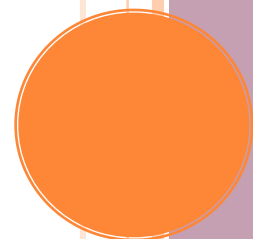


THE REGIONAL REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN

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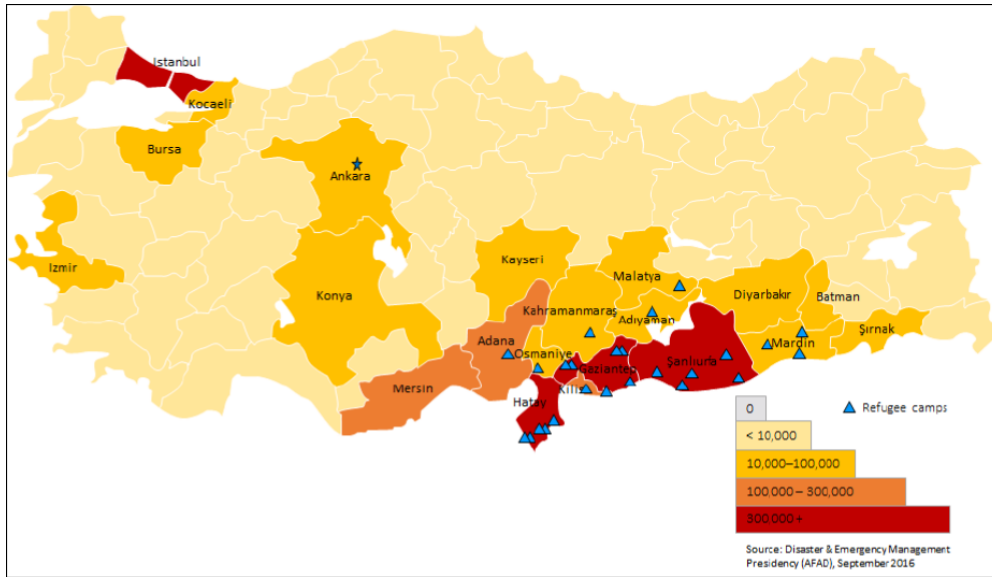
THE REGIONAL REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN

Despite all that has been undertaken and billion dollars of spending, Syrian refugees may still experience various types of protection, living conditions and levels of access to social services according to the country where they found asylum and the environment they are living in. Some of the populations that are the most at risk are children. Many have fled Syria for more than five years and are at risk to become a lost generation exposed to social marginalization and exclusion, radicalization and trafficking. Providing them education is one of the main keys offering them the perspective of a descent future and avoiding such risks. The state of access to education within the main hosting countries, however, remains uncertain. This is what this paper highlights. International assistance remains crucial and highly needed to fill the gaps that the governments cannot address.

Turkey

Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world. 2.764.500 Syrians are officially registered under the new *Temporary Protection Regime* (TPR) that is granted to them by the *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (LFIP). 90,8% (2.509.307) are living in host communities, especially in the south-east areas, Istanbul and Ankara, and 9.2% (255.000) are accommodated in camps all located in the south-east regions. 44% (1.219.000) of the Syrians under the TPR are under 18 and 34% are school aged (945.000). Among these latter, those who live in host communities can access education through the Turkish formal system or through one of the 425 Temporary Education Centers (TEC) spread among 21 provinces. School-aged children living in camps can only access to education through these TECs (there are 36 TEC spread among 26 camps).

Figure 1. Syrian refugee population in Turkey



Source: AFAD (September 2016)

Access to education is guaranteed by art. 28 of the TPR, however major barriers have prevented Syrian children to enrol. This is why TECs are more popular. These private establishments run by charities provide a modified version of the Syrian curriculum in Arabic. They have been legalized by Circular 2014/21 of the Ministry of National Education of Turkey (MoNE) in September 2014. Provincial Directorates of Education now regulate and supervise the activities of the TECs and are supposed to validate the certificates that are delivered but there still exists several issues in this regards, especially related to the compliance with MoNE's requirements. The actual goal of TECs is to gather Syrian people into the formal system and they are expected to progressively disappear grade by grade while children in the disappearing grades are enrolled in the formal system. This policy is expected to start with grade 1 from year 2016-2017 and is linked to a new Circular that will be passed soon aiming at fostering the assimilation of the Syrian children. There also exists informal Turkish course and vocational education programmes dispensed by NGOs within community centers.

According to the latest data given by the MoNE, 139.000 have currently been enrolled in the formal system and 326.000 are enrolled in TECs (465.000 in total). AFAD claims 510.000 children in school today¹. So this means that 49% of the children have now been enrolled in schooling, which represents a 45% increase compared to the last year. The pattern is that school enrolment is far more higher in camps than in host communities (85% rate of enrolment in camps and 30% in host communities)². However, the effective attendance is difficult to

¹ AFAD, *Turkey Response to Syria Crisis*, 30 November 2016; <https://www.afad.gov.tr/en/2601/Turkey-Response-to-Syria-Crisis>, accessed on 1st December 2016.

² Turkey Education External Update, Ankara: UNHCR, September 2016, p 1.

estimate, both in camps and out of camps. It is known, though, that there is a severe decline in secondary schooling to 10%, from 85-90% in primary school³.

This pattern is mainly related with the state of economic deprivation of many families living out of camps that entails for the children the need to work in order to add an income in the household, as well as the prioritization of basic necessities over education. Some cannot afford paying the transportation costs, especially when the school is far away. The lack of income to buy clothing items can lead to bullying and discrimination that can be furthered with the language barrier, already preventing the children to find their way. Psychological trauma also affects the children in this way. These latter considerations are also leading to social disintegration, which can prevent an effective attendance to school. In some parts of the country, especially the south-east, early marriage is equally an issue, linked to the poverty of the families. Eventually, there is a lack of information allowing to understand the diverse educational options and the lack of space in some provinces does not match the demand. In comparison, the high enrolment rate in camps can be linked with a more comprehensive support of the people hosted there.

Lebanon

Lebanon has become the country with the highest density of refugees in the world after having been hosting 1.017.000 Syrian asylum seekers officially registered with UNCHR for a total population of 4.4 million inhabitants. The government refuses to see Lebanon either as a country of asylum or as a final destination for the resettlement of Syrian migrants fleeing the war. This way, Syrians must legalize their stay through a residence permit that has to be periodically renewed with strong requirements. The government did not open any refugee camp so they live in host communities with a precarious status - if not without any - and in a situation of deep poverty (70% living below the Lebanese poverty rate)⁴.

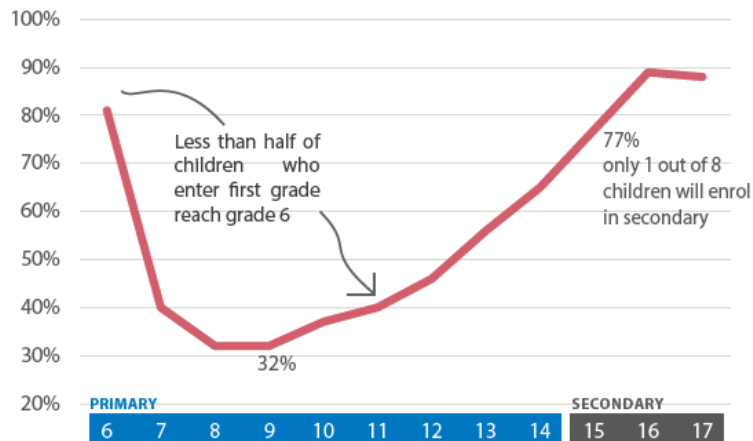
In terms of education, though, the government allowed the children to enroll in the public system without having to provide a proof of legal residency. Such an influx of asylum seekers put the historically underfunded education system under strain. With the backing of the international community, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) designed a three-year strategy called RACE (*Reaching All Children with Education*) with the aim to provide formal education and accelerated learning programmes for the Syrian children (up to 200.000 ones) as well as to all the Lebanese children that dropped out of school. The strategy consisted in the opening of second schooling shifts specifically for the Syrians from in 238 schools 2 pm to 6 pm added to the mixed classes in the morning. MEHE also accredits accelerated learning programmes run by UNICEF or UNESCO that are intended to catch up schooling drop outs and to make the transition into the formal system. Besides, many unaccredited informal curricula and educational activities are led by private for- or non-profit entities.

³ DEMIR Yalcin Köksal (Ministry of National Education), Workshop on equal access to education for Syrian children in Turkey, Ankara, 19 July 2016.

⁴ *Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees*, WFP, UNICEF & UNHCR, 15 July 2016, p 31.

At the end of school year 2015-2016, 65.890 children were enrolled in the first shift and 92.000 in the second shift out of the 477.000 school-aged population (33% of the official number of refugees)⁵. 24.000 others were also enrolled in informal educational activities⁶.

Figure 2. Out of school children by age



Source: UNHCR (November 2016)

The pattern in Lebanon is of an attendance ratio of 53% in primary school (from 6 to 14) that collapses to 16% in secondary school (from 15 to 17). Furthermore, less than half of the children who enter the first grade effectively reach grade six and only 1/8 children enroll in secondary school⁷. Even though enrollment in public schools is free, cost of education is mentioned as the main barrier, so this is related with the transportation costs or school furniture. The poverty further leads the children to work in order to help their family. Other barriers such as the language of education (many courses like sciences or mathematics are given either in French or in English), the different nature of the curriculum, without much support, as well as the fact that some school directors impose additional enrollment requirements, but also bullying, harassment or corporal punishment discourage children to attend the classes. This even more that many are affected by psychological troubles⁸.

Jordan

Jordan does not recognize the status of refugee to the Syrians who fled the war as it has not signed the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol. It signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR in 1988 that provides the framework for the treatment of the refugees. There are currently 656.000 Syrians registered with the UNHCR (22% in camps and 78% out of camp) among the total number of Syrians in Jordan amounts to 1.265 million Syrian citizens⁹. Whether registered or not with UNHCR, Syrian living in Jordan must register with

⁵ *UNHCR Lebanon. Back To School*, UNHCR Lebanon, June 2016, p 1.

⁶ *Syria Crisis Situation Report*, UNICEF, September 2016, p 15.

⁷ *Back To School Dashboard 2016. Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees*, UNHCR, September 2016.

⁸ *Preventing a lost generation: Lebanon "Growing Up Without an Education" Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon*, Human Rights Watch, July 2016, p 29.

⁹ According to the Housing Census report released in late February 2016.

the Jordanian Ministry of Interior (MoI) and receive a MoI *Service Card* that will allow them to benefit social services, including education.

Syrian children can enrol for free in public primary schools in the host communities provided that they are granted official documents (*Service Card* and asylum seeker certificate of the UNHCR) and the government opened accredited public schools in camps. Like in Lebanon, the government opened second shifts in 200 schools in host communities, with mixed morning shifts and afternoon shifts dedicated to the Syrians¹⁰. In camps, morning shifts are for the boys and afternoon classes for the girls. A variety of NGOs and charities also offer informal accelerated, remedial or religious educational programmes however few of these are accredited. They are primarily used to catch up before returning to the educational system. The most famous one is the *Makani* programme of the UNICEF that provides educational and psychosocial support services through 223 centers¹¹.

Access to education have not ceased to increase in Jordan since 2012, where 12% of the 46.700 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugee children were enrolled in the formal system to the 165.000 ones (i.e. 70% of the 235.000 ones) that are today¹². In school year 2015-2016, nearly all of the 145.000 registered children (96%) were so in elementary schools. About 18% (26,200) of those enrolled were living in refugee camps compared to 82% (119,258) in host communities¹³. The enrollment rate in secondary education is very low because of the absence of second shifts for the last grades. There are also fewer schools of this kind, farther away. Poor families cannot afford the costs associated with education such as furniture, clothing and transportation, and these are not offset by clear benefits¹⁴. There are 50.000 children that have been out of school for more than three years in Jordan and the legislation prevents them to re-enter school. This issue should be addressed in the course of the current schooling year through the Catch-Up program¹⁵. Besides, effective school attendance remains difficult to estimate.

¹⁰ *Syria Crisis Situation Report*, UNICEF, October 2016, p 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 10.

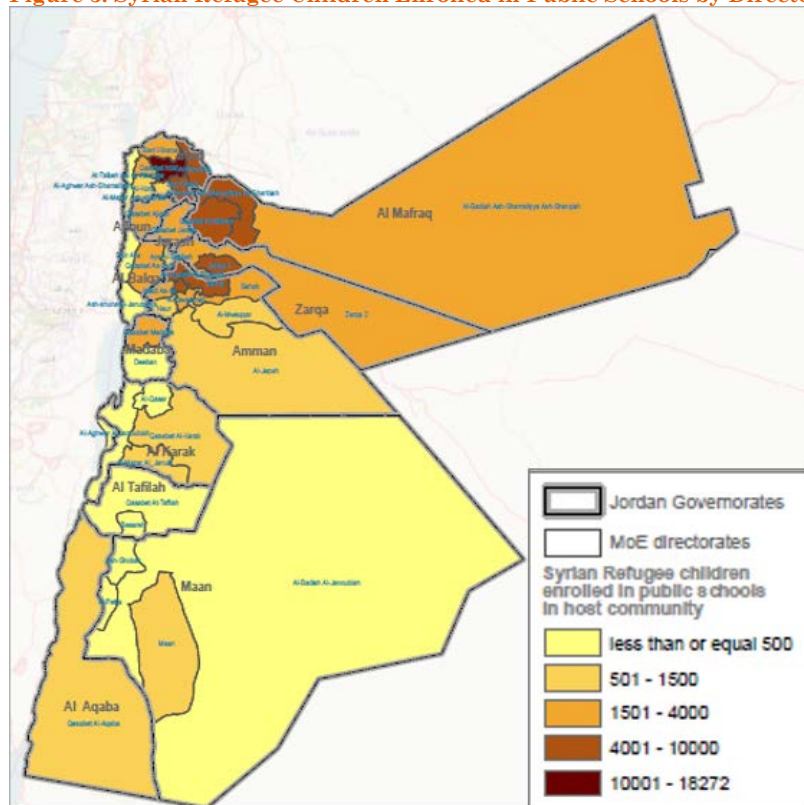
¹² *Syria Crisis Situation Report*, UNICEF, October 2016, p 10.

¹³ *Syrian Refugee Children Enrolled in Public Schools by Directorates (2015-2016)*, UNICEF, February 2016.

¹⁴ *"We're Afraid for Their Future" Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan*, Human Rights Watch, 2016, p 80.

¹⁵ *Syria Crisis Situation Report*, UNICEF, October 2016, p 10.

Figure 3. Syrian Refugee Children Enrolled in Public Schools by Directorates (2015-2016)



Source: (March 2016)

Added to the economic difficulties¹⁶ leading to labor, begging or early marriage¹⁷; administrative issues and registration policies vis-à-vis those who entered illegally or left the refugee camps without authorization and that not have a *Service Card* of the MoI; but also violence, bullying and harassment at school linked to a weak mental health due to the experience of displacement and poor living conditions hinder a comprehensive access to education.

Iraq

There are currently 228.000 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq, 39% (89.000) hosted in camps and 61% (139.000) in communities. An overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees in Iraq are Kurds¹⁸, which explains that 98% found refuge in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) where they can share the same language, ethnicity and religious beliefs as most of the people living

¹⁶ More than two-thirds of the Syrian households were living below the absolute poverty line of 96/month in 2015, according to latest assessment: *Food Security, Social Cohesion, Resilience and Migration in Jordan Assessment Findings 2013-2015*, REACH, 30 May 2016, p 6.

¹⁷ *We're Afraid for Their Future" Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan*, Human Rights Watch, 2016, p 72.

¹⁸ (95% of the 195,000 refugees in August 2013): *Hidden but Hopeful, Life Beyond the Camp for Syrian Refugees in Northern Iraq*, International Rescue Committee, August 2013, p 4.

there. About 60.000 of them are school-aged children (5-17) whom 35.000 live in communities and 26.000 in camps¹⁹.

Iraq did not sign the 1951 Geneva Convention on the refugees, either. Its refugee policy is governed by two different laws but these are not clear regarding the rights of the people who fall under these rules and the responsibilities of the institutions in this regard²⁰. There is a vacuum in the protection framework of the refugees and this latter is not uniform across the territory. They must apply for a residency permit in order to access public services, such as education.

In this area, access to public school is free of charge in public schools. In addition, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the KR-I have agreed to support non-formal education approaches in order to complement formal education.

However, as the rest of Iraq today, the KR-I has to face a multi dimension crisis consisting of ongoing fighting affecting the safety of the environment and economic difficulties that severely affect government functions and the influx of refugees and IDPs adds pressure again on the public services.

In terms of access to education, the state of the situation is difficult to report. 35.754 children were reported to be enrolled in formal education (in and out of camps) last year²¹. Latest reports highlight that 50% of the Syrian children between ages 6 and 14 and 88% between ages 15 and 17 do not attend any kind of formal school in the communities of Sulaymaniyah²²; and that 28% of the children between 6 and 14 years of age with 79% of the children between 15 and 17 years of age do not attend school in the governorate of Duhok²³. For the rest, effective attendance rates are unavailable.

¹⁹ Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103>, accessed on 2 December 2016.

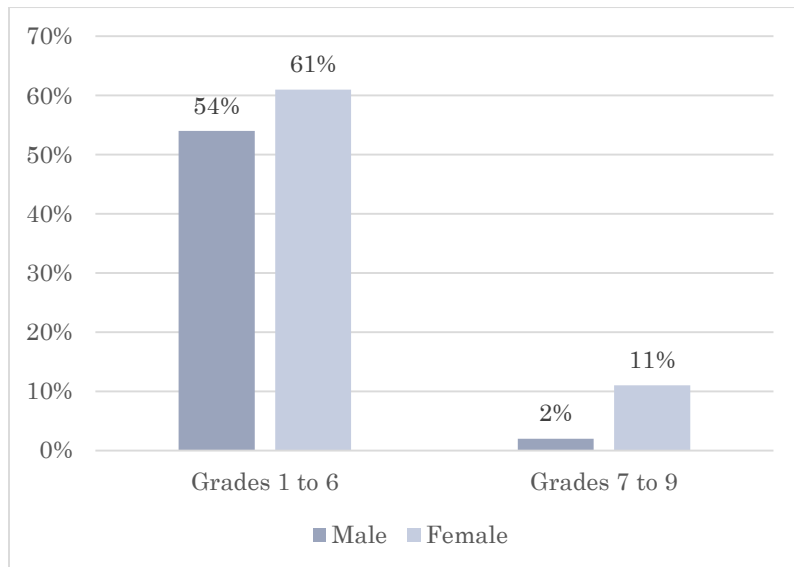
²⁰ The 1971 Political Refugee Law and the 2009 Law No.21 of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement.

²¹ *Information Kit Syrian Refugees - Iraq: Humanitarian Inter-Agency Interventions*, UNHCR, May 2016, p 11.

²² *Displacement as a challenge and opportunity. Urban profile of refugees, internally displaced persons, and host community. Sulaymaniyah Governorate and Garmian Administration, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, UNHCR & DSO, October 2016, p 63.

²³ *Displacement as challenge and opportunity Urban profile: Refugees, internally displaced persons and host community Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, UNHCR & DSO, October 2016, p 62.

Figure 4. Aggregated gross enrolment rate in basic education and high school per gender in the Governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Duhok



Source: UNHCR & DSO (October 2016)

UNICEF reported in October that teachers are not paid anymore²⁴ and that education has been disrupted, especially in Sulaymaniyah. In Erbil and Duhok, schools are full, lack teachers, of qualified and experienced teachers that also have to deal with the Kurdish curricula - different from the Syrian one -, lack of furniture, etc. which affects the quality of the education²⁵ and sometimes serve to house displaced populations. Added to this, education related costs such as transportation and requirement documentation still prevent school enrolment. Barriers in the access to education are further exacerbated by the unsafe environment and population displacements, children on the move not being able to settle in a class.

Greece

Greece is a transit country for migrants so estimations of the population groups is difficult as many are moving throughout the country. 171.751 people arrived in Greece during 2016 whom 78.000 were Syrians (45%)²⁶. The United Nations report today that 60.000²⁷ of these are hosted in the country (including detention in the *hotspots* on the islands facing Turkey) whom 20.000 are children²⁸.

As a member of the EU, Greece signed the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and so children applying for asylum or refugee status are entitled to attend formal public education in Greece. However, the country is involved in the EU-Turkey deal that sends back *irregular*

²⁴ *Syria Crisis Situation Report*, UNICEF, October 2016, p 14.

²⁵ *Iraq Monthly Update – Education Dashboard*, 3RP Plan October 2016.

²⁶ *Mediterranean Update Migration Flows Europe: Arrivals and Fatalities*, IOM, November 2016.

²⁷ *Greece July-September 2016 Protection Dashboard*, UNHCR & DRC, November 2016.

²⁸ *Greece July-September 2016 Education Dashboard*, UNHCR & UNICEF and SCI, November 2016.

migrants to Turkey. Greece's geographical position and its economic situation also put it in a difficult situation. It has been the first landing point for the influx of migrants to Europe, yet Balkan countries behind it have closed their borders while the recent collapse of its economy limits its capacity for action. Greece has been quite slow to adapt to the constant rapid changes in its environment and, as a transit country, to implement programmes that address long-term needs such as education. Greece consequently needs external support, however INGOs do not want to be involved in the EU-Turkey Agreement.

Last year, none of the Syrian children could access to education²⁹. Syrian children currently hosted in Greece have been out of school for an average of two years and 28% have never been to school³⁰. Main reasons of this are related with the insecurity and displacements due to the war. With the slowness of the registration processes and relocation programmes, the Government of Greece announced the opening of separate classes for all the *migrants* in August 2016. The needs of these children are huge and comprehensive and the instability of their situation makes it even more difficult to get fully involved in schooling.

Conclusion

The global trend across the different host countries remains similar: poverty of the families and the underfunding of the education sector are the main underlying causes that prevents school enrolment and attendance, especially among teenagers. These issues should quickly be addressed as if not they could have damaging consequences by de-structuring the Syrian community.

²⁹ *Greece Education Needs Assessment*, Save the Children, May 2016, p 19.

³⁰ *Greece July-September 2016 Education Dashboard*, UNHCR & UNICEF and SCI, November 2016