

Ensuring quality education for young refugees from Syria (12–25 years): a mapping exercise

Authors

Sarah Wahby, Hashem Ahmadzadeh, Metin Çorabatır, Leen Hashem, Jalal Al Hussein
With contributions from Farah Akel, Maha Alasil, Zeina Bali and Hoshang Waziri

Supervised by Professor Dawn Chatty

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Refugee Studies Centre
Oxford Department of International Development
University of Oxford

This policy note provides an executive summary of the RSC mapping exercise, *Ensuring Quality Education for Young Refugees from Syria (12–25 years)*¹. This research focuses on access to education by refugee youth, a crucial yet often overlooked element in the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis. Outlining educational demand and supply, the report analyses good practice and gaps in education services for refugee youth from Syria (including Palestinian, Kurdish and Turkmen refugee youth) in Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey.

The Syrian crisis continues to displace communities on a vast scale. The number of refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey continues to rise, surpassing the one million mark in Lebanon and Turkey. Self-settled refugees living outside camp settings make up the majority, with 100% of refugees self-settled in Lebanon, 70% in Jordan, 70% in Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq and 60% in Turkey, respectively. Increasing demand from refugee populations is stretching limited education resources. It is clear that the initial emergency relief initiatives for Syria's refugee crisis must now evolve in order to develop longer-term strategies.

Tremendous efforts on the part of education actors have resulted in the expansion and adaptation of national education systems in these countries. Yet at the secondary level specifically, demand far outweighs supply and resources are profoundly lacking, leaving the majority of refugee youth excluded from quality formal and non-formal education. Throughout refugee camps in Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq there is currently only one functioning secondary school. In Lebanon, secondary level public schools are under-resourced and overcrowded in spite of a double-shift system. In Turkey, post-primary schooling is limited to camp settings, whereas for self-settled refugee youth there are long waiting lists to access public schools. Jordan's public schooling system is over-burdened and unable to absorb all school-age refugee students, threatening the quality of education provision in the country. In all four contexts language barriers, legal status and choice of

¹Chatty et al., *Ensuring quality education for young refugees from Syria (12–25 years): a mapping exercise* (RSC Research Report, 2014) <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/rr-syria-youth-education-2014.pdf>

curriculum jeopardise both access and quality of learning. Certification and accreditation for studies is not guaranteed and this in turn can deter young people from continuing or re-entering education.

Intertwined social factors prevent refugee youth from Syria from accessing quality education, many of which are dictated by economic deprivation: some young women are marrying early due to social pressure. This custom is excluding girls and young women from continuing education. Young people, the majority being male, are engaging in paid employment to support their families at the expense of continuing formal and non-formal education. Self-settled refugee communities tend to find housing in affordable areas, removed from central city locations where schools are more widely available. This means students have to travel far and incur transportation costs to continue their education. This deters students for both economic and safety reasons. Education interventions targeted at refugee young people need to address these social trends to ensure accessibility, responsiveness and relevance.

More schools, training centres, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), psychosocial support and on-the-job training opportunities are urgently required throughout the region to meet the needs and educational aspirations of young refugees from Syria. The construction of schools and centres is underway, and teacher training and recruitment is in progress, but resources are strained and funding is insufficient. Increased funding combined with innovative thinking and flexible systems are needed to ensure quality education for Syria's young refugees.

Focusing in on the contextual demands within Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey education sectors, the following section details the main issues and recommended steps required to enable young refugees from Syria access to quality education.

Jordan

Jordan's public schooling systems are overwhelmed. Free access to public schools and expansion of spaces through double-shift systems have been unable to supply formal education services in line with demand. Expansion and renovation of existing schools and training centres should be undertaken as well as efforts to improve teaching quality in second shifts. Further resources need to be allocated for teacher salaries and teacher development in order to maintain the quality of teaching in Jordan.

Education services are needed in locations within or close to refugee communities to reduce transportation costs and to allay protection concerns. Education-related expenses such as materials, uniforms and transportation often prevent access to education for Jordan's refugee youth. Research indicates that families cannot cover basic living costs. As a result, young refugees work to provide financial assistance to their families and many drop out of school. With the right to work not permitted for refugees in Jordan, young people tend to work in the informal sector, placing them at high risk of labour exploitation. Measures to include young people who are working in education and training are needed to not only increase educational inclusion, but also to provide protection to young people in employment.

Cash assistance for refugee students has helped to improve attendance and retention rates among refugee youth and should be expanded. Income-generating activities for refugee and host communities should be increased to enable economic self-reliance. Training opportunities that are flexible and allow young men and women to work and study simultaneously should be developed. Examples of responsive interventions that should be scaled up are accredited vocational training centres and apprenticeship schemes that provide skills and experience linked to the Jordanian labour market. This development of skills and business in turn could provide potential economic benefits to the host economy, particularly given the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis.

Delays in registration with UNHCR and the Jordanian authorities prolong the time young people remain out of school. Government policy should be reviewed to speed up the registration process and thus enable refugee students in camps, urban centres and rural settings to rapidly access education and training. It is recommended that all students should be able to enter schooling regardless of time spent away from formal education.

Lebanon

With the largest refugee population from Syria, 1,142,000 in August 2014, Lebanon's national education system is under immense pressure. Significant efforts have been taken to open closed schools, build new schools and enrol more Syrian students through double shift systems, yet only 19% of refugee school-aged children and youth access formal secondary education. Field research indicates basic facilities are lacking in schools, such as running water and stable electricity supplies. Furthermore, a large proportion of refugees remain unregistered in Lebanon. Lack of registration prevents students from accessing education and sitting for official examinations.

Schools in areas with high refugee population density are over-subscribed, while alternative schools are located far away and out of reach. There is an urgent need to establish more education centres in Lebanon for refugee students. This should be achieved through the renovation of existing schools and the creation of more second shifts. Correspondingly, teaching and learning in the second shift system needs enhanced monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality. More teachers should be recruited and in-service teacher training provided on an ongoing basis, in conjunction with psychosocial training and support.

Poverty drives refugee families to send children and youth to work, particularly in Lebanon's Beqaa region. With many young refugees in employment situations, the opportunity to re-enter the education system is limited. Refugee youth are deprived of education owing to school-related expenses and items such as tuition, stationery, books and transportation. Interventions that can help parents to overcome financial barriers, such as cash assistance and livelihoods creation programmes, should be developed and expanded on a wider scale to enable education access for refugee youth.

Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq

At the core of the lack of education for refugee youth in Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq are insufficient funds, with donors prioritising the Syrian refugee situation in Jordan and Lebanon. More resources are urgently needed and should be directed to the Kurdistan regional government, which hosts the majority of refugees in Iraq.

Under the current circumstances, spaces in schools are profoundly lacking and classrooms do not have basic facilities. Existing tented schools should be renovated, equipment provided and a second shift system established in more schools to increase capacity. Furthermore, teachers' salaries currently go unpaid or suffer long delays in payment. Improved cooperation and coordination between Iraq's central government, the Kurdistan regional government and respective stakeholders is needed in order to resolve the issue of funding for teachers' salaries. Incentives such as higher salaries and in-service teacher training would re-engage teachers and ensure the quality of teaching in schools.

In Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Sorani Kurdish is the language of instruction in the majority of public schools in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, while Kurmanji Kurdish is the language of instruction in Duhok, where a large number of Syrian refugees currently reside. By contrast, in Syria, Arabic is the sole language of instruction. Although Kurdish refugee families from Syria speak Kurmanji, Kurdish refugee students are unaccustomed to studying in this language. Notably, Arabic schools currently only make up 1% of schools in Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq. From focus group discussions, the lack of access to teaching in Arabic emerged as a major factor that prevents learning in the classroom. Young refugees involved in the mapping exercise expressed hopelessness and lacked the motivation to engage in education and training given the language barrier and diminished prospects for meaningful onward study or employment.

Since August 2014, schools in Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq have been used as makeshift shelters for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing violence and persecution in the northern areas of Iraq. This does not bode well for refugee and IDP students in the forthcoming academic year. Increased funding and resources are needed for education, together with efforts to find alternative housing for IDPs; this is of paramount importance if educational inclusion is to be granted to all students.

Turkey

Owing to language barriers, the majority of refugee students outside of Turkey's camps, accustomed to learning in Arabic, struggle to engage in meaningful learning inside Turkey's public schools. The lack of adequate Turkish language training not only stops many from accessing public education but also hampers the integration process. More interventions are needed that can bring together Syrian and Turkish host communities to promote social capital and counteract the recent rise in tensions between refugee and host communities.

As in other contexts, research and literature consistently show that many young refugees in Turkey are working in the informal sector rather than studying, particularly young men and women outside Turkey's camps. While some young people opt to work due to financial demands, others are excluded from education because they do not have valid residency permits. Improved information channels enabling refugee communities to understand how to access residency permits, and register their children at public schools, should be provided.

Curriculum choice, and with it accreditation, is another factor that impacts educational quality. Field research found that some refugee students alternate between studying the Turkish, Syrian, Syrian Opposition and Libyan curricula, based mainly on whether their studies can be certified and accredited. Regulation, standardisation and enhanced coordination are needed in order to improve education quality and establish coherent accreditation systems for refugee students in Turkey.



General recommendations for ensuring quality education for refugee youth from Syria:

- Support government efforts in the region to build more schools, increase teaching resources and expand capacity;
- Construct and renovate more schools, training centres and community learning centres for refugee youth;
- Provide funding for tuition fees, transportation, books, stationery and teaching materials for refugee students in urban communities to help overcome financial barriers;
- Design well-structured, free, flexible training programmes for working youth to retain young people in education and enhance their professional performance and job prospects;
- Advocate for and support education programmes that are tailored to include refugee youth in work;
- Establish TVET and livelihood centres that provide extensive training for skilled jobs that could be tied to job markets and appropriate legal frameworks that will be of use upon return to Syria;
- Establish apprenticeship schemes for youth from Syria in collaboration with the private sector and respective government bodies;
- Offer education and training without age restrictions and regardless of time spent out of schooling;
- Identify young refugees who are at risk of dropout, or who have dropped out recently, and provide them with suitable counselling, academic support and alternative options for education;
- Improve teaching and learning quality in second shifts in schools;
- Offer incentives and development opportunities for teachers in refugee schools;
- Establish national youth task forces to involve young people in informing policy and practice relating to refugee youth education;
- Expand and improve training and awareness-raising for humanitarian workers;
- Create policies, procedures and institutions that ensure all forms of refugee education are accredited by national education authorities within the region;
- Open more teacher training programmes for Syrian and host community teachers;
- Conduct more thorough, in-depth research targeted at the 12-25 year old refugee age group to analyse and understand their living conditions, challenges and needs, and to design educational support plans accordingly;
- Promote and fund the development of structured and accredited non-formal education programmes that can accommodate large numbers of refugee children and youth, especially in rural areas;
- Expand virtual self-learning tools such as online courses or educational TV programmes.