase the involvement of non-Lebanese parents in the school community
6. Refer students lacking complete birth registration to area legal actors for fast tracking.

➤ **Municipalities:**

7. Where there are shortages in absorption capacity, adapt appropriate unused buildings to construct temporary public school buildings on public domain lands.

Recommendations for donors to the education sector:

8. Retain and expand predictable and multi-year funding for:
 - transportation costs and school/class capacity;
 - additional classroom space in areas that have reached capacity or in acute need, including funding solutions such as mobile classrooms and temporary/emergency classrooms;
 - innovative pilots to address the education needs of out of school children and scale funding for successful pilots
 - teachers' professional development
9. Encourage and support the MEHE, municipalities and other parts of the government of Lebanon to make the necessary policy changes required to increase enrolment and ensure retention of Syrian refugee children in school.
10. Encourage UNICEF to ensure timely enrolment barrier tracking and follow-up mechanisms are functioning, active and responsive, and follow up with MEHE as necessary

Recommendations for education NGOs, including NRC:

11. Prioritise targeting of children who have never learned in a structured environment since they arrived in Lebanon.
12. Continue reporting on a rolling basis on UNICEF's 'Education Registration Complaints Mechanism', including regarding schools that are not complying with the MEHE Standard Operating Procedures.
13. Communicate proactively and directly with refugee communities on documentary requirements for school enrolment.
14. Support MEHE in the institutionalisation of the Better Learning Programme (BLP) in public schools and document evidence as to its effectiveness in meeting psychosocial support needs of students.
15. Identify a supportive, low-cost programme that can support students transition from non-formal education programmes into public schools
16. Support children who work through ensuring programme timings are flexible.

Recommendations for the education sector:

17. Ensure enrolment barrier tracking and follow-up mechanisms are functioning, active and responsive.
18. Intervene with MEHE to ensure that students identified via barrier tracking are admitted on a bi-weekly basis during the first two months of the enrolment period.
19. Expand funding opportunities to include transportation in order to respond to the increasing need, particularly for retention support programmes.
20. Launch a broad outreach campaign to ensure all children are aware of learning opportunities and supporting interventions (e.g. transportation).
21. Mitigate challenges with the curriculum by improving outreach by education actors providing retention support and being a resource for MEHE on teacher professional development on psychosocial support interventions.

Annex I: Estimated education costs by type of learning environment based on NRC staff assessment

	Public schools	Low-cost private schools	Private schools	Non-Formal Education (NFE)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cycle 1 = Grades 1, 2, and 3 (age 7-9) ▪ Cycle 2= Grades 4,5, and 6 (age 10 -12) ▪ Cycle 3= Grades 7, 8, and 9 (age 13 -15) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-Based Early Childhood Education (CB-ECE) = age 3-5 • Basic Literacy and Numeracy = age 10-14
Registration fee / scholastic year / child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cycle 1: 5,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 2: 5,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 3: 20,000 LBP 	150,000 LBP	320,000 LBP	/
School Fee / scholastic year / child	/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-school: 750,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 1: 1,500,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 2: 2,000,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 3: 2,500,000 LBP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-school: 300,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 1: 3,200,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 2: 3,600,000 LBP ▪ Cycle 3: 4,500,000 LBP 	/
Books / scholastic year / child	/	450,000 LBP	600,000 to 1,000,000 LBP	/
Stationary / scholastic year / child	150,000 LBP	150,000 LBP	350,000 LBP	/
Transportation cost / scholastic year / child	450,000 to 600,000 LBP depending on distance	450,000 to 600,000 LBP depending on distance	1,200,000 to 1,500,000 LBP depending on distance	/
Uniform / scholastic year / child	40,000 LBP	100,000 LBP	150,000 LBP	/