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# Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Right to Education

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# Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Right to Education

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## **1. Introduction**

Lebanon is one of the countries in the world hosting the most refugees relative to its population size: an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees live in this country and around 655,000 of them are believed to be young people aged between 3 to 18.<sup>1</sup> Access to quality education is key to ensuring the continued learning of children displaced due to the on-going conflict in Syria; otherwise a high proportion of uneducated Syrians could potentially have serious individual and societal consequences. Furthermore, to understand the difficult situation of these asylum seekers and the hard work needed of the Lebanese government it is important not to skim over the historical relationship between the countries, Syria and Lebanon, especially with regard to the Lebanese civil war and the period that followed.

This paper analyzes what Lebanon is doing to protect, defend and improve Syrian refugee's right to education and how the international community - especially the UN - can help the national government to achieve this goal. The paper highlights the efforts of the Lebanese Government to provide a receptive environment to refugees and create meaningful opportunities to deliver the best quality of education to the highest number of refugees possible across the different age groups.

## **2. The political framework and its reaktion with the "refugee crisis"**

### **2.1 From the independence to the "Cedar revolution" and the civil war**

Lebanon became an independent State in 1943 after being under the Ottoman rule (1516-1918) and the French mandate (1920-1943), which was decided by France and the United Kingdom in the "Sykes - Picot agreement". The foundations of the state were set out in 1943 with the famous and unwritten, "National Pact" (*Al Mithaq Al Watani*). The "National Pact" used the 1932 census to distribute seats in parliament on a ratio of six-to-five in favor of the Christians. This ratio was later extended to other public offices. Up until today, and as agreed in the "National Pact", the President of the Republic is a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shia Muslim. For all these reasons, we can state that Lebanon is a parliamentary republic with a special political system: the confessional system, which aims to deter sectarian conflicts and attempts to fairly represent the demographic distribution of the 18 recognized religious groups in the government.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Carole Alsharabati, Carine Lahoud, Jihad Nammour, *Preview on Child Education Survey* (Political Science Institute USJ, March 2016).

2 Arend Lijphart, *Consociational Democracy* (World Politics, 1969).

From its foundation until 1975, Lebanon went through a period of relative peace and prosperity including the development of the tourism and bank sectors. This period allowed Lebanon to be considered by Freedom House as one of only two (together with Israel) politically free countries in the MENA Region.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult, if not impossible, to summarize in a few lines what happened between 1975 and 1990 in Lebanon when a bloody civil war afflicted the country. During this war, a coalition of Christian groups opposed the joint forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization led by Yasser Arafat (Lebanon became the base of PLO in the late 1960s), left wing Druze and Muslim militias. In June 1976, the Lebanese President requested the Syrian Army to intervene on the side of the Christians and to help in restoring peace. In October 1976, the Arab League agreed to establish a predominantly Syrian Arab Deterrent Force, which was charged with restoring calm. In June 1982, following the attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador to Britain by a Palestinian splinter group, Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon. In September, Maronite president-elect Bachir Gemayel was assassinated. Israel occupied West Beirut where the Phalangist militia killed thousands of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila camps. Bachir's brother, Amine, was elected president. International peacekeeping forces, comprising mainly American, French and Italian personnel, arrived in Beirut.

In 1988, Amin Gemayel, the President whose term had expired, appointed Maronite Commander in Chief Michel Aoun as the President of an interim military government as the presidential election failed to find a successor. At the same time, the Prime Minister Selim el-Hoss formed an alternative Muslim administration in West Beirut.

In 1989, Lebanese Parliament met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, to support a Charter of National Reconciliation transferring much of the authority of the president to the cabinet and increasing the number of Muslim MPs. In October 1990, the Syrian air force attacked the Presidential Palace and Aoun fled. This formally ended the civil war.

After the war, in 1992, the Lebanese "tycoon" Rafiq Hariri was elected Prime Minister; even if, still today, we can say his mandate was ambiguous, he was supported by most of the population, so when having been elected, he launched the reconstruction of his country and, in particular, the city of Beirut.

In 2005, four months after leaving office, Hariri was killed in a bomb attack. His assassination is the base of a large protest movement opposing Syria, despite the presence of the Syrian army in the city and in the country. The peak of the protest was on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2005 when around a million protesters – in a country of four million habitants – held a rally and demanded the complete withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon. The goal was reached and this phase is known as the "Cedar revolution". In the Arab World, it is better known as Lebanon's *Intifadat al-Istiqlal*, Independence Uprising.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World, Country Ratings by Region, 1972–2013*.

4 BBC News, 'Lebanon Profile – Timeline' <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14649284>> accessed 1 April 2017.

## 2.2 The political situation today, related to the “refugee crisis”

On 28 April 2011, when the civil war began in Syria between opposition and government forces, the first country where refugees fled to was Lebanon: almost 2,000 people entered from the areas close to Talkalakh city and temporary settled near the border, where some of them had relatives and friends through business ties<sup>5</sup>.

It was the beginning of an unprecedented phenomenon; in fact, by January 2015 nearly 1.2 million Syrians were registered as refugees in Lebanon. The number of refugees has continued to grow, despite no public figures being made available since this period.

Since 2011, the Lebanese Government has worked on managing the crisis in coordination with the UNHCR. Meanwhile UNHCR has been present on the field, especially in the North, the Government - led by Saad Hariri, the son of the former Prime Minister Rafiq - started to help the refugees with the first humanitarian aid under the supervision of the Minister of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the High Relief Committee.

The idea was that this situation was only considered a short-term emergency and that it was an opportunity to be seized by certain Lebanese political parties (to show the world the Syrian regime has ruthlessly treated its citizens). During this year, despite the change of the Prime Minister and the nomination of Najib Mikati, Lebanese policies on this issue did not change.

*“In March 2012, the UN enacted the first Regional Response Plan (RRP), a humanitarian project which, with its subsequent addenda, was unprecedentedly large. The RRP was launched with an overall budget demand of \$100 million, which subsequently became \$1 billion in 2013, then \$1.7 billion in 2014. A new program was launched in 2015 with a forecasted budget of \$2.14 billion, while the continuation of this program in 2016 requires funding of up to \$2.48 billion in order to be fully implemented”.*<sup>6</sup>

In June 2012, the B’aabda Declaration, which stated Lebanon’s dissociation policy from Syrian conflict, was adopted. Unfortunately, it did not make any reference to the situation refugees were living in that moment, but only talked about the importance of “humanitarian solidarity”.

In line with this policy, Mikati enforced the use of “displaced persons” – “*nazihoun*” in Arabic – as a legitimate terminology rather than “refugees” (“*lajioun*”).

The idea of the Government was, and still is, that the refugees have to consider Lebanon as a “transit country” and not as a country where they can be integrated or, at least, find asylum. Most probably, this is also related to the difficult situation that Lebanon endured with the Palestinian refugees, who are considered, by a large part of the population, as the biggest reason of the Lebanese civil war.

In the same year, Prime Minister Mikati removed the High Relief Committee after a

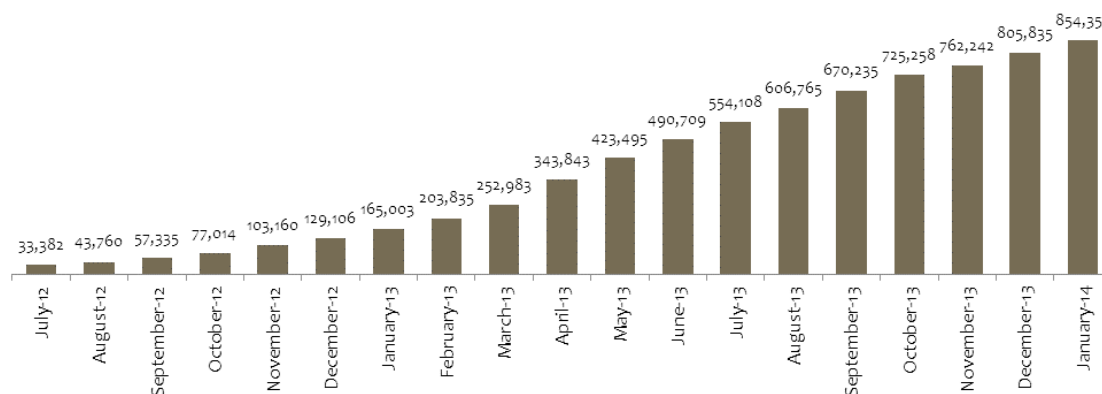
5 Filippo Dionigi, *The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon* (LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016).

6 *ibidem*.

scandal of corruption and mismanagement of funds and put all the powers pertaining to the refugee issue in the hands of the Minister of Social Affairs. In October, the opposition in the Parliament, the “14 March” coalition, asked for the resignation of the Prime Minister Mikati for his “*personal responsibility for the assassination of Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hasan*”<sup>7</sup>. Hasan was a brigadier general at the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the head of its intelligence-oriented information branch and a “*controversial player in the Lebanese political-security arena since 2005*”<sup>8</sup>.

In just a few months, Mikati was pushed to resign and in March 2013 Tammam Salam, an independent legislator allied with the Future Movement block<sup>9</sup>, was named Prime Minister-designate to form a new Cabinet. After a long period of consultations, meetings and discussions, his office became operative in February 2014.

In the meantime, and during a period of slow development in Lebanese politics, the number of the refugees coming from Syria increased: in July 2013 the total number of Syrian refugees assisted by the UNHCR and its partners was over 645,000<sup>10</sup>, in February 2014, the total number was 927,368<sup>11</sup>.



Source: UNHCR (2013) Syria Regional Refugee Response. Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>. Date of access: February, 2014.

In March 2014, Salam delivered his governmental policy statement to the Lebanese parliament, which had endorsed him after a vote of confidence.

In his speech he declared his intention of directly tackling the question of Syrian refugees:

*“The government will work on taking the necessary measures to address the issue of*

7 The Daily Star Newspaper, ‘March 14 Calls on PM Mikati to Resign after Hasan Killing’ <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2012/Oct-19/192077-march-14-calls-on-pm-mikati-to-resign-after-hasan-killing.ashx>> accessed 19 December 2016.

8 Al Akhbar English, ‘Who Was Wissam Al-Hassan?’ <<http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/13029>> accessed 19 October 2016.

9 The Daily Star Newspaper, ‘Salam Emerges as Lebanon’s next PM’ <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Apr-05/212660-salam-emerges-as-lebanons-next-pm.ashx#axzz2PVqkb3k2>> accessed 5 April 2017.

10 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, *Lebanon Inter-Agency Response: Syrian Refugees* (July 2013).

11 Human Rights Documents Online ‘A Daily Struggle to Survive: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.’ <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR\\_Lebanon\\_Daily\\_stats\\_20140213.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR_Lebanon_Daily_stats_20140213.pdf)> accessed 1 April 2017.

*Syrian refugees whose numbers exceed the country's capacity to deal with, in order to contain the security, political, social and economic repercussion of their temporary presence in Lebanon. The government will call upon the international community and the Arab world to assume their responsibilities in helping Lebanon to fulfill its ethical and humanitarian obligation and facilitate their return to their homeland."*<sup>12</sup>

It was perhaps the first time that the crisis obtained a high political profile in Lebanon and became a part of the government policy. Four main ideas were raised:

- 1) the need of international help;
- 2) the idea of a humanitarian crisis;
- 3) the "*temporary presence*";
- 4) the return of the refugees to Syria in a short time.

In May 2014, the number of Syrians registered with the UNHCR reached 1 million. This high number became one of the biggest challenges for the Republic of Lebanon by this time. That month the government set up an Inter-ministerial Crisis Cell headed by the Prime Minister and formed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migration, the Ministry of Interior, the MoSA. These ministries took up certain roles. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities was responsible for managing the situations of refugees internally according to international standards. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migrants was tasked with exploring the possibility of establishing safe zones in Syria in order to relocate refugees. The MoSA was placed in charge of coordinating relations with international organizations and local administrations.<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 2014, the Ministry of Interior recorded 18,000 Syrians travelling between Syria and Lebanon, though certain politicians claimed these Syrians would not have the right to be refugees, nor to have the implied benefits attached. Thus a new regulation was issued with the aim of revoking the status of "displaced" ("*nazihoun*") of those Syrians.

In June, in Syria, the Presidential elections were taking place. In these elections Syrian citizens outside the country were allowed to vote at the local embassies. It became clear, at this time, when thousands of people protested in Beirut, that a great deal of Syrian citizens present in Lebanon are supporters of the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, considered, as we have previously seen, as an enemy of Lebanon, by a large part of the Lebanese population.

The presence in Lebanon of a large number of supporters of the Syrian regime could very well be related to the fact that Hezbollah, the biggest Shiite party of the country, is military involved in the Syrian civil war and is fighting alongside Al-Assad's army.

For this reason, and because of the high tensions between the Syrian refugees and

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12 See: <<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Library/Files/Policy%20Statement-en.pdf>> accessed 1 April 2017.

13 Filippo Dionigi, *The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon* (LSE Middle East Centre, February 2016) 13.



the host communities, public opinion and a part of the Lebanese population started to change their standpoint on the refugee crisis and on the Syrian refugees.

In the same year, the government adopted a policy paper, "*Policy Paper on Syrian Crisis*",<sup>14</sup> setting three main priorities for managing the Syrian displacement into Lebanon: first, reducing the number of individuals registered in Lebanon with the UNHCR as refugees from Syria; second, addressing the rising security concerns in the country; third, sharing the economic burden by expanding the humanitarian response to include a more structured developmental and institutional approach benefiting Lebanese institutions, communities and infrastructure.<sup>15</sup>

In December 2014, the Government started to implement the Policy Paper, which led to limiting the surge of refugees coming from Syria to the Cedar Nation.

The Lebanese Ministry of Interior and General Security introduced border measures for the first time since the establishment of the two states:

- newly-arrived refugees should have supportive documents and reason for entry;
- with the implementation of the new policy on January 2015, the Syrians lost the opportunity of six months entering.<sup>16</sup>

Between 2015 and July 2016, the Lebanese politics and policies towards the "Syrian refugee crisis" remained, substantially, unchanged.

The Republic of Lebanon is trying to face the issues of the Syrian refugees despite the huge numbers and the weakness of its public policies (already evident before the crisis: a lack of governance, weak and missing infrastructures, waste disposal crisis, internal sectarian tensions and a decreasing GDP).

The aforementioned reasons and the politicization of the issue have pushed many analysts to conclude that the Lebanese government sees that the growing number of the Syrian refugees in the country constitutes a serious threat to security and political, economic and social stability.

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14 Session of 23 October 2014, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Republic of Lebanon <<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=6118>> accessed 1 April 2017.

15 *ibidem*.

16 Khalil Gebara, *The Syrian Crisis & its Implications on Lebanon* <<http://www.sciences-po.usj.edu.lb/pdf/The%20Syrian%20Crisis%20%20its%20Implications%20on%20Lebanon%20-%20Khalil%20Gebara.pdf>> accessed 1 April 2017.



### 3. The status of the Syrian refugees and the Lebanese crisis response plan

#### 3.1 The status of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Regarding the status of the refugees in Lebanon, it is worth highlighting four basic points:

First, the Republic of Lebanon has ratified the major international human rights instruments, among which we must remember: the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Second, in September 2003, during the “Iraqi refugee crisis”, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Lebanon permitting it to register asylum seekers and conduct refugee status determination. This Memorandum affirms, “*Lebanon does not consider itself an asylum country*” and specifies that an “*asylum seeker*” means “*a person seeking asylum in a country other than Lebanon*”<sup>17</sup>;

Third, Lebanon (and many other states in the Middle East) did not sign the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. For many analysts, as Dallal Stevens from the University of Warwick has noted, the protracted Palestinian issue is often cited as a reason for this.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, the principles of international human rights law are “embedded” in the Lebanese Constitution. The Preamble of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 – as amended in 1990 – explicitly states: “*Lebanon is Arab in its identity and in its affiliation. It is a founding and active member of the League of Arab States and abides by its pacts and covenants. Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception.*”<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), it accepts the UNHCR’s protection role against the expectation that refugees recognized by the UNHCR be resettled within a six-month period (which can be extended once). It allows registered refugees to obtain a temporary ‘circulation permit’ for up to 12 months, when UNHCR is supposed to resettle the individual.

While a 2006 Ministry of Justice advisory note generally affirmed that the Government

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17 The Memorandum of Understanding between the Directorate of General Security (Republic of Lebanon) and the regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, concerning the processing of cases of asylum seekers applying for refugee status with the UNHCR Office, 9 September 2003.

18 Dallal Stevens, ‘Shifting Conceptions of Refugee Identity and Protection: European and Middle Eastern Approaches’ in Susan Kneebone, Dallal Stevens, Loretta Baldassar (eds), *Refugee Protection and the Role of Law: Conflicting Identities* (Routledge 2014).

19 See: The Lebanese Constitution <<http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>> accessed 1 April 2017.

should not forcibly return refugees recognized by the UNHCR, it occurred that Lebanese authorities refused to give any significance to the UNHCR's refugee status determination decisions, detaining and deporting hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers. More recently, the UNHCR attempted to negotiate a new MoU with the Lebanese government that would more directly address concerns related to the Syrian conflict, but the proposed MoU remains pending at the Council of Ministers.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.2 The Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)

One of the instruments to face this situation is the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The LCRP 2015-16 is a framework plan on the Syrian refugee crisis designed in 2015 by the Lebanese Government - with the International Organizations and the national and international NGOs - for all the actions and the main strategies to face this issue.

*“The LCRP promotes the strategic priorities identified by GoL (Government of Lebanon) and partners (United Nations, national and international NGOs and donors), emphasizing the role of GoL in leading the response with the oversight of the Cabinet Crisis Cell. Interventions in the LCRP are aligned to national policies and strategies, and seek to complement and build on other international assistance in the country.”<sup>21</sup>*

The plan, in a few words, describes how the government of Lebanon and its partners work together to reinforce stability while protecting Lebanon's vulnerable inhabitants including the Syrian refugees and the Palestinian refugees. The main point of the plan is to include all the interventions for the refugees and the “vulnerable” host communities in the same organic framework and to ask international aid for both vulnerable situations.

In particular, “[t]he LCRP is designed to:

- 1) **Ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for the most vulnerable among the displaced from Syria and among the poorest Lebanese;**
- 2) **Strengthen the capacity of national and local service delivery system to expand access to and quality of basic public services;**
- 3) **Reinforce Lebanon's economic, social, environmental, and institutional stability.”<sup>22</sup>**

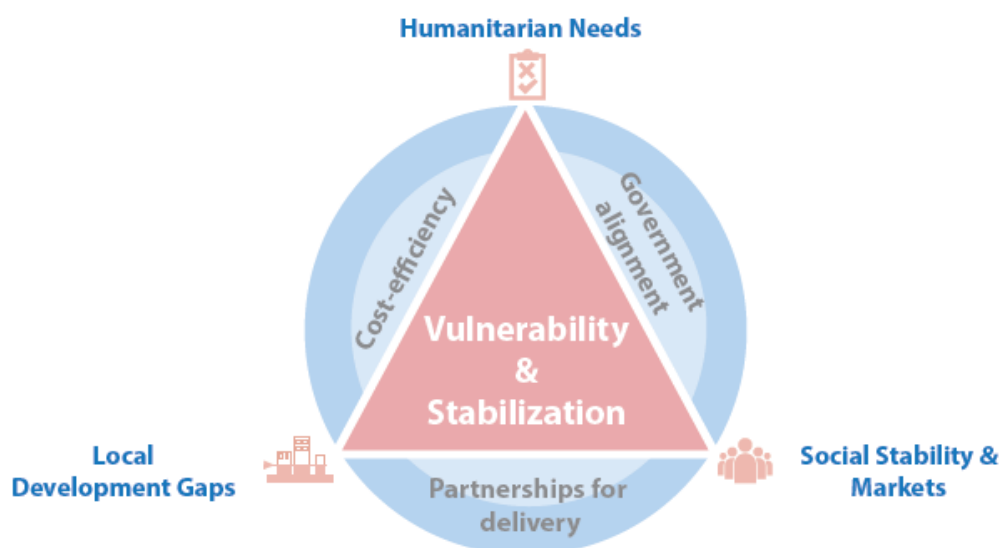
Even from the brief excerpt cited above the approach that the Government intends to implement is clear. This not only includes measures for a refugee crisis but also for the strengthening of the economic, social and institutional system of Lebanon. It is an important step that recognizes the existing weaknesses - an admission not granted to a national state - and the huge number of refugees compared to the inhabitants of the country.

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20 Maja Janmyr, *The legal status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon* (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, March 2016).

21 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16* (December 2015).

22 *ibidem*.



The conceptual framework of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (Source: *LCRP 2015-16*)

Based on priority needs identified jointly by the Government of Lebanon and national and international partners, the Plan focuses on the most vulnerable communities, targeting up to 2.8 million of the most vulnerable Lebanese, “displaced Syrians” and Palestine refugees. 1.9 million individuals are targeted for protection and direct assistance; 2.1 million individuals are targeted for service delivery, economic recovery, and community service. The “key categories” are: 1.5 million vulnerable Lebanese, 1.5 million displaced Syrians, 320,174 Palestine refugees. The funding required is \$2.48 billion.

#### 4. The right to education of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon

##### 4.1 International Human Rights Treaties ratified by Lebanon

As mentioned before, Lebanon didn’t ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of the Refugees, but it ratified and signed other conventions, which protect the right to education: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (on 3 November 1972), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on 14 May 1991).

In particular, article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes that “1. *The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the*

*activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace*".<sup>23</sup>

The same article states that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education. A basic education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for these persons, who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education.<sup>24</sup>

Focusing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is worth to considering article 28 for the right to education of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to this article, "[s]tates Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all".<sup>25</sup> Under the same article States have to encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and acts appropriately such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need. To "encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates"<sup>26</sup> is a duty of the States. This sentence has a high relevance with regard to the case of the Syrian child refugees in Lebanon.

Therefore, both treaties have important references to the right to education and have a fundamental role for the defense of the right to education of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

As already mentioned for the legal status of the refugees, the Constitution of the Republic of Lebanon states that "Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception"<sup>27</sup>. This means that Lebanon, even without signing the Refugee Convention, has to defend and guarantee the right to education of the Syrian refugees. In fact, this is what the Lebanese government is trying to do.

#### 4.2 The Lebanese school system

School in Lebanon is compulsory and free until the age of 15, with three types of schools characterizing the education system: public, subsidized and private. Both public and private sectors work in parallel, rather than in a complementary way.

Although public and private schools are almost equal in number (1,365 public and 1,442 private and free-private), the public sector accounts for only 29.2 per cent of stu-

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23 United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966.

24 *ibidem*.

25 United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

26 *ibidem*.

27 The Lebanese Constitution <<http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>> accessed 1 April 2017.

dents enrolled in the Lebanese education system<sup>28</sup>. The public sector also accounts for only 19 per cent of pre-school service provision compared to 66 per cent in the non-free private sector and 15 per cent in free private schools.<sup>29</sup> Most public schools are located in the 250 most vulnerable localities.

These three types of schools are divided into the following five main types:

(1) Free public schools: education is free of charge, but there are still education fees mainly for registration, textbooks, school uniforms, transportation, and food.

(2) Free private confessional schools: these are usually free and provided by non-profit generally religiously-affiliated organizations. Some are subsidized by the state (semi-private) for each student enrolled (up to a maximum of 600 per school).

(3) Subsidized schools should not be asking fees from families and should use the Lebanese curriculum, although MEHE does not have a monitoring system in place to regulate.

(4) Paid private schools: these generally request high fees and are provided for by for-profit organizations. They can teach a specific curriculum and there is little monitoring by MEHE.

(5) UNRWA schools: They mainly cater to Palestinian children at the primary level, are free and teach the Lebanese curriculum. Because of the scarcity of available public secondary schools, UNRWA has also recently started providing secondary education.<sup>30</sup>

Focusing on the teachers, the public sector accounts for only 43.8 per cent of the 88,413 employed in 2009-2010.<sup>31</sup>

According to MEHE statistics, there are sufficient numbers of teachers in Lebanon. While the national ratio of students per teacher is 7.4 in public schools<sup>32</sup>, these statistics mask regional disparities.

Teacher qualification requires a four-year university degree. The way in which teachers become qualified can limit the quality of teaching, with language skills in French and in English (the teaching languages for main subjects such as mathematics, science and the main foreign languages in Lebanon) sitting at the top of the list of areas in need of attention. One of the reforms prioritized in the Education Sector Development Plan is the establishment of a robust policy for the training, recruitment and monitoring of teachers<sup>33</sup>.

28 *Yearly Statistical Bulletin* (CERD, 2011-2012)

29 UNICEF, Forthcoming. *Education for children and adolescents in Lebanon: a human rights-based, equity-focused analysis of the situation* (draft version).

30 Ministry of Education And Higher Education of Lebanon, *Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon R.A.C.E* (June 2014).

31 *Yearly Statistical Bulletin* (CERD, 2011-2012)

32 *ibidem*.

33 Ministry of Education And Higher Education of Lebanon, *Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon*

Access to primary education has remained fairly stable and over 90 percent for the last decade. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2009 reported a high primary school net attendance at the national level of 99.2 per cent, with little variation among regions. Net attendance for children of secondary school age drops to 85.2 per cent, while it is lowest in North Lebanon, where it can reach 75.6 per cent in certain districts such as Akkar.

Regarding the infrastructural system and the education spending, for the Ministry of Education more than one-third of the public school buildings in Lebanon are not state-owned and the State is renting more than 400 schools.<sup>34</sup> Public education is free of charge but families have to pay for textbooks, school uniforms, transportation, and food. Private provision of education is both fee-paying and free, with the latter provided by non-profit generally confessional organizations offering only kindergarten and elementary education subsidized in large part by the government.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.3 R.A.C.E. - Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon

The second instrument of the Lebanese Government is the so-called R.A.C.E. In 2014, after four years of Syrian civil war, it became clear that it represented a long-term crisis. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) of the Lebanese Republic developed and launched R.A.C.E. - Reaching All Children with Education - a strategy aiming to provide free educational opportunities to out-of-school children, refugees and “vulnerable Lebanese”. This holistic approach to support host communities and populations displaced from Syria is one of the core points of the strategy. It is noteworthy that it is the first time the UNHCR, one of the main partners of the Ministry, works in this way.

Indeed, before 2011 the Ministry of Education was providing education for only 30 per cent of its student population and is seeing this limited capacity further jeopardized.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.4 The three main goals of R.A.C.E.

The program of the Lebanese Government to ensure the right to education has three main goals: first, ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities; second, improving the quality of teaching and learning; third, strengthening national education system, policies and monitoring.

Concerning the first goal, R.A.C.E planned to rehabilitate and equip 250 schools in different localities across the country to improve the capacity of the public sector to integrate an additional number of children. In order to do this the plan expected to improve the absorption capacity of public schools by augmenting the teacher/students ratio and in particular by creating a second shift system. **The second shift mechanism is per-**

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R.A.C.E (June 2014).

<sup>34</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *The National Action Plan for Education for All 2004-2015* (MEHE, 2004)

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, Forthcoming. *Education for children and adolescents in Lebanon: a human rights-based, equity-focused analysis of the situation* (draft version).



**haps the main and more productive innovation introduced by the Lebanese Government in this field.** The idea is very simple. Across the country the classrooms that lie empty after normal school hours are put into use: the second shift thus runs in the afternoon, from 2 pm to 6 pm and is dedicated exclusively to the school age child refugees. In January 2016, 65,890 Syrian refugees were enrolled in the first shift, 92,094 in the second. Today, 238 Lebanese public schools nationwide are running an afternoon shift for children in grades 1 to 9.<sup>37</sup>

In order to ensure equitable access to education, MAHE has even tried to face the problem of transportation that can usually be one of the biggest barriers to the access to education, and the problem of WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) facilities, the lack of which has been identified as a particular barrier to the retention of girls in public schools.<sup>38</sup>

For children older than 10 and whose primary school years were interrupted, R.A.C.E. planned the so-called *Accelerated Learning Programs* (ALPs). Currently NGOs and UNICEF manage this activity, including the selection and recruitment of teachers. In terms of learning outcomes, children undertake an assessment at the beginning and at the end of the activity to ensure they are well equipped for reintegration into the formal education system the following years.<sup>39</sup>

**All these efforts are made to allow refugee children to attend public schools and to receive a certified education; only with the certified education can these children obtain internationally recognized diplomas, which are essential to continue their education in Lebanon or abroad.**

Focusing on the second goal (namely, improving the quality of teaching and learning), MEHE planned two main activities. One concerns the purchase of learning packages, textbooks and teaching and learning material for basic education. Another activity concerns the teachers: *“teachers, and particularly contractual teachers hired to cater to the influx in the first and second shifts, as well as other educators and facilitators in non-formal settings, need to be trained to manage larger classes, engage in child-centered pedagogical practices, address language barriers, further health and nutrition, address issues of conflict, and provide psychosocial support (PSS)”*.<sup>40</sup>

The third and last goal of strengthening the national education system, policies and monitoring concerns supporting institutional development. This means, for example, the standardization of non-formal education and the development of policies and guidelines on languages and curricula. Non-formal education (NFE) is a term generally used for activities delivered for targeted social groups where there is a possibility to provide attention to individual learners. NFE in this context provides children and adolescents

37 UNHCR Lebanon, *Back to school* (June 2016).

38 UNICEF and Save the Children, *Education rapid needs assessment for displaced Syrian children in schools, community and safe places* (2012).

39 Ministry of Education And Higher Education of Lebanon, *Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon R.A.C.E* (June 2014).

40 *ibidem*.



with basic literacy and numeracy skills so that they can make the transition to either mainstream school or ALP.

#### PROGRAM SUMMARY

##### Program title:

Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon

##### Led by:

Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE)

##### Program start date and duration:

January 2014

3 years

##### Total budget:

Total: \$ 634 million

- Year 1: \$ 211.3 million

- Year 2: \$ 191.3 million

- Year 3: \$ 231.4 million

##### Overall objective

Allowing vulnerable school-aged children (3-18 years) affected by the Syrian crisis to access quality formal and non-formal learning opportunities in safe and protective environments

##### Program components and sub-components

1. Ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities
  - 1.1. School rehabilitation and equipment
  - 1.2. Enrollment support for formal basic education
  - 1.3. Enrollment support for basic education (ALP)
  - 1.4. Enrollment support for basic education (NFE)
2. Improving the quality of teaching and learning
  - 2.1. Textbooks, teaching and learning material for basic education
  - 2.2. Strengthening the teaching workforce capacity
  - 2.3. School readiness and learning for adolescents
3. Strengthening national education systems, policies and monitoring
  - 3.1. Supporting institutional development
  - 3.2. Learning outcomes assessments and M&E strengthening
  - 3.3. School-based management and monitoring and school grants

##### Beneficiaries

An average 413,000 Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese school-aged children (3-18 years) per year

#### 4.5 The crisis in numbers

For many reasons, mainly for the weakness of the Lebanese public system and for the difficulties of the refugees to register their formal presence in Lebanon or to renew their permissions, it is very difficult to identify the clear numbers in the crisis, especially regarding school-age refugees.

What we know is that for the Government of Lebanon, in November 2013, there were

260,000 school-age children and 390,000 in 2014.<sup>41</sup>

For the Preview on Child Education Survey, a study done by the Political Science Institute at Saint-Joseph University of Beirut, in 2015 there were around 655,000 school-age (3-18 years old) Syrian refugees.<sup>42</sup>

For the UNHCR, at the end of January 2016, over 472,000 Syrian refugee children between the ages of 3 and 17 were registered by the UNHCR in Lebanon. Of these, 157,984 were enrolled in formal education for the 2015-2016 academic years in grades 1 to 9. That figure marks an increase from 106,735 a year earlier and 62,664 in 2013-2014.<sup>43</sup>

## 5. From the plan to action: the challenges that Lebanon is facing

### 5.1 Challenges that the Government is willing to overcome in order to ensure the access to education to the Syrian refugees

The main challenges that the Government of Lebanon is willing to overcome in order to ensure the access to education to the Syrian refugees are four: language barriers, transportation, years out of school and the economic vulnerability of the families and consequent dropping out of the system.

#### a) Language barriers

Several subjects in the Lebanese curriculum - for example mathematics and science - are taught in French or English, but Syrian refugee students are used to taking all lessons in Arabic. This makes the learning much slower and more difficult. As we see from the Preview on Child Education Survey, the study on the right to education of the Syrian refugees conducted by the Political Science Institute of Saint-Joseph University of Beirut, English classes are the least popular, followed by French and mathematics classes.<sup>44</sup>

The problem of language is one of the main issues, even for Georges Bitar, Principal of the public school of Jounieh, in Sarba Region: *"In my school, around 700 Syrian refugees are enrolled in the second shift; they are children aged between 6 and 17 years, even if the older ones are a clear minority. At the beginning I was very surprised. Having 700 students in the afternoon at a school that usually hosts 150 students in the morning was a big challenge. But I have to be honest, thanks to the teachers' willpower we are overcoming this challenge. That is even more possible because the Syrians are very polite, they have a strong will to learn and their families, for 95% of the cases, are very collaborative with us"*.

41 Ministry of Education And Higher Education of Lebanon, *Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon R.A.C.E* (June 2014).

42 Carole Alsharabati, Carine Lahoud, Jihad Nammour, *Preview on Child Education Survey* (Political Science Institute USJ, March 2016).

43 UNHCR Lebanon, *Back to school* (June 2016).

44 Carole Alsharabati, Carine Lahoud, Jihad Nammour, *Preview on Child Education Survey* (Political Science Institute USJ, March 2016).

*“If you ask me about one of the main problems they face, the first thing that I can say is language. They have a poor language level, especially in French and English. These languages are fundamental for the Lebanese curriculum, French in particular. For this reason, we are working a lot to help them improving their language skills”.*<sup>45</sup>

Even Matthew Saltmarsh of UNHCR, in our conversation, posed the language problem as one of the biggest barriers for the refugees, even if it is not one of the issues that the UNHCR can help to solve. The UN Refugee Agency is much more involved in ensuring access for Syrian students to school and, especially, making sure they stay in schools. *“This is done through different community-based activities – actively involving the community, parents and children – and outreach and awareness-raising efforts. Through a community-based approach UNHCR has worked with partners nationwide to provide information about the importance of education, opportunities for enrollment and support to retention in school”.*<sup>46</sup>

## b) Transportation

Transportation remains another big barrier for the school-age refugees who want to go to school; many of them suffer from a lack of public transportation and the distance from school makes it even harder to attend classes.

A survey conducted by Saint Joseph University, covering 914 Syrian refugees living in different areas in Lebanon, showed that 34% of the students are 0-10 minutes away from school, 51% are 10-30 minutes away and 13% are 30 minutes-1 hour away. Moreover, the research indicates that students who live far from school are more likely to drop out.

In this context, it is interesting to know what the research “A future in the balance: Lebanon” of the Norwegian Refugee Council notes:

*“An important cumulative barrier that transpired from the research is DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL – as the table and the discussion of the previous findings illustrate, for many young men and women reaching schools that are available to them is a problem. For some, paying transportation fees is beyond their families’ financial reach. For others, the main component of the barrier is the already discussed lack of valid legal residency – schools open to refugee youth are few and far between, and reaching them means crossing one or more checkpoints. Together these factors mean that availability of education in the relative vicinity of the places they reside is an important factor - to be influenced either by increasing the number of secondary schools open to refugees free of charge, or by increasing the reach of non-formal education to the communities where refugees reside”.*<sup>47</sup>

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45 Interview with Georges Bitar, Principal of the public school of Junie, Sarba region, Mount Lebanon (July 2016).

46 UNHCR Lebanon, *Back to school* (June 2016).

47 Norwegian Refugee Council, *A future in balance: Lebanon* (April 2016).

### c) Years out of school

Being out of school for one or more years makes it very difficult, for the students, to come back to school. For this reason, as we saw, the Lebanese Government introduced the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). This program helps students to catch up with the Lebanese educational curriculum before enrolling back in the second shift. At the moment ALP is provided by NGOs and international organizations. The true challenge is to improve these programs and to extend them to all the regions of the country.

### d) The economic vulnerability of the families and the consequent drop out

Increased economic vulnerability leads to a high drop-out rate among children aged 14 and above, who tend to prioritize work over education in order to improve household income<sup>48</sup>; in fact, these children usually do not go to school but instead work. The research of the Saint Joseph University of Beirut shows that there is a strong correlation between work and school: 69% of those not working go to school, whilst only 12.6% of those working go to school.

Sometimes, families ask the young refugees to work because it is a real necessity.

In April 2016, poverty levels among refugees in Lebanon reached unprecedented levels, with 70% of Syrian refugees, 66% of Palestinian previously in Lebanon and 89% of Palestinian refugees from Syria living below the national poverty line (Lebanon's poverty line in 2015 has been set at USD 3.84 per day, around USD 115.2 per month).<sup>49</sup>

The Inter-Agency Coordination of Lebanon (United Nations – Government of Lebanon) helped us in analyzing better all the latest data about the drop out and out-of-school children in Lebanon studying the situation in different regions.

#### Bekaa<sup>50</sup>

In the Bekaa region there are around 369,000 children aged 3-18. Approximately 47,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in 2015. According to VASyR2015, approximately 45,100 Syrian children aged 3-5 were out of school. The main reasons for not attending are: not having reached the age to attend school age, and the cost of education. Regarding children aged between 6 and 14: 109,700 were out of school, whilst the number of Syrian children attending is approximately 63,900. For this age the main reasons for not attending are the cost of education and the absence of schools in the area. For the age range of 15-18, there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate numbers of out-of-school children. Either way, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 29,800 Syrian were out of school, and the main reason to not attend was the cost of education.

48 UNHCR Lebanon, *Back to school* (June 2016).

49 3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016-2017, '3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017' <[www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/20151223\\_LCRP\\_ENG\\_22Dec2015-full-versionoptimized.pdf](http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/20151223_LCRP_ENG_22Dec2015-full-versionoptimized.pdf)> accessed 8 April 2016.

50 All data from: Inter-Agency Coordination – Lebanon, *I dream of going to school* (2016).

### South<sup>51</sup>

In the South approximately 19,100 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school. According to VASyr 2015, approximately 8,800 Syrian children were out of school, mainly because they were not of school age, and due to the cost of education. In the same region around 44,800 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school and 8,300 were Syrian. The reasons for this were, again, the cost of education and work. For the range 15-18 there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate numbers of out-of-school children. Either way, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 5,700 Syrian were out of school, and the main reason for not attending was the cost of education and child work.

### North<sup>52</sup>

In the North approximately 36,900 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school. According to VASyr 2015, approximately 25,700 Syrian children were out of school, mainly because they were not of school age, and for the cost of education. In the same region around 75,500 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school and 24.800 were Syrian. The reasons for this were, again, the cost of education and the fact that schools did not allow enrollment. For the range 15-18 there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate numbers of out of school children. Either way, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 18,200 Syrian were out of school and the main reason for not attending was the cost of education.

### Mount Lebanon<sup>53</sup>

In Mount Lebanon there are around 560,800 children aged 3-18. Approximately 30,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in 2015. According to VASyR2015, approximately 30,200 Syrian children aged 3-5 were out of school. The main reasons for not attending are: not of school age, and cost of education. As regards children aged between 6 and 14, 92,300 were out of school; the number of Syrian children being approximately 37,100. For this age range the main reasons for not attending are the cost of education and the fact that they are attending a non-formal education program. For the range of age 15-18, there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate numbers of out of school children. Either way, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 18,400 Syrian were out of school and the main reason FOR not attending was the cost of education.

### Beirut<sup>54</sup>

Regarding education of Syrian refugees, Beirut is the region with the best record. In Beirut approximately 2,700 Syrian children aged 3-5 years old were out of school. Of the children aged 6-14, approximately 4,900 of them were out of school and, according to

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51 *ibidem.*

52 All data from: Inter-Agency Coordination – Lebanon, *I dream of going to school* (2016).

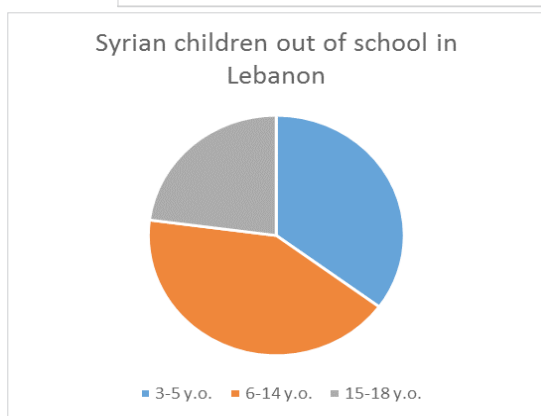
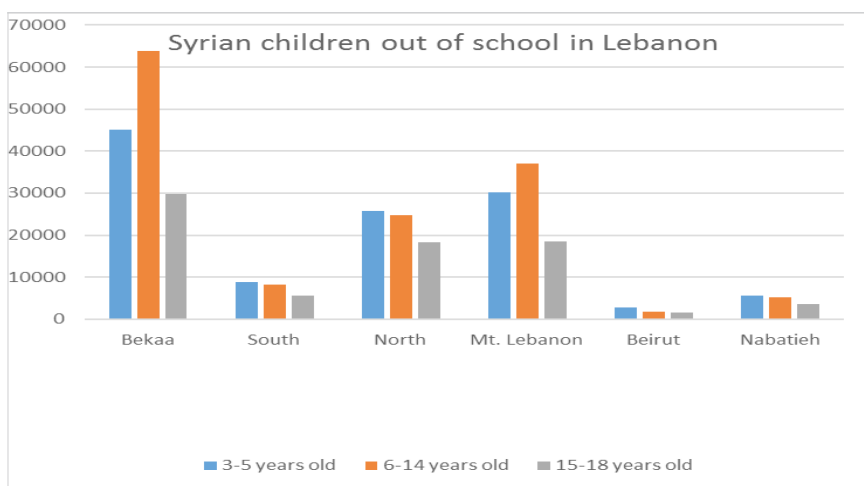
53 *ibidem.*

54 All data from: Inter-Agency Coordination – Lebanon, *I dream of going to school* (2016).

VASyR2015, 1,800 were Syrian children. Regarding adolescents aged 15-18: there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate numbers of out of school children. Nonetheless, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 1,600 Syrians were out of school and the main reason for not attending was the cost of education. The main reason all these children were out of school was the cost of education.

Nabatieh<sup>55</sup>

In Nabatieh, approximately 6,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school. According to VASyR2015, approximately 5,700 Syrian children were out of school, mainly because they were not of school age and because of the cost of education. In the same region, around 17,000 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school and 5,200 were Syrian. The main reason for this was the cost of education. For the range of age 15-18, there were not enough data from institutional sources to calculate the numbers of out of school children. However, according to VASyR 2015, approximately 3,500 Syrian were out of school and the main reason for not attending was the cost of education and children’s work.



3-5 y.o.	118,200
6-14 y.o.	141,100
15-18 y.o.	77,200
<b>In total:</b>	<b>336,500</b>

Source: Inter-Agency Coordination – Lebanon, “I dream of going to school”, 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=11241>.

55 ibidem.

## 6. Syrian children out of school: different perspectives, different solutions

From all this data we can assume that the main challenge for the Lebanese Government in the field of the right to education of the Syrian refugees in the country is the high number of students dropping out, and more generally, the out-of-school children.

In an interview conducted with Sonia El Khoury, Program Manager of the Unit for the program “Reaching All Children with Education” at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Lebanese Government, regarding the plan to face this challenge, the following answer was provided: *“We are doing our best but, especially for the transportation, we need much more funds from the international community because the number of children refugees is huge”,* she said. *“For the students who are out of school or who don’t have a good preparation for the Lebanese curriculum we are improving, for the next year, the Accelerate Learning Program planning. We are also developing another Accelerate Learning Program that targets students aged between 15 – 18 years old”.*<sup>56</sup> At this point, however, what could the teacher’s point of view be? I tried to obtain an answer from Georges Bitar, Principal of one of the public schools of Jounieh, in Sarba Region, knowing that in his school about 700 Syrian refugees are enrolled in the second shift. *“The main problem, for us, are the infrastructures: the number of Syrian refugees needing to go to school exceeds the capacity of the educational public system of our Country. We need to increase the numbers of our buildings and, of course, the number of teachers per students. Some classes have 40 students. It’s quite a high number that could prevent us from providing good lessons”.*<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, very different is the approach of the UNHCR, another main actor in the ‘refugee crisis’. In particular: *“UNHCR has well established links with the refugee community, and uses these connections in the outreach and awareness raising activities in education. Un Refugee Agency and partners work directly with the communities to find solutions to challenges children face in their education. The community itself is at the core of UNHCR’s work, which means that work to the largest extent possible is done both with and by the community members themselves. The Outreach Volunteers (OVs) and the parents committees are operating inside towns, Informal Settlements and refugee homes. After receiving training from the UN Refugee Agency and partners, OVs are providing information on education to their community, through information and awareness raising sessions. They also gather information from the communities and report to UNHCR and partners any concerns expressed by the communities. This helps to inform and better design programmes to bring children into school”.*<sup>58</sup>

On the same topic, Matthew Saltmarsh, Senior Officer of UNHCR, emphasized that *“the agency is helping the Lebanese Government even with the lack of infrastructures, with some basic work in the field”.*<sup>59</sup> However, Mirelle Girard, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon,

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Sonia El Khoury, Program Manager of the Unit for the program “Reaching All Children with Education” at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Lebanese Government (Beirut, July 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Georges Bitar, Principal of the public school of Junie, Sarba region, Mount Lebanon (July 2016).

<sup>58</sup> UNHCR Lebanon, *Back to school* (June 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Matthew Saltmarsh, Officer of the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee of Lebanon.



made a main important statement on this issue in June 2016: *“Attending public school receiving a certified education is seen by the Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon as a key priority. Without education, there is no future for the children who will one day rebuild Syria. Enrollment numbers are up, but too many children are still out of school or dropping out”*<sup>60</sup>.

### 7.1. Sport, arts and computer studies

In the interview with Georges Bitar, another issue emerged. In particular, he emphasized that: *“The Syrians often come for the second shift at 2 p.m. and they cross the path of the students enrolled in the first shift. The main problem between the students of the first shift and those of the second is that when the Syrians come to school, they see that the students of the first shift have hours of sports and Art. The classes are not included in their curriculum. And I think that hours of sport and Art can be very useful to encourage a kind of socialization among students and, also, among Lebanese and Syrian children”*<sup>61</sup>.

After verifying the information received, the question was raised with the Ministry of Education whether it was possible to improve the curriculum of the second shift by adding sport and art classes. Sonia El Khoury, program manager of R.A.C.E. at the Ministry highlighted that: *“We are aware of how important it is to have hours of sport, Art and also I.T. and we are planning to introduce these hours starting from the next school year. ‘Till now the children of the first shift have much more hours of school than the children of the second, since the second shift is held in the afternoon and we have to do the best so the children come back home before the sunset’*.”<sup>62</sup>

## 7. Conclusive remarks

Access to a quality education is fundamental to ensure the continued learning of children refugee or the displaced due to the ongoing conflict in Syria: a high number of uneducated Syrians will have serious consequences on the future of the Syrian society, on the Middle East and on the entire world.

Education, however, is a key aspect to control and fight radicalization, child labor, lack of social integration, lack of initiative and early marriage.

Therefore, ensuring the right to education to the Syrian refugees in host countries, such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and, obviously, the Western nations remains essential. Based on the data gained from the interviews with experts in the field and reports already mentioned, the Lebanese Government has been doing its best since 2011, and especially since 2013, in trying to ensure the right to education to all Syrian child refugees and to Lebanese vulnerable children despite the difficult situation.

60 The Daily Star Newspaper, ‘Number of Syrians in school up 52 per Cent’ (09 December 2016).

61 Interview with Georges Bitar, Principal of the public school of Junie, Sarba region, Mount Lebanon (July 2016).

62 Interview with Sonia El Khoury, Program Manager of the Unit for the program, *Reaching All Children with Education* at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Lebanese Government (Beirut, July 2016).

All this work is generally carried out with the collaboration of other relevant actors in the field: the international community, the European Union, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNESCO, as well as national and international NGOs.

Certainly, the main issue that the Government of Lebanon is facing is the huge number of the Syrian refugees and, in our case, of school-aged Syrian refugees: an estimated 43% of over 1.5 million refugees living in Lebanon are believed to be aged between 3-18 years old. This estimated number, over 650,000 children, is more than twice the number of the Lebanese children enrolled in public schools (300,000 Lebanese students).<sup>63</sup>

The Lebanese Government has tried to solve the first major issue of these children once they have arrived in Lebanon: registration. In the past years, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education have issued many circulars to facilitate the educational process even without any official registration of the child in country. This was the biggest difficulty with regard to a Syrian refugee's enrollment in school in the first year of the R.A.C.E. plan (as mentioned, *Reaching All Children with Education* is the plan launched by the Lebanese Ministry of Education to ensure the right to education to the Syrian refugees and Lebanese vulnerable children).

Now a remaining problem is that the children's enrollment in the school lies in the end with the Principal of the school, without the clear control of MEHE. For next year the Ministry should consider standardized mechanism of control.

In order to solve the additional issue of the huge number of school-age Syrian children, the Ministry of Education introduced the second shift. This idea has become the best solution to improve the absorption capacity of Lebanese public schools. Now the Ministry is considering improving the hours of the second shift to add more subjects like art, sport and I.T. This idea also includes the possibility of having a smaller number of students in each class: in the second shift there are many cases where one teacher educates around 40 students, and this proportion can represent a problem for the quality of their education.

Thanks to the second shift, the UNHCR has declared that 157,984 refugee children (from kindergarten to grade nine) were enrolled in formal public education in the country in January 2016 (that figure was up from 106,735 a year earlier and 62,664 in 2013-2014).<sup>64</sup> As a direct result of Lebanon's "success", Jordan and Turkey have made double shift schools the centerpiece of next year's educational efforts for refugees.

Increasing access to education and fighting the dropping out of school, transportation and distance to school still constitute a further big problem and must be tackled. MAHE is considering the improvement of public transportation for Syrian and vulnerable Lebanese students. However, in a country where public transportation is already a large weakness of the public system, it will be very difficult to find a solution to this

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63 Carole Alsharabati, Carine Lahoud, Jihad Nammour, *Preview on Child Education Survey* (Political Science Institute USJ, March 2016).

64 UNHCR, *Press Release – UNHCR Lebanon and Partners' 'Back to School' Campaign Lifts Refugee Enrollment* (8 June 2016).

problem without the strong intervention of the international community, which could fund or provide the means of transport. Sonia El Khoury, Program Manager of the unit for the programme “*Reaching All Children with Education*” at the Ministry of Education, was very clear on this point: “*we need funds*”.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding the integration of the Syrian children in the host communities and with the Lebanese students, the idea to propose sport courses in the curriculum, as Sonia El Khoury and especially Georges Bitar emphasized, is very interesting. However, as the research carried out by Saint Joseph University of Beirut suggests<sup>66</sup>, the problem of integration is not solvable on a school level but requires a national strategy for social integration and cohesion. As regards the language barriers, MEHE introduced French and English (languages present in the Lebanese curriculum and not in the Syrian curriculum) in the second shift, in NFE programs (Non Formal Education) and in the ALP programs (Accelerate Learning Programs). As mentioned, NFE, and especially ALP, are fundamental to help children with important educational weaknesses to come back to school.

Concerning school rehabilitation, R.A.C.E. has allocated a part of its budget to be used for upgrading the electrical system; assessing and waterproofing roofs and walls; safeguarding existing school infrastructure; replacing broken windows and doors; and minimizing danger and increasing safety. An important part of the budget was focused on WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) in schools. As we have seen in Jounieh, and based on what Georges Bitar told us, the Ministry is in charge of all these works. Even Matthew Saltmarsh, from UNHCR, highlighted that the agency is helping the Government on this issue directly in the field.

The research conducted for the present paper shows that the Lebanese Government is doing its best to ensure the right to education for the Syrian refugee children despite the structural weaknesses of the state. Many problems still occur on the ground though; in particular, Lebanon was already a State facing numerous challenges pertaining to its economy, politics and society. For this reason, Lebanon still needs many funds to improve its capacity to ensure the right to education.

Moreover, Lebanon is hosting as “refugees” the citizens of a state, Syria, which was considered for many years as an “enemy” by a great number of the Lebanese, because of the presence of its army on the Lebanese territory as the “Arab deterrent force” from 1976 to 2005. Six years after the departure of the Syrian army from Lebanon, the citizens of a regime that was involved in many brutal assassinations in this country came back as asylum seekers.

In the light of all the considerations articulated in the present paper it is reasonable to conclude that the Lebanese Republic is making many efforts to ensure the right to education of the children of Syria in Lebanon.

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65 Interview with Sonia El Khoury, Program Manager of the Unit for the program, *Reaching All Children with Education* at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Lebanese Government (Beirut, July 2016).

66 Carole Alsharabati, Carine Lahoud, *Analysis of child education survey – a study done at the Political Science Institute at USJ* (March 2016).

It should be stated that efforts must be augmented. Here, the help of the international community becomes necessary. This aid should be translated into funding as well as into the sharing of expertise and the ensuring that at least the larger part of these refugees would be resettled or would have the opportunity to go back to Syria. In the end, a basic problem that remains to be solved is the Syrian crisis itself, and its causes: only a solution of the related conflict will ensure a better future for all the children concerned.

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