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RUPTURES AND RIPPLE EFFECTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND

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Syria's Lost Generation: Refugee Education Provision and Societal Security in an Ongoing Conflict Emergency

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Abstract Education policy is uniquely placed to address the soft security concerns of refugee resettlement, with educators equipped to recognise, react and respond to the unique education needs and welfare of the Syria's next generation. An appropriate education policy response to the refugee crisis can reduce the risk of stigma, isolation, intra-community tensions, marginalisation and even radicalisation. The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict has directed international donors' attention to the 'lost generation' of school-age Syrian refugee children. Governments, international agencies and foundations at the fourth Syria donors' conference in London (Supporting Syria and the Region) pledged to fund education projects and programmes to bridge the education gap. This article addresses the status of formal and informal education in Syrian refugee host states. The article examines the factors that shape formal, non-formal and emergency education provision, and addresses accelerated learning and best practice provision to help the next generation of Syrian refugees thrive.

1 Introduction

Education, described by Aristotle as a refuge in adversity, can be part of the problem or part of the solution in conflict and post-conflict transitions. Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in 2011, education has become a societal security issue. A generation of Syrian children have had their formal education suspended. The protracted conflict in Syria has displaced over 6.6 million people and created 4.5 million refugees, of whom 2.1 million are children. The war has rendered 18 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, of whom 8.1 million are children.¹ Of the 5.4 million children in need of education inside Syria, 2.1 million are not in school. Of the 1.4 million Syrian refugee children in Syria's neighbouring host states, 700,000 are not in school.² The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict has directed international and local organisations' attention to the 'lost generation' of school-age Syrian refugee children.

Education policy is uniquely placed to address the societal security concerns of social cohesion, child protection and refugee resettlement. Similarly, educators are in a position to recognise, react and respond to the unique education and welfare needs of Syria's next generation. By executing an appropriate education policy response to the refugee crisis the risk of stigma, isolation, intra-community tensions, marginalisation, and even radicalisation can be reduced. To that end governments, international agencies and foundations have funded education projects and programmes to address the education gap and secure support for communities caught between humanitarian emergency aid provision and the need for long-term development support. For example, in 2013 the No Lost Generation (NLG)³ initiative was created to support and coordinate Syrian refugee host states' national education responses, and to bridge humanitarian and development responses to the crisis. At the fourth United Nations (UN) Syria pledging conference in London in February 2016,⁴ donors promised that by the following year every Syrian refugee child would be offered a place in school.

This article addresses the status of formal, non-formal and informal education⁵ in Syria and the main Syrian refugee host states (Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan) in the context of the promises made at the London conference. The article examines the factors that shape education provision for refugees, including insecurity, neglect of students and children in refugee communities, and often limited and uncoordinated responses of donors and governments, and considers the ramifications for European states planning to host, educate and resettle young Syrian refugees. It starts by providing an overview of the current state of refugee education in Syria and the three main host states, before examining basic, secondary and higher education in more detail. It makes a number of recommendations about how to fulfil the promises made at the London conference, but also calls for the international community to pay far greater attention to the pressing need of Syria's refugees for improved access to higher education.

2 Refugee education in Syria and the host states

2.1 Syria

The war in Syria has crippled all state capacity to build the human capital that is vital for a sustainable post-conflict economic recovery. In Syria itself, the impact of the war on education provision was immediately measureable. In 2011, the Syrian Department of Education purchased 6,386,000 one-per-child textbooks for schools. By 2013, the number of books purchased had dropped to 2,378,000.⁶ The textbook figures show the speed at which school-age children were displaced. According to a 2015 UNICEF report, one in four Syrian schools had been damaged, destroyed or procured for military use (UNICEF 2015a). Some 80 per cent of educators remaining in Syria are women.⁷ Often untrained, these women are teaching 2 million students using alternative learning modalities, accelerated learning programmes and an alternative 'curriculum B' for children who have missed out on elementary education. School-age children experience

multiple displacements, continuous exposure to violence, and economic exploitation during successive waves of population movement.

Internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees include doubly displaced Palestinians, Kurds and Iraqis, as well as Syrians, migrating first in search of safety, then to neighbouring states and, more recently, in increasing numbers to Europe, in search of safety, sanctuary, education and health provision. Syria's neighbouring states of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, in addition to Iraqi Kurdistan have absorbed the greatest number of refugees, and attempted to educate refugees in double and sometimes triple school shifts, with mixed results. Regional fears of conflict contagion have escalated insecurity in poorer border areas in neighbouring states, with limited access to rudimentary education, and escalating host community–refugee tensions. The varying education responses of host states demonstrate the role of education in societal security provision.

2.2 Turkey

Turkey shares a 911km border with Syria, and at the beginning of the crisis instituted an 'open door' policy toward Syrian refugees. As a result, Turkey in February 2016 was hosting an estimated 2.6 million refugees (registered and unregistered), out of the total 4,718,279 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR. In 2015, since the beginning of the refugee crisis 159,000 Syrian refugees had been born in Turkey. Of the 452,598 refugees of school-going age, Turkey made education provision for 310,000, and committed to enrolling 460,000 Syrian refugees in education by the end of 2016 (Erdogan 2015).

While Turkey's Ministry of National Education operates under a temporary protection mandate, and has eliminated administrative barriers for Syrian refugees to access the education system, Turkish language instruction is an obstacle for Arabic-speaking Syrians. Temporary education centres in Turkey use Arabic as the language of instruction based on a modified and limited Syrian curriculum, taught by Syrian volunteer teachers. A professional development and support programme for teachers has trained 7,000 Syrian volunteer teachers on child-centred protective and interactive methodologies, psychosocial support and classroom management. The Turkish government prohibits payment of Syrian teachers; instead, standardised incentive schemes exist for Syrian volunteer teaching.⁸

The volunteer status of Syrian teachers is one of the obstacles education-focused international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) face. Similarly, donors' insistence on determining the syllabus taught to refugees hinders the ability to coordinate education for refugees across Turkey; education providers lament the fact that nine different syllabi are in operation in Turkey. Despite these efforts, since 2013 the number of refugees excluded from education has increased; many child and adolescent refugees are unaccompanied, showing a demographic shift in the refugee community in Turkey, where women

and children are over-represented as young men leave for Europe (Royal Institute of International Affairs 2015).⁹ As a result of these obstacles, Turkey calculates that 50,000 Syrian refugee children are in need of child protection, and better integration mechanisms are needed for Syrian children in Turkish schools (UNICEF 2015b).

2.3 Lebanon

In Lebanon 50 per cent of 6–14 year olds are in formal education in public and private schools. Of the 755,000 refugees in need of education, 377,000 (Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese returnees from Syria) are targeted for support, 158,000 refugees have been enrolled in public schools, with provision made for 200,000 (UNHCR 2015).¹⁰ The challenge of meeting the needs of refugees lies in existing public school provision, which the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) acknowledges. Its Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) plan is an attempt to meet this challenge. Official MEHE figures state that 30 per cent of Lebanese children attend public schools, although this overestimates the actual number of Lebanese children in public schools.

Lebanon's languages of instruction (Arabic, French and English) compound the learning challenge for the small minority of Syrian refugees currently in formal education. In Lebanon, English and French are taught as second languages, and the language of instruction for maths and science is either French or English. In Syria, English and French are taught as foreign languages rather than second languages. Limited public education provision and language challenges notwithstanding, Lebanon's education provision for Syrian refugees imposes ever-increasing strains on the resources of the state.

To address this demand, 239 public schools currently operate in double shifts, with Lebanese children attending school in the morning and, where possible, Syrian refugees attending in the afternoon, at a cost of US\$600 per child, funded by the international community. Increasingly overworked teachers grapple with problems of language of instruction and broader security protection issues concerning refugee children. Lebanese Education NGOs have wisely rejected informal (and unpublicised) proposals that some INGOS have proposed to institute triple shifts, which would require refugee children to go to school in the evenings and place even greater demands on Lebanese teachers.¹¹

Syrian refugee children receive subsidised formal education in Lebanon's numerous private schools, and some of the 205 informal settlements across Lebanon provide non-formal education (NFE). Facilities in informal schools are often limited: in one informal settlement 'school'¹² in the Bekaa Valley, where only 36 per cent of refugee children attend school, one toilet serves 250 elementary school-age children, their parents and teachers. However, refugee preferences for informal schools reveal inter-communal tensions, and a response to peer-to-peer violence in double-shift schools. Refugee settlement schools understand that boys, sometimes as young as eight years old, are often

the sole breadwinner for their families, and hence need to work rather than attend classes. Refugee parents' preferences for informal settlement schools that teach a Syrian curriculum stem from a perception that Syrian teachers will understand refugee needs better and will also be less likely to discriminate against refugee children.

Lebanese initiatives to further regulate education for refugees can create unforeseen obstacles. For example, efforts to transport refugees from informal settlements to public schools not only incur transportation costs, but also have an impact on protection perceptions for refugee families. Non-formal schools in informal settlements allow girls to attend classes close to their family residence. Lebanese government proposals to transport refugee children outside settlements to public schools threaten to discourage refugee families from allowing girls to attend public school. In Lebanon, 20 per cent of refugee heads of households are women, who often opt to keep their female children close. By requiring refugee girls to travel a distance to attend public schools, new education initiatives, in turn, have an impact on protection and security concerns for refugee girls and young women.

NFE provision in informal settlement schools in Lebanon serves as a platform for greater education, protection, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and food distribution provision for refugees. Strict regulation of refugee education provision would require greater coordination of supplementary services to address the needs of Syria's most vulnerable refugees and their host communities in Lebanon's Akkar and Bekka Valley regions. To bridge these gaps, Lebanon has developed an accelerated learning programme to provide children (aged 7–17 years) who have been out of school for more than two years with a condensed Lebanese curriculum, which will allow them to integrate into public education in Lebanon.

In February 2016 Lebanon committed to securing quality education for all children aged 3–18 years with the RACE plan. Under the 2015/16 enrolment campaign, the MEHE has provided formal places for 200,000 Syrian children in public schools. Lebanon is now accelerating its targets to meet the London conference goal to enrol all children aged 5–17 years in education by the end of the 2016/17 school year. Lebanon seeks to provide early childhood education for all children aged 3–5 years. A subsequent plan (RACE II) seeks to go beyond opening the doors of public schools to all children, by ensuring that Lebanese public schools achieve high learning standards through curriculum reform, expansion of access, regulation of NFE, and improved access to youth, vocational and technical training for young people aged 15–24 years. The cost of educational reform for Lebanon is estimated at US\$1.75bn over five years.

2.4 Jordan

Of the 635,324 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, 50 per cent are under 18 years of age, and 50 per cent are women. Jordanian officials

determine that 7 per cent of Syrian refugee children are at risk, and 203,264 are in need of child protection services. In Jordan, only 18 per cent of Syrian refugees live in the refugee camps at Za'tari, Azraq, and Mrajeeb Al Fhood (Supporting Syria and the Region 2016). For Syrian refugee children in Jordan, many of whom come from Daraa in southern Syria, literacy is the greatest education challenge. To meet this need the Jordanian Ministry of Education concentrates its efforts on basic education provision for grades 1–10 (ages 6–15) for Syrian refugees.

According to estimates, in February 2016 130,000 Syrian refugees were in the Jordanian school system, but at least 90,000 were not in school.¹³ Public schools in refugee camps operate a double-shift system, and use Syrian teaching assistants to help Jordanian teachers. In cities with large refugee populations, such as Irbid, for example, the double-shift process escalates tensions between Jordanian students attending the 0700–1400 morning shift and Syrian refugees attending the second shift 1400–1700 in the afternoon. Teachers supervise shift transitioning to mediate tensions between the Jordanian host community and refugee pupils, because tensions have been known to escalate into confrontation and even fighting.¹⁴ To accommodate the demands of a double shift, lessons are shorter and teachers work longer hours. The strain on teachers and students is palpable. Teachers note that the education of all of their charges, Jordanians and Syrians alike, is suffering.

Existing legal and admission regulations often prohibit Syrian refugee children from accessing formal education in urban areas where the majority of refugees live. In February 2016, 30,000 Syrian refugee children were attempting to access the Jordanian school system. Successful non-formal and informal education options involving art, play, sport and drama are available, funded by independent charities and INGOs. Similarly, foreign donors often fund vocational training and technology courses for Syrian young people in Jordan, beyond the auspices of the host government.

In emergencies a greater onus is placed on non-formal and informal education, often without ministerial oversight, is a cause of concern for the Jordanian government. The Ministry of Education has made repeated calls for greater coordination and collaboration, particularly in NFE provision for refugees, highlighting the broader issue of education funding and differing donor priorities. The Makani ('My space') informal integrated education system provides numeracy, literacy, English and science classes to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian children.¹⁵ The Accelerating Access to Quality Formal Education plan is the Jordanian response to remedying the education gap for Syrian refugees and vulnerable host Jordanian children. The plan seeks to implement the promise of a place for every Syrian refugee child in formal education in Jordan in 2016/17, and is expected to cost up to US\$1bn over three years.

3 Towards a school place for every Syrian refugee

Despite research highlighting the importance of education provision in emergencies, historically it has been a second-order priority in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Conflict-affected states spend far below the recommended levels of national income on education. In 2012, just 3.2 per cent of conflict-affected states' national income was spent on education, when the global average is 5 per cent. Doubling the percentage of young people in secondary education from 30 to 60 per cent has the potential to halve the risk of conflict. When education inequality doubles, the probability of conflict more than doubles from 3.8 per cent to 9.5 per cent, and yet education projects receive only 1.4 per cent of global humanitarian funding. This represents a decrease from 2.3 per cent in 2010. The globally agreed figure for minimum spending towards education in humanitarian aid is 4 per cent which represents a shortfall in education funding of 2.6 per cent (UNESCO 2015).

Moreover, historic education providers (UNICEF, Save the Children) have changed their focus to concentrate on child protection rather than education, because education provision is too difficult to monitor and evaluate in keeping with traditional government donor requirements. For their part, existing education initiatives, such as accelerated learning programmes, basic literacy and numeracy, catch-up programmes, remedial classes, and including the NLG initiative, tend to overlook the long-term strategic and security ramifications of large-scale population displacement.

Donor responses to the Syria crisis have left the provision of education for refugees to the generosity of host state governments. When first tasked with shouldering the education burden of refugees, governments anticipated that UN agencies would assist in covering extra costs (Watkins 2013). In 2016, the UN agencies must not only assist the commendable efforts of the host states in the task of educating refugees, but also help to protect the education systems of the increasingly overburdened host states.

In this context, the February 2016 London conference marked a watershed in international recognition of, and the response to, the refugee education crisis. At the conference, donor states sought to meet the Oslo Summit on Education and Development's call for a global education emergency fund of US\$4.8bn (Oslo Summit 2015) to meet the financial challenge to educate children in conflict. By devising new financial instruments, and a new global education emergency fund, donor pledges at the London conference have started to meet the financial response to special envoy Gordon Brown's call to establish the goal of ensuring that every Syrian refugee child continues in education. The international donors' pledges will help support strained host state education ministries, and allow new initiatives to draw on successful NFE initiatives. Created in response to the Syria crisis a proliferation of NFE initiatives operate across Syria and in refugee host states to meet the pressing and widespread challenges that out-of-school children face. NFE initiatives for IDPs in Syria and refugees in neighbouring

states are united by a shared objective to seek equity in education for displaced, disadvantaged and refugee children.

Conflict and dislocation mean that many Syrian IDP and refugee children have no formal education, or prior learning. Formal education provision is unavailable to many refugee children because of issues of supply, cost, certification and access. As a result, unregulated NFE initiatives have been largely successful because the learning support and instruction provided, usually by small local and foreign NGOs and charities, adapts education instruction to the ever-present challenges and testing realities of a refugee child's experience.

Successful NFE programmes are child focused. Most programmes integrate music, art, play, sport or storytelling into conventional literacy, numeracy and language classes to assist children with education and play, many of whom have been or are exposed to conflict and violence and display signs of psychosocial trauma. Children often withdraw socially, while conversely others tend to act out in class. Some students refuse to talk and need to be encouraged to engage in play-driven learning. In one NFE location, when bilingual Arabic-English children's books were being distributed to refugee children, the teacher expressed surprise when a child who had not spoken in class before volunteered to read the book in English to the whole class.¹⁶ Engaging in English rather than in Arabic facilitated a new route to communication.

In addition, NFE programmes also tend to integrate health and hygiene education, often by the simple virtue of housing the most accessible WASH facilities for children. NFE programmes are often housed in buildings or shelters that only offer rudimentary protection from the weather, but children are made to feel at home by painting and drawing on plywood-sheet walls, or in one memorable instance, on the papers covering glassless window frames. Children learn to share limited materials and resources where necessary. In one 'science lab' in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon an instructor explained the principles of momentum, velocity and force with a child's toy car and an elastic band; the children in the instructor's charge were transfixed, as were many of the researchers.¹⁷

Desks in classrooms are rarely empty and children often sit in fours rather than in conventional twos for warmth in winter. Refugee children regularly cry, but are promptly comforted by their peers and teaching instructors alike. Far greater affection is visible among children and teachers than is the norm in formal education settings. Issues of space and insufficient teaching support often result in children with physical and learning disabilities being educated side by side with their peers.¹⁸ In these instances children often compete to help their more vulnerable friends. In NFE environments children appear to benefit from an unexpected 'bonding through adversity' effect in a way that children in formal education settings do not.

Child refugees often engage in seasonal work, which leads to difficulties retaining male pupils in the formal education sector, which UNHCR student retention figures show. Where schools tend to penalise students for absence, NFE makes greater provision for pupils missing class time.¹⁹ By accommodating absences and working students, NFE adapts to the needs of refugees, making its provision all the more important. One of the criticisms of existing NFE provision in refugee camps and informal settlements is the lack of formally qualified educators and teachers. The majority of NFE educators are female, and while they may not possess formal teaching qualifications, many have attended university only to have their studies cut short by the war.

Among Lebanese education charities, educators are often dual-nationals; many have a Syrian parent, and a Lebanese or Jordanian parent. NFE instructors live in the informal settlements and are refugees themselves. As a result, NFE educators, who are paid *less* than teachers in formal education, are often *best* placed to advocate for the needs of refugee children. In addition, NFE educators can promptly identify gaps and share insights into techniques, mechanisms and processes to best help refugee children. While no resource or vocation is wasted in the NFE sector, successful programmes are often limited by scale and access to resources. As a result, despite their effectiveness, small NFE programmes are often absorbed by larger INGOs that have greater access to funding and, importantly, because donors require a programme delivery infrastructure, which smaller education-oriented NGOs often lack.

Informal education mechanisms, including community-based homework support groups, operate in refugee camps, settlements and urban areas. Well aware that it is not an option to delay education while waiting for development, 18,000 parents in Lebanon share their knowledge and assist vulnerable Syrian refugee children with their homework in their own homes.²⁰ Community-based NFE initiatives form the basis of emergency education bridging programmes that help vulnerable students to learn, by supporting basic literacy and numeracy for children most at risk. Homework support groups have proved invaluable for improving school attendance rates for hard-to-reach refugees in urban areas.

The Syria crisis has created an education emergency. A flourishing NFE sector has emerged in response. In turn, Syria's neighbouring governments are trying to standardise NFE to create a uniform pathway to formal public education access. For example, as part of the commitment to education of donors at the London conference, Lebanon's RACE plan commits the education ministry to ensuring that all children in Lebanon have access to quality formal and non-formal learning opportunities in a safe and protective environment. The Lebanese government will implement this promise by adopting existing good-quality programmes that work and making sure everyone follows the same standards, regardless of service provider, location, nationality or socio-economic status.

Education ministries are beginning to advocate greater technical and operational coordination between formal and non-formal education, with the aims of ensuring appropriate supervision and monitoring of NFE delivered to children, and validating and accrediting learning achievement in NFE. New oversight mechanisms are being created to effectively authorise, supervise, monitor and coordinate NFE programming with any authorised legal entity providing NFE programmes. In so doing, neighbouring host state governments are beginning to respond to the new education initiatives, acknowledging NFE programming mechanisms and seeking to replicate and formalise NFE provisions.

Lebanon is one of the first of the education ministries in the region to institute new national standards and validation processes for NFE and to introduce regulatory mechanisms to bridge the existing gaps between formal and non-formal education. New proposals for child-focused pathways propose to emphasise early learning and school readiness for children aged 3–5 years, before joining Grade 1 of formal education:

For children aged 6–15 years, corresponding with the compulsory school age in Lebanon, NFE programming is required to support children to reach a grade of formal education appropriate to their age. For adolescents and youth aged 16–18 years, NFE is designed to either support re-enrolment in formal Secondary or vocational/technical education, or to support young people to reach a minimal level of functional literacy and numeracy (MEHE 2016).

The MEHE seeks to integrate existing NFE programmes as a pathway towards formal public school education for all younger children, and towards vocational training for older children. The new objective of the NFE initiative in Lebanon is to map how children might move through NFE programmes to join formal public education, or for adolescents and young people to move through NFE to further formal education or other learning opportunities.

Effective implementation of these new policies will require greater coordination between education donors and stakeholders at local, regional and national levels, with training and monitoring of NFE programmes. Greater geographical coordination is being considered to ensure provision of spaces in formal public schools (first/second shift and secondary) within a reasonable distance of NFE service points for each child of compulsory school age (6–15 years) and upper-level age (16–18 years) enrolled in NFE programming. The 'School-in-a-Box' initiative²¹ provides materials for pupils in public schools, with each child in first and second shifts receiving necessary learning materials.

The MEHE will address long-standing challenges surrounding accreditation to ensure singular standardised child assessments with accreditation; in addition, greater scrutiny of pilot activities and strategies to scale up successful programmes are planned. A series of action plans are scheduled to standardise each of the NFE programmes. These action

plans are designed to create continuity in service provision between NFE and formal public education, so that out of school children can progress through NFE programmes into appropriate grades of formal public schools. Regulatory responsibility – to ensure that all delivered NFE services are of good quality and aligned with international standards, including INEE (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) standards, and taking into consideration national standards – lies with the host governments. To that end, educators, bureaucrats and institutions alike would welcome initiatives to support further training, and certification of NFE instructors and educators.

Certifying NFE instructors and recognising the qualifications of Syrian teachers working as assistant teachers in Jordan and Turkey would temper the frustrations expressed by well-qualified and experienced Syrian teachers, who must report to sometimes junior teachers in the host state. The frustrations of the Syrian assistant teachers and host community teachers may partially account for the number of violent incidents between teachers and students that NGOs report. It may also account for the numbers of young, disillusioned refugee NFE instructors who decide to seek refuge elsewhere because of the conditions and hardships they face in camps and urban areas.²²

UNHCR protection and education officers and NGO staff repeatedly referred to instances of teacher violence in classrooms and the need for greater training of teachers to curb peer-to-peer violence and teachers' violence against pupils in refugee classrooms. In addition, they highlighted the need to provide teachers with psychosocial training to assist in the identification of children suffering from post-traumatic stress and manage classroom discipline effectively. Similarly, in interviews and direct observation with teachers in schools, the degree of prejudice and discrimination some educators directed at Syrian children vividly illustrated the cost of conflict and accompanying strain on resources, resilience and inter-communal relationships.²³ A number of NGOs have called for greater teacher training in classrooms to help teachers better manage students with post-traumatic stress disorder. Creating certified education and training opportunities for NFE instructors and Syrian refugee teachers would build community resilience and counter the trust deficit between host and refugee communities.

4 The tertiary education crisis

Education initiatives in conflict and post-conflict contexts typically focus almost exclusively on basic and secondary education; higher education is rarely even considered. The Syrian United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2007–11, for example, does not mention higher education nor does it plan for higher education initiatives (UNDAF 2006). Similarly, tertiary education provision did not feature at the London conference, despite the emphasis on refugee education.

The gravity of the Syria crisis is such that higher education provision for refugees is not a priority for emergency relief, humanitarian

provision or development support. Higher education is also deemed beyond the remit and scope of designated ministries and international agencies. UNHCR is primarily tasked with humanitarian assistance and emergency relief, not development. UNICEF is concerned with the welfare of children and women, and UNESCO is mandated to address the quality of education provision rather than building schools. Combined, these agencies, in association with the World Health Organization and UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, could coordinate the higher education response in the longer term, but there is currently little such collaboration.

A related problem is the absence of reliable information on refugee higher education needs, because very little attention is paid to the higher education and training needs of refugees. Tertiary education information does not guide the allocation of resources and mandates across international organisations tasked with addressing emergency relief. Among humanitarian service providers in the host states, there is little understanding or knowledge of the size, need or distribution of Syrian refugees aged 18–24, many of whom have had their university studies interrupted.

According to the first higher-education survey research that began to address some of these issues, which the International Institute for Education (IIE) conducted in April 2013 in Za'tari camp in Jordan, humanitarian aid and higher education officials said that there were no university students at the Za'tari refugee camp (Watenpaugh and Fricke 2013). But for every two Jordanian teachers in Za'tari, there is approximately one Syrian assistant teacher. Syrian assistant teachers are often university students who have had their university education interrupted by the war. The IIE researchers found only 17 students in the camp who were willing to speak to them.

In September 2013 the UNHCR Youth Task Force (YTF), along with the Norwegian Refugee Council, conducted a study to document the number of young people aged 15–24 in Za'tari camp, in response to the possibility of a scholarship programme for Syrian students. The findings showed a total number of 292 tertiary-age students in Za'tari.²⁴ The figure is far from exhaustive, but nonetheless reflects the number of young people with skills in law, languages, English and teaching accessible in Za'tari through the activities of the YTF.

There are important reasons why tertiary refugee education should receive greater international attention and support than it does presently. First, higher education is critical to the building of human capital. The long-term future of Syria lies in the ability to regenerate its human capital and encourage its now displaced and refugee population to return home once the conflict ends. Human capital affects growth directly, and indirectly when working in conflict-affected environments. Education can improve legal, economic and political institutions, which are conducive to growth. Individuals with tertiary education typically

earn higher incomes than those who begin work immediately after completing secondary school. The London conference reiterated the strong correlation between tertiary education returns, training and work-based learning, and the quality of legal, economic and political institutional factors.²⁵ The better the institutional environment, the greater the productivity of highly educated people; fostering higher returns in schooling encourages more capable people to complete tertiary education. This in turn creates momentum for human capital accumulation, and consequently for growth (EBRD 2013). Syria's human capital currently resides with its refugee diaspora, rendering higher education provision for talented refugees an imperative for Syria.

Secondly, higher education provision and training can support an existing security platform that provides the university as a semi-public place of assembly for students, and as a platform for mitigating tensions, and a mechanism for security protection. Higher education provision can begin to map the numbers and needs of Syrian refugee students and academics, and act as a bellwether for measuring the societal impacts of refugees and host communities. In shaping state and non-state actors' responses and responsibilities, higher education provision creates scope for identifying policies that bolster the resilience of states, refugees, INGOs, agencies and host communities. Moreover, education and appropriate skills training provide supporting or resilience mechanisms for mitigating the risk and effects of conflict as well as of economic recession. States with a higher education base are more resilient to political and economic shocks. Higher education combined with sufficient training provision can counter the destabilising influences of conflict-affected economies.

There is also, thirdly, an important gender dimension to higher education. Syrian women outnumber men in tertiary enrolment, though this trend is not reflected in employment figures. High fertility rates, limited affordable child care, cultural norms that require the permission of male family members before accepting employment, the mismatch between female skills and the demands of the labour market, and gender-based gaps in remuneration, shape women's participation in the workforce. Where possible, women are more likely to secure paid employment in the public sector than the private. Where impossible, women are more likely to leave education to marry early, and are more susceptible to gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and early pregnancy. Greater education provision for women mitigates early marriage and early pregnancy. Redressing the scarcity of women teachers among Syrian refugee communities is necessary to harness a greater role for women in the provision of education and harness the capacity of education in the interests of child protection and security.

From the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Syrian students have expressed a desire to complete their studies abroad, in other Arab states, the United Kingdom or the United States. However, without access to UNHCR-administered DAFI programme²⁶ and similar scholarships,

visa requirements and costs were deemed to be prohibitive. The refugees who are seeking to return to education that are most at risk lack access to stable resources and are struggling to meet their basic needs. For more fortunate refugee students currently in tertiary education in Jordan and Lebanon, access to external sources of funding is usually found among family members in the diaspora. For refugees without financial support from diaspora family abroad or Syrian diaspora change agents options are limited.²⁷ Without external support, skilled students are subject to exploitation. For example, criminal gangs in Lebanon and Jordan coerce and co-opt students with chemistry backgrounds to engage in drug production. Creating opportunities for skills-based academic training for refugees is critical for the refugee generation. Postponing training and scholarship decisions in the short term increases the likelihood that Syria's refugees may become part of a permanent diaspora in the long term.

The need for language and vocational training is particularly strong. Among the Syrian refugee population of tertiary age in Lebanon, urban and rural, accelerated language courses are the most pressing need identified after surveying scholarship donors and providers across Lebanon (Brehon Advisory n.d.). Language courses are in equal demand for Syrian students in Turkey and Jordan. The provision of language courses is prohibitive due to course costs, travel restrictions and costs, and, critically, space for classes. All existing school and learning-friendly spaces are occupied in urban areas, because the majority of schools have second shifts of secondary school classes to accommodate Syrian refugees late into the evening.

Pearson Education and the British Council provide online English language and literacy programmes, as well as online British Technology and Education Council national diploma courses in their 'passport for work' initiative,²⁸ which allows students to take a series of modules to gain an internationally recognised qualification (IPPR 2013). Documentation requirements that restrict refugees from accessing university courses can be addressed by taking coursework-based diploma courses. Teaching refugee students skills that they can use for a trade or profession is increasingly problematic in Lebanon and Jordan without complementary legislative changes to allow refugees greater access to work. Online courses and virtual mechanics courses are innovative alternatives for refugee students. Greater access to online academic courses and training programmes, such as technical and vocational education and training courses (Oxford Refugee Studies Center 2014) democratises knowledge and access, and signals the beginnings of an 'education passport' opportunity for refugees whose physical movements are restricted by law, licence or finance.

5 Conclusions

In conflict-affected states, education is a means of socialisation and identity development; education is critical for inclusive post-conflict state-building, and the absence of education is often instrumental in narrow ideologically driven and exclusive nation-building efforts.

Typically, refugee children in conflict crises spend at least 17 years in exile, often missing out on essential formal education. Conflict and prolonged dislocation negatively affect literacy rates. The unprecedented exodus of people that the Syrian conflict has displaced will resonate beyond the next generation if initiatives fail to address the escalating instability and associated crises of a generation of children and young people with limited literacy, language and formal education. Any education initiative to fill the knowledge gap must encourage greater provision for institutional learning and acceptance of the refugees among host communities.

The diminishing numbers of young male Syrian refugees finishing school, coupled with the lack of appropriate educational and foundational skills provision, contributes to the regional employment crisis. Syria's human capital – defined as the accumulated stock of education, knowledge and skills – is dislocated, dispersed and currently virtually unaccounted for. Syria's protracted conflict undermines efforts to build the human capital that is vital for future economic sustainability.

The long-term education, employment and security ramifications of, in effect, losing a generation of Syrians is well understood. Yet, coordinated 12- and 15-week accelerated NFE learning programmes can enable refugee and conflict-affected students to bridge the learning gap and flourish in formal education. Equally important to long-term education provision is the need for a similar pathway for refugees to access tertiary education. Accelerated certification recognition, visa provision and language training will not only help individual refugees pursue their interrupted education, but would also help foster globally recognised accreditation by facilitating greater academic exchange between higher education institutes in the region, and overseeing the development of regionally and internationally recognised degrees.

In short, the education deficit among Syrian refugees will undoubtedly have profound negative impacts for economic growth and regional security in the future. Addressing this deficit is not only a duty in and of itself, because education is a fundamental human right, but, crucially, the provision of high-standard, good-quality education is also of critical importance to the building of a post-conflict Syria, and the long-term stability, security and economies of its neighbouring states.

Notes

- 1 See Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 'Overview 2016', www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/syria; and Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2016–17 (3RP), www.supportsyrians.com (accessed 4 February 2016), which draw on figures from <https://data.unhcr.org>.
- 2 Figures from the Education Working Group, Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 4–5 February 2016.
- 3 See <http://nolostgeneration.org/about>
- 4 See www.supportsyria2016.com

- 5 Formal education is defined as the traditional structured system of education guided by a curriculum, leading to a formally recognised credential, found in primary and secondary schools. Non-formal education is organised with or without a curriculum and refers to educational activity that takes place outside the formal education system. Informal learning operates without a formal curriculum.
- 6 Interview with global publisher 2015.
- 7 Figures from Syria All-Party Parliamentary Committee briefing, Palace of Westminster, Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 5 February 2016.
- 8 Education Working Group, Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 3 February 2016.
- 9 Refugees' in Syria's Neighbours, Exploring Policy Response, Roundtable, Chatham House, RICS, London, 4 December 2015.
- 10 November–December 2015 Monthly Educational Sectional Dashboard UNHCR http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=21 (accessed 4 February 2016).
- 11 Interviews with Lebanese education charities, MED Dialogue, Rome, 10–12 December 2015.
- 12 In Lebanon, unregistered informal schools are not referred to as 'schools.'
- 13 Jordanian education charity official, Education Working Group, Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 3 February 2016.
- 14 Interviews conducted during school visits, Al-Qadeseyeh school, Irbid, Jordan, November 2014.
- 15 Education Working Group, Support Syria, London Conference, 3 February 2016; see also www.unicef.org/jordan/overview_10143.html.
- 16 Author's bilingual book distribution to refugees with Brehon Advisory and monitoring and evaluation review with informal school teachers, May 2015.
- 17 Author's bilingual book distribution to refugees with Brehon Advisory, December 2015.
- 18 Of the 72 public schools in Lebanon rehabilitated in 2015 to meet safety and WASH needs, only seven schools are equipped to accommodate children with special needs.
- 19 Interviews with UNHCR staff and empirical evidence note that young males are conspicuously absent from schools.
- 20 Repeat interviews with UNHCR education officers.
- 21 This is a UNICEF initiative in origin, but is run with UNHCR; see www.unicef.org/supply/index_40377.html
- 22 Refugees and aid agency staff expressed these opinions, lamenting the return to Syria of refugees who were contributing to their NFE programmes. When Syrian assistant teachers returned to Syria, students suffered the loss of the teacher and took time to adapt to a new assistant. Interviews with NGOs in Jordan working in Za'tari camp, 10 November 2014.
- 23 Author interviews conducted over three years and school visits between 2013 and 2016 in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

- 24 Author interviews with NRC staff Amman, January 2014 and Za'tari camp education officers, November 2014.
- 25 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Meeting, Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 4 February 2016.
- 26 The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI) Scholarships for Refugees. In 2015 134 Syrian Refugees were awarded DAFI scholarships. See www.unhcr.org/40dbec984.pdf.
- 27 Interview with Kingsley Aikins, *Diaspora Matters*, 5 October 2015.
- 28 <https://tr.pearson.com/en/work-passport.html>

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