Education provision for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

Preventing a "Lost Generation"

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Summary

As we enter the fifth year of the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, it is becoming clear that this crisis could lead to the long-term displacement of Syrian refugees. Education is an "essential platform for protection, social stabilization and economic recovery" (UNICEF *et al.,* 2013). Access to quality education is key to ensuring the continued learning of children displaced due to the on-going conflict in Syria. A high proportion of uneducated Syrians will have serious individual and societal consequences. Education provision for Syrian children in their host countries is therefore indispensable. Yet, 57% of the region's children are currently not attending school. This report discusses the education provision for Syrian refugees in three neighbouring countries; Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It will specifically look at the educational possibilities for Syrian refugee girls and the role these can play in reducing gender-specific vulnerabilities that girls can experience in times of displacement.

"Education is very important because it's the shield we can use to protect ourselves in life. It's our method to solve our problems. If we don't have education, we can't defend ourselves."

Mazoun Almellehan, 16 years old
2015, Jordan
(cited in Thompson, 2015)

Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis began in March 2011, when Syrian authorities responded with force to anti-government protests, eventually leading to the outbreak of an extensive civil war across the country. Now, in its fifth year, over four million Syrians have moved into their neighbouring countries to seek refuge (UNHCR, 2015c). In March 2015, there were approximately 752,000 Syrian school-age children out of school. This makes up 57% of the total number of children in the region, which is estimated at 1,328,000 (UNHCR, 2015a). This policy report intends to examine education provision for Syrian children in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which currently host the highest number of Syrian refugees. Although provision has been made to increase classrooms, teachers and school materials for around 450,000 Syrian refugees in these neighbouring countries, a high proportion of refugee children are still not accessing education (Children of Syria, 2014).

The report will present the education barriers faced by Syrian refugee children in general and the education provisions made for them. It will then focus more specifically on the gender-specific challenges faced by Syrian refugee girls in accessing and attending school and the opportunities that education provision can offer them.

Education in emergencies

Education in emergencies refers to the education of children affected by crises such as armed conflicts or natural disasters. It can be assisted by a number of stakeholders, which include international and local governments, international organisations, NGOs and local communities.

Humanitarian aid systems often neglect investment in the education of children in countries affected by conflict (Education for All, 2015). Yet, this is an area that needs a significant amount of attention. Out of the approximately 57 million children that are currently not at school worldwide, more than half are living in conflict-affected states. 55% of these children

are female (INEE). Children suffer extensively from conflict, disasters and displacement and it is of upmost importance that children in conflict-affected states gain access to education. Often they have suffered from traumatic experiences and their lives have been uprooted. School allows for the 'normalisation' of refugee children's lives and can give them hope for the future; it provides a place where students can learn new skills and values. Access to education for refugees is fundamental in the short and long term not only for the refugees themselves, but also for the stability of the countries they are residing in. Furthermore, it supports post-conflict reconstruction if and when refugees are able to return to their home countries in the future.

A UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) has been drawn up to respond to the protection and assistance of Syrian refugees. It brings together 155 actors, including host governments, UN agencies, NGOs, the IOM, foundations and donors (UNHCR, 2014c). The RRP6 strategy stipulates that all Syrian children should have access to education.[1]

The table below shows the estimated number of registered refugee children that were in and out of formal or informal education in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in May 2015 according to the 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (UNHCR, 2015a). Neighbouring countries have been overwhelmed by the number of Syrian children they are to enrol and integrate into schools. Additionally, there are political, cultural and practical issues that can prolong or hinder this process.

Syrian School Aged Children in Formal or Non-Formal/ Informal Education and out of School

	In education	**Out of school**
Jordan	182,867	34,216
Lebanon	119,389	285,661
Turkey	200,500	394,049

Source: UNHCR, *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-2015: Regional Monthly Update May 2015*

[1] "The Regional Response Plan 6 (2014) identified uninterrupted education, early childhood interventions, and physical and social interventions as essential to ensuring children acquire the skills necessary to integrate into the host society and to rebuild their country when they return", UNHCR (2015g), Syria Regional Refugee Response, Zaatari Refugee Camp

Syrian Girls and their access to education

Four out of the five Syrians who have fled Syria and entered Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq or Turkey are women and children (IRC, 2014). This report will look specifically at the education provision for Syrian girls in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which currently host the highest numbers of Syrian refugees, and the barriers they face in accessing and continuing with their education.

The report *"Are we Listening? Acting on our commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict"* (IRC, 2014) highlights some of the challenges that refugee girls face. These include being more exposed to violence within the home, being encouraged or forced to marry at a young age[2] and experiencing barriers to accessing services such as education and health care. The report also found that parents often fear for their daughter's safety on their way to and from school and they therefore often prefer for them to stay at home. Nevertheless, the research generally found that girls wanted to attend school and that there is a need for providing safe learning environments and clear information for parents and their daughters regarding educational opportunities.

If children are out of school they are more vulnerable and at risk of entering the labour market or being forced into early marriage (Watkins and Zyck, 2014: 5). Early marriage was common in Syria prior to the current conflict, particularly in rural areas and it is not uncommon across various refugee populations. Nevertheless, it has become more frequent for Syrian girls to marry at a young age since the start of the Syrian refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2014a). In contexts of displacement and violence, some families may find that marriage offers girls more protection. Further primary research is needed to understand the factors behind girls increasingly marrying at a young age and there is a need for policy to respond to some of the underlying structural reasons as to why families may choose for their daughters to marry. Beyond traditional Syrian practices of early marriage particularly in rural areas, the factors could include the belief that marriage could provide increased protection in unsafe contexts of displacement, access to better housing and overall a more secure future.

[2] There has been an increased international commitment towards ending child, early and forced marriage. The first global Girl Summit in 2014 stipulated the priorities set out in the Girls Summit Charter, which includes that "no one should be forced into marriage or made to marry whilst still a child" (The Girl Summit, 2014). Recently there has been a concern over the increase in the number of Syrian refugees entering early marriage. Early marriage is a worldwide phenomenon. In low and middle-income countries (with the exception of China), one in three girls marry before they turn 18. Marrying at a young age can have a strong social, physical and emotional impact as well as limit access to education (King and Winthrop, 2015).

Therefore family decisions in crisis situations can impact or limit girls' future options. One policy option could be to expand educational possibilities to offer girls an alternative space for protection, at the same time as allowing girls to exercise their agency, particularly as research has shown that many express their desire to go to school.

The International Rescue Committee's evaluation of their education programmes in emergencies found that access to education gives girls hope for their future (2014: 4). A way of reducing the vulnerabilities faced specifically by girls can be through improving access to education, its quality and girls retention at school. Girl-sensitive education programmes which address some of these needs such as non-formal learning environments, providing information about education opportunities and the creation of awareness campaigns for parents, could help to address some of the barriers that girls face in accessing education.

Case Study 1: Education for Syrians in Jordan

There are currently 629,128 Syrian refugees registered in Jordan (UNHCR, 2015d). In 2014, the Syrian RRP6 estimated that 80% were living outside of refugee camps (UNICEF, 2015). Jordan also has the world's largest Syrian refugee camp, the Za'atari camp, which currently hosts 81,405 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2015g).

The Government of Jordan has demonstrated commitment in supporting Syrian children with the continuation of their education. Syrian children are accepted into public schools, regardless of their registration status with the UNHCR so long as they are registered with the Jordanian Ministry of Interior. However, the increasing numbers of Syrian refugee children entering the country are placing great pressure on the Jordanian public education system (UNHCR, 2014b).

In refugee camps, remedial and catch-up classes are provided for Syrian children to overcome their learning difficulties due to being out of school for a number of weeks, months or years (UNHCR, 2014b: 51). Nevertheless, there are a number of barriers impeding access to education for Syrian children in Jordan. Many Syrian students have difficulty accessing a curriculum that is different from their own. Furthermore, students fear they will not receive official diplomas at the end of their time in education, due to arriving in Jordan without the relevant documentation (Al Monitor, 2014). Additional barriers include a lack of information on how to access education services, distance from school, overcrowding of classrooms, bullying and protection concerns for young girls (UN Women, 2013).

An area of concern in Jordan particularly related to girls is the increased number of girls marrying at a young age, which often reduces their school access and attendance. In pre-conflict Syria, early marriage made up 13% of weddings. This figure has doubled since Syrian refugee girls moved to Jordan (A World at School, 2014).[3] In some cases early marriage for young Syrian girls is seen as more important than receiving an education. Rahaf, a young married Syrian living in the Za'atari refugee camp said that she wanted to go to school, yet her father did not think it was safe and he thought the qualifications would be useless in Syria (Al Monitor, 2014). Research has found that it is often males and fathers who encourage early marriage, while women and girls are usually more drawn to completing their education (UNHCR, 2014a). A UN Women report found that some young female refugees dropped out as they felt that they no longer needed education as they were preparing to marry.[4] The report highlights a need for social workers to conduct field visits to assess Syrian families' needs and address the challenges girls face in accessing education (UN Women, 2013).

The Jordanian Ministry of Education provides a range of programmes to increase the options available for school-age girls to continue their education after marriage. Literacy classes and non-formal education programmes are offered in fifty schools around Jordan, as well as home schooling programmes. Despite these efforts, few girls complete their education once married (UNICEF, 2014).

Nevertheless, improving access to education can have an impact on whether girls enter early marriage. A UNICEF participant study: *A study on early marriage in Jordan*, found that education was consistently mentioned as a factor when deciding whether a girl should marry. Girls saw themselves as having one of two options, either they married, or they continued with education. The study found that if the girls were performing well at school, they would be less likely to drop out and marry early. However, on many occasions, if they left formal education,

[3] According to a UN WOMEN report on *Gender based Violence and Child Protection* (2013: 29), the issue of early marriage within the Syrian refugee community in Jordan often stems from Syrian traditional and above all rural traditions. Nevertheless, other studies have found that the culture of early marriage has been enhanced by the Syrian crisis, which has increased the potential for girls to end up in abusive situations (UNICEF, 2014: 9).

[4] Education Law in Jordan states that no child can be excluded from basic education before the age of 16. Before approving a marriage, the judge must be satisfied that the marriage will not cause the discontinuation of the girl's education (UNICEF, 2014). If girls do enter early marriage in Jordan, their contracts are supposed to include a clause that ensures the girls will continue with their education (IRC, 2014).

they would marry within a short period of time. The report highlights the need for the promotion of programmes, which keep girls in formal education for longer and promotes education as a compatible goal alongside marriage (UNICEF, 2014).

Some measures have been taken to address the barriers that girls face in attending school. The Za'atari refugee camp has set up three schools operating double-shifts where boys and girls are taught separately and the camp also provides formal and informal education opportunities. Specific strategies to improve the attendance of girls have been implemented. Assembly points have been set up where teachers meet girls to walk them to school and ensure for their safety (UNICEF *et al*.2015). However, there continue to be many obstacles to children attending school in the camp. Often children live too far away to access the schools and there is a concern of girls being harassed on the way to and from school. Furthermore, due to 42% of families in the camp having female-headed households, boys are often being sent to school in preference to girls (Al Monitor, 2014).

Case Study 2: Education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

There are currently 1,172,753 refugees registered by the UNHCR in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2015e). Syrians now make up 25% of the Lebanese population. This influx of Syrians has inevitably overwhelmed the capacity of the Lebanese public school system. Lebanon has not set up official refugee camps and therefore Syrian refugees live in rented housing, nomadic camps or are hosted by families and local communities (European Union Institute). This in turn has led to complications with aid delivery and has increased the pressure on schools to absorb Syrian refugees into the Lebanese public system, which Syrian children can be enrolled in regardless of their legal status.

Beyond overcrowding and oversubscribed schools, the reasons behind the lack of school attendance and the cause for school dropout in Lebanon are transportation, tuition fees, language barriers (many classes in Lebanon are taught in French and English), curriculum challenges, mixed-sex education and safety concerns.

The Lebanese Ministry of Education launched an initiative to deliver education to refugees and vulnerable Lebanese students in 2014. The *Reach All Children with Education* (RACE) initiative is a three-year programme, which consists of increasing spending, improving education quality and strengthening national education systems, policies and monitoring (Watkins and Zyck, 2014). Lebanon has also introduced an *Accelerated Learning Programme* (ALP) for 10,000 students, with the aim of Syrian children catching up with the Lebanese curriculum.

In 2014, UNHCR recorded 91% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 out of school (Watkins and Zyck, 2014: 3). More information is needed on girls' attendance at school in Lebanon so that the Lebanese government can address gender specific barriers.[5] At present there are only a few local NGOs addressing the educational needs of Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon (Malala Fund, 2015). Research has found there to be a need for more community-based education programmes that address girl-specific barriers. The International Rescue Committee has set up Community-Based Education (CBE) in Lebanon for 8,500 vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian children who are currently out of school. This has proved successful in keeping girls safe and in school (IRC, 2014). This year, Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani education activist, opened a school for 200 Syrian girls aged 14-18 in Lebanon on her 18th birthday (Bloch, 2015). More programmes are needed which specifically address the barriers facing Syrian girls in the aim of expanding their future opportunities and options for self-realisation.

Case Study 3: Education for Syrians in Turkey

Turkey is currently hosting 1,805,255 registered refugees (UNHCR, 2015f). 36% of Syrian refugees are in camps and the remaining 64% are in cities across the country. Refugees living outside the camps often face significant challenges to access basic services. Education access is still a huge concern with only 60% of children in the camps and as little as 14% outside of camps attending school. There are a growing number of students who have fallen behind in schooling and are in need of catch up sessions. Many children have missed up to three years of schooling (UNHCR, 2014d).

Language is one of the biggest barriers to integrating Syrian students into Turkish schools. There are also practical barriers such as the recognition of Syrian certification of education and of the Syrian curriculum. Some provisions have been made to overcome this barrier. For example, in certain areas, the Syrian Education Commission and Turkish Ministry of Education have agreed that students in grades 9-12 will follow the Libyan curriculum. Nevertheless, due to other cultural and practical barriers, the number of Syrian refugees with Turkish residence permits enrolled in Turkish schools is significantly lower than those enrolled in schools run by the Syrian Education Commission in Turkey (Kirişci, 2014: 26).

[5] An increase in Syrian girls entering marriage before turning 18 is also a growing concern in Lebanon. Although there are no recent figures regarding the growing rate of child marriage in Lebanon, the Lebanese government has drafted legislation requiring the approval from both civil and religious courts before a child can be married (Middle East Online, 2014).

Syrians first began to enter Turkey in April 2011. At the time, they were recorded as "guests" (Syrian Refugees, 2011), which gave them access to temporary education and health care. However, five years into the conflict, there is a growing need for policy to be shifted from humanitarian assistance and temporary protection to focusing on long-term incorporation of refugees in Turkish society (Kirişci, 2014).

Besides the language barrier, there are other significant cultural differences that can impede the school attendance of Syrian refugees. In Syria, girls and boys are taught separately, whereas Turkish schools are mixed. According to the UNICEF 2014 *No Lost Generation* report, girls and children with disabilities are most likely not to be enrolled in school, to drop out or to have low attendance (UNICEF, 2014). Furthermore, Syrian parents often want their daughters to wear a hijab at school, which is not permitted for Turkish teenage girls (Nielsen and Grey, 2013). There is also an increased tendency for Syrian families to prefer their daughters to marry as it improves their chances of gaining access to housing. (Women1One). A participant study of women in the Kirikhan area of Turkey found that girls usually married early due to their families' financial difficulties and because they were unable to enrol in schools (Dorman, 2014). This lack of access could be due to the aforementioned cultural and practical barriers. The report *Are we Listening? Acting on our commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict,* highlights the need for more communication between the Turkish government and the Syrian service providers, to improve formal and non-formal education opportunities for Syrian refugees (IRC, 2014).

Conclusion

The expanding Syrian refugee crisis is leading to a large number of Syrian children who are not receiving an education. Neighboring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have implemented a range of policies to attend to the educational needs of Syrian children. A diverse range of educational arrangements have also been offered by NGOs, international and local organisations and civil society and community groups. Nevertheless, a high proportion of children remain out of school.

Host countries need the support of the international community and funding to be able to absorb the high numbers of Syrian refugee children into their public school systems, create formal and informal learning opportunities for these students and address political, cultural and practical problems that arise in the process of improving access to schooling for Syrian refugee children.

There is also a gendered dimension with regards to education access and provision for young Syrian refugees. This report has focused on the barriers that Syrian refugee girls face in attending school. Access to quality education can play a key role in offering sustainable and empowering opportunities to girls for their futures and can allow them to exercise greater agency over their decisions. Education has the potential to make key differences in: addressing gender inequalities in contexts of displacement; allowing refugee children to interact with peer groups and giving them the right to a youth and future; offering a safe space for learning and a relevant, quality curriculum for displaced populations.

General Recommendations for Syrian Refugee Education Provision

- **Funding requirements** for the *No Lost Generation* initiative: The education initiative is currently 72% underfunded. Jordan requires a further $94 million, Lebanon $241 million and Turkey $59 million (3RP, 2015: 19). Yearly roughly 1% of humanitarian aid is spent on education (Martinez, 2013). Increased support and funding from the international community to provide education for Syrian refugee children.

- More **research** into the quality of education provided for Syrians inside and outside of refugee camps and an increased monitoring of access to education services.

- **Specific response to girls' education**: lifting the barriers that cause girls to drop out of school or that prevent them from enrolling: improvement in access, quality and retention of refugee girls at school.

- Development of **girl-sensitive education programmes**: addressing the specific needs of adolescent girls: transportation, safe learning environments, a balance of academic and social/emotional skills, non-formal education that is flexible, accurate information about education provision opportunities, awareness campaigns for parents.

- The introduction of more **long-term solutions**: curriculum, teachers, language, certification: Building a systematic approach to education of Syrian refugees in the region. Increased roundtable discussions such as the Amman Conference (Children of Syria, 2014), which discuss the challenges preventing Syrian refugees from receiving an education.

- Greater **cooperation between different actors** involved in education (state, non-state, intergovernmental, community).

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