

Syrian refugee children: A Lost Generation

Henriette Johansen

MIDDLE EAST M●NITOR

The Middle East Monitor is a not-for-profit policy research institute that provides research, information and analyses of primarily the Palestine-Israel conflict. It also provides briefings on other Middle East issues. Its outputs are made available for use by journalists, academics and politicians with an interest in the Middle East and North Africa region.

MEMO aims to influence policy and the public agenda from the perspective of social justice, human rights and international law. This is essential to obtain equality, security and social justice across the region, especially in Palestine.

Title: *Syrian refugee children: A Lost Generation*

Cover image: *David Cameron, British Prime Minister, with Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the President of the United Arab Emirates; May 1, 2013*

First Published: January 2014

Copyright © Middle East Monitor / MEMO Publishers

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission of the copyright owner.

This report is available to download free of charge on the Middle East Monitor Website: www.middleeastmonitor.com



e: info@memopublishers.com
w: www.memopublishers.com

Syrian refugee children: A Lost Generation

Henriette Johansen

Syrian refugee children: A Lost Generation

As the Syrian crisis now approaches its fourth year, there is an entire generation of children being shaped by violence, displacement and a constant absence of prospects for their future. Five million children are already affected by the war; school systems in refugee-host countries like Lebanon and Jordan report extreme overcrowding.

This week UNHCR, UNICEF and other partners launch a new campaign called “No Lost Generation” to address the issue of education and childhood in war-torn and war affected areas in the Levant region. Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director, said that these children are the next generation of leaders in Syria and that education and reconciliation will bring much-needed hope for the future. The “No Lost Generation” umbrella is, with its \$1 billion strategy, designed to protect the wealth of future Syria through practical ways of forming the next generation of leaders, teachers, engineers, doctors and peacemakers.

The campaign is focused on expanding access to learning and psychosocial support, strengthening social cohesion and peace-building efforts, and restoring hope for the future to millions of children.

BACK TO SCHOOL

SYRIA EMERGENCY: PALESTINE REFUGEE CHILDREN

2/3
PALESTINE REFUGEE CHILDREN
AFFECTED BY CLOSURES
OF UNRWA SCHOOLS IN SYRIA



OF **118** UNRWA SCHOOLS
IN SYRIA

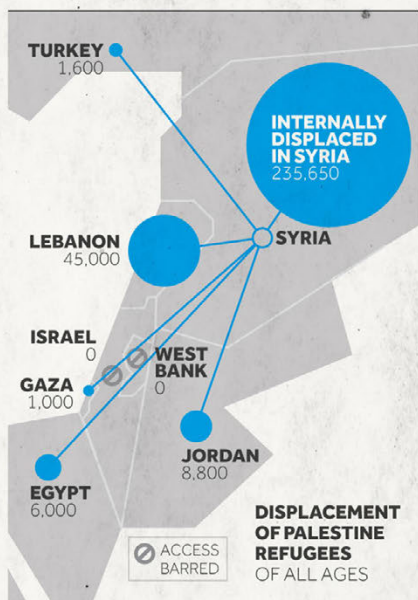


68 CLOSED
DUE TO
DAMAGE OR
INSECURITY

10 OPERATE AS
EMERGENCY
SHELTERS
FOR DISPLACED
PEOPLE

40 REMAINED
OPERATIONAL
LAST ACADEMIC
YEAR

41 ALTERNATIVE
BUILDINGS FOR
SCHOOLS
SECURED BY UNRWA



LEBANON



AS OF JUNE 2013, **35%** OF PALESTINE REFUGEE CHILDREN FROM SYRIA HAD ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

JORDAN



PALESTINE REFUGEES FROM SYRIA AT UNRWA SCHOOLS **EXPECTED TO DOUBLE** FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR BY END OF 2013

How are Syrian children gradually becoming “A Lost Generation”?

Nathalie Hamoudi, the head of education and adolescent development with UNICEF, told MEMO that the enrolment of Syrian children in education remains low and that an estimated 75 per cent of refugee children aged 6 to 17 do not attend school. There is a long list of reasons for this appalling situation.

- First of all, most children cannot afford tuition fees, and those who can have difficult accessing schools as roads are often blocked and the generally poor infrastructure takes its toll on daily traffic.
- The language barrier is another problem; as the Syrian students are accustomed to being educated in Arabic, they are currently struggling with new curricula and different medium of instruction in Turkey.
- Children often reside in places where issues of safety and security would not allow education to be considered, in addition to overcrowded places where it does not allow or facilitate the running of education support/activities, whether in schools or in a camp.
- Harassment and discrimination is a major obstacle for education in the Lebanese education system and in some of the education activities in refugee camps.
- Fuel and heat are also an obstacle to education as some schools and all the camps are not equipped with basic services to host refugees.

These factors are all created by the war or were existing pre-war. However, there are also aspects such as money and cultural and socio-economic structures that have their origin prior to the crisis, which are reflected in these statistics. Raising young adolescents for employment is a barrier for education, as these young people are not attending lessons of any kind. Ms Hamoudi explained to MEMO that this trend arises because the young people are engaged in political activities and possibly social disruption, or because they are working to support their families. “Hence, they do not have the luxury of enrolling in education activities,” she said.

75% of refugee children do not attend school

At a UNHCR registration site in Wadi Khaled, Umar, a 16-year-old from Homs, told IRIN: “I did not go to school in Syria. Why should I go here? I have worked in construction for a few years, and that’s what I would like to do again.”

According to UNICEF’s chief of child protection programmes, Isabella Castrogiovanni, both push and pull factors are responsible. “It’s an income factor for these refugee families, but you also have all these adolescents sitting at home doing nothing and getting bored. They have no chance to go to school or to take any other opportunity.”

Lebanon: adapting to the influx

The Lebanese education system is in need of serious reform and support, and was so even prior to the Syrian crisis, making it vulnerable as it seeks to adapt to the influx of refugees. “With regards to the Syrian crisis and the role of the government, there is a need to develop a unified integration policy and disseminate it to host schools,” Ms. Hamoudi told MEMO.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education needs to provide Syrian students with course completion documents, certificates and diplomas. It should also ensure that there are equivalent student records between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Syrian Ministry of Education so that Syrian students can reintegrate into their home education system when circumstances allow.

Lebanon, host to 819,239 Syrian refugees, is struggling with its lack of capacity but is planning ahead. The absorption capacity of Syrian students into Lebanese education is poorly designed; with no specific outlines of mechanisms to manage the anticipated increase in pupils, it is no wonder that refugees are unable to attend schools even after fleeing Syria.

Needless to say, security issues and the socio-political conflict have affected the Lebanese and Syrian communities enormously, and serious government measures must be put in place to

enhance security within the communities where Syrians are being hosted. Simultaneously, the social structure within smaller communities are in great need of development; according to Ms Hamoudi, civil society organisations need to hold communal events to strengthen community ties in order to diffuse the local friction that often arises between refugees and hosts.

Furthermore, the Lebanese teachers need to know how to handle the stress and trauma evident in Syrian students and learn to teach in different ways. “They need to be trained in student-centred experiential learning in addition to educational alternatives to corporal punishment and psychosocial intervention including violence management,” explained Hamoudi.

Consequences of the war on Syria’s next generation

Nearly 2.3 million children have stopped attending school in Syria, which is similar to the situation in refugee-hosting countries. Currently, over 70 per cent of the 735,000 school-age refugee children are not enrolled in school. The obstacles to education and the accumulated loss of school years are putting a whole generation of Syrian children at risk as their future depends on strategic assistance to their education and to their physical and psychological protection. Children are facing serious psychological problems that will no doubt have long-term effects on them and the re-building and reconciliation of their country when the war is over.

The majority of Syrian refugee children and adolescents may be poorly educated or illiterate, which will leave many young adults with very few prospects of achieving a stable socio-economic life. Hamoudi warned about the potential internal conflict this poverty could bring about and how “the Syrian economy, which was quite stable before the war, will experience brain drain, inflation and regression.”

Overall, these factors which are shaping the lives of Syrian children and young people, and their ability to contribute to the reconciliation and reconstruction process in their country, should

Nearly 2.3 million children have stopped attending school in Syria

be taken very seriously. With no apparent end to this humanitarian disaster, we risk these features developing further, and yet most of them could be remedied quite simply through readjusting, training and organising education opportunities. It has been predicted that a lack of education prospects for young people could lead to an increase in early marriage, abuse and violence.

Health and education in Palestinian refugee camps

UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) is currently strengthening its coordination with other UN agencies such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF and World Health Organisation (WHO) as funds and coordination within and around besieged camps become critical.

We spoke to UNRWA's spokesman, Christopher Gunness, about the price being paid by Palestinians during this crisis. "Palestine refugees from Syria are facing a future in which the sense of security... has been shattered by the on-going conflict," he said. They are confronted daily by with acute shortages of food, water, electricity, child and health care.

Within Syria, hostilities and armed confrontation both inside and outside the refugee camps are destabilising six out of the twelve official UN camps around the country. They have forced most residents to flee, leaving behind only the most destitute who do not have the means to get out. In Yarmouk, Husseiniyeh, QabrEssit, Sbeineh and Khan Sheikh camps we find the most deprived refugees restrained in the quest for safety, both economically and by continuous sieges.

Lebanon has received the majority of this migration, but is the least capable of accommodating any more Palestinians. The problem lies especially with regards to protection, shelter and relief aid which UNRWA provides. The UNHCR's mandate does not cover Palestinians. As the 12 official camps are overcrowded and UNRWA is unable to extend its mandate to include more than these camps, it leaves Palestinian refugees particularly vulnerable in this crisis.

UNRWA's 12 official camps in Lebanon are already overcrowded, and as such, can not accomodate the rise in Palestinian refugees from Syria

Once across the border into Lebanon, Palestinian refugees receive only a one-week visit visa, which they must then extend. There have been many reports of Palestinians being faced with punitive registration fees. Mahmoud Assir Saawi, president of the Council for Palestinian Refugees Fleeing from Syria, told IPS News on Wednesday: “Who from the Palestinian families can pay \$200 for the papers for every family member? If the average family is five people, then that is \$1,000. This is impossible as we know most Palestinian refugees aren’t even sure how they are going to feed their children one day to the next.”

See our report: [Influx of Syrian refugees highlights ongoing Palestinian struggles in Lebanon](#)

Around 43,000 (out of 66,000) Palestine refugee children are still able to attend UNRWA schools in Syria. However, more than 35 per cent of the students cannot attend classes, although many others can be reached with home study materials and Satellite TV programming broadcasted from UNRWA in Gaza.

There are also barriers to accessing UNRWA medical centres. The agency has tried new approaches to the issues, such as mobile health clinics and satellite TV education, to help mitigate this narrowing of humanitarian space, whilst its microfinance programme is meant to support creative new businesses that have sprung up in the midst of the conflict.

The already overcrowded Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are now feeling the strain on their poor infrastructure. There has also been growing tension with local host communities, often due to competition over limited employment opportunities. Based on availability of funds, UNRWA has been providing PRS (Palestinian-Syrian Refugees) with emergency relief.

UNRWA continues to emphasise the urgent need to support a viable political path to end the crisis. “We are also encouraging the development of a regional approach to mitigate the impact of the

Approximately 23,000 Palestinian refugee children in Syria are not able to attend UNRWA schools

crisis on host communities, social services, local institutions and national budgets,” Guinness assured MEMO. This approach has to be based on reinforcing the links between the humanitarian and development spheres.

It should connect development actors and international financial institutions, and this is precisely the plan.

Donors pledge \$400 million to Syria

As the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria convenes in Kuwait, more than 9 million Syrians are in need assistance, including 6.5 million people displaced inside their own country who are struggling to survive and cope with the crisis. More than 2.2 million more people have fled Syria since January 2012, seeking refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

The Pledging Conference aims to gather international financial support to meet the basic humanitarian needs of millions of Syrians. It will be held in Kuwait City, chaired by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and hosted by the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Non-governmental organisations have promised to donate a combined \$400 million for humanitarian aid for Syria ahead of the conference, the official news agency KUNA said on Tuesday. The aim is to help the UN to raise \$6.5 billion, the biggest humanitarian aid appeal in the organisation’s history.

MEMO ●
MIDDLE EAST MONITOR
Creating New Perspectives

middleeastmonitor.com