



The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis

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Foreword

The world must act to save a generation of traumatised, isolated and suffering Syrian children from catastrophe. If we do not move quickly, this generation of innocents will become lasting casualties of an appalling war.

This report highlights the painful challenges these children face every day. It details the horrors that Syrian children have suffered—loved ones dying around them, their schools closed, their friends lost.

Research conducted over four months in Lebanon and Jordan found that Syrian refugee children face a startling degree of isolation and insecurity. If they aren't working as breadwinners—often doing menial labour on farms or in shops—they are confined to their homes.

Perhaps the statistic we should pay the most attention to is: 29 per cent of children interviewed said that they leave their home once a week or less. Home is often a crammed apartment, a makeshift shelter or a tent.

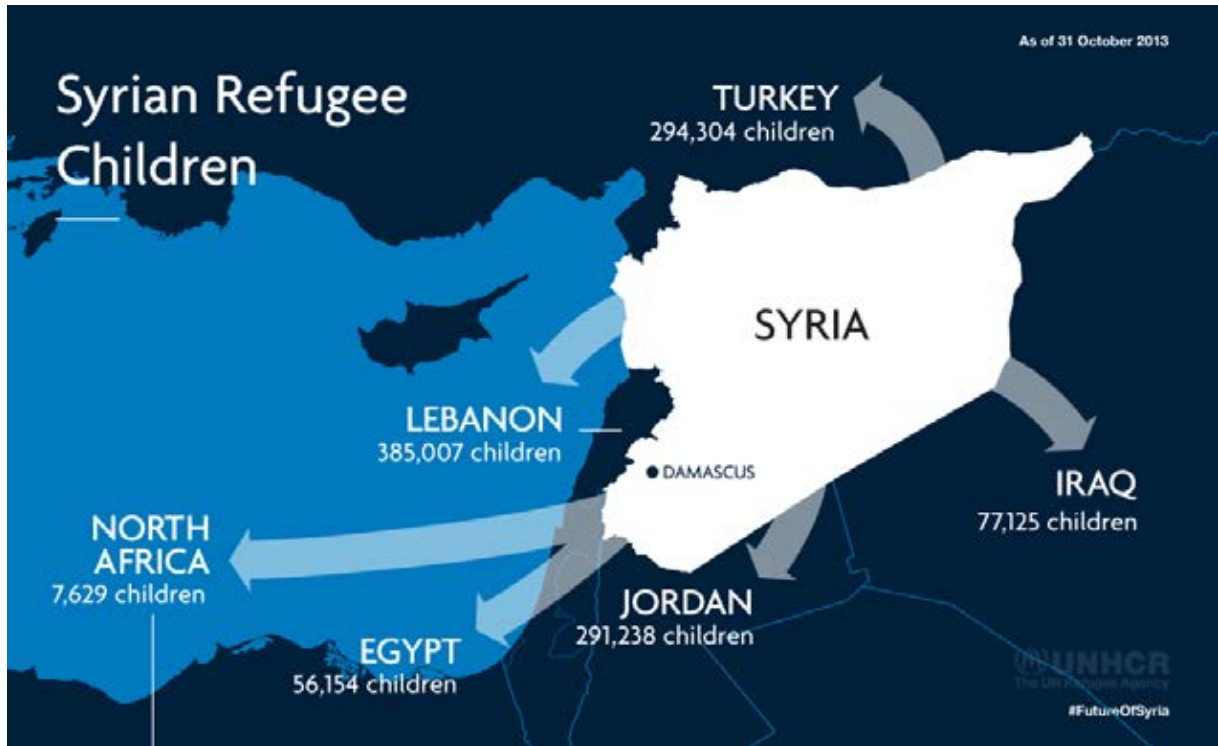
It should be no surprise that the needs of these children are vast. Too many have been wounded physically, psychologically or both. Some children have been drawn into the war—their innocence ruthlessly exploited.

A grave consequence of the conflict is that a generation is growing up without a formal education. More than half of all school-aged Syrian children in Jordan and Lebanon are not in school. In Lebanon, it is estimated that some 200,000 school-aged Syrian refugee children could remain out of school at the end of the year.

Another disturbing symptom of the crisis is the vast number of babies born in exile who do not have birth certificates. A recent UNHCR survey on birth registration in Lebanon revealed that 77 per cent of 781 refugee infants sampled did not have an official birth certificate. Between January and mid-October 2013, only 68 certificates were issued to babies born in Za'atari camp, Jordan.

Over 1.1 million Syrian children are refugees. This shameful milestone of conflict must deliver more than headlines.

*A Syrian boy, followed by his family, runs with his luggage in his hands moments after crossing the border into Jordan.
UNHCR / O. Laban-Mattei*



Every day, the conflict in Syria is forcing thousands of Syrian children to flee their country.

Humanitarian organizations and governments are desperately trying to address the needs of the vulnerable children—but much more needs to be done if we are to avert a catastrophe. We must all work to:

Keep the borders open:

For all the problems identified in this report, children have access to protection because countries like Lebanon and Jordan have welcomed them. No effort should be spared in supporting Syria's neighbours to keep their borders open. Further afield, in the past few months, many adults and children have lost their lives attempting to reach Europe. States must do more to ensure the safety of people attempting to cross water and land borders.

Help the neighbours:

The unwavering commitment of neighbouring countries to tackle the monumental task of supporting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugee children must be matched by international solidarity. Overstrained school systems must be built up, health services expanded and local communities reassured that support is available for them too.

Stop recruitment and exploitation of children:

Children should never be drawn into conflict. All parties should make every effort to end this practice.

Expand resettlement and humanitarian admissions programmes for Syria's children:

Countries beyond Syria's borders should also offer a home to Syrian refugees. These programmes are important lifelines for the most vulnerable, including people who continue to be in danger and families with seriously wounded children. Unaccompanied and separated children are only considered for these programmes after a careful examination of their best interests.

Provide alternatives so children do not have to work:

We urge individuals and businesses to help fund UNHCR's financial assistance scheme that targets vulnerable refugee families and call on governments to explore alternative livelihoods opportunities for Syrian refugees.

Prevent statelessness:

Lack of a birth certificate or related documentation can increase the risk of statelessness and expose children to trafficking and exploitation. Return home may be impossible for children without the necessary documentation. Progress is already being made in neighbouring countries, but it is vital that host countries continue to improve access to birth registration.

António Guterres

UN High Commissioner for Refugees



Angelina Jolie

UNHCR Special Envoy





Executive Summary

Over 1.1 million Syrian children have registered as refugees with UNHCR worldwide. Of this number, some 75 per cent are under the age of 12. Children represent 52 per cent of the total Syrian refugee population, which now exceeds 2.2 million. The majority live in Syria's neighbouring countries, with Jordan and Lebanon combined hosting more than 60 per cent of all Syrian refugee children. As of 31 October 2013, 291,238 Syrian refugee children were living in Jordan, and 385,007 in Lebanon.

The turmoil in Syria has torn families apart, with over 3,700 children in Jordan and Lebanon living without one or both of their parents, or with no adult caregivers at all. By the end of September 2013, UNHCR had registered 2,440 unaccompanied or separated children in Lebanon and 1,320 in Jordan. In some cases the parents have died, been detained, or sent their children into exile alone out of fear for their safety. UN agencies and partners help to find safe living arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, reuniting them with their families or finding another family to look after them. Despite living in already crowded conditions, Syrian refugee families continue to open up their homes to relatives or even strangers.

The conflict in Syria has caused Syrian girls and boys of all ages to suffer immensely, both physically and psychologically. Children have been wounded or killed by sniper fire, rockets, missiles and falling debris. They have experienced first-hand conflict, destruction and violence. The psychological effects of such horrific experiences can be far-reaching, affecting their well-being, sleep, speech and social skills. Living in crowded homes with family members who are also distressed, some children find little respite. In 2013, UN agencies and partners have already reached out to over 250,000 children across Jordan and Lebanon with various forms of psychosocial support.

The unrelenting exodus of Syrian refugees to Jordan and Lebanon is having a dramatic impact on these small countries. Lebanon, with a population of a little more than 4 million, has received more than 800,000 Syrian refugees in two years. The economy, essential services and stability of the country are all suffering. Jordan, one of the most 'water poor' nations in the world, with a

Ali, just a year old, fled to with his parents to Lebanon, where he and 15 family members are living in this derelict building. UNHCR/ E. Byun

population of a little over 6 million, is now home to more than 550,000 Syrian refugees. It is also buckling under the pressure on its services, infrastructure and resources. While many Jordanians and Lebanese display kindness and generosity towards Syrian refugees, tensions between the communities—and even within refugee communities—have put refugee children at risk. The pressures of displacement and dramatic changes in lifestyle lead many Syrian refugee children to feel isolated and insecure, both within and outside their homes. Children, particularly girls, are often kept at home for their safety. However, the stressful and uneasy environment in which many refugee families live can also trigger tension and violence in the home. Case managers and social workers offer vital support and counselling and work with families to ensure that children are living in safe and appropriate conditions. Local and international organizations also offer a wide range of recreational activities to children and adolescents, to brighten up their day-to-day lives.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, children as young as seven years old are working long hours for little pay, sometimes in dangerous or exploitative conditions. While some girls are employed, notably in agriculture and domestic work, the majority of working children are boys. Sheer financial necessity is at the core of almost all cases of child labour. In some families, parents simply cannot find a job, do not earn enough to support the family, or are unable to work owing to physical, legal or cultural barriers. An enormous burden falls on working children's shoulders. Some are mistreated in the workplace, are exposed to illicit activities, or come into conflict with the law.

Case managers and social workers from UNHCR and partner organizations work with refugee children and their families to help them enrol in school or take part in other educational programmes, and where possible remove them from the workforce, or at least minimize the negative effects of working. UNHCR's financial assistance programme also helps to deter Syrian refugee families from resorting to negative coping strategies, such as taking their children out of school to work.

Despite the generosity of donor and host governments and the efforts of UN agencies and partners, school is out of reach for many Syrian refugee children. As of September 2013, over 100,000 Syrian school-aged children in Jordan were not enrolled in formal education. Twice this number could be out of school in Lebanon by the end of 2013. The number of Syrian school-aged children is soon likely to exceed the number of Lebanese children who were enrolled in the public system last year.

The low enrolment rate is linked to a range of factors including school capacity, cost, transportation and distance, curriculum and language, bullying and violence, and competing priorities such as the need for children to work. Educational opportunities for children with disabilities are particularly limited. If the situation does not improve dramatically, Syria risks ending up with a generation disengaged from education and learning.

Most Syrian refugee children are eager to go to school, and many parents also place high value on their children's education. UN agencies and partners in Jordan and Lebanon are working with the respective Ministries of Education to improve levels of enrolment and the quality of education—including by training

teachers on how to work with refugee children, boosting the capacity of schools to accommodate more students, covering the costs associated with going to school, and providing school materials such as uniforms, books, bags and stationery.

Local and international organizations also offer creative solutions to transport children to school safely, or to bring educational activities directly to refugee communities. Given the numerous barriers to education in both countries, the non-formal education programmes offered by UN agencies and partners are essential.

Birth registration provides evidence of a child's age and legal identity, which is critical for ensuring that they can access their rights. It can also help to prevent statelessness. Families who have fled Syria with unregistered babies, or who have given birth in Jordan and Lebanon, face barriers to registering their children's births. These are primarily linked to their lack of understanding of the importance of birth registration and how to go about it, and an inability to produce the required documents.

Consequently, levels of birth registration in both countries are low. A recent UNHCR survey in Lebanon revealed that 77 per cent of 781 Syrian refugee newborns did not have an official birth certificate. Between January and mid-October 2013, only 68 certificates were issued to babies born in Za'atari camp, Jordan, though birth certificates are now being issued on a weekly basis. The Governments of Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR and partner organizations have been working together to ease the requirements for birth registration, and to raise awareness among refugees about this critical procedure.

Despite the difficult conditions in which children live, refugee girls, boys, women and men are demonstrating incredible strength and resilience, finding creative solutions to the issues they face and providing support to their families, friends and even strangers. Many girls and boys refuse to let go of their hopes and dreams; their eyes light up when they announce that one day, when all this is over, they will become doctors, lawyers and teachers.

While such an overwhelming number of refugees is placing an enormous strain on national systems, economies and even stability, the Governments of both Jordan and Lebanon continue to welcome Syrian refugees into their countries and facilitate their access to essential services, such as health and education. Many Lebanese and Jordanians are also reaching out to their Syrian neighbours in solidarity.

UN organizations, and local and international NGOs, are providing crucial support to governments, working to protect and assist Syrian children, and restore a sense of normalcy in their lives.



Finger-painting found at the Women's Centre in Tyre, Lebanon. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

Objectives

Over half of all Syrian refugees are children. As the leading refugee organization in the region, UNHCR undertook a research project on what life is like for Syrian girls and boys in the two countries hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees—Jordan and Lebanon. The objective was to produce an evidence-based report with a human face, targeting a wide audience to increase awareness about children's protection challenges, give a sense of how UN agencies and partners are responding, and highlight some of the gaps that require the urgent attention of the international community.

Methodology

Research was conducted in Jordan and Lebanon between July and October 2013. This entailed a desk review of existing reports and assessments, data collection, and field research in urban, rural, and camp settings. Information was gathered through focus group discussions and interviews with refugee children and their families, refugees working with children in their communities, and staff from UNHCR and other organizations working with refugee children. In individual interviews, a life cycle approach was taken, asking refugees about their lives in Syria, their journey to the country of asylum, their lives as refugees, and their hopes for the future.

Interviews and focus group discussions with refugee children provided quantitative information on a variety of issues, including how often children leave the home, how many children go to school, and how many children are working. They also provided qualitative information on the lives of refugee children. Due to the focus and methodology of this report, sexual and gender-based violence, including early marriage, was not addressed. This area requires more time and cultural sensitivity than the scope of this project allowed and will therefore be addressed in a separate project.

Overall, 81 refugee children (52 boys and 29 girls) and 26 parents were interviewed in Jordan and Lebanon. Furthermore, 121 children (57 boys and 64 girls) and 54 mothers participated in focus group discussions. In total, 106 children were spoken to in Jordan and 176 in Lebanon. The research team held 27 structured interviews in Lebanon and 33 in Jordan with staff from UN agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as refugees working with children in their communities. In addition, a number of informal interviews were conducted with UNHCR and partner staff during the course of field research and data collection.

The names of the refugee children referred to in this report have been changed for their protection, except for those who appear in videos and photos and gave their express permission.



Fractured Families

Syria's ongoing conflict, now in its third year, has torn apart countless families. Entire communities have been uprooted, scattering large populations within Syria and driving over 2 million into surrounding countries.

Children have been particularly affected, many of them becoming refugees, some separated from one or both parents and sometimes with no adult caregiver at all.

Missing Family Members

The scale of the problem was highlighted during focus group discussions and interviews across Jordan and Lebanon. Forty-three of 202 children interviewed said that at least one of their immediate family members was either dead, detained or missing.

Tens of thousands of displaced children in Jordan and Lebanon are growing up without their fathers: as of 30 September 2013, there were 41,962 female-headed households in Jordan, and 36,622 in Lebanon. Not only are fathers absent; many children have no idea where they are.

Living Without Both Parents

By the end of September 2013, UNHCR had registered 2,440 unaccompanied or separated children in Lebanon and 1,320 in Jordan—more than 3,700 in total.

Rahab and her children in their apartment in Qobayat, Lebanon, stand around an empty chair, cloaked with their father's robe. He was killed when a shell hit their neighbourhood in Homs, Syria. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

Maher

The last time 16-year-old Maher saw his father was nearly two years ago.

Before his family fled the fighting in Syria, he and his father were both detained. Maher was tortured, but released after nine days. His father was not so lucky: he is still missing.

Maher now lives in Zarqa, Jordan, where his mother is the only caregiver for his six siblings ranging in age from four to 18 years old. "I am both mother and father," she said.

Maher just wants his old life back.

"My first wish would be to go back to Syria and have my father released," he said. "Then for things to go back to the way they were."

Until then, he is facing new challenges and building a new life. He is afraid to work—he cannot do so legally and fears arrest—but he must nevertheless help to support his family. He takes on short-term construction jobs whenever he can, but the lingering effects of the torture he underwent in Syria mean he can only work for a few days at a time without feeling pain in his shoulder.



Miram, 11, front right, was eating breakfast in her home in Syria, when a bomb fell on the kitchen and killed her mother. She was brought to her brother's family outside of Beirut, where she now lives with her cousins, brother and his wife. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

Unaccompanied children have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. Separated children have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

These numbers do not necessarily reflect the precise extent or complexity of the problem. Elsa Laurin, UNHCR's Child Protection Coordinator in Lebanon, said that refugee children who flee Syria alone often know where at least one family member is, and how to contact them. Many are quickly reunited or welcomed into the homes of other Syrian refugees.

Interviews with boys and girls in Jordan and Lebanon underline various reasons why children become separated or unaccompanied. Parents may have died or been detained or sent their children alone to seek safety or avoid military conscription.

Parents sometimes send their sons ahead of the family to find work and a place to live. In one

case, a ten-year-old boy was sent to Lebanon by his family to see if the situation there was safe.

A New Home

UN agencies and partners help to reunite unaccompanied children with their families when this is what they want and it is deemed to be in their best interest.¹ When families cannot be found or traced, UNHCR and partners help children to find alternative arrangements, such as with another family in the community, and regularly monitor their well-being and living conditions.

In Jordan, during the first six months of 2013, UN agencies and partners identified care arrangements in camps and urban areas for more than 800

1. All actions concerning children are guided by the principle of the best interests of the child, which is applied during Best Interests Assessments and Best Interests Determinations. See UNHCR, *Guidelines for Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, Geneva, 2008 and the UNHCR and International Rescue Committee guidebook, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, Geneva, 2011.



Foddiye Abou Nomri hosts several families at her home in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, for a meal during Ramadan. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

Khaled

The story of 15-year-old Khaled in Za'atari camp, Jordan, captures not only the pain, pressure and fear that many unaccompanied and separated children feel, but also their resilience in the face of an uncertain future and new responsibilities.

When asked whether he misses his mother, Khaled tugged the brim of his baseball cap low over his face and began to cry. "I miss coming home and finding her there," he said. "I miss having her around us, to sit with her, to actually get to see her face."

His parents divorced before the conflict began. As fighting escalated, Khaled's mother fled north to Idlib in 2012, while his father stayed in Daraa. Shortly afterwards, Khaled, his brother and two sisters, and several aunts and cousins escaped to Jordan to join extended family members, while his father stayed behind.

Over the course of five months in Za'atari camp, Khaled and his siblings were abandoned by all of their extended family.

The pressure the teenager feels to protect and provide for his siblings in an unknown country is often overwhelming.

"It was scary," he said. "We were suddenly all alone and I found myself responsible for my siblings... If anything were to ever happen to them, I could never live with myself."

Without parents, Khaled has become the family protector, but at a steep price to his own education and future.

He would like to move out of the camp, but would then need to find a job and pay rent for an apartment. He has two enduring goals: to reunite with his mother and to send his siblings to school.



Amal, 13, left Syria after shelling destroyed her home. She says the conflict has claimed the life of her oldest brother and many neighbours. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

Home Alone

One Syrian family typifies the strength and resilience of the refugee community. Fearing for their safety, the parents of Khaled, Reem and Adel sent them alone to Jordan. Khaled, 13, had been involved in street protests and feared repercussions; Reem, as a 15-year-old girl, was vulnerable to sexual violence; and Adel, 16, faced military conscription.

Before they left Syria, their mother made them a tent in which they still live today. For over a year after their arrival, they lived in a community of Syrian refugees near the Syrian border. Though they initially knew no one around them, their neighbours provided a strong support network. Men would work when they could, sharing their food and money within the community, taking particular care of the three unaccompanied children. Adel, the eldest, worked alongside the men, farming or picking fruit.

The children registered with UNHCR in April 2013. They were provided with financial and material support—including mattresses, blankets and cooking materials—through UNHCR's partner, International Medical Corps (IMC).

Now an IMC case manager visits them every two weeks to monitor their well-being. Adel no longer needs to work, and Khaled has recently started school. The children turned down help to find an apartment, preferring to live in a tent so that they can pack up and return to Syria as soon as it is safe to do so.

In June 2013, their father's best friend fled Syria and at his behest sought out the children. They subsequently moved to another Syrian refugee community with the man they now call 'uncle.' He provides valuable adult support, though Adel insists that he is still the main protector of his siblings. Reem sees herself as fulfilling the role of their mother.



Cradling her daughter, a Syrian mother waits to register for assistance in Tripoli, Lebanon. Her husband is missing. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

unaccompanied and separated children. This involved tracing and reuniting children with family members in Jordan or abroad, identifying safe and appropriate care arrangements with extended family or other members of the community, and assessing existing care arrangements to ensure that they were suitable and safe.

Working with Jordanian and Lebanese authorities, UNHCR and UNICEF are in the process of formalizing alternative care arrangements within the refugee community. Clear criteria will be applied to identify and monitor eligible families.

UNHCR and UNICEF have also been working with the Jordanian Government to develop national procedures and guidelines for alternative care. These will apply to unaccompanied and separated Syrian refugee children.

Hospitality

Hospitality is central to Arab culture. One 14-year-old boy from Aleppo explained that Syrians help each other because “in Syria, there is loyalty between people who know each other.” Even total strangers within the refugee

community have been willing to open their homes to unaccompanied children. In Jordan’s Za’atari camp, for instance, 59 families had registered on the International Rescue Committee’s standby list to take unaccompanied children into their care as of July 2013.



As of 30 September 2013, UNHCR had registered over 3,700 unaccompanied or separated children in the two countries: 2,440 in Lebanon and 1,320 in Jordan.



SCARRED

The conflict in Syria has taken an acute physical and psychological toll on refugee children. They have witnessed unspeakable horror, which they struggle to forget. Bombs and missiles have destroyed their homes, communities and schools. Friends and family members were killed, sometimes before their own eyes.

In Tyre, Lebanon, two UNHCR registration assistants, Tatiana Nassar and Therese Sarkis, invite children to draw during registration interviews. Children as young as four or five have drawn graphic images of rockets, guns, blood and houses that have been destroyed. Others have alluded to their desire to go home, writing statements such as “I love Syria” alongside their drawings.

Physically Injured

Children of all ages, from babies to teenagers, have suffered severe physical trauma and injury from sniper fire, rockets, missiles and falling debris. According to UNHCR data, in the first six months of 2013, 741 Syrian refugee children received hospital treatment for physical trauma and other injuries incurred in Syria or Lebanon including burns, bullet wounds and broken bones.

In Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan, 1,379 children were treated for weapon or war-related injuries between 20 October 2012 and 25 October 2013. The majority of these children, 58 per cent, were boys.

Whada, a Syrian refugee mother living in Zahle, Lebanon, holds her young daughter, Waffa. Waffa has barely spoken since losing her father and her home in January 2013. UNHCR / E. Dorfman



An 11-year-old girl drew this picture while she and her family were registering with UNHCR at the registration centre in Tyre, Lebanon. It portrays an attack on her neighbourhood in Syria in which she lost many friends and neighbours. The text says “Shame, shame, people are killing with tanks.” The arrow from the woman in purple points to the word “blood.” UNHCR / S. Baldwin

A War They Cannot Forget

While some Syrian refugee children have escaped serious physical injury, few have avoided the psychological repercussions that come from living in the midst of a war.

In interviews with 81 refugee children in Jordan and Lebanon, 22 children, or parents speaking on their behalf, said they continued to be deeply distressed by violence they witnessed in Syria.

Sheeraz Mukhaimer, a community-based case manager with the International Medical Corps



This picture was drawn by a nine-year-old boy while his family were registering as refugees at Tyre registration centre, Lebanon. The bus that he and his family took to flee their home in Syria was stopped and robbed by armed men. To the right of the bus, the boy has written the word “death.” UNHCR / S. Baldwin

(IMC) in Irbid, Jordan, has worked with more than 90 Syrian refugee children over the past nine months. She has met a number of children who have not only seen their family members killed before their eyes, but have then helped

to move and bury their bodies—a horrific experience which is not easy to leave behind.

The two UNHCR registration assistants, Therese Sarkis and Tatiana Nassar, in Tyre, Lebanon, each typically register between seven and 12 families a day. Both have backgrounds in psychology and see at least one or two children every day they can identify with acute distress or depression.

According to Sarkis, some girls and boys have memorized the sounds of war. Children have described to her how they used to hide together under the bed when they heard a missile close by. Even girls as young as three years old recognize the sound of a gun, missile or bomb.

Distress

According to parents, the war in Syria has had a lasting impact on their children, including trouble sleeping, horrifying flashbacks, bed-wetting and even speech problems. A 16-year-old boy from Homs, now living in Amman, had trouble sleeping when he first arrived in Jordan. He found the absence of gunfire—which was

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This is impossible to forget. It’s like someone has stabbed me with a knife when I remember.

Taha, 15, who saw seven corpses lying on the ground near his home in Damascus, Syria.



These children live in a tiny apartment in the suburbs of Amman. The television is one of the only sources of entertainment. With family still inside Syria, the parents often follow Syrian channels that show graphic images of violence, destruction and death. UNHCR / O. Laban-Mattei

a constant backdrop in Homs—unsettling. He was worried it would start again.

A father from Aleppo who now lives in Tyre, in southern Lebanon, said the effects of war had caused his sons—aged three, seven and nine—to become bed wetters. This is a common symptom among distressed children in conflict situations. His second son, Hani, who was toilet trained long ago, was unable to control his urination even during the day.

A six-year-old boy, now living in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, developed a stutter after surviving bombings close to his home in Jobar, Damascus. The mother of a two-year-old girl in Mount Lebanon said that whenever her daughter hears a plane, she runs inside crying with her hands covering her ears.

Another mother, in Beirut, said her seven-year-old son was so severely affected that he imagines that his father, who was killed in the war, is still alive.

Staff from UNHCR and partner organizations said that some displaced children in Jordan and Lebanon have become hyperactive or aggressive,

while others have turned unusually quiet and shy. Parents said that constant crying is common.

In an IMC/UNICEF assessment in Jordan's Za'atari camp, 71 per cent of 255 adolescents said 'withdrawal' from everyday life was one of their main coping mechanisms.²

According to Sheeraz Mukhaimer, with IMC in Irbid, Jordan, the distress often weakens children's ability to interact with others. Mukhaimer said this can prevent children from wanting to go to school, participate in recreational activities, or in extreme cases even leave the house.

The most important support network for psychologically affected children is usually in the home. Yet Syrian refugee parents and caregivers, struggling with their own scars, can find it difficult to support their own children emotionally.

2. IMC and UNICEF, IMC Jordan Mental Health/Psychosocial and Child Protection for Syrian refugee adolescents in Za'atari July 2013 Report, Jordan, p.10.



Soundos, 9, was struck in the head by machine gun fire in June 2011. She and her family now live in a tent in Za'atari refugee camp. The bullet remains lodged in her head, as removing it would be too risky. UNHCR / G. Beals

Abdel-Menhen, a 25-year-old refugee outreach worker in southern Lebanon, said that when he knocks at some families' doors to offer support or monitor their well-being, they are so haunted by their past experiences that instead of answering, they hide.

According to IMC and UNHCR staff, children living in small or overcrowded homes often overhear

their parents talking about their experiences in Syria, the losses they have suffered and the stresses they feel being displaced.

Many families regularly tune into television channels featuring disturbing footage from Syria. This can cause children to relive horrifying events, increasing their own sense of anxiety.

Supporting Distressed Children

During the first nine months of 2013, UN agencies and partners provided psychosocial support to 96,368 children in Jordan and 159,585 in Lebanon.³ This can take many forms, such as counselling and follow-up for individual children and their families provided by UNHCR case managers; psychosocial support in schools from teachers who have received specific training; and recreational activities and more specialized psychosocial support provided by UNICEF and partners at child- and adolescent-

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There is blood up to
people's knees in Syria.

Hala, 17

3. See Jordan – RRP5 Update (Protection Sector), September 2013 and Lebanon – RRP5 Update (Child Protection), September 2013.



A young Syrian refugee enters Jordan on crutches. UNHCR / J. Kohler

friendly spaces. Children also receive psychosocial support through NGOs and community centers, as well as at UNHCR registration centers.

In Jordan's Za'atari camp, 304 children—162 boys and 142 girls—were treated for post-traumatic stress disorder or severe emotional disorders between 20 October 2012 and 25 October 2013. But beyond the emergency services provided by humanitarian organizations, there is a serious gap in the availability of state-run mental health services in both Jordan and Lebanon. There are no specialized child psychiatrists working with refugee children in Jordan, and only some 30 psychiatrists country-wide in Lebanon.

Firas

Firas, 17, fled Syria alone owing to his parents' fears for his safety, and now lives in Irbid, Jordan. He had always dreamed of owning a shop and a house and being self-sufficient. Now, he says, "the exact opposite has happened."

Before he escaped Syria, Firas saw a bullet strike his sister's head while they were in a car. He also heard stories of young girls being raped, including his neighbour's daughter, and about men being tied up and tortured in the village next to his. The women were raped and burned. Afterwards, he saw the devastation first-hand when he and his friends buried the women's bodies.

Now, in addition to reliving those atrocities he worries constantly about what will happen to his family back in Syria.



ISOLATED AND INSECURE

Isolation and insecurity have become part of everyday life for many Syrian refugee children. Some prefer to be alone; others are kept at home by their parents, who fear for their safety in unfamiliar surroundings.

Tensions within and between refugee and host communities often intensify these fears. The home environment is not always free of tensions either, given the stressful conditions under which many Syrian refugees live. This can also jeopardize the safety and well-being of children.

Tensions and Safety

The influx of Syrian refugees has had a major impact within Lebanon and Jordan, destabilizing local economies and putting pressure on housing and infrastructure.

A poll conducted in Lebanon in May 2013 with 900 Lebanese adults found that 54 per cent agreed with the statement that “Lebanon should not receive more Syrian refugees.”⁴ A similar survey conducted in July 2013 with

4. National opinion poll conducted 15-21 May 2013 undertaken by Fafo Independent Research Foundation in cooperation with Information International, available at <http://bit.ly/1dclayy> accessed 27 October 2013.

l'tmad, 17, lives in a collective shelter in Lebanon that houses more than 700 Syrian refugees. Most days she stays inside in the single room that her family shares. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

1,800 Jordanians found that 73 per cent were opposed to receiving more Syrian refugees.⁵

Father Nour Al-Sahawneh, of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Mafraq, Jordan, said that based on his interactions with the local community, “Jordanians are starting to see this as a crisis for them as well.”

Security issues and community tensions are particularly acute in Tripoli, northern Lebanon. UNHCR's Senior Field Coordinator, Daniela Raiman, cited several contributing factors, such as existing religious and cultural differences between population groups, the proliferation of weapons and the pressures placed on the host community by a growing number of refugees. She said that conflicts within Lebanese communities are often resolved outside the formal legal system—by individuals themselves and through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, such as community elders or religious leaders.

Refugees are sometimes caught up in conflicts in volatile areas such as Tripoli, and UNHCR regularly monitors their well-being. When violence flares up, Raiman said, children are often afraid and cannot sleep because they are reminded of their experiences in Syria. Their parents sometimes keep them inside for their safety.

Security concerns also arise within refugee communities. In Jordan's Za'atari camp, for instance, violence, theft and vandalism occur among

5. July 2013 survey of 1,800 Jordanian nationals, 'Current Issues in Jordan,' by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. The survey was led by Dr. Walid Alkhatib.



In many areas of Lebanon, curfews are imposed on Syrian refugees. Some refugee children have jobs that do not allow them to return home in time. This sign in a busy street in this suburb of Beirut, Lebanon, reads, “It is forbidden for foreign workers to walk around from 8pm-6am for public safety – Jounieh Municipality.” UNHCR / S. Baldwin

Syrian children. One community leader said theft by children had increased in the first half of 2013, sometimes instigated by adults. Some boys in Za’atari allegedly belong to gangs, which instill fear in other refugees living in the camp.

Against this backdrop of fear and insecurity, organized educational and recreational activities can often be the only way for children to socialize. A 23-year-old Syrian volunteer with Questscope’s mentorship programme for adolescents and youth said many children in Za’atari camp “can’t breathe, can’t live” due to claustrophobic living conditions.

Child Recruitment

The volatile environment in parts of Jordan and Lebanon, particularly border areas, can lead children, especially boys, to consider returning to Syria to join armed groups. Several staff working with refugee children said that they were aware of

children returning to Syria for this purpose, as recent reports have noted.⁶

Concrete information on child recruitment is lacking, but during focus group discussions several boys expressed a desire to return to Syria to fight. One 16-year-old boy in Irbid, Jordan, claimed that he has heard about boys being sent to Za’atari camp, trained to fight and then sent back to Syria. However, he and the other boys who spoke about the issue said that to their knowledge, children under 18 did not fight, but rather worked “distributing information.”

A new initiative in Jordan is under way—the UNICEF-UNHCR Joint Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Recruitment in Jordan. This includes increased monitoring of the returns process and a detailed information

6. See, for example, Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, Findings from the Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Za’atari Refugee Camp, Jordan, February 2013, pp. 18-19.



After a rocky start, Killian and Mohammed are now good friends. When Mohammed and his gang vandalised the UN compound and threw stones at humanitarian workers, Killian confronted him. Today, Mohammed and his friends offer smiles, not stones, to Killian and his colleagues. UNHCR/ J. Kohler

Mischief in Za'atari Camp, Jordan

UNHCR's Za'atari camp manager, Killian Kleinschmidt, described the boys in the camp as "premature adult men who have dreams about fighting, especially now with the war so present in their lives."

Za'atari is one of the most unruly places Kleinschmidt, a veteran aid worker, has ever worked in. He said that many of the violent incidents there involve children. However, he has observed a reduction in the daily number of incidents since the holy month of Ramadan. He attributed this to humanitarians working more closely with the refugee community. He also linked it to ongoing discussions that include the

community in the camp's governance structure and increased involvement by the Syrian traditional leadership system in maintaining order.

"Community is coming back to the camp," Kleinschmidt said, noting that out-of-school children were integrating into a more familiar social structure. But despite improvements in the overall situation, he warned that children were still engaged in mischief and misbehaviour.



Twenty-nine-year-old Nasra heads a family of eight, all of whom are living in grief. She struggles to cope with the needs of children whose experience is steeped in loss. Her children spend most of their time at home and do not attend school. UNHCR / G. Beals

campaign for the prevention of recruitment. The importance was underscored by information highlighting violations of children's rights in Syria, including the use or recruitment of children by armed actors engaged in the conflict.

Acts of Kindness

Despite the strain of such a massive influx, Lebanese and Jordanian communities continue to help when they can—donating food, water, crockery, furniture, gas and even books for children to read.

One mother in Mount Lebanon said that when her nine-year-old got lost in the streets, a stranger helped him find his way home. A Jordanian family in Zarqa gave an oxygen device to the family of a Syrian refugee child who suffered from asthma. In Tripoli, Lebanon, one business man provided shelter to a refugee family in the back of his shop, while another offered jobs to a number of Syrian refugees in his factory and provided them with accommodation.

Stuck Indoors

In the words of Abdel-Menhen, a Syrian refugee

and outreach volunteer in southern Lebanon, some Syrian children “feel like they are in prison.” Due to safety concerns, their need to do family chores and a lack of knowledge about available activities, many rarely leave the house and do not play with friends as frequently as they did in Syria.

During field research across Jordan and Lebanon, 106 children were asked how often they left home; 29 per cent said once a week or less. Seven children left less than once a month.

Isolation, loneliness and boredom were raised as particular problems among girls. Noor, 13, spent a month in Za’atari camp with her mother and father and four siblings. They did not interact with anyone else outside the family. Her father was concerned for his daughters’ safety to the point where he didn’t allow them to leave the tent. He did not even want people to know that any girls were living there. He set up a bucket inside the tent as a toilet, so they would never have to leave. Noor and her elder sister would amuse themselves by playing with rocks.

Even parents who had not heard of specific security incidents against girls said that they felt wary about letting their daughters leave the house in a strange



“I left all my dolls in Syria when we fled to Lebanon. So my daddy made this doll with a piece of wood, then I put some clothes on it. I really love my new doll but I miss all my toys back in Syria. And I also miss my friends.” ~ Noura, age 7. UNHCR / E. Byun

country. Hiba, a single mother with eight children aged eight months to 14 years, lives in a caravan in King Abdullah Park in Jordan. Although she is not aware of any kind of harassment, she worries about her two daughters' safety. She does not let them out alone. She explained: “A girl's reputation is like a cup. Once it's broken, there's no putting it back.”

While boys leave the home more freely, they are also sometimes kept at home for their safety. When errands need doing, and it is a choice between sending a girl or a boy, several families said they choose to send their sons.

Missing Friends

“I have friends from all over Syria here,” said 15-year-old Samer who now lives in Jordan's King Abdullah Park after fleeing Syria without his parents. “I have friends from Aleppo and Homs now and they teach me about areas in Syria I've never been to.” Despite the hardships, Samer and others have enjoyed some good experiences with new friends from among fellow refugees or local Jordanian and Lebanese children.

Overwhelmingly, however, young refugees endure lives of isolation and have limited opportunities to make friends and interact with refugee and local communities. In urban areas, a child's social sphere may not extend beyond their immediate building, or even their apartment.

When children living in apartments were asked who they interact with socially, the most common answers given were their siblings, cousins, Syrian neighbours or their classmates.

The Importance of Play

Humanitarian agencies know that sports and other physical activity can mitigate the memories of war and lay the groundwork for a more normal life amidst the chaos of displacement.

UNICEF and partners support child-friendly and adolescent-friendly spaces in Lebanon and Jordan where children can play and learn safely. In Jordan's King Abdullah Park, Cyber City and Za'atari camp, UNICEF has established 11 playgrounds and sports courts. UNHCR has built a playground at one registration center in Jordan and War Child Holland, Save the Children and Intersos have centres at



Newly arrived refugees at the Jordan-Syria border await transport to Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. UNHCR / O. Laban-Mattei

UNHCR registration sites in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre. Some organizations run unique programmes, such as Korea Food for the Hungry International, which offers tae kwon do for children in Za'atari camp.

In southern Lebanon, Terre des Hommes runs a programme where “animators” visit refugee homes for up to two hours, engaging children with activities such as storytelling, puppetry, face-painting and games. An Intersos “Child Smart Bus” in southern Lebanon brings recreational and educational activities to 64 local villages, particularly targeting isolated 6- to 13-year-old girls and boys.

Tensions in the Home

Most Syrian refugee families are living in conditions that are drastically worse from what they used to know in Syria. “Home” today is a tent, caravan, collective shelter, or crowded apartment shared with extended family. Some lack electricity. When it is available, they cannot afford to pay the bills to run basic appliances like a fridge.

Many depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. The difficulties they face are compounded by an uncertain future, the unknown fate of missing family and friends, financial concerns

and a lost sense of purpose. All this creates a tense and uneasy environment, which can be psychologically damaging for children and can trigger violence in the home.

Although only anecdotal information was collected on domestic violence involving Syrian children, humanitarian workers expressed overall concern about the situation. Opinion varied as to whether the prevalence of domestic violence against children has increased as a result of displacement. Some people interviewed—including a psychiatrist in Lebanon with over ten years of experience in Syria—said it is not uncommon for Syrian mothers and fathers alike to use a degree of physical force when disciplining their children, particularly among families from rural areas. They do not think that this has necessarily increased.

Others disagreed, contending that domestic violence has become more prevalent among Syrians, particularly men, since fleeing their country because of increased levels of stress, anxiety and crowded living conditions. Kazem Saleh Al-Kfery, who manages the Family and Childhood Protection Association in Irbid, Jordan, had the impression that domestic violence among Syrian refugees has increased since their



A Syrian refugee mother living in Amman, Jordan, shows the wounds on the face of her young daughter after she was hit by a neighbour. UNHCR / O. Laban-Mattei

displacement. He attributed this to their changed living conditions, as sometimes 12-15 people live in the same apartment. Al-Kfery said that domestic violence is a particular problem for girls.

An assessment conducted in Za'atari camp found that "domestic violence is the most prevalent type of violence, and it most affects girls aged 12-18,"⁷ although violence is sometimes also directed against boys.⁸ However, comprehensive data on the extent of domestic violence against girls and boys in Jordan and Lebanon is lacking—not least because women and children are more likely to report domestic violence to family members, rather than seek support outside the home.⁹

UNHCR and partners conduct awareness-raising activities to prevent domestic violence, increase awareness of available services and encourage those who have experienced or know about cases to come forward. There are several response mechanisms including individual case management, mediation and follow up with children and their parents, and the development and implementation of safety plans for affected children.

In many cases, UNHCR and partners involve the authorities, following a determination of the best interests of the child and obtaining the consent/assent of the child and/or his or her parents. UNHCR works closely with the Union pour la Protection de l'Enfant au Liban in Lebanon and the Family Protection Department in Jordan, to assist children who are survivors of violence and abuse.

7. Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, Findings from the Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan, February 2013, p.3.

8. Ibid.

9. See, for example, UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage, Jordan, July 2013, p. 28, and Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, Findings from the Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan, February 2013, p.3.



CHILDREN AT WORK

Mustafa, 15, lives with his aunt, uncle and younger sister in Zarqa, Jordan. His uncle was tortured in Syria and now finds it difficult to work, as he cannot stand for more than a few minutes. Mustafa has become the family's breadwinner and works every day in a shoe store for US\$ 7 a day. He is proud of his role providing for his family but it is also a crushing burden for a child.

Children like Mustafa, some as young as seven, must work long hours for little pay, and in some cases in dangerous conditions. In such circumstances, they are also forfeiting their future by missing out on an education. The majority of working children are boys, although some girls are employed, mostly in agriculture and domestic work.

A Widespread Problem

Child labour has reached critical levels. UNICEF estimates that one in ten Syrian refugee children in the region is engaged in child labour.¹⁰ UNHCR and partners said it is one of the most widespread and complex of all child protection problems.

10. UNICEF, *No Lost Generation* (publication pending).

Amar, 16, wipes the grease and sweat off of his arm after finishing work as a mechanic's assistant. Although Amar wants to go to school, he has to work in the automotive repair shop to support his family, who were forced to flee after their home was destroyed in a rocket attack. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

A recent assessment covering 11 of Jordan's 12 governorates¹¹ found that 47 per cent of 186 households with one or more working family member relied partly or entirely on the income generated by a child.¹² A UNICEF/Save the Children assessment in the Jordan Valley, conducted in April 2013, yielded a similar finding: 1,700 out of 3,500 school-aged children, or nearly 49 per cent, were working.¹³

The prevalence of child labour is likely to be even higher than reported numbers suggest. Many children work intermittently, picking up short-term jobs that may change from day to day. It is difficult to identify working children in both urban and rural contexts because refugee populations are often dispersed.

Given that child labour is illegal in Jordan and Lebanon,¹⁴ employers and refugee families are likely to hide the problem, fearing the ramifications of being identified. Further, some parents fear that if humanitarian organizations discover their children working, it might undermine their eligibility for financial assistance. According to UNHCR's Kilian Kleinschmidt in Za'atari camp, "There are around 680 shops in Za'atari—all of them employ children." Manal Eid, Programme Development Manager with War Child Holland

11. Ajloun, Amman, Aqaba, Balqa, Irbid, Jarash, Karak, Madaba, Ma'an, Mafrq and Zarqa.

12. UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage*, Jordan, July 2013, p. 35.

13. Save the Children Jordan and UNICEF, *Comprehensive Outreach to Syrians in Ghor and Irbid on Educational Needs*, Jordan, April 2013.

14. Jordanian law requires children to be in school until age 16; this is also the legal age for employment. In Lebanon, education is compulsory until age 15, while the minimum legal age for employment is 13, instead of 15 years as required by International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention, which Lebanon has ratified (Law of 23 September 1946, Labour Code, article 22).



A young boy looking for work in Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan. UNHCR / G. Beals

in Lebanon, said that “If you go on the street, you see Syrian children working everywhere.”

A Bigger Issue for Boys

UNHCR and partner staff throughout Lebanon and Jordan said that more boys than girls are engaged in child labour, undertaking a wide range of jobs. Of the 59 working Syrian refugee children interviewed, 97 per cent were boys. Of these, 43 per cent worked in services, such as in electrical shops, carpentry, rock quarries, motor shops, barbershops and restaurants. Thirty-nine per cent worked in retail, including clothing shops, shoe shops, sweet shops, supermarkets and street stands. A smaller number worked in construction and agriculture.

During field research, only two girls were found working—one in a vegetable store and the other as a hairdressing assistant. However, UNHCR and partner staff said that a number of Syrian refugee girls also work, mostly in agriculture or domestic work. The findings of a recent inter-agency assessment suggest that up to

80 per cent of Syrian refugee girls working in Jordan are employed in these two sectors.¹⁵

Hard Work, Tough Conditions

Many children work long hours in hazardous or demeaning environments. Dangerous forms of child labour are more prevalent in urban and rural areas than inside camps, where work tends to be limited to retail and service jobs.

Children working in construction and agriculture can be exposed to dangerous and heavy machinery, the harsh sun and pesticides. For those selling items or begging through car windows at busy intersections, the risk of accidents is high. During interviews, three boys in Lebanon, aged 10, 11 and 13, reported being injured at work. One was burned by hot oil at a restaurant, another cut his hand while fixing a car mirror and the third was beaten by the son of his boss.

15. UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage*, Jordan, July 2013, p.37.



Syrian refugee children line up for work in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. UNHCR / G. Beals

Little Money, Little Choice

Child labour is directly linked to the basic survival of refugee families. Many Syrian families fled with only what they could carry—a change of clothes; precious documents or photos; and for some, a baby or toddler who could not walk long distances through fields or across borders.

The savings, assets and possessions of most Syrian refugees were lost or destroyed. Their livelihoods came to an abrupt end, and their lives were essentially frozen.

Assessments on child labour, conducted both within Syria and in host countries, indicate that the primary reason children work is to support their families.¹⁶ An inter-agency rapid needs assessment conducted in Lebanon in early 2013 found that

Naser

Naser, a father of five in Mount Lebanon, was ashamed to admit that he could not find a stable job and that his 13-year-old son worked from 7am to 9pm each day, making accessories for handbags. Naser used to drive a tractor in Syria, but could only find temporary construction work in Lebanon. He brought US\$ 2,000 in savings when he fled, but this did not last long.

Naser proudly noted that his son's school certificates were among the few items he brought with him to Lebanon. His son was at the top of his class, and could even speak a little English. Naser said that he wished, "from the bottom of my heart", that his son could go to school. But with a family of seven to provide for, he saw no other choice.

16. International Labour Organization, *National Study on Worst Forms of Child Labour in Syria*, March 2012, available at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/publ/clsyria.pdf>; Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group, *Child Protection in Emergencies Rapid Needs Assessment, Lebanon, Jan-Feb 2013*; UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage, Jordan, July 2013*.



Mahmoud, 15, hasn't been to school for nearly three years. Back in Syria, his parents worried about the violence in their neighbourhood, so he missed school. Today, Mahmoud's salary of US\$ 60 a month from a Lebanese fish factory helps to pay the rent for the underground storage room his family lives in. The family says they cannot afford the luxury of sending him to school. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

the money earned by Syrian refugee children was predominantly used to pay for rent and food.¹⁷

Some families do receive financial assistance from UNHCR, but still their resources are severely stretched. Assistance only reaches the most vulnerable, and is not always sufficient to cover all their needs. Many refugee families in Jordan and Lebanon have no alternative but to send their children to seek work.

Parents Cannot Work

Some parents or caregivers face physical barriers to working, such as those who are elderly, have serious disabilities or were injured during the war.

Refugee children are often the only ones in their families able to generate an income. UNHCR prioritizes such situations for financial assistance. Even when accompanied by their families, many refugee children still need to work. Their parents or caregivers can face legal and social barriers to taking on employment themselves.

During interviews and focus group discussions, parents and children said it is easier for a child to find work and the ramifications of being caught are less severe. One mother in Zarqa, Jordan, explained why her son works while her husband does not: "A boy can take the abuse and insults, a man can't. So the men stay at home and the children work."

However, most parents whose children were working made it clear that they did not take the situation lightly. UNHCR and partner staff said that Syrian refugee children often work of their own volition to help their families, not because they are necessarily forced by their parents to do so.

17. Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group, *Child Protection in Emergencies Rapid Needs Assessment, Lebanon, Jan-Feb 2013*, p. 16.

A Cultural Matter

For some Syrian refugee families, particularly from rural parts of Syria, it is part of their culture for children to start working at a young age. According to a 2012 assessment conducted in Syria by the International Labour Organization (ILO), 18 per cent of children between 10 and 17 years old were working.¹⁸ However, most of the children interviewed during field research only started working since becoming refugees, with several UNHCR and partner staff also noting this as the general trend.

In some female-headed households, mothers felt they could not work because it is considered culturally unacceptable, so they asked their sons to work instead. The 2012 ILO assessment similarly concluded that one reason behind the acceptance of child labour was that it allowed mothers to avoid working in the absence of a working father.¹⁹

Children Paying the Price

An enormous burden falls on the shoulders of working boys and girls. Their childhood worries are often replaced with adult concerns. A senior social worker with Caritas, Mount Lebanon, oversees a team of five social workers, who together have worked with over 900 families this year. She said that when children work, it can lead to stress, causing them to “grow up faster than other children.”

They can also become aggressive towards their parents, she said. They feel entitled to act in this way because they are now providing for their family.

Growing Up Too Fast

A group of 12- to 16-year-old boys in Jeb Jannine, Lebanon, were asked what they would like if they could change one thing in life. Their answers tended to be rooted in financial concerns. One wanted money to pay rent, since this would make his life entirely different. Another said that getting a

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A boy can take the abuse and insults; a man can't. So the men stay at home and the children work.

Mother in Zarqa, Jordan

job was his most important concern. All the boys agreed that their number one desire is to go home.

One 12-year-old boy working in carpentry said he wanted “a different job, any job.” His issue was not the nature of the job, nor the conditions of his work, but the simple fact that he did not earn enough to pay his family’s rent.

Many working boys accept their fate as providers for their families. A 14-year-old boy in Jeb Jannine, Lebanon, said that his 12-year-old brother goes to school while he works in a rock quarry. He described the situation as “a matter of circumstance and luck.”

Wrong Side of the Law

According to Shadi, 16, who lives in Irbid, Jordan, “At any moment a Jordanian police car can pick you up and throw you in Za’atari or jail.”

Child labour is illegal in both Jordan and Lebanon, and running afoul of the law was a major concern raised by working boys during focus group discussions in both countries. During individual interviews, two boys in Jordan reported that they had previously been arrested and held for over five hours. One had been working in a cafeteria, the other in a motor shop.

18. International Labour Organization, *National Study on Worst Forms of Child Labour in Syria*, March 2012, p.20.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Ayman

Ayman, a 15-year-old boy in Tyre, Lebanon, wants to be a doctor when he grows up.

But for the moment, his reality is very different. He lives with his parents, aunt, grandparents and two younger siblings. His father cannot find a job. Ayman is the only family member working, selling gum on the street. He makes \$US 4 a day.

He said his job was “very difficult” and that he was harassed for being Syrian. A man even kicked him for selling gum during Ramadan. He would prefer to be in school, but it was Ayman himself who decided to work to support the family.

Ayman proudly looks after his younger siblings, and his face lit up when he described how he saved up enough to buy his five-year-old sister a new dress for Eid al Fitr.

But there are few sources of happiness in Ayman’s own life. He has no friends and is embarrassed by his work, so has not tried to socialize with other boys in the building. When asked about his hopes for the future, Ayman said that he wants his father to find work so that he can go to school.

UNHCR’s Kilian Kleinschmidt said that his main concern with regard to child labour in Za’atari camp is that boys could slip into the world of smuggling, where they can be used as decoys, distracting the police, for example, while adults smuggle goods out of the camp. Trenches have recently been dug to prevent vehicles from getting in and out of the camp, but smugglers are trying to use children to fill them in.

Helping to Meet Financial Needs

UNHCR provides financial assistance to help vulnerable Syrian refugee families cover urgent and basic needs, including medical expenses and rent. This can prevent families from resorting to negative coping strategies, such as taking their children out of school to work.

In Jordan, UNICEF and its partners are working to move 1,700 children from the labour force to the education system, by providing cash assistance to their families to compensate for lost income.

The Vital Role of Case Management

Individual case management is a core aspect of the child protection response in both Lebanon and Jordan. UN agencies and their partners have established functioning referral systems throughout both countries to identify children who face protection risks, manage their cases and refer them to appropriate services.

Case managers and social workers visit refugees in their homes to assess their needs. In addition to providing social counselling and emotional support, they develop an action plan with families to promote their children’s safety and ensure that they can attend school or take part in other educational services. Where possible, they work together to remove children from the work force, or at least minimize the negative effects of working. In serious cases of violence, abuse or neglect, national authorities become involved.

Case managers and social workers emphasize to parents the importance of education, the potentially harmful effects of child labour and the impact that domestic violence has on children. Given the pressing financial needs of many



Syrian refugees sit with their wheelbarrows outside the gate of Za'atari refugee camp, waiting for odd jobs pushing loads. UNHCR / J. Kohler

families, it is often not possible to find a way for children to stop working. In such situations, case managers also interact directly with children's employers to minimize the risks they face in the workplace. This can include providing materials to improve their safety at work and negotiating with employers to ensure they can access at least informal education alongside work.

Where necessary, case managers and social workers refer children to UNHCR and partners for specialized services such as health care, psychosocial support, or legal advice. In certain cases, they might also help families to access financial assistance, or provide in-kind donations from private donors, such as clothing or toys. Case managers and social workers follow up regularly with children and their families and monitor implementation of the action plan.

Volunteers

Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon can work as volunteers through UNHCR, partners and local organizations to spread information among the refugee community about issues facing children, raise awareness about available services, provide a support network, and identify and refer children in need of help to UNHCR and partners.

In Jordan, more than 950 Syrian refugees and Jordanians volunteer on 99 child protection committees: 53 in camps, and 46 in host communities. These men and women have reached out to more than 17,000 Syrian refugees. In Lebanon, UNHCR is working to increase the number of refugee outreach workers deployed throughout the country from 106 to 200, the majority of whom will be women.



THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION

“Education is the best thing in life,” said a 12-year-old girl in Jeb Jannine, Lebanon. And yet, a large number of Syrian refugee children are not in school, despite efforts by governments and UN agencies.

During interviews and focus group discussions in Lebanon, 66 per cent of the 80 children asked about education said they were not attending school. If the situation does not improve dramatically, Syria risks ending up with an under-educated generation.

Against this backdrop, UNICEF has been leading the development of a strategy entitled ‘No Lost Generation.’ The strategy aims to improve children’s access to quality education and strengthen the protective environment for children. It also seeks to expand national capacity and access to education and protection for host communities, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, by bridging humanitarian and development responses. Recognizing the stress on the public school systems, the strategy also aims to significantly

expand formal education in non-traditional settings, as well as non-formal education.²⁰

The Extent of the Problem

Lebanon has a population of a little over 4 million and reached a saturation point long ago, with 800,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR by the end of October 2013.

In the previous school year, some 30,000 Syrians were enrolled in Lebanese public schools, a comparatively low figure when compared to the 270,000 school-aged Syrian children registered with UNHCR as of September 2013.

Shifting demographics are also at play. By the end of 2013, the number of Syrian school-aged children could exceed the number of Lebanese children who were enrolled in the public system last year. UN agencies, working to support the Ministry of Education, aim to more than triple the number of Syrians enrolled in public schools by the end of 2013, but even if this goal is achieved, nearly 200,000 Syrian children could remain out of school.

Jordan, with a population of just over 6 million, has absorbed more than half a million Syrian refugees since 2011. As of September 2013, a total of 187,675 school-aged Syrian refugee children were registered with UNHCR: 44,649 in camps, and 143,026 in host communities. According to Ministry of Education data, 83,232 Syrian children

Syrian refugee students attend a class in an accelerated learning programme at public school in Kamed Al Louz in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

20. UNICEF, No Lost Generation (publication pending).



Jamal, 12, writes in English on a blackboard beside his teacher, Miss Abir Sbai, on his first day back at school after many months of displacement and absence from school. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

were enrolled in formal education; 56 per cent, therefore, were not receiving formal schooling.

Dropping Out

School drop-out is a serious problem in both Jordan and Lebanon. According to a recent World Bank report, failure and drop-out rates among Syrian children are twice the national average for Lebanese children.²¹ UNHCR estimates that 20 per cent of Syrian refugee children drop out of school in Lebanon—the biggest problem being among children over 12 years old.

Treatment in School

For many refugee children, school is a safe place where they can learn new things and make friends. It helps them to restore some normalcy in their lives, and develop future goals. Parents and children spoke of teachers

being very supportive and kind, giving Syrian students extra attention and assistance.

However, the influx of refugee students is taking a serious toll on the capacity of local teachers and the quality of education offered not only to the refugees, but also to Lebanese and Jordanian students.

In some schools, the entire dynamic in the classroom has changed. Not all teachers have



In Lebanon, in the 2013–2014 school year, an afternoon shift will be introduced in 70 schools, reaching at least 21,000 Syrian refugee children.

21. World Bank, Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict, Report No. 81098-LB, Lebanon, 20 September 2013, p.78.



When Kinana, 9, fled her home in Syria, she was devastated that her school bag was dropped in the chaos of the journey. Although her father only completed primary school, he is passionate about her education and dreams of her going to university one day. UNHCR / J. Kohler

been trained to work with refugee children suffering from psychological distress. Coupled with a lack of adequate resources, some Syrian students complained that the quality of education they receive in public schools is poor.

Some parents also reported verbal and physical abuse by teachers. Several children in Lebanon said their teachers beat them in class and “tell us bad words.”

A recent UNICEF report found that corporal punishment is widespread in Jordanian schools.²² At Za’atari camp, girls described how their teachers tell them “you have ruined your country,” cursing Syria for sending them to Jordan. Muna, 17, who dropped out of school, said, “We can’t get educated at the cost of our self-respect. We fall victim to verbal abuse, and are bundled together as Syrians even if we didn’t do anything wrong.”

UN agencies and partners train public school teachers on how to work with children who need additional support. In Jordan, UNICEF, UNESCO and partner organizations provide teacher training in camps and urban areas on coaching strategies, teaching in emergencies and supporting children who have lived through a crisis.

When serious cases of bullying, violence or discrimination by teachers or other students are identified, UN agencies and partners alert the relevant Ministry of Education to follow up with the school and, if necessary, the authorities. However, parents are often reluctant to report cases, wanting to keep a low profile in a foreign country. The number of identified cases is, therefore, low.

Can’t Cover the Costs

The Government of Jordan has generously waived tuition fees for Syrian refugee students in public schools. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education covered school fees for all Syrian students in 2012. This year, the Ministry continues to pay the fees for the same number of students who were enrolled last year, and newcomers will be covered by UNHCR and UNICEF. Students

22. UNICEF, *Shattered Lives: Challenges and Priorities for Syrian Children and Women in Jordan*, Jordan, June 2013, p.20.



Twelve-year-old Jamal, right, and a new Lebanese friend ride the bus on the first day of school in Beirut, Lebanon. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

must also pay a US\$ 60 parent committee fee in Lebanon. UNHCR and UNICEF cover this fee for all Syrians, in addition to a small number of vulnerable Lebanese children and returnees. To the extent that resources allow, UNICEF and UNHCR also provide Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan with uniforms, books, bags and stationery.

Despite the efforts of the governments and international community, the costs associated with going to school prevent some families from enrolling their children. During a recent WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 660 out of 1,432 households (46 per cent) reported that they had at least one child out of school. Of these, 57 per cent said that cost was one of the reasons.²³ Assessments conducted in Jordan have found that the cost of transportation

can be especially prohibitive in urban settings.²⁴

Some parents cannot afford to send all of their children to school and must make the painful decision of choosing which should attend. Staff in Lebanon said parents faced with this decision often choose to send younger children to school, with adolescent boys seeking work instead.

Schools are Full

Classrooms in Jordan and Lebanon are overcrowded, and the growing number of Syrian students is putting the national education system in both countries under considerable strain. The situation also prevents a large number of Syrians from getting an education.

Children and parents alike spoke of their attempts to register in school, only to find that their local schools

23. Taken from a 20 June 2013 dataset provided by WFP, as part of a WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. The assessment was conducted between May 27 and June 7 2013, covering all Governorates of Lebanon. 1432 households were surveyed.

24. UNICEF, *Shattered Lives: Challenges and Priorities for Syrian Children and Women in Jordan*, Jordan, June 2013, pp.18-20 and *Questscope, Participatory Reflection and Action Report: Factors Affecting the Educational Situation of Syrian Refugees in Jordan*, Jordan, 20 January 2013.



Mozoun and Safia (r) hand out flyers. Safia tells a 17-year-old girl, "If you study here you don't lose out." Mozoun raises the bar: "Life goes on. Our people are educated. We have to rebuild Syria." UNHCR / J. Kohler

were already full. In Irbid, Jordan, all 23 participants in a focus group discussion of girls aged 12-17 said that they attended school in Syria and wanted to continue. However, only four were able to register for the new school year. Fifteen tried, but were turned away—they were told there was simply no space.

A number of assessments and surveys underline the seriousness of the problem. The WFP/ UNHCR/ UNICEF vulnerability assessment in Lebanon found that in 29 per cent of 660 households reporting that one or more children were not enrolled in school, one of the reasons given was either that there was no space in school or there was no school in the community. A household survey from March 2013 in Mafraq Governorate, Jordan, found that 15 per cent of 2,397 out-of-school children requested enrolment, but were placed on a waiting list.²⁵

As of September 2013, 96 schools in Jordan had received support to increase their learning capacity

through the provision of double shifts, school refurbishment and prefabricated classrooms.²⁶ While the Government of Lebanon has expressed willingness to include Syrian children in a second shift in some public schools, it has also set a ceiling on how many can enrol in first shifts.

Transportation and Distance

Even for children who are able to find a place in school, there are additional problems. Discussions with parents and children suggest that transportation is a major barrier, with distance and safety considerations keeping numerous children out of the classroom.

This is a particular issue in Lebanon, where the population is extremely dispersed. For some children living in remote villages, for example, the only way to get to school is by collective taxi. This is too expensive for most refugee families.

25. REACH, UNHCR and UNICEF, *An assessment of Syrian families living in northern Jordan*, May 2013 (unpublished).

26. Jordan: RRP5 Update – September 2013.



Education ambassadors Suhair (left), Safia (centre) and Mozoun (right) head back to the office. “It’s something to be proud of, giving to others like this,” said Mozoun. “We encourage children to do what’s good for them. Through education you can achieve goals in your future.” UNHCR / J. Kohler

Waleed

Waleed, 13, is one of the programme’s success stories. As his family’s sole income-earner, he was out of school when the ambassadors met him. They convinced him of the importance of education, so he started attending school in the afternoons and working only in the mornings. He even joined the programme, taking to the streets of the camp in the evenings to encourage others to go to school.

Many children must walk to school. Parents and protective older siblings in both countries described their concerns that pupils—particularly younger children and girls—will be unsafe or get lost. Some therefore keep them at home. Others insist on the importance of education and, though wary about safety, let them walk alone.

A group of mothers in Jeb Jannine, Lebanon, said that they worry about the safety of their children on the way to school, but asked: “What choice do we have?” They are painfully aware of the risks, as one of their adolescent sons was beaten up by a gang of locals on his way home from school.

Creative programmes are helping children get to school safely. In Mafraq, Jordan, Syrian parents at three schools set up a private carpooling



Syrian refugee Aya, 8, right, and her sister Labiba, 11, who has disabilities, write in notebooks in their family's home in an informal settlement in Dalhamiyeh in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

system. At one of these schools, the system benefited 100 children in the last school year.

In a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, War Child Holland set up a “walking bus.” The camp, which is home to 120 Syrian families, is a 15-minute walk from school. Families used to fear for their daughters’ safety because of consistent verbal harassment. This has improved now that they walk to school together in one large group. In Ramtha District, Jordan, UNICEF provides buses to take children to school from King Abdullah Park and Cyber City.

Some organizations in Lebanon bring educational activities to the homes or communities of children who cannot otherwise attend school. The Lebanese NGO Iqra runs a “Classroom in a Bus” in the Bekaa Valley which includes a library, educational supplies and two trained teachers. They run two-hour reading and writing workshops for 14 children at a time, reaching 42 children a day. Language classes are also provided. The teachers also offer training to parents on reading out-loud activities while their children participate in the workshops, which they can carry out with children once the bus leaves.

Missed Too Much School

The crisis in Syria, the journey into exile and the transition into a new life have caused many Syrian refugee children to miss months or even years of school. Some have lost the drive to start again, especially if this would entail enrolling at a lower level. A Syrian teaching assistant in Za’atari camp said he feared many children in Jordan have “lost the spirit of education.”

In Jordan, any child who misses more than three years of schooling is not eligible to enrol in formal education.

Curriculum and Language

Differences between the Syrian curriculum and that in Jordan and Lebanon deter some children from going to school, or cause them to drop out.

Language is also a major issue in Lebanon. In Syria, teaching is exclusively in Arabic, while in Lebanon, classes are also taught in English or French, depending on the school. This is



Syrian children attend class at a primary school in Domiz refugee camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Syrians, even those of Kurdish ancestry, seldom attend public schools in the Kurdistan Region, where the language of instruction is Kurdish, because they are accustomed to attending Arabic-language schools in Syria. UNHCR / B. Sokol

a particular problem for older children. It is easier for younger children to pick up a new language, and their Lebanese peers are also less advanced. Despite the difficulties in learning a new language, a number of Syrian refugee children see this as a valuable opportunity.

Children with Disabilities

The exclusion of children with physical, mental and intellectual disabilities from public schools in Jordan and Lebanon, including Syrian refugees, is a serious issue, despite policies to promote inclusion. A recent assessment of 120 refugees in Lebanon—half of whom had disabilities, the others being caregivers—did not find a single child enrolled in school or other educational activities. Only a small number of those disabled children attended school in Syria.²⁷ Recent reports from

Jordan's Za'atari camp suggest that children with disabilities generally do not go to school.²⁸

Of the five children with disabilities interviewed during field research, none were going to school. Although the issue of parents not believing in the importance of education for children with disabilities has been reported elsewhere,²⁹ none of the parents interviewed expressed this view. Several were upset about the lack of opportunities for their children, wishing they could go to school and be integrated into the community.

Claire Catherinet, an inclusion advisor for HelpAge and Handicap International in Lebanon, said there is a common mindset in Lebanon among

27. Women's Refugee Commission, *Disability Inclusion in the Syrian Refugee Response in Lebanon*, New York, July 2013, p.8.

28. See UNICEF, *Shattered Lives: Challenges and Priorities for Syrian Children and Women in Jordan*, Jordan, June 2013. This was supported by preliminary data from Handicap International, as reported in Education Sector Working Group, *Joint Education Needs Assessment, Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan*, April 2013.

29. This was raised as an issue in Za'atari camp in UNICEF, *Shattered Lives: Challenges and Priorities for Syrian Children and Women in Jordan*, Jordan, June 2013, p.18.

Lebanese and Syrians alike that children with disabilities should be placed in specialized education facilities rather than be mainstreamed into the public system. However, this is beyond the financial reach of most Syrian refugee families. Further, in Catherinet's opinion, while some children with severe disabilities might require specialized services, many children with sensorial, intellectual, mental or physical disabilities could, and should, be included in public schools.

Discrimination, Bullying and Violence

Children often pick on each other for being different. In Lebanese and Jordanian schools, this is sometimes magnified, and Syrian girls and boys face blatant discrimination, bullying and violence.

This was raised as a particular issue by parents and children in Lebanon.³⁰ A 15-year-old girl in Mount Lebanon said that “the hardest thing about school here is that we don't feel safe.” Violence against boys can be serious—in Mount Lebanon a 13-year-old was hospitalized after being beaten up outside his school. Several mothers reported that their sons were afraid to wait outside the school and they prefer to be picked up from a nearby shop.

Discrimination is sometimes fuelled by the parents of Lebanese and Jordanian children, who fear that Syrian students are lowering the standard of education or putting their children's health at risk. A protection officer in Tyre, Lebanon, said that following outbreaks of contagious diseases among the Syrian refugee population, children were discriminated against. She was aware of some teachers physically dividing Syrians from Lebanese students in their classroom. Parents came to one school in Tyre to make sure their children were not sitting next to Syrians. A social worker in southern Lebanon recalled Lebanese parents telling their children not to play with the Syrians “because they have head lice and scabies.”

30. Children's aggressiveness in schools, and security concerns en route, were also reported as reasons for children not going to school in Za'atari camp in Education Sector Working Group Jordan, Joint Education Needs Assessment: Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan, April 2013.

Mixed Priorities

There were mixed reactions among children and parents about the importance of school, though the majority saw education as a priority.

With upturned lives and uncertain futures, some Syrian children channel their energy away from education. “Our brothers are dead,” said Tamer, 17. “How can we focus on school while our families are being slaughtered?”

Manal Eid, Programme Development Manager with War Child Holland in Lebanon, noted that it can be particularly difficult for children older than 12 to attend school—some have been out of the system for too long, feel too old to re-enter, or have been working and believe that this is a better

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The hardest thing about school here is that we don't feel safe.

use of their time. In Za'atari camp, 17-year-old Saif is among those who would genuinely prefer to work than go to school: “My younger siblings are in school but I'd rather work,” he said.

During interviews, several boys questioned the need for an education, or blatantly stated that they did not want to go to school. This was not only linked to their new lives as refugees. Some said they had stopped school even before the crisis because they didn't like it, they wanted to work or they felt they weren't learning much. Other children said that although they valued education, they did not plan to go back to school until they could return to Syria.

But again and again, children expressed their eagerness to learn—some for fun, others to make friends and many because they value education so highly. Some were all too aware of the dire consequences of not going to school. “Our lives are destroyed,” said 14-year-old Nadia in Irbid. “We're



A mural painted by children in Za'atari refugee camp that says "Let's go register for school." UNHCR / J. Kohler

not being educated, and without education there is nothing. We're heading towards destruction."

Some children insisted on going to school, even if they also had to work. Two boys in Lebanon, aged 10 and 11, were willing to get up at 7am, go to school, then work in a restaurant from 4pm until closing time. One boy in Za'atari camp was told by his father that he had to stop school to work. He wanted an education, so in between selling credit for mobile phones in the camp, he would secretly slip into the school. Because he did not want his father to know, he would hide his book under his clothes when he left for work in the morning.

While a few adolescent boys reported that their parents did not care if they stopped school, the majority of children and parents interviewed said the contrary. For example, Nidal, in Mount Lebanon, was a teacher in Syria before the war and understands the value of school for her 15-year-old daughter, who works as a cashier in a vegetable store ten hours a day, seven days a week and earns about US\$ 350 a month. "She is an innocent child who belongs in school, but I need the rent and no one will hire me to do that kind of work," the mother said.

Even in the face of resistance and discrimination by school staff when trying to register their children, some parents have fought to ensure that their children can go to school. One mother thinks that the local school only registered her children "because they got sick of my coming and nagging them." She explained that "I won't let my children sit at home and do nothing. It won't happen."

Education Ambassadors

"We are the ambassadors of education," said 14-year-old Safia. She is one of 12 girls and 11 boys in Za'atari camp who volunteered for Save the Children Jordan with their UNICEF-supported Back to School Campaign.

Armed with flyers, the ambassadors went from tent to tent, caravan to caravan, persuading children to go to school. Some days they reached more than 100 families a day.

"Take this chance, it's yours! Education is important!" 15-year-old Mazoun urged. Suhair, 17, would take an even tougher stand: "Why did you waste these last nine months? You could have been studying!"



Kassem, 11, shares a tender moment with his Aunt Fatima. Kassem has severe disabilities that include limited use of his legs, no bladder control, difficulty hearing, and an inability to speak. UNHCR / S. Baldwin

Encouraging School Enrolment

Back-to-school campaigns in both countries have encouraged children to register in school, and educated parents about the enrolment process. In Jordan, Syrian and Jordanian volunteers helped UNICEF and Save the Children to reach out to over 20,000 children in Za'atari camp and 60,000 children in host communities. In Lebanon, UNHCR, UNICEF and partners have supported a large-scale community outreach campaign, including through the development and dissemination of posters and leaflets that clearly set out the steps to enrol.

Supporting Students Outside Formal Schools

Given the low rate of enrolment by refugee children in public schools in both Jordan and Lebanon, other structured learning opportunities are crucial. During the past summer, humanitarian organizations offered catch-up classes to prepare children for the new school year. In Lebanon, 17 organizations provided summer courses for more than 42,000 children. In Jordan, 7,989 Syrians took part in UNICEF-supported summer catch-up classes in camps and urban areas.

Informal education and accelerated learning courses in both Jordan and Lebanon target children who have missed considerable time in school, remain out of school because of eligibility or other access issues, or are struggling with language or curriculum. These follow an approved curriculum, so that children who complete the courses can then enrol in public school or receive equivalency diplomas.

In an effort to keep children in school, UN agencies and partners offer remedial classes in areas such as literacy, numeracy and languages. In Jordan, 30,000 Syrians received non-formal education in the first eight months of 2013. In the 2012–2013 academic year, 41,000 Syrian students in Lebanon attended remedial classes or accelerated learning programmes.

A number of organizations in Lebanon provide vocational training to Syrian adolescents including courses in car mechanics, computer training, hairdressing, English language and electronics maintenance. These give adolescents skills that they will be able to take back to Syria, when conditions permit their safe return.



BIRTH REGISTRATION AND STATELESSNESS

Birth registration is a right of all children under international law.³¹ In addition to proving a child's legal identity, birth registration also provides proof of age, which is critical for ensuring the enjoyment of rights and child-specific protections.

Families are increasingly forced to flee Syria with babies who have not yet been registered, or are facing barriers to registering their children born in exile.

Unregistered refugee children can face increased risks of exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation. Birth registration can also help to prevent statelessness by documenting the child's parentage and country of birth, both of which are required by states to grant nationality to a child at birth.

31. See Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force 2 Sept. 1990, Article 7; and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force 23 March 1976, Article 24(2). The right of all children to be registered at birth is also recognized by the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam.

One of baby Ziad's first expeditions outside his tent was to register with UNHCR. He still needs to register with the Jordanian authorities to get a birth certificate. UNHCR / J. Kohler

Scope of the Problem

In Lebanon, an estimated 10,000 Syrian refugee newborns will be registered with UNHCR by the end of 2013. Additionally, a WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that 40 per cent of registered refugee households included women who were lactating or pregnant. But levels of birth registration are low, with a recent UNHCR survey on birth registration revealing that 77 per cent of 781 refugee newborns did not have an official birth certificate. This problem was particularly prevalent in the Bekaa Valley and the north of Lebanon.

UNHCR staff in Jordan also confirmed that access to birth registration is a serious concern. In Za'atari camp, over 1,400 children born between the end of November 2012 and the end of July 2013 have not received birth certificates.

Birth certificates are now issued on a weekly basis by the Civil Registry in Mafraq, Jordan. From 1 August to 12 October 2013, 66 birth certificates were issued to babies born in Za'atari camp, a dramatic increase from the two birth certificates issued between January and July 2013.

The classification of Syrian personal identity documents by UNHCR staff in a new Jordanian reception centre, Rabaa Al-Sarhan, has made it possible to find and copy Syrian identity documents for families. This helps those seeking to register their newborns in Za'atari camp.



A young mother crosses the border from Syria and becomes a refugee. She carries her one-month-old son, Hamid. "Since he was born there has been non-stop bombing every day." UNHCR / S. Rich

Barriers to Birth Registration

While the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon permit Syrian refugees to register children born in their countries, for numerous reasons many births are not registered. A major barrier in both countries is a lack of understanding of the importance of birth registration and how to go about it. When asked whether he will register his newborn, Radwan, a new father in Za'atari camp, held up his son's birth notification document from the hospital, mistakenly proclaiming, "But this is a birth certificate!"

In Lebanon, some refugees are so overwhelmed by the complex birth registration process that they resort to risky practices to obtain a birth certificate. This includes returning to Syria in the late stages of pregnancy to give birth, or enlisting relatives in Syria to fraudulently register babies born in Lebanon as having been born in Syria.

Another significant barrier is that some refugees are unable to provide the documents required to register births, such as identity papers and marriage certificates. These requirements differ between Jordan and Lebanon, and even within both countries. In Lebanon, the Personal Status

Directorate issued guidelines in May 2013 to address this, but the practice is not uniformly applied.

UNHCR and partners have been working with the authorities in both countries to ease the requirements for Syrian refugees to register births. Significant progress has been made. In Jordan, the Civil Status Department agreed that Syrian refugees can provide copies of their identification documents if they do not have the originals, though practice differs between governorates. In Lebanon, the Personal Status Directorate agreed in May 2013 to accept the family booklet as proof of parental identity and marriage.

UNHCR is also working with refugees to raise awareness about the significance of birth registration and the process. In Jordan, UNHCR works with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) Legal Aid in urban areas, conducting field visits with refugee families and awareness sessions through community-based organizations.

In Lebanon, UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council offer refugees family counselling, group information sessions and outreach at registration centers, providing advice and distributing a

leaflet on how to register births. Every month, UNHCR offers counselling to about 80 families with newborns, and together with its partners provides training for service providers and clinics on birth registration procedures.

Some refugees never had documents such as marriage certificates, as they did not register their marriages with the civil authorities in Syria. Others did not bring their original documents from Syria because they were destroyed or lost. A single mother in Mafraq, Jordan, told UNHCR that she was unable to register her child because her family booklet was burned when her home was bombed. Her husband is still in Syria, complicating the prospect of verifying her marriage in Jordan. Without such verification, it will not be possible to register her baby born in Jordan.

Failure to obtain a birth notification document, which is required to register a birth, is a problem in both Jordan and Lebanon. Some refugee women give birth at home without an authorized midwife. Others give birth in an emergency situation, or are refused notification from the hospital if they cannot pay the full cost of delivery.

A particular issue in Lebanon is the need to provide evidence of legal stay in order to register a birth. At least 20 per cent of Syrian refugees do not have valid stay documents because they entered unofficially or cannot afford or are unable to renew their residence permit.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, births can only be registered administratively within one year of birth. After that, registration must be done through a judicial procedure.

Roadblock to Rights

Refugee children whose births are not registered in their country of asylum can have difficulty accessing national services such as healthcare and education. By documenting a child's links with his or her country of origin or nationality, birth registration can also help to lay the foundation for a safe and voluntary return to Syria, if and when conditions allow.

At Risk of Statelessness

Rasha and Lina, twin girls born in Jordan, risk becoming stateless. They were born to a Jordanian mother who had moved to Syria and married a Syrian national. Although they qualify for Syrian nationality on the basis of having a Syrian father, there is currently no way to prove this. The girls' father has been detained in Syria for refusing compulsory military service, and their mother—who fled to Jordan whilst pregnant—left Syria without any documents showing marriage registration. Consequently, the children have not been registered in Jordan.

The nationality laws of Jordan and Syria do not permit women to confer nationality on children in most circumstances.

In addition to being at risk of statelessness, these children are already facing other problems. Each was born with a hole in her heart, and one had both legs broken at birth. The related medical costs were borne out of pocket, as the babies were unregistered and therefore did not qualify for free assistance at public hospitals.

While medical assistance can be provided in such cases, unregistered children often have difficulties accessing health care and other basic rights, in addition to facing the risk of statelessness.

Children who are unregistered might have difficulty crossing the border legally. Once in Syria, they are likely to then have a hard time proving their Syrian nationality, acquiring Syrian identity documents and accessing their rights. This could lead to statelessness and inhibit their ability to reintegrate into society and help to rebuild their country.

The problems facing unregistered children can intensify as they grow older and need to prove their age and legal identity in different areas of life—to enrol in school, for example, or to access social services and find work.



Act Now

We can all do something to help these children. No matter where you live or what means you have available, if you're reading this, you can do something to help. Take as many actions as you can, but please take at least one.

Donate:

Even the smallest amount helps fund the crucial work that UNHCR does to change children's lives. Please give what you can: the support really adds up. <http://donate.unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria>

If you can't afford to give money, email this report to someone who can or would be interested in reading it.

Share what you've seen:

Don't let the world forget about these children. They are the [#FutureOfSyria](#).

Tweet their stories and share their photos on all of your social media channels.

Follow the news from UNHCR on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/refugees>.

Connect with us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/unhcr>.

Send a message to a Syrian child:

Leave a message of support and we'll make sure to translate it and share it with the children registering in our Beirut reception center. They would love to hear from you. <http://www.unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/Action>

In the chaotic moments when her family fled their home in Syria, nine-year-old May left behind her beloved doll. But then Mimi, a five-year-old girl in Thailand, saw a photo May by UNHCR photographer Brian Sokol. With help from her mother, Mimi sent a new doll to Domiz refugee camp in northern Iraq. "I have never met Mimi, but she is so kind and I already like her," May said upon opening the package. "I wish one day we could meet and play together." UNHCR / N. Prokopchuk

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Back cover: Children play amid the dirty water and darkness of an underground storage complex in Saida, Lebanon. It is home to more than 200 Syrian refugee families. UNHCR / E. Dorfman

