As another autumn begins, children across the globe express a universal excitement of going back to school. Every year however, millions of children do not share in this excitement — they do not have access to schools due to conflict, violence, and displacement. Over 8 million Syrian children are among those left behind. They are scattered across Syria, living under the constant threat of bombs and shells. They are spread across the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, trapped in exploitative child labor jobs to help their families survive. They have traveled across seas and countries to Europe, North America, and every corner of the planet seeking shelter and opportunity — thousands as unaccompanied minors. For these children, autumn must be the saddest season of the year as they watch yet another school year begin; another year of their potential futures about to be lost.

Karam Foundation is determined to keep Syrian children attending school and send those whose educations have been suspended due to the war, back to school. We invest in Syrian schools, sponsor Syrian refugee families to take their kids out of child labor and register them in schools, and deliver cutting-edge innovative education and nurturing mentorship programs to Syrian teenage students. Our commitment has deeply impacted the lives of tens of thousands of Syrian refugee children and youth.

As the Syrian conflict grinds through its sixth year and as children are growing into young adults, we will continue to invest in opportunities for higher education and job training. Providing access to skills, tools, technology, and language acquisition is crucial to Syrian refugee youth as they seek to build their futures. Delivering curriculums that build solid STEAM and critical inquiry foundations will impact the increasingly global Syrian refugee youth wherever they settle in the world.

Karam Foundation’s report, *Displaced Generation*, provides an overview of the current status of education for Syrian students across Syria and the neighboring host countries. We hope it will be the starting point of important discussions and actions to scale up innovative and successful learning models and weed out outdated or failing education models that are not flexible enough to serve a mass-displaced population in the 21st century.

Every Syrian child’s secured education is an investment in a better, brighter, more hopeful future for all. It’s time to end the season of lost futures. Let’s invest in a strong, resilient, and successful generation of Syrians equipped to lead.

Join us in our mission.

Lina Sergie Attar
Co-Founder / CEO
www.karamfoundation.org
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYRIA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infograph &amp; Map Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURKEY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infograph &amp; Map Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JORDAN</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infograph &amp; Map Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEBANON</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infograph &amp; Map Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT KARAM FOUNDATION</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the past year, the Syrian refugee crisis has dominated headlines worldwide. From the pictures of drowned child Alan Kurdi to ominous warnings about the takeover of Europe, much has been written on the topic. Unfortunately, not much has been written about the conditions of refugees themselves.

Over half of Syria’s population has been displaced, with over 7 million displaced internally and more than 4 million officially registered refugees. Syria’s neighboring countries, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have accepted the vast majority of the refugees as well as people who have fled and have not registered as refugees. Though the governments and citizens of these countries have been generous, the reality is that the refugees face lives of hardship in these countries.

The children, in particular, are most vulnerable to the violence and hardships of refugee life. At least 3.3 million Syrian children are currently unenrolled in school, and have no foreseeable plans to return. Many things stand in their way: lack of information, poverty traps, and lack of access are a few of the barriers preventing their enrollment.

While a number of families are extremely reluctant to send their children to school, citing an imminent return to Syria, the reality is that Syrian refugees will likely not return home for years or decades to come. On average, it takes 20 years for refugees to be resettled in either their home countries or a third country. As such, it is crucial that long-term solutions are thought of for refugees, specifically refugee children.

Ensuring that refugee children have access to education is one step to ensuring that the children have a future to look forward to. Without an education, the children are likely to be exploited, get caught in poverty traps, fall victim to extremist ideologies, and will become a ‘lost generation.’ Giving children access to an education empowers them, provides them with the tools they need to construct sustainable, productive lives for themselves and their families, and ensure that they will be able to contribute once the time for reconstruction in Syria comes.

This report is an overview of the current information on the state of refugee education. There is a pressing need to utilize innovative strategies to solve these problems. Karam Foundation hopes that this knowledge can help move the conversation on long-term, innovative, sustainable solutions forward.
SYRIA

Karam Foundation, Taalim, and Kesh Malek are all dedicated to working on the grounds in Idlib and Aleppo.

BETWEEN 2011 - 2014

OVER 4,000 ATTKACS ON SCHOOLS IN SYRIA

160 CHILDREN KILLED IN THESE ATTACKS

1,000 REPURPOSED SCHOOLS FOR MILITARY BASES, STAGING CENTERS AND EVEN PRISONS
Internally Displaced in Syria

There exist no real figures of how many Syrians remain within its borders today. Death, destruction and mass displacement have shrunk the population. However, one thing has been apparent the past four years: education is under attack in Syria.

Between 2011 and 2014, there were over 4,000 attacks on schools in Syria. In 2014 alone, 160 children were killed in attacks on schools. What is meant to be a place of safety and learning, has turned into another front of the battle in Syria with over 1,000 schools repurposed into temporary bases, staging centers, and even prisons.

Many schools are forced to suspend their operations regularly due to bombing or fighting nearby. For example, in May 2015, the local authorities shut down Aleppo’s schools and thousands were prevented from sitting their year-end examinations.

Higher education is also under attack in Syria, with notable massacres occurring on school grounds such as the Aleppo School of Architecture bombing in 2013, and repeated arrests and assaults against students in Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo taking place since 2011.¹

The targeting of schools and the potential for schools to be caught in the crossfire has also caused many parents to be wary of sending their children to school. In 2014, a car bomb targeted a school in Homs province killing dozens. As a result, many parents are simply too fearful of sending their children to school, instead holding them back to protect them.

In response to bombing campaigns, many schools have moved underground. However, there are still problems associated with getting to these schools. Even schools that are not within the crosshairs of the fight have seen a decline in attendance, as children are often unable to find their way to the campus due to their location near the front lines of battle.

These children are at risk of joining the conflict and being married off young. Providing them with an education prevents them from falling into positions that force them to remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence.²

Innovative Solutions

In addition to putting schools underground, several organizations have been established to ensure that Syrian children are attending school, despite their internal displacement. It is crucial, in these circumstances, to support grassroots efforts at education.

Taalim is one of these organizations. It is dedicated to rebuilding schools and retraining those left inside to become teachers. It is run with the support of private donors, which includes Karam Foundation, outside of Syria.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, Taalim has reopened 11 schools in the Idlib province, supporting education at the primary and secondary school levels. Taalim’s school program also supports the local

² Ibid.
communities by employing those in need of work at their schools. The organization functions not just in Idlib province, but all over Northern Syria.³

Another organization that aims to tackle the problem of child education in Syria is Kesh Malek. Though not an educational organization, Kesh Malek supports over 3,000 students in its programs across Aleppo, and implements a system that aims to provide a healthy educational environment for Syrian students.⁴

By supporting organizations that work at the grassroots efforts to provide what is needed for Syrian children and the community, one is empowering the future of Syria. These are the people who will ultimately rebuild Syria and it is of utmost importance to ensure that they are supported in every way possible.

TURKEY

Turkey is currently host to over 1.7 million officially UNHCR registered Syrian refugees (the world’s largest community of displaced Syrians).

Over 2.9 million Syrians are registered with the Turkish government.

In total, estimates put the number of Syrians registered & unregistered, in Turkey at over 3 million.

Over 700,000 of these refugees are school aged children close to 500,000 Syrian children living in Turkey are not attending school.

500,000 Syrian refugee children in Turkey are not attending school.


230 Syrian run schools in 19 Turkish provinces.

Only 8,000 students registered for Syrian Baccalaureate administered by Turkish government.

Syrian Refugees make up 0.22% of total population of Turkish public schools.
Turkey is currently host to over 1.7 million officially UNHCR registered Syrian refugees, the world’s largest community of displaced Syrians. Over 2.9 million Syrians are registered with the Turkish government. In total, estimates put the number of Syrians, registered & unregistered, in Turkey at over 3 million. Over 700,000 of these refugees are school-aged children. Close to 500,000 Syrian children living in Turkey are not attending school. While a number of initiatives have been established in Turkey to attend to the needs of children, they are unfortunately not enough. The students in Turkey are suffering not only from being displaced, but also from disrupted schooling; many students have gone anywhere from two to four years without being enrolled in school.

The majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey live outside of the Turkish refugee camps that dot the Syrian border. In the 25 camps, 90% of school-aged Syrian children regularly attend school. Outside of the camps, the picture is much more grim: in the 2014-2015 school year, only 25% of Syrian children reported attending school.

Institutional Struggles

While law stipulates that the government of Turkey must provide all children residing within its borders free and compulsory primary education and access to secondary school education, Syrians have struggled to enroll in schooling.

Schools in Turkey also face their own problems not related to the Syrian refugee crisis; many are not funded adequately and are in a disadvantaged position, especially those in more rural areas such as the southeastern parts of the country. Southeastern Turkey, host to the highest number of Syrian refugees, had many school problems prior to the influx of Syrian refugees.

Prior to 2014, Syrians were only allowed to enroll in Turkish public schools if they were able to provide proof of residency in Turkey, which is obtained via a lengthy residency permit application. The difficulties of obtaining a residency visa and the sheer number of families trying to apply left a backlog that is still being processed today. In an effort to promote school enrollment, law was changed in 2014 to allow for Syrians to enroll in public schools using only a government-issued I.D.

Unfortunately, for the 2014-2015 academic year, Syrian refugee enrollment in the Turkish public school system represented .22% of the total in-school population in Turkey. Syrian refugee enrollment numbers in Turkish public schools remain extremely low for a number of reasons, primarily due to the language barrier.

Firstly, the parents of many of these students are simply unaware of their rights and the institutions they have access to. They do not know that their children are entitled to enroll in school, or they tried prior to 2014 and were rejected because they did not have a residency permit.

Secondly, many parents do not see the value of a Turkish language education. A majority of refugees do not view Turkey as their future home, and want to go back to Syria. An education in Turkish would not benefit people hoping to return to Syria, where the official language is Arabic.

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7 Ibid.
Temporary Education Centers

Turkey, in a bold move, has chosen to allow Syrian run schools to be accredited by the Turkish government, with a curriculum set by the Syrian Interim Government. These schools are meant to continue educating students in Arabic, allowing them to earn a high school diploma that would be recognized in Syria and the Arab world, thus securing their future for a return.

During the 2014-2015 school year, there were more than 230 Syrian run schools in 19 Turkish provinces. These schools were mostly in large cities that were host to many Syrian refugees, such as Istanbul and Gaziantep, as well as smaller border towns that have absorbed a number of Syrian refugees, such as Reyhanli and Urfa.8

Private donors and NGOs fund the schools, however the majority of them charge tuition. While the tuition they charge is oftentimes less than $300 a year, this cost, when factoring in transportation costs, is unaffordable for many families.

Because the vast majority of Syrian refugees do not see themselves staying in Turkey permanently, they do not see the value in Turkish education. They would rather enroll their children in the temporary education centers, which are oftentimes understaffed and underfunded. As a result, these centers suffer from overcrowding.

Temporary education centers also offer their own set of problems, such that the curriculum is an underdeveloped one that relies on the old Syrian curriculum. There has been no effort to redevelop the curriculum into one fit for the refugee’s situations, or one that is fit for the turbulent world that they inhabit. A cursory glance at the textbooks distributed by the Interim Government includes mentions of war, guns and “the tyrant” Bashar Al Assad in humanities texts for middle school aged children.9

Prior to 2015, Syrian students graduating from these temporary education centers had to take the Libyan high school exit examination,10 as the Syrian Interim Government was not able to administer the Syrian baccalaureate exam. While Turkish universities recognized this exam, the difference in curriculum and the incongruence of the Libyan exam compared to the Syrian one meant applying for universities was a challenge for these Syrian students. However, in 2015 the Turkish Ministry of National Education supervised the administration of a Syrian baccalaureate exam, with over 8,000 students registering for it.11

Community Struggles

As in Jordan, one of the biggest struggles for Syrian refugees in Turkey is social integration. In Turkey, there is the added barrier of language. Recent events in Turkey have certainly not helped to soften attitudes towards refugees; bombings in Istanbul and Ankara, for example, are frequently attributed by the unhappy population to Turkey’s involvement in Syria and Turkey’s open-borders policy. This creates popular resentment against refugees, which only increases as the number of Syrians does. As in Jordan, Syrians are also blamed for a myriad of domestic problems, such as unemployment, rent

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10 Ibid.
inflation, and an uptick in sexual assault and crime.

As a result, many parents are hesitant to send their children to Turkish public schools. They fear harassment and bullying in a setting that they do not know how to navigate. As such, it is easier for many parents who are not near temporary education centers to simply abstain from sending their children to school.

Access to these temporary education centers is also a community struggle. Though most of these centers have opened where a large number of Syrians live, many Syrian refugees in Turkey do not have a means of transportation to get to the school. While these centers oftentimes provide buses, they are not free; families must pay a fee to use the service. This fee, while nominal, is an added expense to families already struggling. Factoring in tuition, transportation expenses, food, and books makes schooling a fairytale for many.

Innovative Solutions

The accreditation of the Syrian temporary education centers in Turkey is a wonderful way of trying to enroll Syrian children in schools. The more time the children spend away from a learning environment, the more detrimental it is for their future. The expansion of these programs is a must and should be supported by NGOs and international governments alike.

Moving away from the official structure, NGOs can also step in to cover the gaps that exist. As noted above, a primary issue why Syrian children are unable to attend school is due to lack of information and accessibility about their options. Better outreach in the Arabic language must be done to ensure that Syrian refugees are aware of the existing opportunities for their children.

For those that cannot attend school due to financial limitations, conditional cash transfer programs like the Karam Foundation’s Sponsor A Syrian Refugee Family are ideal. Such programs provide families with a monthly stipend on the condition that their children enroll in school. This stipend is meant to cover any wages that would be lost by removing the child from labor and is meant to act as a disincentive for families to encourage their children to work.\(^{12}\)

Furthermore, it is extremely important to implement accelerated Turkish language programs through the public school system to overcome the language barrier for Syrian children. The Syrian schools in Turkey are meant to be a temporary solution; enabling these children to attend school in Turkey will provide them with many more opportunities.

In addition to these solutions, third parties and NGOs must seriously consider implementing alternative education programs for older children. How to join the workforce following completion of schooling is a concern for all refugees, and older students who have suffered gaps in their secondary school education especially feel this pressure, as they oftentimes must provide for their families. Offering programs that teach these students practical skills, such as product development, coding, and general project management. These skills correspond to tasks that are frequently being outsourced by major firms and if Syrian refugee teenagers are provided with the opportunity to learn these skills, they will be able to enter the workforce fairly quickly.

JORDAN

JORDAN HOSTS OVER 650,000 UNHCR-REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES ACROSS THE COUNTRY WITH UNOFFICIAL ESTIMATES PUTTING THE NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED REFUGEES AT AROUND 741,000 PEOPLE. 80% OF THEM ARE URBAN REFUGEES, OF THESE 36% ARE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.

APPROXIMATELY 260,000 SCHOOL AGED UNREGISTERED REFUGEES

ONLY 120,602 HAVE ENROLLED IN JORDANIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ONLY 45 SYRIAN STUDENTS TOOK THE TAWJHIHI EXAMS IN 2014

46% OF REFUGEE BOYS WORKING MORE THAN 44 HOURS A WEEK FOR 3-5 JORDANIAN DINARS A DAY

25% OF STUDENTS WHO DON’T ATTEND SCHOOL SAY IT’S BECAUSE IT IS “TOO FAR”

IN ZAATARI, 22% OF PARENTS WERE NOT INTERESTED IN SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL
Jordan hosts over 650,000 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees across the country, with unofficial estimates putting the number of unregistered refugees at around 741,000 people. 80% of them are urban refugees. Of these, 36% are school-aged children.\textsuperscript{13} As the crisis in Syria seems to stretch on with no end in sight, the number of Syrians in Jordan is bound to increase. As this number swells, so too do their needs. Syrians in Jordan will need to be fed and to be educated, to enter the workforce and to be housed. Syrian children, many of whom suffer from trauma, are the most vulnerable of this population. The best way to ensure that these children are not exploited and have bright futures to look towards is to secure an education for them.

**Institutional Struggles**

The Jordanian Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees Syrian refugee education. It has allowed for Syrian children to access and enroll in public schools, if they have not been out of school for more than three years. Of the school-aged refugee children, 25% of them are eligible for formal education in Jordan. However, the MoE released a report in 2013 that stated only 120,602 have enrolled.\textsuperscript{14}

The Jordanian Ministry of Education has attempted to provide for Syrian refugee children; in late 2014, it was reported that they would be building 72 new schools in order to absorb the population.\textsuperscript{15} However, the public schools are extremely overwhelmed.\textsuperscript{16} As with Lebanon and parts of Turkey, Jordan has attempted to establish a double-shift system in which Syrian refugees attend school after the ‘first shift.’ The double shift system in Jordan has been unable to supply formal education services in line with the demand.

However, this has created a strain on the services provided by the Ministry of Education. Only Jordanian teachers can be employed in the public sector, and the number of qualified teachers has risen exponentially since the refugee crisis. Hiring Syrians to teach in these schools is extremely difficult, as most Syrians are unable to access the necessary documentation needed to obtain work permits in Jordan. However, recent legislation and collaboration between the Jordanian government has removed barriers for Syrians attempting to obtain work in various sectors; hopefully, this will soon expand to include teachers as well.

As a result, waiting lists have been created so that Syrian children can enroll at a later time. In 2014, the waiting lists reached over 8,000 students, a shockingly low number. The enrollment numbers of Syrian refugee children can be attributed to a number of factors.

The differences in the Jordanian and Syrian school curriculum make it difficult for students who do enroll in public schools to feel integrated. This is especially true when taking into account any gaps in Syrian children’s education. This becomes a large problem when assessing the secondary school needs of the children, as the high school exam structure (Tawjihi in Jordan, Baccalaureate in Syria) differs greatly; only 45 Syrian students enrolled in Jordanian public schools took the exam in 2014.\textsuperscript{17} Many share the view that enrolling in the Tawjihi exams may be a wasted effort, as it will not benefit

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\textsuperscript{13} UNHCR, “2014 Syria Regional Response Plan” 2014.

\textsuperscript{14} Jordanian Kingdom, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, “National Resilience Plan 2014-2016, Proposed Priority Responses to Mitigate the Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Jordan and Jordanian Host Communities.” 2014.

\textsuperscript{15} The Jordan Times, “Jordan needs 72 new schools to accommodate refugee children — Majali” 2014.


\textsuperscript{17} International Peace Institute, “Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan”. 2015.
them if they were to return to Syria. Others, still, are unsure of their futures -- Will they stay in Jordan, or return to Syria? Will they move on to Europe? -- which causes them to lose confidence in any effort they may put in towards their education.

Such uncertainty has caused Syrian students, especially older ones, to be viewed negatively by some NGOs purporting to work towards refugee education; at a conference held in early 2015, Syrian students enrolled in public schools were described as “affecting the quality and infrastructure” of the schooling system.\(^\text{18}\) This negativity oftentimes spills over to the students, who may already feel discouraged from enrolling in school.

Community Struggles

The massive influx of Syrian refugees has led to visible demographic changes in many Jordanian neighborhoods. As a result, there has been an increase in prejudice against newcomers. Rent has gone up, and many view Syrians as “stealing” their jobs, and putting a strain on their resources, such as water and electricity. According to UNHCR data, many Syrians experience regular harassment and discrimination.

There have been similar incidents reported in schools, which has discouraged parents from sending their children to school. Though the double-shift system separates the two groups, that is Jordanian students and Syrian students, there are still tensions when the two groups meet. There is also the issue of violence in the schools, perpetuated by the teachers. This has been cited as a main reason for not enrolling in schools, and as a reason why students drop out after being enrolled. This is common amongst the male students especially.\(^\text{19}\)

Refugee Struggles

Though the majority of Syrian refugee children are enrolled in schools in Jordan, the number of children that are not enrolled continues to grow with every new wave of refugees. Though the Jordanian government is trying, it is unable to accommodate the growing refugee population. Additionally, some Syrian children are unable to enroll in Jordanian public schools due to familial and economic pressures. Close to half of all Syrian refugee children are now the joint or sole family breadwinners.\(^\text{20}\) As such, they are unable to go to school because they must work instead. The exact number of children in the workforce is hard to document -- child labor is illegal in Jordan. This leaves the children ripe for exploitation and abuse. Jordanian employers are willing to recruit Syrian children as laborers because of the low salaries.\(^\text{21}\) Over 46% of refugee boys are working more than 44 hours a week for a daily wage of 3 - 5 JD. The minimum wage for Jordanian workers is 190 JD a month.

Other children are unable to attend school due to transportation difficulties. In Jordan, each household has to pay for the transportation to public schools, an expense that can be difficult to cover for refugees living below or at the poverty line.\(^\text{22}\) As most refugees are urban refugees, they oftentimes live

\(^{18}\) Ibid.


\(^{21}\) Ibid.

far away from local schools which renders them unable to walk. 25% of Syrian refugee children who do not attend school said the reason they do not attend is because school is too far away.23

Girls who do not attend school are a particularly vulnerable group; their parents will oftentimes seek to get them married as a form of protection and to ensure stability in their lives. Unfortunately, these marriages are often to men two or three times their age, after which the girls are exposed to a multitude of risks, one of which being the cessation of education.

Parents’ and kin-caregivers’ attitudes towards school also play a role towards enrollment. In 2013, a UNHCR conducted survey at Zaatari refugee camp found that 22% of parents were not interested in sending their children to school.24 Many expected to return to Syria “soon” and used that as an explanation to not send their kids to school. This is an attitude shared by urban refugees as well.

Conclusions and Solutions

Though there have been efforts to integrate the Syrian refugee children into schools, they have fallen short. The longer Syrian children remain outside of the educational system, the dimmer their prospects are for the future. It is important to ensure that the children can see that they have a future beyond marriage for the girls and manual labor for the boys.

Innovative solutions, like the ones Karam Foundation is implementing in Turkey, are urgently needed to address this looming crisis.

While the Jordanian government can help by funding more educational opportunities, allowing for Syrian teachers to teach Syrian students, securing transportation for children, and imposing stricter penalties on those who employ child laborers, there must also be incentives offered to Syrian families to enroll their children in schools.

Programs like Karam’s Sponsor a Syrian Refugee Family, that provide cash-based incentives, have proven to be successful in both eliminating child labor and increasing the number of students enrolled in schools. Improving the livelihood of Syrian families is essential to creating the conditions at home that enable children to return to school.

Special programs must be implemented for those in secondary schools. Innovative Education initiatives, like Karam’s Leadership Program (KLP) which provides these students with entrepreneurial and technological workshops are important for cultivating a future generation that is able to implement creative thinking, as many drop out because they do not believe they have a future after graduating. Providing them with scholarships and the opportunity to pursue higher education at Jordanian and other Arab universities, as well as universities in Europe and the United States, is crucial in building a professional class.

Education has healing effects on traumatized populations, and is also a great stabilizer. Many of these children have faced extreme amounts of violence and trauma in their lives, as well as instability. Providing them with a stable education and a future will go a long way towards helping them. These efforts will build the capacity that Syria will need in the future.

23 Ibid.
LEBANON

Jusoor, Basmeh and Zeitouneh are dedicated to working on the grounds in Beirut and Bekka Valley.

400,000+ Syrian refugees

&

ONLY HALF ARE ENROLLED IN ANY KIND OF SCHOOL
Lebanon is currently host to over 1.5 million officially UNHCR registered Syrian refugees, the world’s densest community of displaced Syrians. Unofficial estimates put the number of Syrian refugees at over 1.8 million. More than 400,000 of the refugees are school-aged children. Only half of these children are currently enrolled in any kind of school in Lebanon.²⁵

Lebanon has elected to not build any official Syrian refugee camps, and as such Syrian refugees live in urban areas, the Palestinian refugee camps, or makeshift camps that are not recognized by any official bodies. As such, most Syrian refugees are urban refugees.

### Institutional Struggles

The Lebanese curriculum differs greatly from the Syrian curriculum. In many ways, the Lebanese educational system is more advanced than the Syrian system and as such, even students who do not have an education gap, struggle to keep up with their Lebanese counterparts.

For many Syrian students who have had gaps in their education, they find it extremely difficult to catch up to their Lebanese counterparts.

Many Syrian children within Lebanon are not registered as refugees for a number of reasons: their parents mistrust the system, they lack the documentation needed, or they do not have the necessary funds to get to the U.N. offices in order to register. This lack of legal status prevents many children from enrolling in school.

Similar to how other host communities view Syrian refugees, the Lebanese are especially unhappy about the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Lebanon and Syria share a history that has been marked by unpleasant events. During Lebanon’s own civil war, Syria was accused of arming and supporting many of the militias that committed numerous war crimes including massacres at the Palestinian camps. For 15 years, during and after the civil war, Syria occupied Lebanon and treated it as an external canton. As such, many Lebanese people have long harbored resentments for their neighbors.²⁶

As a result, Syrian children in Lebanon are more prone to violent attacks and racism. Stories of young Syrian refugee children being harassed – and even killed – are not uncommon in Lebanon. This has translated to schools as well, as Syrian children enrolled in Lebanese schools are victims of bullying and exclusion by their fellow classmates and by their teachers.

Parents, in a move to protect their children, discourage them and prevent them from going to school. They do not want to expose their children to unnecessary vitriol, especially not in an academic setting.

Syrian refugees also struggle to get to school, as there are limited transportation options to and from whatever schools may be near them. Children living in unofficial tent cities, such as those established in the Bekaa Valley, have virtually no way of getting to a school.

Syria’s proximity to Lebanon also presents a different challenge. Lebanon and Syria historically share a very porous border, which allows for refugees to move more freely between both countries. This movement is by no means done through legal means. This leaves many refugees at risk for deportation;

²⁶ Mroueh, Mahmoud. “(Syrian) Black Skin, (White) Lebanese Masks” openDemocracy, 2015.
if they are found to not have the proper documentation at checkpoints, this usually results in their imprisonment and deportation. This may separate families, which causes instability at home thereby affecting children’s potential performance at school. This also means that parents are tempted to move their families back and forth between Lebanon and Syria whenever there appears to be a lull or increase in the violence. This causes many gaps in the children’s education.

As in other host countries, Syrian refugee children are often forced to work in order to make enough money to cover their families’ expenses. Syrian child laborers in Lebanon are at risk of exploitation and abuse. They are usually open to return to school, however the loss of income for their families is difficult to mitigate.

Innovative Solutions

Lebanon’s government has taken some positive steps towards improving the number of Syrian refugee children enrolled in schools through the establishment of double-shift programs. However, the Lebanese schools are feeling the burden of extra students and the Lebanese government is struggling to cover the costs of these centers and the accelerated programs it has offered.27

As such, Lebanon’s proximity to Syria has allowed for a number of innovative programs assisting refugee education to launch. Most notably are Basmeh & Zeitooneh and Jusoor. Basmeh & Zeitooneh, while originally founded as a means to provide work opportunities and workshops for widows and female headed households, now provides workshops for children teaching them practical skills and assisting them with their after school work.28 29

Jusoor, an initiative founded by Syrian expats, has launched education centers aimed at bridging the gap for Syrian refugees between what they are learning at school and what they had last learned in Syria. This is especially important as the Syrian curriculum differs greatly from the Lebanese curriculum.

In Lebanon, it appears as though NGO initiatives may be more successful at tackling Syrian refugee education. It is important to empower local Syrian-run organizations in Lebanon to step in to fill the gaps that will just widen as time goes by.

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Karam Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to help people help themselves. We seek to restore the dignity and quality of life for people affected by conflict by eliminating barriers to success through innovative education, entrepreneurial development, and community-driven aid.

Innovative Education are programs started and supported by Karam Foundation that engage and inspire young minds, heal the trauma of war and cultivate dreams of bright, confident futures. Our programs include innovative interventions at local schools on the border in Reyhanli, Turkey; supporting the rebuilding of schools in Northern Syria; and the establishment of a scholarship initiative in the U.S. and Turkey.


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was a collaborative effort. We would like to recognize and thank all who contributed their skills and experiences in the production of this report.

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