Education without Borders:
A Summary

A report from Lebanon on Syria's out of school children

by Kevin Watkins

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for A World at School

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A World at School is a social-media, communications and mass mobilisation digital campaign designed to support strategic efforts taking place at global and national levels to accelerate progress on access and learning in developing countries. A World at School supported Kevin Watkins' recent trip to Lebanon to visit the Syrian refugee camps during August/September 2013.

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INTRODUCTION

by Rt Hon Gordon Brown, MP, United Nation's Special Envoy for Global Education

Children are always the most neglected and forgotten victims of conflict. Already deprived of food and shelter, they are also denied their rights to education, condemned to forfeit a childhood that, once lost, can never be re-run or relived.

The one million Syrian children, who make up half of that country's refugees, are simply the most recent victims of this monumental gap in our global system. They are among 28 million children worldwide now being denied their right to schooling in conflict zones and under broken-down regimes.

Soon small, unstable Lebanon will have absorbed 500,000 Syrian boys and girls. Already in just a few months, the refugees have grown in number to an astonishing 25 per cent of Lebanon's child population. However today, and for the foreseeable future, there are school places for only a small fraction of them - just 30,000 children. If they suffer the typical exile of children in conflict the rest could spend ten years in displaced and insecure in a foreign country.

The calamity engulfing Syrian children underscores an enduring global failure. One hundred years ago, through support for the Red Cross, the world decided it would meet people's basic health needs, even in theatres of war. Forty years ago Médecins Sans Frontières established that healthcare should be available across the most dangerous and violent of war zones. Today, despite huge progress by people and organisations pushing for schooling to be central to our response to conflict, the concept of "education without borders" still remains an elusive idea, a concept yet to be fully built into our system of humanitarian relief. Yet the cost of inaction for young people deprived of an education, destroyed by anger, restlessness, and desperation and sentenced to tents and camps often for years, will haunt us for generations. Because the millions of young unemployed will become the adult unemployable, and many will graduate not into jobs but into violence.

On September 23rd, 2013 in New York, organisations that have for years fought valiantly to deliver education in emergencies will build on pioneering work by UNICEF led by Anthony Lake, OCHA under Valerie Amos, UNHCR with Antonio Gutteres and the dedicated coalition in the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The acknowledged global education expert Kevin Watkins, the Executive Director of the Overseas Development Institute, has just returned from a visit to Lebanon, meeting Syrian refugees, the Lebanese government, international agencies and NGOs to conduct an enquiry into provision and in this plan for Syria's biggest group of child refugees. While there are potentially 500,000 located in Lebanon, he suggests that many of them could be in school and being fed in a matter of weeks and months. The plan involves keeping Lebanese schools open day and night in a double-shift system; hiring Syrian refugees as teachers in Arabic in community colleges and providing school meals to tackle hunger as we tackle illiteracy. The plan is also rooted in the realistic presumption that the plight of Syrian children is more than a short-term emergency: their exile could last years. The plan has the active support of the Lebanese government, has already been welcomed by many agencies on the ground in Lebanon, and has the merit that it can be implemented quickly without huge capital expenditures. At US$130-170 million a year (with school meals) this plan is cost effective, but it remains an open question as to whether the world

community will put up the funds. The plan can only work if there is support forthcoming from donor countries as well as concerned foundations and individuals.

The proposals are in the spirit of the *Global Education First Initiative,* the brainchild of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, and Irena Bukova of UNESCO. This autumn as world leaders gather for the United Nation's annual meeting, a large movement of young people including Pakistani teenage activist Malala Yousafzai and Sierra Leonean youth leader Chernor Bah will bring together young people hailing from conflict zones around the world to make the case for the right of every child to education irrespective of borders. They will be backed up by a million-strong petition, to be presented to the UN Secretary-General that will lend their support to an appeal for funds for this venture. We can build on great humanitarian initiatives that are already underway. We can show that while we cannot do everything, we can do something. We can show that hope can survive even amid horror, and that good can yet triumph over the worst evils, even in the most troubled and desperate parts of the world.

This report addresses some of the practical steps that can now be taken and we must now work quickly to bring together the means by which this can put into action.

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KEY POINTS

- **The humanitarian response to the conflict in Syria has fundamentally failed to address the education crisis facing Syria's children.** Business as usual will create a lost generation of over 2 million children denied an opportunity for learning. The bottom line for the international community should be a simple principle: Syria's children have suffered enough and should not have to bear the brunt of a crisis that is not of their making.
- **Lebanon is on the front-line of the refugee education crisis.** While the government has demonstrated enormous generosity in opening the country's schools, there are some 300,000 refugee children out of school – and that number could reach half-a-million over the next year. If Syria's refugee children were a country, they would have the world's lowest enrolment rate. Current enrolment levels for primary school age children are around one-fifth of the average for sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Providing education for all of Syria's refugee children will require an international response and strengthened partnerships.** Lebanon's public education system, like other essential services, is under acute pressure. Absorbing all refugees would be equivalent to a city like London having to cater for the combined school populations of Manchester and Birmingham; or New York having to cope with an influx equivalent to the entire school populations of Washington D.C. and Chicago. This is not a challenge that can be met through short term humanitarian appeals, which are already heavily under-funded.
- **Economic pressures are adding to adjustment costs, reinforcing the need for international support.** Research from the World Bank suggests that the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis will cut economic growth by 2.8 per cent a year, costing Lebanon US$7.5bn in lost GDP over the period 2012-2014 and widening an already large fiscal deficit. The crisis is also set to double unemployment, to over 20 per cent, adding to already acute labour market pressures. There is a real danger that these economic pressures will fuel potentially explosive social and political tensions. The refugee crisis has placed an immense strain on health, education, water and energy services, and on vulnerable host communities. The international response should include scaled-up support aimed at maintaining the quality of public education, while at the same time providing predictable funding for NGOs equipped to increase coverage.
- **We propose an international plan of action to mobilise US$165m annually over three years, or just under US$500m.** Within the proposed framework, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) should provide US$150m over three years, with bilateral donors, regional governments and philanthropic bodies delivering the remainder. Because of the political situation and difficult public financial management environment, consideration should be given to the creation of a pooled fund jointly managed by government and donors. The framework should include provisions for Palestinian refugees.

SUMMARY

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has described the crisis caused by the war in Syria as "a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history." Behind the humanitarian disaster and the unspeakable brutality visited on civilians, there is a hidden emergency. Syria's refugee children have seen their schools attacked and their education disrupted. They desperately need the security, stability and sense of normality that would come with a return to school. Over half of the 2 million refugees leaving Syria are aged less than 17.

The international community has been slow to respond to the education needs of Syria's children. Overall financing falls 40 per cent short of requirements – and the gap is growing with the growth of the refugee population. In the case of education, the financing gap has left Syrian refugee children in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon locked out of school. While the data is patchy there is a strong likelihood that, on current trends, around 2 million of Syria's internally displaced and refugee children will be out of school in 2014.

Failure to put change this picture will create a lost generation of children denied the chance of an education that would help them to rebuild their lives. The international community urgently needs to put in place the financing and delivery mechanisms needed to deliver education for all of Syria's refugee children. This will require fundamental changes in the humanitarian aid and delivery architecture, including recognition that short-term financing commitments are insufficient to build a response to what is likely to be a long-term emergency.

Lebanon is on the front-line of Syria's humanitarian calamity. The country is currently hosting at least 720,000 Syrian refugees and other displaced persons. By the end of 2013 that number is projected to pass the 1 million mark – a figure equivalent to one-in-every four people living in the country. On a conservative estimate, there will be half-a-million school age Syrian refugee children in Lebanon during the current school year. Political paralysis, economic slowdown and growing fiscal pressures are adding to the adjustment costs associated with the refugee crisis, imposing pressure on basic services and hardship on vulnerable communities.

The flow of refugees has dramatically exceeded early projections. In June 2012 the UN estimated there would be 185,000 refugees by the end of 2012. The actual figure reached over 350,000 and has since doubled again, far exceeding anticipated growth. This influx of refugees is placing enormous pressure on the coping capacities of host communities, the government, UN agencies and non-government organisations. Beneath that pressure, shifting demography and the refugee influx is magnifying already acute political tensions. The early warning signs are already evident. With the crisis into its third year, there is a real and present danger that what started as a refugee crisis will transmute into a social, political, and wider human development crisis both for vulnerable populations in Lebanon and for Syrian refugees.

With resources of the government, host communities and refugees increasingly over-stretched, it is vital that the international community steps up to the plate and provides a response commensurate with the scale of the crisis. Only 38 per cent of the humanitarian financing requested for Lebanon has been delivered to date. This reflects donor concerns of the financial and political environment in Lebanon, allied to a failure to develop innovative and practical solutions to what are eminently solvable problems.

Nowhere is a greater level of ambition more urgently required than in education. Many of Syria's refugee children have already lost two years of schooling. The Lebanese government has demonstrated extraordinary generosity in its response to the refugee crisis. It has opened the country's schools, waived registration fees and provided wider support to 30,000 Syrian children enrolled in the country's schools. By contrast, the international community has provided just $21m, or around US$60 per child. On a generous estimate, this represents around one-tenth of the per pupil commitment made by the government of Lebanon to children who have been provided with school places. UN agencies and NGOs operating on the ground have been prevented from scaling up their education programs through inadequate and unpredictable financing.

If Syria's refugees were a country, that country would have the world's lowest enrolment rates for primary and secondary education. The enrolment rate among primary school age refugee children (aged 6-14) is around 12 per cent – less than half the level in South Sudan. For secondary school age children it is probably below 5 per cent. The situation in Lebanon compares unfavourably with that in Jordan, where around half of Syrian refugee children are in school. Without a concerted effort on the part of the international community, some 500,000 refugee and displaced children could be out of school in 2013. These children desperately need education not just to keep alive the hope of a better future, but to rebuild their lives and to recover from the trauma that comes with displacement. The scale of the challenge can be illustrated by a simple comparison. Getting all of Syria's refugee children into school in Lebanon, would be equivalent to schools in London absorbing all of the school children now enrolled in Manchester and Birmingham; or schools in New York absorbing the combined school population of Washington DC and Chicago.

The education crisis extends beyond the refugee community to vulnerable children in Lebanon itself. Lebanon's public schools, which serve children from the poorest households in the country, are under increasing pressure. On a conservative estimate, the refugee intake represents 10 per cent of those now in school. In some areas of northern Lebanon, Syrian refugees represent half of the school population. Absorbing refugees has placed immense strain on what is an under-resourced education system. Differences in the curriculum and language of instruction add to the difficulties associated with entry to schools. While the Lebanon's schools perform relatively well by regional standards, they cannot cater for refugees on the scale required at current resourcing levels without adverse consequences for the quality of provision – and it is unrealistic to expect the government to increase resourcing.

Several arguments, none of them credible, are commonly deployed to justify the limited response to the education crisis. Lebanon is a middle income country. The absence of a functioning budget and performance management system create problems with fiduciary management in aid. There is no Education Management Information System (EMIS), which limits data availability. The political coalition in Lebanon includes some representation of Hezbollah. Yet whatever the constraints, there is an overwhelming humanitarian, social and political imperative to act. Refugee children should not pay the price of political inertia. Allowing the Syrian conflict to deprive a whole generation of Syrian children of an education would be an act of indefensible neglect. These children have suffered enough – and they have a right to expect more of the international community. Piecemeal initiatives funded through short-term humanitarian appeals will not be enough.

The international community should work with the Lebanese government to develop a three year strategy for financing and delivering education provision for all refugee children. To succeed, that strategy will also have to build the capacity and resilience of the Lebanese public education system, while at the same time developing community-based efforts delivered through credible NGOs. On the basis of current evidence, we know that education opportunities need to be provided to some 300,000 out of school refugee children with immediate effect. That number is projected to rise to 500,000 during 2013-2014.

It is difficult to determine precise financing requirements for education provision. Much will depend on precise mapping of the location of refugees against the existing stock of schools and availability of teachers, and the strategies adopted to extend provision. With cost-effective provision, it should be possible to provide primary education at an average per capita cost of between US$400-600. Up to half of the provision could come through the expansion of double-shift systems in Lebanese schools. The remainder could be provided through the creation of learning centres using community-based facilities, temporary facilities, or rented buildings.

Detailed costing data are required to establish financing parameters. Inevitably, any costing exercise will reflect provisions for pupil-teacher ratios, textbook supply, and investment in buildings. Our mid-range estimate is that some US$150m annually will be required to extend education provision to all refugee children, with an additional US$15m for special needs and school transport. Over a three year period, the total financing requirement is just under US$500m – and credible planning will require predictable financing over a three year time horizon.

There is considerable scope for scaling-up current initiatives. Several national and international NGOs – including Save the Children, Islamic Relief, the Norwegian Refugee Council and RET Lebanon - are well-positioned to scale-up what appear to be high quality programs implemented through professional local partners. Urgent consideration should also be given to provision of Arab language instruction by Syrian teachers in community centres located close to refugee settlements. While there are some dangers associated with the development of a twin-track approach, particularly in the event of a protracted conflict in Syria, double-shifting in Syrian schools will be insufficient in the short-term.

It is critical that the international community and the Lebanese government reach early agreement on delivery mechanisms. On the basis of current practices, it would appear unlikely that donors will channel resources through the Ministry of Finance on a significant scale. However, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), along with other ministries, have well-established mechanisms for integrating development assistance into sectoral programmes through project-based budget lines. These mechanisms are sufficiently robust to meet fiduciary management and reporting requirements. In the interests of scale and efficiency, we recommend that:

- The Lebanese government works with key donors to submit a request for US$150m in financing from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) over a three year period, and that the GPE set up a fast-track procedure for processing the request. UNICEF should act as the lead agency for the GPE financing.

- The European Union, USAID and bilateral donors mobilise $230m annually for three years, with regional donors providing a similar amount.

- Regional governments and philanthropic bodies should provide around US$115m.
- Donors and the Lebanese government create a jointly-managed pooled fund for education to finance provision for refugees. Such a fund could be used to support provision through public education and community-based initiatives, with clear rules for fiduciary management addressing concerns associated with Lebanon's budget and public finance management system.
- Provision should be made through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), UNICEF and other agencies for Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria and arriving in Lebanon.

THE COUNTRY CONTEXT

The refugee crisis in the Lebanon has received less international attention than in other countries. That may be partly because the refugee population is more dispersed. In contrast to the situation in Turkey and Jordan, the Lebanese government has a policy of not allowing the creation of refugee camps. The relative neglect of Lebanon may also reflect wider factors, including donor concerns over government capacity, the absence of a functioning national budget, and the perceived political influence of Hezbollah.

Whatever the underlying reasons for the limited support provided, it is increasingly clear that a business-as-usual response on the part of the international community to the crisis in Lebanon will convert what started as a refugee crisis into a full-blown social, economic and political crisis with the potential to spill-over into neighbouring countries. The crisis has been exacerbated by, and is exacerbating, wider social and economic pressures. As a first order priority, the international community needs to look beyond traditional humanitarian financing to the provision of support for public service provision in health and education, including allocations for vulnerable Lebanese populations in areas with high concentrations of refugees.

Economic growth is slowing. Pressures in the economy are making it more difficult to respond to the refugee crisis, and to maintain the quality and coverage of public service provision. Lebanon is an upper-middle-income country, with an average income in 2011 of US$9,904. While the country registered strong growth over the decade to 2010 – averaging 4 per cent a year – this has now slowed. Political deadlock in the country and the fall-out effects of the Syrian crisis reduced growth to 1.4 per cent in 2012. The fiscal position has also deteriorated markedly. The overall fiscal deficit doubled in 2012, reaching 9.4 per cent of GDP. Slower growth and rising deficits combined to reverse the downward trend in the debt-to-GDP ratio, which reached 134 per cent at the end of 2012. While the Lebanese economy has a proven capacity for resilience and recovery, uncertain growth prospects, shrinking fiscal space and rising debt limit the government's capacity for responding to urgent humanitarian needs.

The political environment is not conducive to an effective partnership. Sectarian rivalry, entrenched in a complex political system intended to provide a balance between different groups, has complicated the response to the crisis. Lebanon has operated for over six months under a caretaker government. The legislature has not approved a budget for several years. Political deadlock has made it impossible to undertake fiscal reforms that might release resources for more equitable and efficient public investment, including a reduction in the energy subsidies that absorb almost one-quarter of budget expenditure. Despite these difficulties, several line ministries – including education – are well managed and have effective financial governance. The success of a number of aid programmes demonstrates that effective partnerships are possible.

Despite strong growth and a vibrant private sector, employment generation is a long-running problem. The influx of refugees has magnified already severe pressures in labour markets. Just under half of the working-age population participates in the labour market, with 11 per cent unemployment. Youth unemployment is some three times the national average, underlying the difficult transition from education into the jobs market. While Lebanon has struggled to convert

strong growth into jobs creation, reduced growth has added to labour market pressures that are being further exacerbated by the refugee influx.

High average income levels obscure a more mixed record on human development. The refugee crisis is adding to already serious human development problems obscured by Lebanon's middle-income status. While poverty data is outdated and unreliable, best estimates suggest that 27 per cent of people – 1 million in total – live perilously close to the poverty line on less than US$4 a day. Around one third of this group lives on less than US$2.40 a day. Poverty is significantly higher in parts of the north, Bekaa and (though again reliable data is lacking) Palestinian refugee populations. These are precisely the areas with the highest concentration of refugees.

Survey evidence helps to illustrate some of the underlying social pressures generated by the rapid influx of refugees. One 2012 survey found that over half of Lebanese citizens reported not having any money left after paying for basic needs and necessities, with two-thirds unable to afford basic necessities at some point. Weaknesses in the coverage and efficiency of public services mean that many people, including the poor, turn to private sector providers – and ability to afford health and education costs is a widespread concern. This is a potential flashpoint. With the Lebanese government covering the costs of education and health provision for refugees, poor Lebanese will inevitably feel that their needs are taking a back seat. Some progress has been made in developing social welfare programmes, including the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP), but as a recent World Bank report notes "social safety nets in Lebanon are fragmented, weak, and ill-prepared to play and effective role in times of need."

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Developments in the education sector have an important bearing on Lebanon's capacity for responding to refugee needs. By most measures of international performance, Lebanon is a strong performer. The net enrolment rates at the primary and secondary levels are respectively 87 per cent and 66 per cent. School life expectancy is 14 years. Learning achievement levels have been improving over time. Between 2003 and 2007 Lebanon's score on the TIMSS benchmark for eighth grade pupils increased for science and maths, as did the proportion of students reaching the advanced international benchmark. This is in marked contrast to the performance of other education systems in the region. Lebanon also scored high marks for quality in a recent (and less robust) World Economic Forum survey.

Lebanon's education system is dominated by private provision and finance. Only around 20 per cent of Lebanese children attend public schools. While total education spending in Lebanon exceeds 11 per cent of GDP, public spending is just 1.7 per cent of GDP (and 7 per cent of the budget). These public spending levels are very low by international standards. Unsurprisingly, there is a significant gap in test scores between public and private students. That gap is especially pronounced in the national *Brevet* exams, where success rates for private school students and public school students are respectively 74 per cent and 55 per cent. Registered refugees, the vast majority of whom are unable to afford private provision, will depend on access to public schools or community-based learning centres.

Behind the impressive headline data there are a number of structural problems. High repetition rates are a source of drop-out and inefficiency in the education system, especially in public schools.

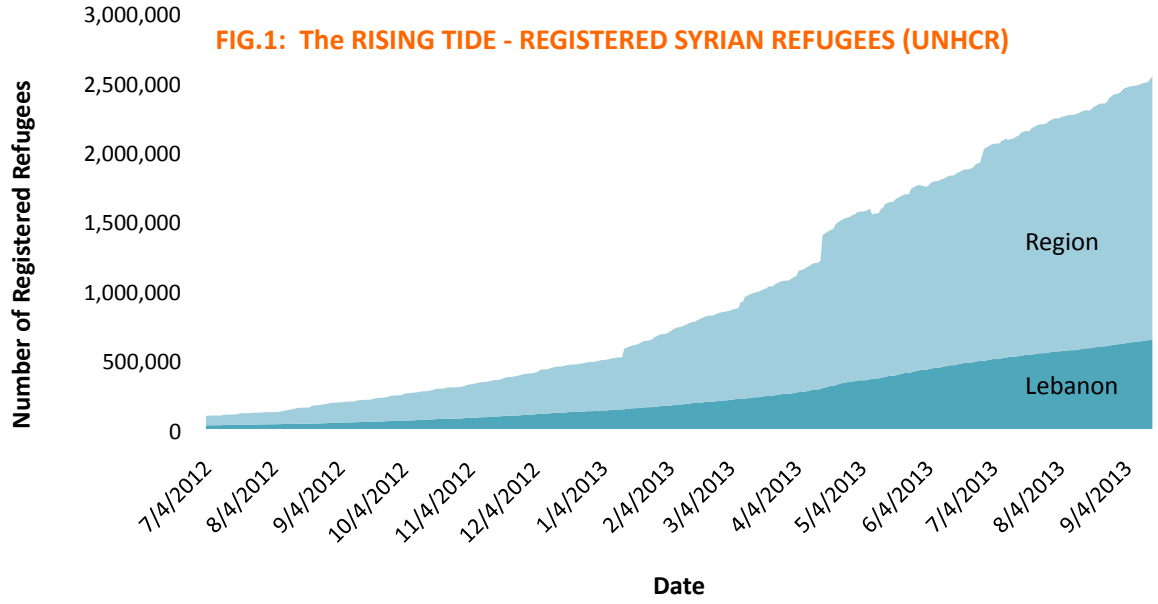
The highest repetition rates are at Grade 7 (15 per cent) and Grade 9. Some 60 per cent of students at the secondary school level are over-age in the public sector, which is almost three times the over-age incidence in private schools – another indicator of pressures in the public education system. The underlying pressures associated with inefficiencies in public schools will inevitably be compounded by the large intake of refugee children.

Problems in public education point to an interaction between household-level disadvantages and school-based factors. Many poor households struggle to meet the costs of keeping children in school – and costs rise sharply at the secondary level. Lower rates of participation in secondary schooling are symptomatic of problems in the quality of provision. While teacher-pupil ratios are very low, the share of uncertified contract teachers in primary and secondary school has been increasing (one quarter), along with the average age of teachers (55 years). Only 4 per cent of public school teachers hold a specialised degree. Meanwhile, the quality of classroom instruction suffers as a result of limited in-service training and support. Weaknesses in the quality of schooling, coupled with the misalignment of education and employment markets, helps to explain Lebanon's very high unemployment rates for secondary and tertiary graduates, and the large number of highly educated people in low-skill jobs. Once again, the influx of refugees into the public school system is likely to intensify the education quality problems that contribute to youth unemployment.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The continuing conflict in Syria has led to the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. In the six months to May 2013, refugee numbers flowing into Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt increased by 1 million, to reach 1.5 million. Since then, the flow of refugees has increased. Almost 2 million refugees are registered with UNHCR (figure 1). In its last Regional Response Plan, UNHCR estimated that the total number of Syrian refugees could reach 3.4 million by the end of 2013. Such projections are inevitably subject to large margins of uncertainty. However, with the conflict intensifying there is a very real possibility that refugee numbers could exceed UNHCR's projections.

FIG.1: The RISING TIDE - REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES (UNHCR)



Lebanon has more Syrian refugees than any other country. As of September, 2013 there were 748,000 refugees registered with UNHCR. On current projections, the refugee population will reach around 1 million by the end of the year. In addition to Syrian refugees, UNHCR projects that Lebanon will absorb 80,000 Palestinian returnees from Syria (PRS) and 45,000 displaced Lebanese. Currently, some 69,000 refugees are crossing the border every month. It should be emphasised that not all refugees seek registration. The Ministry of Social Affairs estimates that the total number of refugees in the country already exceeds 1.2 million - and that it could reach as many as 2 million by the end of 2013. Most Syrian refugees in Lebanon are from Homs, Aleppo, Idleb and rural Damascus (where large numbers of Palestinian refugees live). However, there has been a marked increase in numbers arriving from southern and eastern areas of Damascus affected by the conflict. More than 90 per cent of registered refugees are Sunni, which has far-reaching implications for Lebanon's demographic profile and confessional balance.

Refugee populations have spread across Lebanon. The past year has seen a dramatic expansion of refugee settlements across Lebanon (see Annex map 1). There are high concentrations of refugees in Bekaa and in the north, around Akkar and Tripoli, reflected in pressures on the education system (Annex map 2). In some areas of Bekaa and the north, there are as many Syrian refugees in school as local Lebanese children. Many areas with high concentrations of refugees are areas marked by high levels of poverty and hardship among host communities (Annex map 3). According to UNHCR, there are around 1.2 million vulnerable Lebanese people living in areas with high concentrations of refugees. Social tensions between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees have increased as pressure on local employment markets, utilities, and public services has grown, underlining the case for greater support to be provided to host communities.

Lack of funding and the scale of the crisis have overwhelmed the humanitarian response. UN agencies were not prepared for the upsurge in numbers that occurred during 2012 and the first half of 2013. The same is true for NGOs. As a result, the proportion of refugees receiving support for food, shelter, health, education and children has declined over time.

Humanitarian funding has fallen well short of targets – and very little support has been provided to the government of Lebanon. Under the fifth Syrian Regional Response Plan (RRP5, which runs from January to December, 2013) revised financing requirements were estimated at US$1.65bn. Of this amount, US$450 million was earmarked for support to the Government of Lebanon. As of mid-August, 2013, just 38 per cent of the US$1.2bn requested by UN agencies had been funded. Almost no support has been provided to the Government of Lebanon. As a result, almost the entire adjustment cost has been absorbed by existing public service budgets, with far-reaching consequences for both quality and coverage.

There is a large gap between refugee needs and provision. Many refugees have suffered traumatic experiences and physical injuries, but access to health services is limited. Secondary and tertiary health care is particularly costly in Lebanon relative to Syria, as are out-of-pocket payments for primary health care, which limits treatment options. While the survey evidence is fragmentary, a large proportion of the Syrians entering Lebanon – especially those originating from rural areas – are desperately poor. Others have become poor as their financial resources have been depleted through payments for food, rent, health, education and transport, as well as payment of fees for the renewal

of residency. One assessment found that 65-75 per cent of households were classified as moderately or severely vulnerable.

The Lebanese government has adopted a policy of integrating refugees in host communities, rather than establishing camps. Although most refugees reside in rental properties, a growing number live in over-crowded rooms, garages, shops and dilapidated buildings that do not meet minimal standards for safe shelter. In addition, a large – and growing – number of refugees live in tented settlements, most of them in Bekaa. With winter approaching, these settlements represent a site of acute vulnerability.

SYRIAN REFUGEES AND EDUCATION

The refugee crisis is also an education crisis for Syria's children. Many of the children entering Lebanon have suffered acute trauma. In many cases they have been deliberately targeted by snipers on the journey to school. In others, they have suffered the consequences of indiscriminate bombing. Over 5,000 have been killed on some estimates. Meanwhile, around 2 million children have had to leave school because of bombing or displacement. Some 4,800 schools have been severely damaged or destroyed - one fifth of the total. Financial difficulties and security concerns have also led many parents to keep their children at home. Drop-out rates have increased. Beyond the immediate effects of reduced school participation, many children have experienced injury, lost

BOX 1: THE HUMAN FACE OF THE CRISIS

The sheer scale of the Syrian humanitarian disaster can obscure the individual human tragedies behind the headline numbers. Over half of the 2 million refugees who have fled Syria are children aged below 17. Many of these children are coping not just with the disruption that comes with physical displacement, but with personal loss, injury and trauma.

In carrying out the research for this report, we spent a day interviewing refugee children in the town of Bar Elias in Bekaa. Many were from the Ghouta district of Damascus and Aleppo, where urban and rural areas have seen protracted conflict, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, and the targeting of civilian populations.

Malik aged 10 arrived in Lebanon two years ago. He is living in one rented room with his grandmother, three brothers and two sisters. His father is missing. Malik witnessed two friends being killed as a result of bombing, and suffered a serious leg injury. He was unable to attend school for two years because of security concerns in Syria, but has now enrolled in an accelerated learning programme run by a non-government organisation. "I want to learn and be with my friends," Malik says, "but we are all struggling to understand English. More than anything, I want to go home."

Souriya aged 15 has been in Lebanon for one month. Her family were forced to flee when armed groups and snipers began targeting their district. She has not attended school for two years. Two of her friends were killed in a rocket strike which hit her school in 2012. She recalls a teacher being killed by sniper fire. Although she was absent, she still struggles to cope with the memory. "I want to learn and become a doctor, but every day I remember what happened at home."

Nasra aged 14 was wounded during bombing in eastern Damascus. His sister, aged six, was killed by falling rubble. Nasra has not been to school since he was 11, and doubts that he will ever complete his education. He now works as a day labourer in agriculture. "It's very hard to find a place in school. I would like to learn, but now I have to help feed our family and also pay the rent."

parents, siblings and friends, or suffered acute trauma as a result of witnessing acts of violence (**See Box 1**).

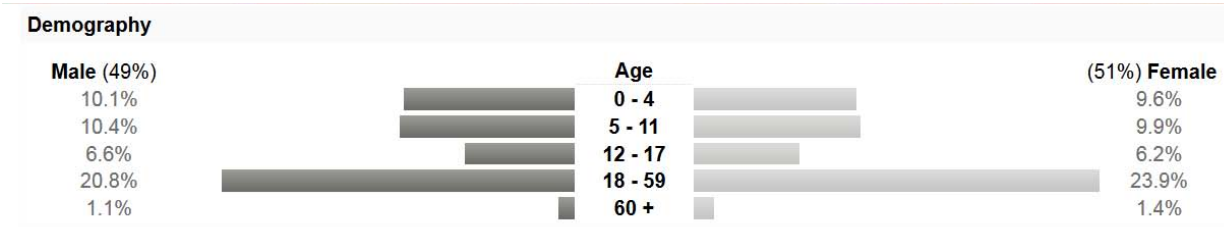
Education can play a critical role in enabling children to cope with and recover from their displacement. School offers the prospect of a return to normality. It provides a safe space in which children can share their experiences and anxieties. Critically, the continuation of schooling keeps alive the hope of a better future. Children who experience protracted periods out of school as a result of displacement are less likely to complete their education, with damaging consequences for their life-chances.

It is not only the future of Syrian refugee children that is at stake. As outlined in greater detail below, the Lebanese government has demonstrated extraordinary generosity in opening its public education system to refugees. That generosity comes at a price. An already over-stretched school system is coming under intense pressure – and there is a danger that quality will suffer. It follows that any response to the refugee crisis has to address the challenge of building coping capacity in the national education system.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The population of school-age refugees has grown with the overall flow of refugees. Data from UNHCR suggests that around half of registered refugees are aged 17 years or less (figure 2). Assuming that the age profile of refugees awaiting registration is broadly comparable, this would put the number of children and adolescents at 360,000. It should be emphasised that this figure applies to Syrian refugees. Adding Palestinian refugees would push the global number closer to 400,000. In this report we rely principally on UNHCR age profile estimates, while recognising that they may well under-estimate the numbers involved.

FIG. 2: DEMOGRAPHY OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON (UNHCR, SEPTEMBER 2013):



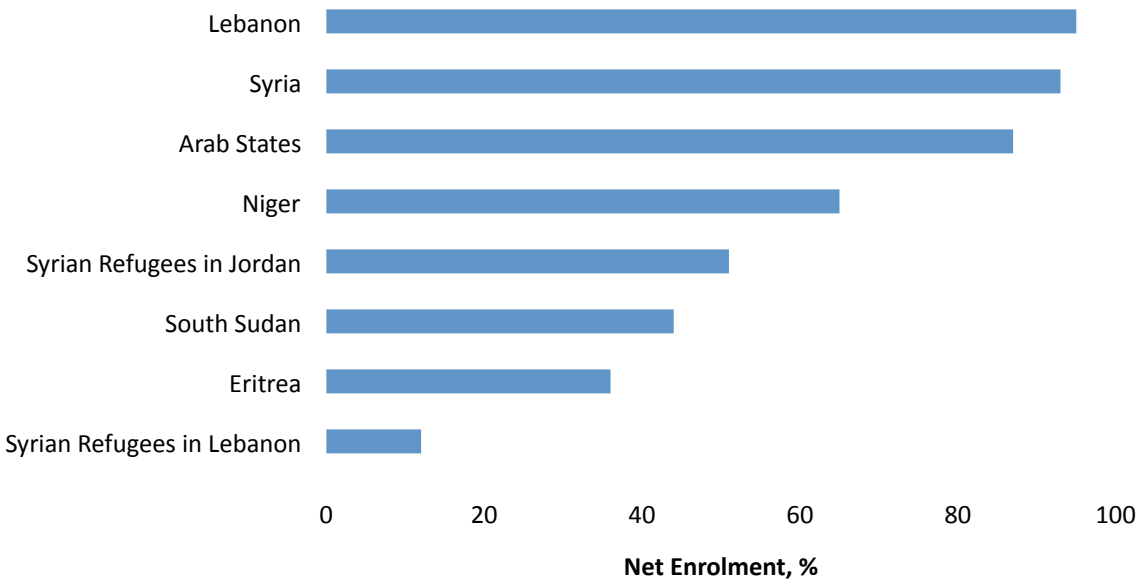
The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has made an enormous effort to accommodate refugee children. In 2012 the minister issued a decree instructing all schools to enroll Syrian students regardless of their legal status. The decree also waived school and book fees. These actions proved critical in providing many children with opportunities that they would otherwise have been denied. Around 980 Lebanese public schools accepted just under 30,000 Syrian children during 2012. Almost all of these children were enrolled in primary schools, suggesting that most secondary school-age children are out of school.

Lebanon's public education system is absorbing extreme adjustment costs. During the 2012 school year, Lebanon's primary schools absorbed an intake equivalent to around 10 per cent of the existing school population. Providing for currently out-of-school refugees will require provision for another

300,000 children. This is equivalent to the schools of a city like London absorbing the combined primary school population of Birmingham and Manchester; or schools in New York providing for all of the school children in Washington D.C. and Chicago. Such analogies draw attention to the sheer scale of the challenge that will come with providing education for all of Syria's refugees.

Despite the efforts of the Lebanese government and the humanitarian response, the vast majority of Syrian children remain out-of-school. Even on the most generous estimate, the net enrolment rate among 6-14 year old refugee children (an estimated 257,000 in 2013) is no higher than 12 per cent. It is less than 5 per cent for secondary school age children. If Syria's refugee children were a country, they would have the world's lowest enrolment rates – far lower than the worst performing countries in Africa (figure 3). Palestinian children face equally desperate prospects. One report from UNRWA documents that only around one-third of children displaced from Palestinian camps in Syria were enrolled in school at the end of the 2012 academic year.

MISSING OUT ON EDUCATION: SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON



Sources: UNESCO, UNHCR (for Jordan) and own estimates for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

In the absence of decisive action, an already bad situation will deteriorate over the course of the 2013/14 school year. Projections indicate that the number of refugee children from Syria could reach 550,000 by the end of 2013. There is a real and present danger that the vast majority of these children will be denied an opportunity to continue their education. Changing this picture will require not just additional resources, more teachers and innovative strategies to accommodate more children, but also measures aimed at addressing the very real problems facing refugee households and vulnerable host communities.

Expanding educational provision for refugee children is more than a matter of creating school places, daunting as that challenge may be. Among the wider challenges to be addressed:

- **Language of instruction and curriculum**. The Syrian educational system provides primary and lower secondary education solely in Arabic, whereas the Lebanese system introduces instruction in French and English at the primary level. For children who have been uprooted and, in many cases, missed over one year of schooling, this poses a considerable barrier – and almost certainly contributes to the high drop-out rates reported for Syrian refugees.

- **Certification**. Syrian students without education documents from their home country can register and sit exams in Lebanon, but they cannot receive certification. Given the difficulties that children and parents face in securing documentation from their municipalities in Syria, this is a potential barrier to schooling.

- **Cost barriers**. While the government has waived school registration fees and other costs, several financial barriers remain. Transport is a major concern. For refugee children located 2-3 miles from a school, monthly transport costs can reach US$20 per month – a considerable barrier for poor households. Moreover, as the assets of refugee households are depleted there is a growing pressure on children to generate income – and several NGOs report a rise in child labour.

- **The wider learning environment**. The surge in refugee numbers has inevitably compromised the learning environment. There is a lack of qualified and trained teachers, restricted classroom space, and shortages of learning materials. Some evidence is emerging of Syrian children facing stigmatisation and bullying in their schools and neighbourhoods.

Recent evidence has underlined the mutually reinforcing barriers facing refugee children from Syria. One survey in southern Beirut, carried out by AMEL, found that household poverty and learning barriers were recurrent themes. Many children were unable to access the Lebanese education system, due to financial constraints (48 per cent) or access issues (16 per cent). Where they *were* able to access education, children face linguistic issues (35 per cent), difficulties with the Lebanese curriculum (22 per cent) and difficulties adapting (18 per cent), amongst others.

THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

As the number of refugees seeking safety in Lebanon has spiralled, demand for support has relentlessly outstripped supply. This is not to downplay what has been achieved. UNHCR moved rapidly to scale up its operations in Lebanon, reflecting astute political leadership. UNICEF has moved swiftly to draw up strategies for delivering basic services in education and other sectors. Coordination problems may in some cases have added to delivery problems. UN agencies, bilateral donors and NGOs have struggled to cope with resources that fall far short of those required to meet refugee needs. For understandable reasons, the international community has seen the crisis in Lebanon as a 'refugee problem'. It is now impossible to avoid the conclusion that the country is dealing not with a short term refugee emergency, but a long term development challenge. Failure to meet the challenge will have grave consequences for Lebanon's future and, by extension, for regional peace and security.

Financing for education has been provided under the umbrella of the Regional Response Plan which has been overtaken by events on the ground. Under the Fifth RRP, the government, UN

agencies and partners estimated that US$158m would be required. Government financing estimates amounted to US$54m to scale-up provision from the 30,000 enrolled in 2012. As in other areas, these figures have been overtaken by events. Support provided through the humanitarian system has almost entirely bypassed the government. It is now clear that, in the absence of further support to government schools, the MEHE will lack the resources to meet the 2013 enrolment target. While initial planning estimates suggest that public schools have the potential capacity to increase provision from the 2012/13 level of 30,000 refugee children to 90,000 refugees in 2013/14, this will require significant committed investments to:

- Expand double shifting across the education system
- Rehabilitate sub-standard premises
- Rent new classroom premises
- Recruit, support and train new teachers
- Cover registration costs and expenditures on books, classroom equipment and learning materials
- Deliver accelerated learning programs that enable refugee children to make the transition
- Provide learning and psycho-social support

UN agencies and NGOs have scaled up their programmes, in most cases from modest beginnings, to support the education response. UNICEF has outlined ambitious plans to support the enrolment of 174,000 plus children in primary education, along with expanded early childhood provision. UNHCR also supports a wide range of education activities. Non-government organisations such as Islamic Relief, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children have scaled-up provision for accelerated learning programmes (**See Box 2**). UNRWA has outlined plans that could provide some 20,000 school places for displaced Palestinians.

BOX 2: BRINGING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS – THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Lebanon's education system has been overwhelmed by the influx of refugees. In contrast to other countries in the region, Syrian refugees in Lebanon live not in camps but alongside host communities in rented accommodation. The education minister moved rapidly to open the country's schools to refugee children, waiving registration fees and providing support for books. But the country's public schools are under immense pressure, especially in the Bekaa and areas around Tripoli.

That pressure is set to intensify. Catering for all of Syria's refugee children would double the public school intake for 2013 to 2014. It is difficult to find any precedent for the scale of the challenge. Unsurprisingly, UN agencies and NGOs were, like the government, unprepared for the scale of the challenge. However, there is evidence that innovative approaches have the potential for rapid scale-up *if* the international community provides predictable finance at the required levels.

One example can be found in the town of Bar Elias in the Bekaa. Lebanese Youth Action (LYA), a local NGO supported by Save the Children, is providing classes for 500 refugee children. The youngest children work with animators who use play to support learning activities. Older children take accelerated learning classes in which they learn English and French to a level sufficient to facilitate their entry into a Lebanese public school. Many children also take remedial classes to bring them up to the level required. Children are tested each week to monitor their progress.

Led by a dynamic head teacher, staffed by a core group of professional teachers, and supported by highly motivated volunteers, the classrooms in the LYA centre are living proof that it is possible to deliver education. However, there are concerns. Save the Children has struggled to raise finance for Lebanon, limiting its capacity to develop large-scale programs based on secure and sustainable finance. Meanwhile, there are serious question marks over the availability of school places for children graduating from the accelerated learning programme.

Even on the most optimistic assessment the combined effect of the strategies in place will leave many children behind. If the plans outlined in RRP5 are fully funded and the 2013 Back-to-School programme achieves its goals, less than half of the projected refugee population will be in school. Moreover, the programme currently lacks the financing and wider planning strategy for delivery. To take one example, less than a dozen schools have been rehabilitated out of 200 requiring urgent work. There is no financing in place to cover the running costs that will come with an expansion of the second shift system to the 70 additional planned for 2013. In the absence of that financing, even this target (which could accommodate some 21,000 children) will prove unattainable.

The extent of the challenge in education should not be under-estimated. Few of the estimated 257,000 6-14 year old Syrian refugee children have any prospect of entering the private school system since the costs of entry are too high. However, incorporating them in public schools would increase the current intake by around 80 per cent. With current estimates suggesting that 6-14 year old age cohort will increase to 409,000, education for all through the public system would more than double the school population in the space of one year. Bluntly stated, this is not a plausible outcome. The implication is that a twin-track approach is required, with increased support for public education linked to expanded provision through NGOs. There is no shortage of evidence demonstrating the potential for community-based approaches to deliver education (see box 2).

However, national and international NGOs currently lack the financing required to scale-up provision, reflecting their dependence on inadequately funded humanitarian aid channels.

AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR REFUGEE EDUCATION

The international response to the refugee education crisis has been inadequate. Lebanon has been left to carry an excessive share of a burden that should be shared across the international community. Beyond the humanitarian imperative to maintain the right of Syria's children to an education, there are compelling grounds for action. Allowing the quality of Lebanon's education system to diminish in the face of rising demand will exacerbate social tensions across the country, reinforcing other factors that threaten to undermine political stability.

Any assessment of the financing requirements for a credible response in education has to proceed with caution. The government of Lebanon, the World Bank and other aid agencies are currently undertaking a needs assessment for responding to the refugee crisis. It is critical that this assessment considers in detail cost-effective strategies for getting all refugee children into school while protecting the integrity and resilience of the education system.

Given the sheer scale of the numbers involved, allied to financing requirements in other areas, it is not feasible to integrate another 300,000 refugee children into the public school system on the existing cost basis. Pre-crisis spending per pupil in Lebanon amounted to an estimated US$2000 on some assessments. It is simply not credible for the international response to provide per pupil spending at this level for refugees. The marginal costs of provision must be brought well below average costs, with provisions for pupil-to-teacher ratios of around 30:1 (compared to 12:1 in the current system), recruitment of temporary teachers (including Syrian teachers in community-based programmes), use of community centres and recourse to NGO providers. Efforts should be made to contain within a range of US$400-600 per pupil.

Any estimate for financing has to be treated as indicative. Our figures would imply a requirement of US$150 million for education. However, additional provision of around US$15m will also have to be made for special needs and transport costs. The total annual financing requirement is around US$165 annually, or just under US$500m over three years.

The starting point for an effective international response is credible and predictable medium-term financing with contingency provisions. Reliance on humanitarian appeals will not suffice. As noted above, existing delivery has fallen well short of requests. Moreover, as the crisis becomes more protracted, and as other emergencies occur, it is likely that the gap between requests and delivery will widen. It is widely recognised that the Syria crisis does not have an early end in sight – and attempting to fund medium term expenditure programmes in education through short-term, unstable and diminishing humanitarian appeals is both inappropriate and unworkable. Agencies with a capacity to deliver high quality programmes are competing (in many cases in a weakly coordinated fashion) for a small and unpredictable pool of resources, which may well shrink over time. Lebanon needs a three-year education financing strategy to respond to the refugee crisis aimed at providing support for an additional 300,000 children.

Looking beyond the financial envelopes there is scope for considering a range of financing and delivery options. There are two urgent priorities. The first is the development of a coherent donor strategy for supporting public provision in education through a partnership with the government of Lebanon. The second is the design of a three-year financing framework that increases the availability and strengthens the predictability of finance for education. There is a real danger that already

inadequate flows of humanitarian finance will shrink as the refugee crisis becomes more protracted. Against this backdrop we recommend:

- **The development of a national strategy for refugee provision, with a premium on cost-effective delivery**. Every avenue for lowering costs while meeting quality standards should be explored. For example, community groups may be willing to provide temporary classroom facilities at lower rentals than the private sector. Consideration could be given to the temporary hiring of Syrian teachers for deployment in community-based education centres. If Syrian children are covered in second school shifts, authorities may reconsider the English and French language requirements and allow Arabic only teaching.

- **An application by the Lebanese government to the Global Partnership for Education for US$150m over three years, with UNICEF acting as lead agency**. The application should be fast-tracked by the GPE Board to reflect the urgency of immediate action. Resources disbursed through the MEHE could be channelled either through project budget lines, following current donor practices, or through a dedicated pooled fund. While there are a number of administrative rules that would require reform in order to unlock GPE funding, this should not be permitted to obstruct action. If the rules are a barrier to delivering a response to what may be the greatest reversal in education in recent decades, surely the rules should be changed. Ultimately, the relevance of the GPE to global education challenges will be determined by what it does to protect learning opportunities for vulnerable children, not by its adherence to internal operating procedures.

- **Provision of US$230m through the EU, USAID and OECD donors, with consideration given to the creation of a pooled fund for education jointly managed by the government of Lebanon and donors**. With fiduciary management provided by an established financial management agency, the fund could be used to tender for the delivery of programmes over a three year period, placing a premium on cost-effectiveness and proven delivery capacity. Such an arrangement would provide a secure and predictable financing base for provision through the public education system, and through NGOs with a capacity to scale-up delivery through well-established local partners.

- **Delivery of US$115 million through regional governments and philanthropic bodies, also operating through a pooled fund**. Arab states, philanthropic foundations and companies have a strong record in supporting education initiatives, but they have been slow to respond to the crisis in Lebanon, reflecting political sensitivities and wider donor concerns over public finance management. The creation of a pooled fund would provide a financial delivery mechanism that might help allay such concerns.

CONCLUSION

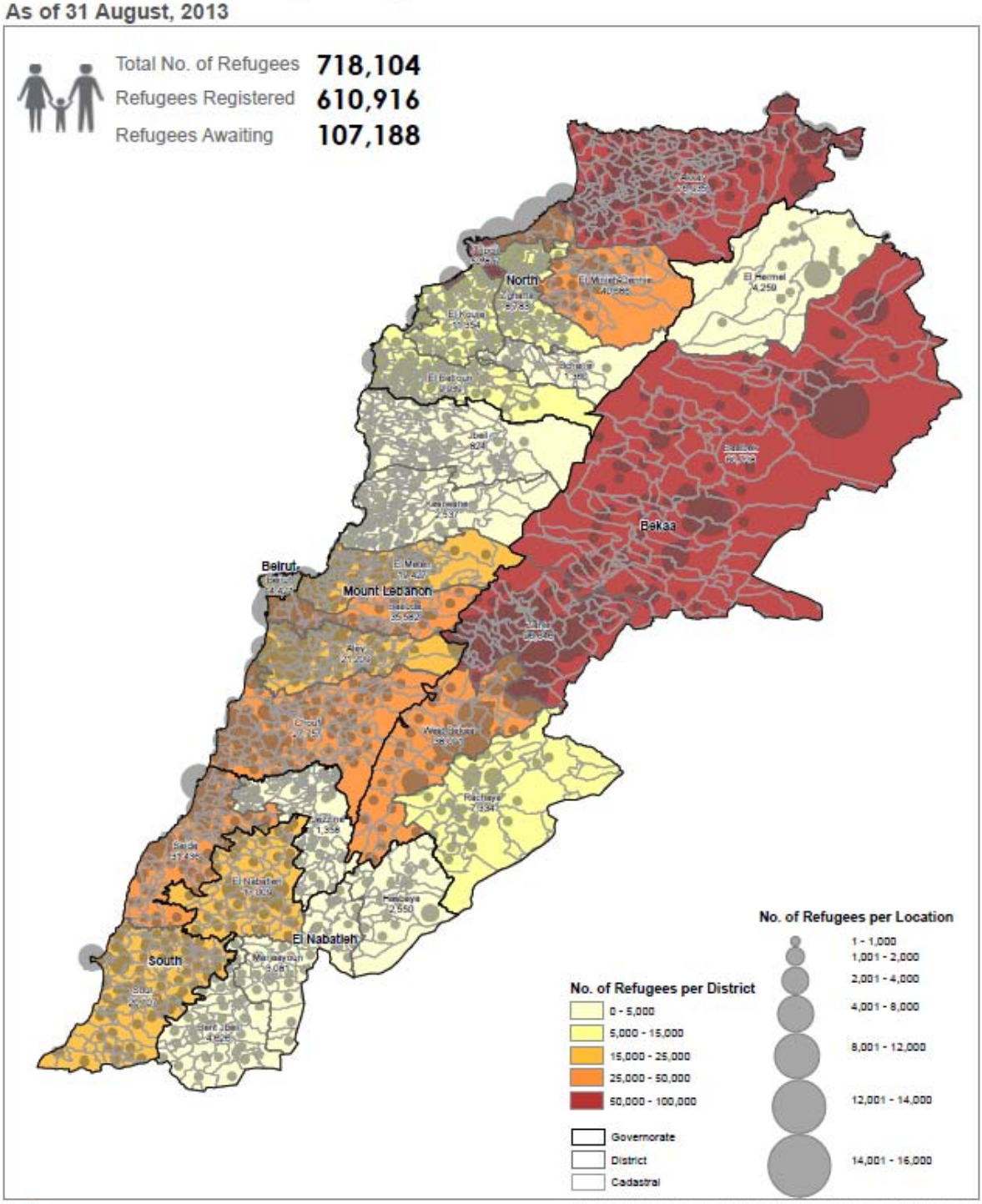
The Syrian refugee crisis is above all a human tragedy. Yet it is also a litmus test of the international community's resolve, and of the values that underpin humanitarian action, multilateralism, and international cooperation. That test extends across many areas. The protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and respect for international law are priorities. Yet the critical importance of education should not be neglected. Refugee parents and children themselves are making extraordinary efforts to secure an education. It is time for the international community to match that effort.

ANNEX 1

SYRIA REFUGEE RESPONSE

LEBANON Syrian Refugees Registered

As of 31 August, 2013



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

The boundaries, names, and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement of the United Nations or UNHCR. All data used were the best available at the time of map production.

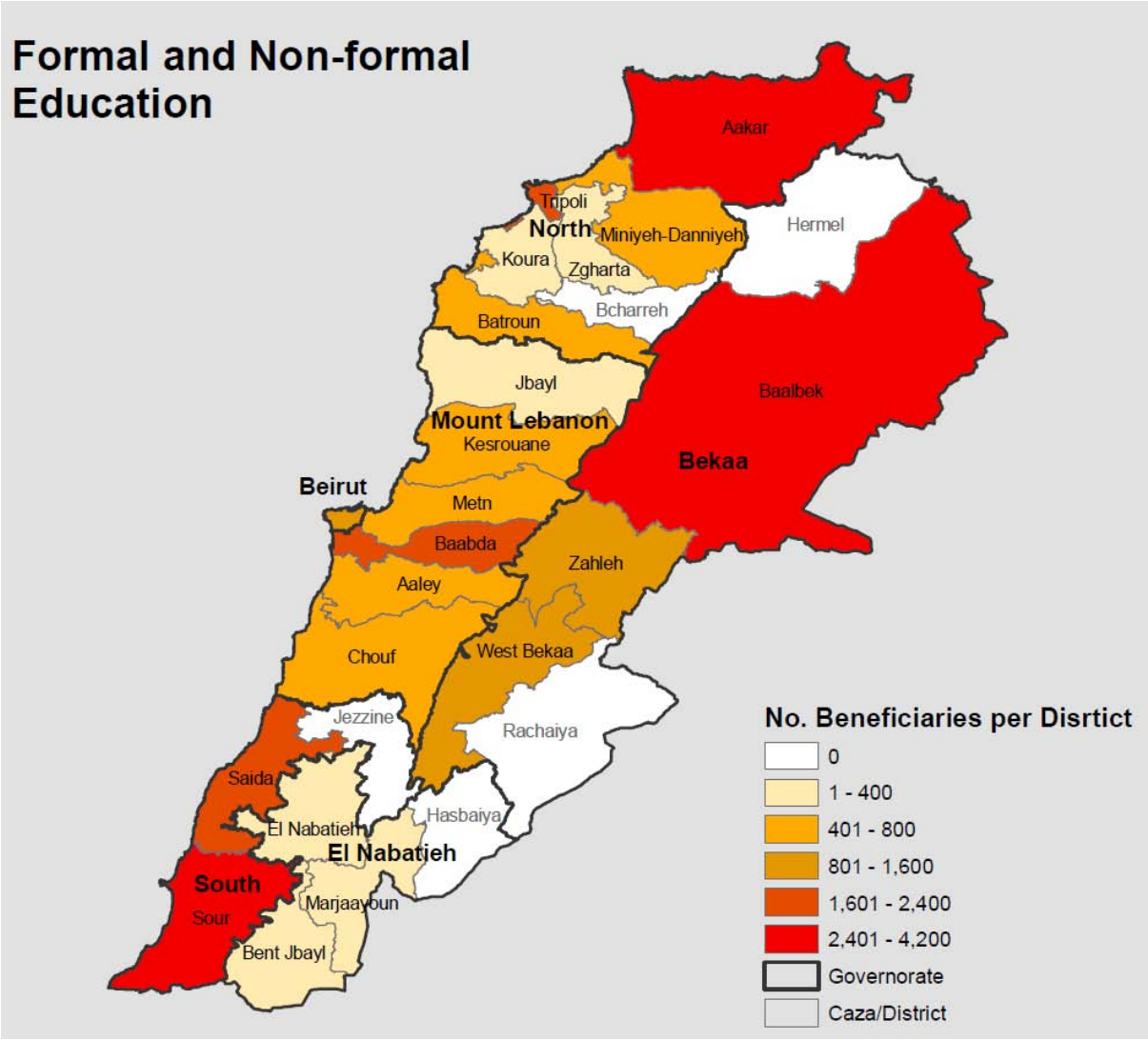
Data Sources:

- Refugee population and location data by UNHCR as of 31 August 2013. For more information on refugee data, contact Rana G. Kaalfi at kaalfi@unhcr.org

GIS and Mapping by UNHCR Lebanon. For further information on map, contact Wali Ahadi at ahadi@unhcr.org

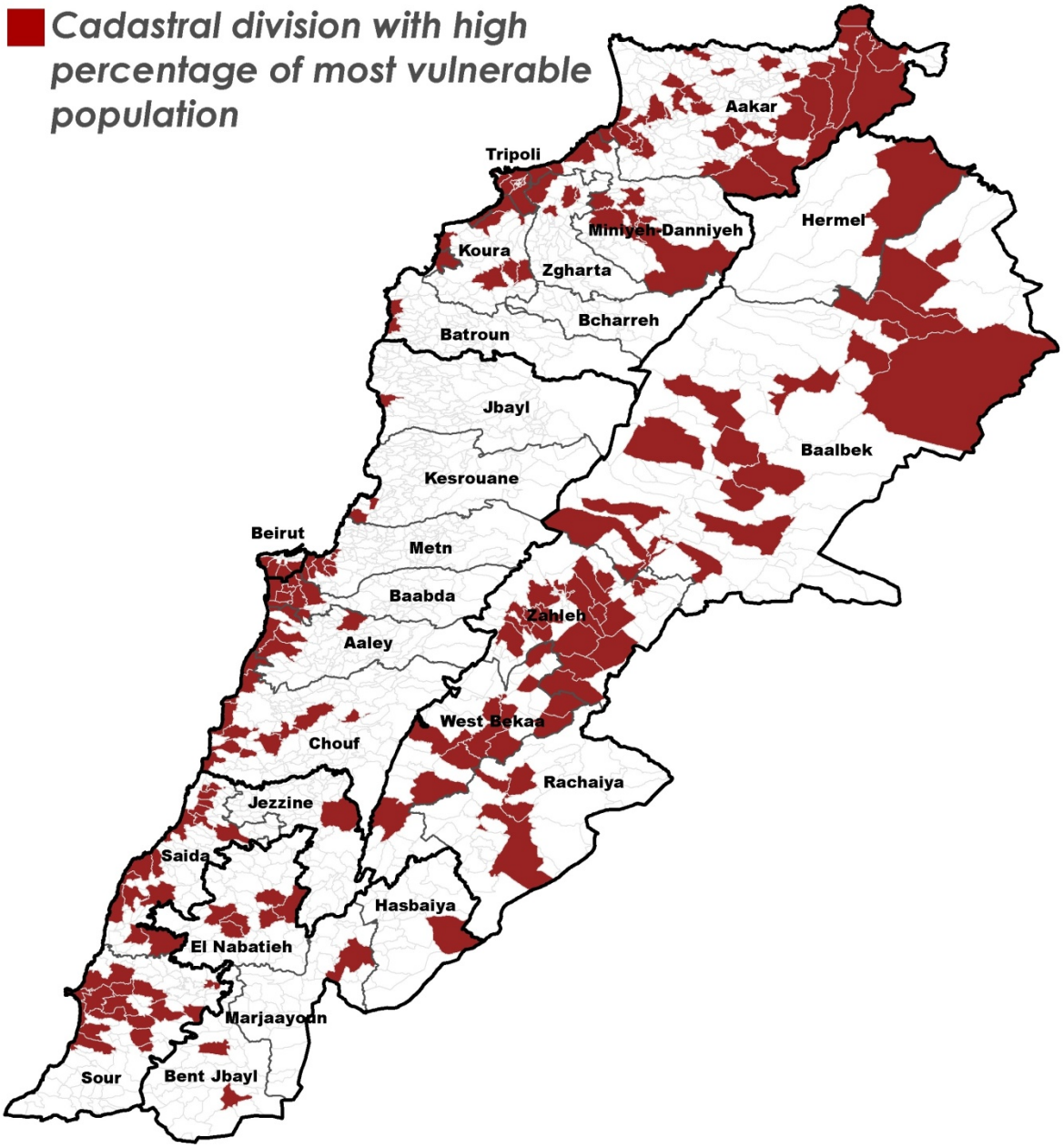
ANNEX 2

UNHCR/ UNICEF – number of beneficiaries reached in each area, September 2013:



ANNEX 3

Lebanese Vulnerable Population Map



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