



UNHCR Lebanon
Back to school

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Challenges For Syrian Refugee Students In Accessing Formal Education

Language Barriers

Several subjects in the Lebanese curriculum are taught in either French or English, as opposed to the all-Arabic curriculum the students were used to in Syria, making it difficult for Syrian refugee students to catch up.

Transportation

Many additional second shift programs were opened in Lebanese schools over the past years, especially in areas with a high number of refugees. However, for many students the distance to school and lack of transportation is still a barrier for attendance as transportation is only provided to the most vulnerable refugees and those living 2.5 kilometres or more from the nearest school.

Years Out Of School

Being out of school for one or more years makes it more difficult for students to go back to school. The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) was launched to help students catch up with the Lebanese educational curriculum before enrolling back in school.

Hightened Economic Vulnerability

Increased economic vulnerability leads to high drop-out rate among children aged 14 and above who tend to prioritize work over education in order to improve household income.

Photo: UNHCR/M. Dudek

Introduction

After being displaced by war in their home country, for many Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, enrollment in Lebanese public schools is their only chance to continue their accredited education. As early as 2012, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) generously opened the doors of Lebanese public schools for Syrian refugee students. This has given Syrian children the valuable opportunity to continue their education.

Since the onset of the crisis, MEHE has worked hard to make sure Syrian refugee students could attend school. Initially, students were enrolled in the regular morning shift, going to school side-by-side with their Lebanese peers. However, as their numbers grew, MEHE and UNHCR worked together in 2013 to launch an additional shift that runs in the afternoon from 2:00 to 6:00 pm, the so-called second shift. The second shift was created to accommodate a higher number of Syrian refugee children in Lebanese public schools. These efforts contribute to MEHE's strategy of Reaching all Children with Education in Lebanon (R.A.C.E.). R.A.C.E. aims to reach all school-aged children in Lebanon, including over 200,000 refugee children, with formal and accredited education opportunities.

At the end of January 2016, over 472,000 Syrian refugee children between the ages of 3 and 17 were registered with UNHCR in Lebanon. Of these, 157,984 students are enrolled in formal education for the 2015-2016 academic year in grades 1 to 9. Attending public school and receiving certified education is often the only chance for these children to obtain internationally recognized diplomas, which will be essential to continue their schooling in Lebanon or elsewhere.

UNHCR has played an important role in ensuring access for Syrian students to schools, and making sure they stay in school. This is done through different community-based activities – actively involving the community, parents and children – and outreach and awareness-raising efforts. Through a community-based approach UNHCR has worked with partners nationwide to provide information about the importance of education, opportunities for enrollment and support to retention in school.

UNHCR's activities have been made possible by the generous contributions and support from the international donor community. In Lebanon UNHCR's education activities have been supported by the European Union, France, Germany and private donors.

Facts and Figures

Number of children enrolled in the academic year 2015-2016 (as of January 2016)	157,984	Of these, 65,890 students are enrolled in the first shift, and 92,094 students are enrolled in the second shift.
School-aged (3-17) registered Syrian refugee children as of January 2016	472,028	
Second shift schools 2015-2016	238	238 Lebanese public schools nationwide are running afternoon shifts for children in grades 1 to 9.
Funding in 2015	USD 27,658,351	The European Union, the Swedish Post Code Lottery, the Big Heart Foundation and France. The Said Foundation supports DAFI scholarships (managed by UNHCR headquarters).

Back to school campaign 2015-2016

Each year before the start of the new school year, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), UNHCR, UNICEF and partner Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) jointly launch a nationwide “Back to School” campaign. Together, the organizations inform students and their parents about enrollment opportunities and procedures, and encourage all school-aged children to enroll in formal education. Information on enrollment opportunities was provided to refugee and Lebanese families through TV-spots, radio messages, poster campaigns, information sessions, leaflets, text messages and social media.

The Back to School campaign for the 2015-2016 academic year was especially important as it was the first year in which education in public schools was free of charge for all students, both Lebanese and refugees.

The involvement of parents in the education of their children was key for UNHCR during the Back to School campaign as they played an important role in enrolling their children in school, and making sure they remain in school. UNHCR reaches out to parents through awareness-raising sessions, and assists in the establishment of Parents Community Groups, empowering parents to become active actors in the education of their own children. This gives students the support at home to help them succeed in their education.

With the additional places available for refugee students through the opening of more second shift schools, the Back to School campaign helped double the enrollment numbers compared to the 2014-2015 academic year. In the 2015-2016 school year a total of 354,936 Syrian and Lebanese children are enrolled in Lebanese public schools. More ambitious targets are now being set for the coming academic year, to make sure as many children as possible have access to education.

Key Achievements Facts and Figures

Outreach Volunteers (OVs)	109	The Outreach Volunteers (OVs) are the backbone of UNHCR's community-based approach. As a part of the refugee community, OV's, provide and collect information and refer cases to the appropriate services. Community outreach on education is mainly done through specialized OV's. They organize awareness-raising and information sessions for students and parents.
Parent Community Groups established (PCG)	83	These groups are one of UNHCR's key initiatives to involve parents in the education of their children. In the PCGs, parents work together to find solutions to any problems they or their children face in school, and thus contribute to the retention of their children in school.
Homework Support Groups	101	As second shift students have classes in the afternoon, doing homework together in the morning has become a very popular activity. The groups are led by volunteers, either OV's, parents or other adult active community members.
Community Awareness sessions	1,365	These sessions take place in different locations varying from houses to community centres. The sessions are in the form of focus group discussions where education is the topic and are designed to inform families about education opportunities and enrollment procedures – an estimated 24,451 parents were reached in 2015.
Students enrolled in Vocational Education	1,033	Refugee and vulnerable Lebanese students all across the country are attending 134 vocational education centres accredited by MEHE and financially supported by UNHCR. This helps youth and young adults acquire practical skills. This activity has been funded by the EU.
DAFI scholarship programme	131	The DAFI scholarship programme is implemented in 40 countries by UNHCR and provides qualified refugees with university education. The DAFI programme in Lebanon is helping 131 Syrian refugee students pay for education in Lebanese universities in 2015-2016.

Reaching All Children with Education

In 2014, the Lebanese Ministry of Education launched their strategy 'Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon' (R.A.C.E.). With this plan, the Ministry has committed to providing free education opportunities to out-of-school children, both refugees as well as vulnerable Lebanese. The international community has supported this strategy, and the Ministry has received technical and financial assistance provided by international donors and UN agencies.

Over the years, big strides have been made and for the 2015 – 2016 academic year, almost 158,000 Syrian refugee students are enrolled in public formal education. UNHCR will continue to work with MEHE and other partners to reach enrollment targets of 200,000 in formal education.

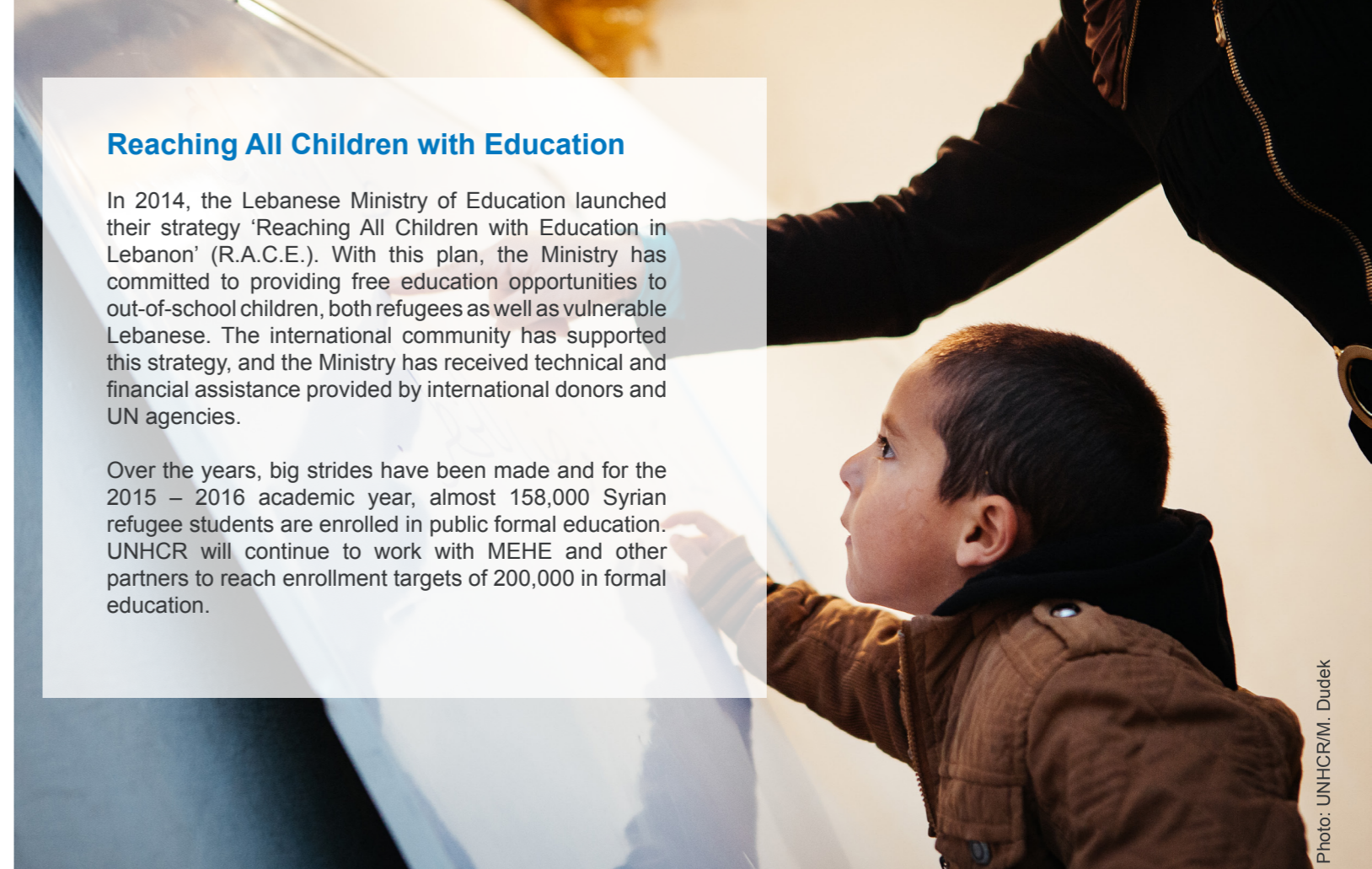


Photo: UNHCR/M. Dudek

School on wheels

“I will do everything in my power to make sure my children get a good education,” said one mother while her children were playing in the ‘School on wheels’. This roving school bus went from town to town in North Lebanon, to inform parents during the Back to School campaign. While parents received information on enrollment, children learned and played in the mobile classroom built by Scouts du Liban.

This is one of many activities undertaken together with the Lebanese Scouts. Another successful example is the partnership with the Swedish Clowns without Borders. Chief and assistant scouts attended a workshop on ‘Learning through Laughter’, training the scouts on trauma reduction methodologies. This was done with trainings on educational games, storytelling and music. Based on these workshops, the clowns developed a tool kit for MEHE scout groups, which includes the main techniques of trauma reduction.



Photo: UNHCR/V. Mandjikian

Out of School Children

Although the enrollment numbers are increasing, many children are still out of school, for numerous reasons. Next to barriers in the curriculum, such as schooling in a different language as well as being out of school for years, costs of education is the most prominent reported reason for families keeping children out of school even though enrollment is free. However, families experience a barrier in the additional costs, such as uniforms, additional stationary, transportation and the loss of income when children are not working. Together with the OV's and the Parents Community Groups, UNHCR works on community-based solutions to the issues raised by the communities. Often solutions can be found within the communities, such as organizing adults to accompany the children to walk to school when transportation is not available.

Another reason often quoted is the difficulty of enrollment in some schools as sometimes school management has additional requests for the enrollment, such as identification cards or vaccination booklets. In these cases UNHCR works together with the regional offices of the Ministry of Education, to inform the school directors about the enrollment regulations.

Identifying and addressing the reasons for refugee children being out of school is one of UNHCR's top priorities. Information about this is being collected through household visits, community reporting from OV's and partner NGOs, and discussions with parent and community groups.

UNHCR's Community-Based Approach

UNHCR has well-established links with the refugee community, and uses these connections in the outreach and awareness raising activities in education. UNHCR and partners work directly with the communities to find solutions to challenges children face in their education.

The community itself is at the core of UNHCR's work, which means that work to the largest extent possible is done both with and by the community members themselves. The Outreach Volunteers (OVs) and the parents committees are operating inside towns, Informal Settlements and refugee homes.

After receiving training from UNHCR and partners, OVs are providing information on education to their community, through information and awareness raising sessions. They also gather information from the communities and report to UNHCR and partners any concerns expressed by the communities. This helps to inform and better design programmes to bring children into school.

Engaging parents

The most effective and sustainable way of promoting access to education is through community-based initiatives, by making sure the community is engaged in the education of their children. An example of this are the Parent Community Groups, where parents meet to discuss the education of their children and challenges they are facing.

Together they find solutions to common problems, such as transportation to and from school. UNHCR and partners encourage parents to set up transportation plans – such as walking together with children to school or arranging transportation for a group of children from the same area. Additionally parents are encouraged to assist children in their school work, for instance through the organization of homework support groups.

Homework support

A great community-based initiative is the establishment of homework support groups. The groups create a safe place for students to do homework, preferably in the presence of a person who can give academic guidance. To ensure a high quality of the homework support groups, university students benefitting from UNHCR's DAFI programme (a scholarship programme for university students) are encouraged to volunteer. By having DAFI students as their mentors, children also come to see them as positive role models, giving them a great example of what can be achieved with continuing education.

Most of the homework support groups are held in the morning as most refugee children attend school in the afternoon. The groups provide them with a safe learning space facilitated by parents, community volunteers or OVs. As refugees in Lebanon live in a large variety of shelter options, homework support groups take place in homes, tents, makeshift shelters, and some are arranged in community centres. In these groups the children can also help each other with their homework. The initiative is very popular with both children and parents as it motivates and encourages children to stay in school and continue their education.



UNHCR's Outreach Volunteers

Outreach Volunteers (OVs) are an essential link between UNHCR and the refugee community. Grounded in their communities, OVs who are refugees themselves provide other refugees with information on the assistance they can receive and ensure referrals if there is a specific need in the families. UNHCR mobilizes specialized OVs, in sectors such as education and health. These OVs usually have specific backgrounds, for instance the majority of the education OVs were teachers in Syria.

In 2015 UNHCR mobilized 109 specialized Education OVs, more than ever before. They have been essential in the Back to School campaign in 2015, informing parents about available education opportunities, encouraging enrollment and referring cases in need of special attention. When parents are informed and involved in the

education of their children, lasting support will be present in the academic career of the students. This can only be achieved through continued contact, coming from the community itself, in which the OVs have a key role.

After ensuring enrollment many efforts are undertaken to ensure that children stay in school, for which the OVs also carry out important activities. They provide information, report problems children experience in schools, coordinate and help with setting up the homework support groups and Parents Community Groups (PCG).

Fatime (45) is an Outreach Volunteer in the Saida area of South Lebanon. She has eight children.

"When I was younger I had a science teacher who has inspired me to become a teacher. He had a great methodology and personality; he made me realize that being a teacher is a humanitarian job. Because of him, I wanted to contribute to society and to spread my knowledge. I became a physics and chemistry teacher back home in Syria. After I came to Lebanon, I wanted to continue to be a valuable part of the community and use my skills to make a difference. That is why I became an education OV here in Saida.

When I was a student I was fascinated by science, so I pursued that in my studies. I don't see science as a man's world; I don't believe there are different tracks for men and women to follow in this life.

I recently became an OV, as one of my friends was a volunteer and suggested this would be a good role for me. Before I started as an OV, I also helped my own and neighbouring children with their homework and supported them in their education. This has been a bit difficult for me because of the language differences; the curriculum is partially in English here. However when they translate it for me I can definitely help out with their homework.

As an OV, I cover the region of Saida. I meet with families and inform them about the education opportunities available to their children. I encourage them to send their children to school and make them realize the importance of education. When the conflict in Syria will be over, our children have to be equipped and ready to contribute to rebuilding Syria. That's what makes this role very humanitarian.

I have eight children myself, between the ages of nine and 22. One of the good things in my position as an OV is that I also learned about education opportunities for my own children. I learned about the DAFI scholarship, which could give my eldest daughter a chance to continue her education in university. She is now applying for the scholarship so hopefully she can continue her studies."



Photo: UNHCR/M. Dudek

Photos: UNHCR/M. Dudek



The Aydamoun Public School

Akkar, an area close to the Syrian border in North Lebanon, is one of the areas that has experienced a high influx of Syrian refugees. Even though the area is one of the most affected by the crisis, the hospitality from the host communities in this region has been tremendous.

One of the first schools to open a second shift in the 2013-2014 academic year was the Aydamoun school in Akkar, enrolling 206 Syrian students. This year the school has a total of 313 Syrian students registered; 282 students in the second shift and 31 students in the first shift. The latter are attending school together with 139 Lebanese peers.

The school director, Mr. Samir Abboud, notes that the second shift school has come a long way since the opening, and he is very happy to see the progress of the students in the second shift. "Syrian students in second shift have demonstrated impressive academic achievements and their French language skills, especially in the lower grades, are close to the Lebanese in first shift", he stated. This shows hard work and great enthusiasm among the enrolled children in the second shift.

It is the supportive environment of the school that contributes to the positive progress of the students. The teachers take the education of the students very seriously, and have shown compassion for the situation

the Syrian students are in. Students are encouraged to share where they need additional support, so the school can assist where possible.

However, the school is also facing some challenges. Although the enrollment for Syrian refugee students stands at 313, only 297 Syrian students are actually attending. The school director thinks this may be due to the frequent moving around of some refugee families in the area, who often move as seasonal employment opportunities change. He actively searches for solutions to any of the hurdles faced by the students, such as the lack of transportation. The director encourages parents to assist, and makes arrangements himself with any organization available to help.

Recruiting qualified teachers to teach French and Science has proved difficult as Aydamoun is a small community and most teachers live in larger towns further away from the school. The commute might not be a problem when employed in the first shift but is more problematic for the second shift, when the day ends at 6 pm. One solution to this is to provide the teachers already present at the school with additional trainings to improve their French skills. In the 2014-2015 academic year a nationwide training was rolled out by the French cultural centre, which assisted teachers to improve their French and teaching skills. Teachers of the Aydamoun school also benefitted from this assistance.

Fourteen-year old Amar dreams of becoming a nurse when she grows up. Every day that she goes to school is dedicated to achieving this goal. When she first came to Lebanon, Amar attended classes at a so-called Syrian Learning Centre - these are providing non-formal learning programs based on Syrian curricula. However, as the quality of instruction was not up to standard compared to the formal public system and Amar wanted certified education, she soon moved to the Aydamoun Public School.

"My brother does not like to go to school. I think he finds it hard to catch up to the new curriculum. But children who do that are missing a great chance after all that we have lost.

I especially focus on my Science courses, as I want to go to nursing school. Being a nurse is a very humanitarian job, and there is a big need for nurses. That's why I want to become a nurse."



Photo: UNHCR/K. Kodre



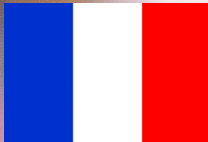
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