



# SYRIA EDUCATION SECTOR ANALYSIS

## **The effects of the crisis on education in Syria, 2010-2015**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Whole of Syria Education Focal Point

وحدة تنسيق التعليم لكل سوريا



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# Acknowledgements

The *Syria education sector analysis: The effects of the crisis on education in Syria, 2010-2015 – Executive Summary* summarizes the findings of two studies: *The Syria education sector analysis: The effects of the crisis on education in areas controlled by the Government of Syria, 2010-2015* and *The Syria education sector analysis: The effects of the crisis on education in areas controlled by opposition groups, 2010-2015*. The two studies were conducted by Suguru Mizunoya, Assistant Programme Director of the MSSc Programme in Global Political Economy and Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Science at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Robert West, independent consultant.

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The tireless engagement in this work has been remarkable and underlines the commitment of all stakeholders to provide sound and robust evidence-based analysis to guide the programmatic response to the education needs of Syrian children.



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# Acronyms

4Ws	Who has done What, Where and When
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CLC	community learning centre
CPI	consumer price index
DoE	Directorate of Education
EiE	education in emergencies
EMIS	education management information system
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group (Damascus-based)
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GER	gross enrolment ratio
GPI	gender parity index
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SHARP	Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SRP	strategic response plan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WoS	Whole of Syria



# Introduction

Five years after the Syrian crisis began in March 2011, an estimated 13.5 million people are now in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. A total of 6.5 million people, of which 2.8 million are children, have been internally displaced.<sup>1</sup> Almost 4.2 million people, 1.4 million of which are school-age children, have left the country as refugees.<sup>2</sup> If children do not return to school, the loss of human capital formation due to the increased drop out from school could reach US\$10.7 billion, or 17.7 per cent of Syria's 2010 gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the economy has contracted by more than 40 per cent since the crisis began. The literature estimates that life expectancy has reduced by almost 13 years, and that, thus far, Syria's development has regressed by as much as four decades.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis has deeply impacted children and their ability to access high quality education with equity. In October 2015, 5.4 million school age children were in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>5</sup> Education, as well as other social services, have been compromised by the destruction of infrastructure, population shifts, loss of life and consequent distress.

This Executive Summary summarizes the findings of two studies: *The Syria education sector analysis: The effects of the crisis on education in areas controlled by the Government of Syria, 2010-2015* and the *Syria education sector analysis: The effects of the crisis on education in areas controlled by opposition groups, 2010-2015*. It describes the current state of education in the Whole of Syria (WoS).<sup>6</sup> The studies utilize three sources of data: (1) education census data; (2) survey results from 59 schools in **government-controlled** areas and 122 schools in **opposition-controlled areas**; and (3) relevant literature written on the subject. As the circumstances within Syria are neither static nor homogeneous, any remedial interventions proposed require further investigation and should, in all cases, be contextualized appropriately for the circumstances at that time and for that area.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Plan*, OCHA, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Based on data reported by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the number of refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Number of children based on age cohort 5-17 years.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Economic Loss from School Dropout due to the Syria Crisis: A cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the Syria crisis on the Education sector*, UNICEF, Amman, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> OCHA Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Needs Overview*, OCHA, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> A term used to describe all areas of Syria, whether under the Government of Syria or opposition groups.



# PART I QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Using the Government of Syria's education management information system (EMIS) and other data reporting services, a quantitative analysis was conducted examining the impact of the crisis on enrolment, the availability of facilities, the quality of facilities, effects on education personnel and on Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries from 2011 to 2015.

**Enrolment.** Out-of-school children ratios, gross enrolment ratios (GER) and the number of students at risk of repeating grades or dropping out were acquired. To obtain these metrics, the study uses the out-of-school children's conceptual framework formulated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).<sup>7</sup> Because not all Syrian governorates and districts reported to the Ministry of Education (MoE) throughout the entire study period, the study accounted for data uncertainties by making three sets of calculations, each of which assumed different levels of functionality within districts: (1) none of the schools in an unreported area are functioning; (2) 25 per cent of schools are functioning; and (3) 50 per cent of schools are functioning.<sup>8</sup> The analysis shows that 2.1 million children inside Syria are out of school in K-G12, of which 1.4 million are in K-G9.

The number of school-age Syrian refugees increased drastically from 2011 to 2015. In October 2012, approximately 100,000 refugees of school age were reported. As of September 2015, this number increased thirteen-fold: There are now an estimated 1.3 million school-age Syrian refugees. This indicates that of all the Syrian children accounted for prior to the crisis, 20 per cent have become displaced.<sup>9</sup> In terms of their enrolment, the refugee out-of-school-children rate is somewhat encouraging in that it has continually decreased from October 2012 to June 2015 and reduced from 73 per cent to 53 per cent. However, in terms of absolute numbers, the vast influx of refugees into neighbouring countries still means the number of out-of-school refugee children is very high. In October 2012, there were 27,000 out-of-school refugee children (out of 99,000 total refugee children). As of June 2015, there are 627,000 out-of-school refugee children (out of 1.3 million total refugee children). Thus, continuing efforts are needed from both recipient countries and other stakeholders to address the needs of an increasing Syrian refugee population.

For non-refugee children, if one uses the most likely assumption (25 per cent of schools in the unreported areas are still functioning), the 2014/15 kindergarten to Grade 12 GER was 60 per cent, meaning almost 40 per cent of school-age Syrian children within the country were not attending school.<sup>10</sup> The majority of enrolment losses (2.1 million) occurred in basic education,<sup>11</sup> with particularly high losses from the Aleppo (0.9 million) and Deir-ez-Zor (0.4 million) governorates. If one calculates the national GER only for basic education (Grades 1 through 9), 78.1 per cent of children are enrolled. This number is alarming, for it is far worse than the earliest recorded value for basic education GER in 1996 (91.72 per cent). Essentially, the war has set back educational progress by more than two decades.

Currently, an estimated 1.4 million children are at risk of repeating grades, or one in three children.<sup>12</sup>

Outside of basic education, one will find that even though the figures are rather small in terms of absolute numbers, the percentage drops are serious. Kindergarten and vocational secondary enrolment fell by 89 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> The framework proposes five dimensions to help one fully understand all the ways in which children can be considered out of school: Children not in pre-primary school (Dimension 1); children of primary and lower secondary school age who attended but dropped out, will enter late or will never enter (Dimensions 2 and 3); and primary and lower secondary school students at risk of dropping out (Dimensions 4 and 5).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, since the beginning of the crisis, the total number of schools reporting education statistics to the MoE decreased by about 12,000 (from 22,113 to 10,111) from the 2011/12 to the 2014/15 school years, with basic education schools making up about 9,000 of this decrease. An MoE survey of basic education schools found that 1,200 schools were damaged, used as shelters or destroyed. The survey also reported 1,500 schools deemed inaccessible. Moreover, the MoE was unable to conduct any assessment whatsoever for approximately 800 schools.

<sup>9</sup> The 20 per cent figure was drawn from comparing the current 1.3 million school-age refugees with the pre-war school-age population of 6.5 million.

<sup>10</sup> Total children is 5.5 million, with 3.2 million enrolled and 2.1 million unenrolled.

<sup>11</sup> Understood to mean Grades 1 through 9.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this estimation relies on historical data and does not identify the determinants for being at risk of dropping out. Hence, a follow-up study should be conducted to determine not only why so many children were not attending school, but also examine reasons for repetition and dropping out. This detailed information will be crucial to restoring universal basic education in Syria.

For Palestine refugees within Syria, basic education schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) saw 40,000 pupils drop out (60 per cent) from 2011/12 to 2013/14. During this same period, 62 schools closed, with the majority of school closures occurring in Damascus (31 closures, or 50 per cent of total closures) and Rural Damascus (19 closures, or 30 per cent of total closures). Surprisingly, student-to-staff ratios in UNRWA schools fell nationwide. Indeed, all school districts throughout Syria, with the exception of three, reported a decrease in student-to-staff ratios. The exceptions were: Al-Kaboon school district in Damascus Governorate (with an increase of six students for every staff member), Governorate Centre in Rural Damascus Governorate (increase of 12) and Palmyra in Homs Governorate (increase of 16).

Regarding the country's heterogeneity, it should be noted that Damascus and Aleppo governorates contain districts with both substantial increases and decreases in enrolment and school numbers from 2010/11 to 2013/14. Thus, to re-emphasize: The heterogeneous impact of the crisis across and within governorates means that any targeted responses must be district-specific.

In the study's examination for **gender disparities**, the conflict appears to have affected girls and boys roughly equally in kindergarten, basic education and general secondary education. Vocational secondary schools, however, which historically exhibited a skewed gender ratio (0.73 girl-boy ratio in 2010/11), saw a substantial number of female dropouts, resulting in a 0.48 ratio in 2014/15. In many governorates, the reduction in female enrolment was dramatic. Quneitra's girl-boy ratio dropped from 1.33 in 2010/11 to 0.38 in the 2014/15. Rural Damascus saw a similar dramatic decrease, falling from 1.11 in 2010/11 to 0.55 in 2014/15.

Regarding **educational personnel**, it was found that nationally, student-to-staff ratios decreased for kindergarten and basic education, from 18.0 to 14.6 and 17.1 to 15.3, respectively. For general and vocational secondary education, student-staff ratio increased, from 8.7 to 10.4 and from 4.8 to 5.2, respectively. In absolute numbers, Aleppo saw the sharpest decline of educational personnel. In normal circumstances, a lower student-to-staff ratio is associated with higher teaching quality, as each child potentially has access to more staff and teacher time. However, in this case these statistics should be used with caution, as the qualitative findings demonstrated overcrowded classrooms as a prevalent concern. The lower student-staff ratios found in the quantitative section could derive from a slower "delisting" of the staff that have left the school, and the lower number of children per school.

There were few significant differences in the availability of specific **school facilities** (libraries, information technology – or IT – rooms and science laboratories) pre- and post-crisis. The most notable decreases were in IT rooms and laboratories per school at the general secondary level. However, the number of classrooms per school dropped by 0.5 to 1.0 per school in all categories except basic education. Even though a decrease of half a classroom per school may not seem substantial, when multiplied across more than ten thousand schools, it means that there are now 700 less classrooms for use that there would be otherwise. As a consequence, this exacerbates overcrowded classrooms and decreases the supply capacity of the system as a whole.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because Syria's EMIS only provides rudimentary education statistics on enrolment, staffing and facilities, it is recommended that the EMIS extend its scope to cover other areas affecting children, such as access to running water, sanitation, school governance and security, which are equally important factors in shaping children's learning and life.

Decreases in recorded enrolment and educational resources are also partly attributable to incomplete data (presuming at least some schools no longer reporting to the EMIS remained operational), and data must be interpreted with this in mind. It is recommended that EMIS' data collection capabilities be strengthened, as the current metrics limit analysis and the ability to identify areas with the greatest needs. Moreover, efforts to ensure an adequate supply of resources and infrastructure investment should especially be focused on the areas found to be receiving or experiencing re-enrolment.

# PART II QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative information in this report is drawn from two sources: Primary data extracted from surveys and supplemental information from secondary data sources found in the available literature. The surveys from which primary data were gathered covered 59 schools in **government-controlled areas** of 11 governorates and 122 schools in **opposition-controlled areas** of nine governorates.<sup>13</sup> The qualitative information, which provides information on how people think and feel, helps complete the picture provided by the quantitative data, as quantitative data do not explain the changing patterns other than through general references to the crisis. However, again, readers should not use these data to make generalizations, particularly because of the sampling methods used. For safety reasons, purposive and convenience sampling methods were deployed, rather than random sampling methods.<sup>14</sup>

The qualitative analysis is structured around the five domains and the corresponding standards set forth by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), which proposes what is an acceptable minimum education standard during an emergency.<sup>15</sup> Structured interviews were conducted with key informants<sup>16</sup> and school principals in government-controlled areas. In opposition-controlled areas, surveys were conducted with principals (also called head teachers) and local council representatives. Structured focus group discussions were held with teachers, parents and children (mainly students attending school). Enumerators from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) collected the data and submitted information based on their observations in government areas, with support from the Damascus-based Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). For opposition areas, the exercise was supported by the Gaziantep-based Education Cluster in Turkey, whose members themselves undertook data collection.

Although there was overlap in the questions asked in government- and opposition-controlled areas, the questions were not identical between the two surveys, making direct comparison between government-controlled areas and opposition-controlled areas seldom possible.

## 1 Cross-domain concerns<sup>17</sup>

In **government-controlled areas**, parents and children were asked to list changes they noted over the past four years. The most frequently occurring answers, ordered from most frequent to less frequent, were:

- 1 Decline in living standards;
- 2 Deterioration in education;
- 3 Security and safety;
- 4 Displacement and immigration; and
- 5 Increases in levels of trauma.

<sup>13</sup> Neither of the surveys included any schools from Ar-Raqqa or Deir-ez-Zor.

<sup>14</sup> Because random sampling methods were not used, generalizations to the sub-district or district level would not be statistically valid. It is likely that the information provided by respondents will be typical of many more schools in the country, but the relevance of interventions based on such data should be mentioned before implementation.

<sup>15</sup> The first domain, the “foundational standards,” involves community participation, community coordination and community analysis. The second domain covers “access and learning environment”, setting three minimum standards: Equal access; protection and well-being; and facilities and services. Thirdly, the domain of “teaching and learning” sets four minimum standards: Curricula; training, professional development and support; instruction and learning processes; and assessment and learning outcomes. The fourth domain, “teachers and other education personnel”, covers recruitment and selection, conditions of work, and support and supervision. Finally, the fifth domain of “education policy” sets two standards: Law and policy formulation, as well as planning and implementation. See: <http://www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards>

<sup>16</sup> Key informants comprised mostly of government employees and neighbourhood residents of five years or longer. Some of these neighbourhood residents are parents with direct experience with the school system.

<sup>17</sup> Cross-domain concerns refer to responses that cannot be categorized under INEE domains and standards.

Also noticed, but not to the same extent as the above, were: A decline in social values and relations; a decline in children's behaviour; and the spread of disease and the inadequacy of health services.

As for changes and concerns related to education, there were several common concerns, although they were differently prioritized by different categories of respondents.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, several questions encouraged respondents to prioritize their concerns across domains. The answers demonstrate that local council representatives, principals, teachers and parents were largely in agreement when ranking the top four priorities for improving education:

- 1 Teachers' remuneration;
- 2 Teaching supplies;
- 3 The school environment; and
- 4 Training of teachers.

In response to a further general question, local council representatives drew attention to the need for providing psychosocial support to teachers and students.

## 2 Foundational Standards

### Community participation

In many areas, the wider community has changed throughout the course of the conflict. The departure of large numbers of people and the arrival of displaced persons have redefined the community's social fabric. Because members may not "recognize" their community or feel familiar and at ease with their surroundings, localities may require external assistance in building a new identity. Schools are firmly rooted within communities. Thus, a strong, positive sense of communal identity is essential if members are to feel motivated to and proactive in addressing educational needs.

Indeed, within **government-controlled areas**, parents tended to only see a responsibility for their children, and in general, did not show an awareness of the need to work with other parents in the interest of the school. In the wider community, there was evidence of providing tangible aid to schools, most often in the form of repairing buildings and providing stationery.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, local councils were responsible for one or more villages, towns or for a sub-district. Most did not identify being responsible for camps or settlements within their area.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the relationship between local councils and schools require strengthening. Almost a quarter of local councils acknowledged their relationship with school administrators was weak or non-existent. Principals seemed to view local councils more harshly: Almost 40 per cent felt they had weak or non-existent relationships with the local council. Seventy per cent of local councils believed they were providing moral support to schools and slightly less than 40 per cent some form of material support. Once again, in contrast to what local councils believe, school representatives did not feel local councils provided moral and material support at the same rate as local councils did – in fact, the figures are half. About 35 per cent of school representatives felt local councils provided moral support and about 20 per cent believed they provided material support.

Local council representatives believed their relationship with schools could be improved by collaboration. They wished to increase material support, but do not have the means to do so. Schools have had to become creative, receiving financial or in-kind assistance from the community, and some community members have been willing to work voluntarily. School representatives, when articulating their expectations of community support, were somewhat unrealistic in their hopes. However, more improvements might be possible if communication between the school and community were to improve.

<sup>18</sup> Camps refer to formally established camps for internally displaced persons. Settlements refer to informal settlements that can spontaneously form as internally displaced persons move. These informal settlements can then transform into formal camps if humanitarian agencies and government or opposition groups step in.

As for teachers, they looked to the parent community to be supportive of the learning process through two-way communication, assisting with homework, attending meetings and participating in school activities.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community support for schools is vaguely described as “moral support”, with material assistance provided in some cases. There does not appear to have been serious attempts to mobilize community members or define the precise nature of assistance required. It is recommended that school principals make efforts to involve parents. It is imperative that parents are active and involved in their child’s education, as they can more likely ensure children are actually sent to school, stay in school and do not drop out. Only if principals mobilize parents are they likely to rise to this challenge, thereby making the larger community more likely to take action.

Sector coordinating bodies should prepare guidelines for activating communities and should provide training to school management on how to mobilize them. For example, utilizing or forming parent-teacher associations (commonly known as PTAs) could prove beneficial, as they facilitate active participation from parents, students and, at times, community members. However, school requests from their communities should be concrete and specific, and the feasibility of proposals should be tested. Capacity building might be needed to unlock the capacity of the parent community and of the wider community. Participating partner organizations should act as catalysts to get the process moving.

## Coordination

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been coordinating United Nations agencies, donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) efforts in various sectors across Syria. In the education sector, the ESWG in Damascus and the Education Cluster in Gaziantep have played major roles.

Overall, programmed aid activities by international and national NGOs players are limited by available financial and human resources, and they may have to be further cut if donors do not meet their pledges. In mid-2014, the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP), for example, was funded at only 26 per cent of overall requirements. The Syria HRP, by December 2015, was only funded 43 per cent.

Response plan coordination is improving, albeit with challenges. In 2015, a unified WoS plan replaced and harmonized the separate initiatives that had previously been developed. It was hoped that this would lead to long-term and predictable funding for aid programmes. However, because the number of school-age children requiring help keeps escalating, it is unlikely that funding models will be sustainable year after year.

Regarding coordination between Syrian authorities and civilians, respondents in **government-controlled areas** expressed that the Directorates of Education (DoE) in each governorate should play a stronger role in meeting common school needs, such as providing psychological counselling, furniture, equipment and “communicating with students’ parents”. The latter need suggests that the DoE has not been communicating relevant information to schools and its attendant communities. However, given that there are no further details, respondents should be more specific about the information they believe they ought to be receiving to help the DoE serve them.

Schools tended to look to donors and NGOs for material support, such as the repairing/rehabilitation of facilities, providing textbooks and supplies, and providing financial support. Both national and international NGOs have been providing school necessities to children and funding school clubs to increase recreational and learning opportunities.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, numerous respondents suggested the international community persuade conflicting parties to avoid attacking schools, relocate schools from hostile areas and take other actions to reduce fighting and bombardment in the vicinity of schools.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to strengthen coordination for an evidence-based response among partners implementing across Syria.

The 4Ws (Who has done What, Where and When) reporting process is a fundamental function of information management and essential to the work of the Education Cluster or Sector Working Group. Information is critical to decision making and planning in a humanitarian response. Decisions should be based on reliable data and the needs of children most affected. This is not easy when access to people affected by the crisis is difficult, when the operating environment is dangerous and when requests for information are frequent and diverse. This exchange encourages parties to share lessons learned, avoid duplicated efforts and scale up what works well. Brief qualitative reports on assistance to education should be produced annually by Education Cluster and ESWG members. Possibilities of scaling up interventions should also be explored at an early stage, in consultation with the beneficiaries.

## Analysis

Intuitively, realistic planning depends on a sound analysis of needs. Unfortunately, the state of education needs assessment in Syria requires improvement. The MoE's annual education census has lost access to a large number of schools since the crisis began, resulting in large gaps in data. Only 30 per cent of the surveyed schools in opposition-controlled areas were submitting statistics to the Government of Syria, and only 25 per cent to the Syrian Interim Government (SIG).<sup>19</sup>

Since 2010, efforts to measure educational needs were largely conducted in areas safe for researchers, which, while understandable, does not permit generalized conclusions to be drawn for large regions. There is current evidence, however, of assessments conducted via mobile phones in remote areas. If possible, these strategies should be explored further to better understand the needs of hard-to-reach areas.

Of the assessments conducted, partners routinely submitted summary data through the aforementioned "4Ws" approach. This reporting, however, lacks a qualitative dimension. Partners need to share positive and negative lessons learned during implementation to replicate good practices, scale up the most effective practices and eliminate inefficiencies. While input data, and to some extent output data, are routinely provided for aid programmes, outcome data are scanty.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All efforts to improve children's equitable access to quality education should be based on sound quantitative and qualitative data. Sector partners should share information gleaned during their work with schools. The MoE should engage with sector partners working in areas where contact with schools has been lost to extend the coverage of the annual education census. Questions should be added to the EMIS questionnaires to gather information on what the school lacks.

Education authorities in opposition areas should collect EMIS equivalent data from schools in their area, regardless of whether or not they are submitting census returns to the Government of Syria's MoE.

Firm conclusions on teacher and student attendance could not be drawn because detailed attendance data were not requested during the survey. Attendance trends should be investigated, and schools themselves should be encouraged to keep detailed records of teacher and student attendance. If a school records the attendance of its own staff and students, accountability is fostered and attendance may improve.

Further investigation is needed on how teaching responsibilities are allocated in the school and on what actually happens in the classroom.

<sup>19</sup> The Syrian Interim Government was established in Turkey in March 2013, with a Cabinet of technical ministers, as an alternative to the Government of Syria. The SIG was formed by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, an opposition group. It appears that schools affiliated with the SIG send school data from their school registers to the SIG, most likely through the SIG's DoE.





بناد  
مجاني وهو حق  
للشباب المدارس في ٣ ايلول  
وهو  
مفتوح لفتحكم في المدرسة  
التعليم يمكن المستقبل  
او الترحيب في الاصل  
مع مهارات التنية  
علاوة على ذلك للخدمة

PREMIUM QUALITY BANANAS  
BANANASOFT  
SOFT

## 3 Access and learning environment

### Equal access

Prior to the crisis, school enrolment was high: Primary grade enrolment was described as almost universal, while secondary enrolment was reportedly 76 per cent on average. However, enrolment data from the annual education census, adjusted for the non-responding schools, showed a 44 per cent drop in enrolment between 2010/11 and 2014/15, with a slight increase in the proportion of female students. The quantitative analysis<sup>20</sup> used in this study calculates that about 2.5 million school age Syrian children (inside and outside Syria) were out of school during the 2014/15 school year.<sup>21</sup> This general picture is complicated by geographical variations and by fluctuations over time. Because of these dramatic changes, it was important to examine how, and if, any populations were disproportionately affected by the crisis.

Seven schools (out of 51) in government-controlled areas reported a drop-out rate above 20 per cent. Prior to the crisis, only one of the schools had fallen into this category, demonstrating the crisis is affecting schools under the Government's control.

In **government-controlled areas**, survey respondents identified the following as the main reasons children are out of school:

1. The need for children to work and supplement the family income;
2. Safety considerations (the school itself is dangerous, or travel to and from school is dangerous);
3. Supply-oriented factors, such as the lack of facilities or perceptions that tuition is of poor quality; and
4. Demand-oriented factors, such as poverty and trauma, which reduce the level of priority given to education.

The children's discussion groups attributed most drop outs to poor living conditions. For children, they perceived other factors, such as parental negligence, security, displacement and a lack of interest in studying as playing a lesser role.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, the majority of teachers (60 per cent) surveyed identified the following as reasons why children are out of school:

1. Security issues and fear;
2. Earning money to support the family (the majority of parents agreed with this particular reason);
3. Education is not a priority; and
4. Learning costs.

It appears that female student enrolment was not more seriously affected than that of boys in either **government- or opposition-controlled areas**. Regarding enrolment patterns among age groups, there was no clear explanation in differences of enrolment patterns between younger and older children. Younger children seemed to be enrolled at lower rates than older children, which is surprising, as older children are more likely to be pulled out of school to work and generate income.

The latest data in the literature report that over the first three years of the crisis, the consumer price index (CPI) in education increased by 74 per cent. By the end of 2013, almost half of the population fled their homes, with 54 per cent living in extreme poverty and 20 per cent in abject poverty. Due to these trends in movement and poverty, the literature reports that education for many families is "not a priority", not because they do not value education, but because of more pressing needs. As a result,

<sup>20</sup> Part II of this report.

<sup>21</sup> The literature covering the period of the crisis provides different estimates of the number of out-of-school children. However, this study utilizes a rather transparent method, generating enrolment numbers based on three different assumptions (None of the schools in unreported areas are functioning, 25 per cent are functioning, and 50 per cent are functioning).

the literature states the demand for education has decreased, which may explain the increase of out-of-school children. Additionally, the lack of a healthy diet and poor health might keep children away from school.<sup>22</sup> There were also reports of children having to work to supplement the family income.

The literature also illuminates other factors that may contribute to children not attending school: The unavailability of school buildings. Prior to the conflict, more than 22,000 schools were available. Since the conflict began, classrooms have been destroyed or damaged, and school buildings have been repurposed to serve other operations, such as community shelters. Abandonment is also an issue, in which functional buildings are no longer in use because the community has been displaced. The literature shows that these problems continue to persist and become more serious. In December 2012, 2,400 schools were reported as destroyed or damaged. In October 2013, the MoE reported 4,500 out-of-service schools. In areas surveyed across nine governorates in late 2014, 55 per cent of 7,118 schools were not functioning. In April 2015, additional schools being converted to collective shelters were recorded. In informal settlements, the non-attendance of children was linked to the lack of education facilities. In some areas, buildings doubled up as schools and shelters, putting a strain on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities.

While the two surveys do not completely line up with the topics presented by the literature above, the following supply-oriented findings can help supplement and nuance the above reports:

- Of the 122 schools in **opposition-controlled areas**, 44 schools ran double shifts.<sup>23</sup> If one third of schools have double shifts, this presents a serious concern about the quality of education delivered, overcrowded classrooms and the availability of learning spaces.
- Seventy-eight per cent of the 471 schools in **government-controlled areas** offered grades in the basic education range (Grades 1 to 9), while 23 per cent offered secondary grades (Grades 10 to 12).
- In 13 of the 59 neighbourhoods in **government-controlled areas**, fewer than three-quarters of the schools were functioning.
- All schools in **government-controlled areas** had water and sanitation facilities.
- In three neighborhoods in **government-controlled areas** surveyed, more than a quarter of the schools had suffered severe damage. In 10 neighbourhoods, more than a quarter of the schools had suffered moderate damage. Only three key informants were aware of temporary learning spaces in their neighbourhoods.
- In the vast majority of surveyed schools within **government-controlled areas** (91 per cent), upwards of 80 per cent of school-aged children had been enrolled prior to the crisis. After four years, this was true of only 69 per cent of the neighbourhoods. Moreover, only three key informants were able to report that the nearest local school was well attended every day. They added that these schools regularly followed up on absent students.

The ability of displaced children to access education is of serious concern. Currently, across all schools in **government-controlled areas**, displaced children made up at least 20 per cent of total enrolment, 60 per cent of whom were girls. This large influx has placed a strain on facilities and has thus made equal access to education difficult for these children. At 51 of the schools, displaced children have been required to take a placement test prior to admission because of these strains. Overall, principals acknowledged that 1,400 children, not necessarily of displaced families, had been turned away when they tried to enrol. The majority of school principals (60 per cent) saw no difference in attendance patterns between children of the host community and children of displaced families. Those who saw a difference attributed it to the lack of a settled home, to loss of interest in education or to economic conditions.

<sup>22</sup> There exists scientific evidence that nutrition plays an influential role in keeping children in school. This connection is why school feeding programmes have been introduced. For more information, please see: <http://www.unicef.org/nutrition>

<sup>23</sup> Double shifts refers to schools in which two "shifts" of classes are conducted within one typical school day. While there are different models of double shifts, this report generally refers to the "end-on shifts", which means that a group of students goes for classes in the morning and another group goes for classes in the afternoon, when the first group has completed its school day. The second shift will teach the same curriculum, but to another set of students, during the afternoon. Often double shifts present shortened instruction time.

Regarding children with disabilities, there also appears to be a general lack of facilities for them. In 2008, there were 32 centres for children with disabilities throughout the country. Fifty-three per cent of the surveyed schools in **government-controlled areas** had enrolled children with disabilities. Although the nature of the disabilities is not specified, no school claimed to have adapted instructional methods or made use of special teaching equipment for these children. It may be that the only disability catered to was restricted mobility. In **opposition-controlled areas**, 33 per cent of the parents' group felt that there were children with mental disabilities in the community, and the same percentage saw there were children with physical disabilities. Fourteen per cent of parents' groups believed that such children were deprived of schooling because schools lacked appropriate equipment. Ten per cent or fewer of the groups were aware of children with speech or hearing disabilities or impaired sight.

Kindergarten or early childhood education received little mention when needs were identified, probably because this level of education was not extensively available prior to the crisis, and during the crisis, it was overshadowed by the need for basic and secondary education. Thirty-seven of the 59 surveyed neighbourhoods in **government-controlled areas** had some provision for kindergarten.

Special measures to encourage out-of-school children to return to school generally appear to ignore the need for remedial teaching (to allow students to catch up on work missed) and ignore the need for psychosocial support (for those who have suffered trauma).

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Equitable provision" requires sufficient, adequately repaired school buildings with access for physically disabled students. Buildings should be close enough to children's homes and accessible to both girls and boys. There should be qualified and competent staff with sufficient teaching equipment and materials for all the students in all the subjects taught.

Evening classes should be available to those of school age who have taken on day jobs. These should also cater for older children who may have very few years of schooling and who may be functionally illiterate. Those studying at home should have regular adult support and encouragement.

There is little educational provision for children with disabilities. Awareness should be raised among teachers on the implementation of inclusive approaches to the schooling of such children.

The literature notes that displaced children are often out of school for extended periods because (1) the family expects that they will soon return to their home; (2) finding a school close to their refuge is difficult; and (3) the procedures for enrolling the children are not clear. These are areas in which the wider community could play a more supportive role.

Parents of children who have re-enrolled should be drawn into the efforts to get other out-of-school children to return to school.

Notably, students' groups in **opposition-controlled areas** drew attention to the uninviting environment of many schools, requesting that walls be painted or decorated with drawings and that trees and flowers be planted. They also complained of a lack of cleanliness about the school. Addressing these concerns could boost student morale and improve the learning experience.

## Protection and well-being

At the end of 2013, it was estimated that 11,400 children had been killed in the conflict, including children who were attending school at the time they were fatally injured. Schools have been deliberately attacked, and some have been converted for military use. Appeals by humanitarian actors to preserve schools as safe havens for children have gone unheeded. Indeed, safety concerns were serious among parents, children and teachers. The surveys on feelings of protection and well-being revealed the following:

- The vast majority of parents' groups in **government-controlled areas** (more than 80 per cent of the groups) identified poor security situation as the greatest risk facing children. The decline in health services was identified as the second most serious risk, and increases in negative behaviour within the community ranked third. Key informants agreed with parents on the top three risks.

- Additionally, recent unrest in these **government-controlled areas** was reported by 36 per cent of the key informants. Effects of unrest in these and other neighbourhoods led, naturally, to feelings of insecurity and fear. However, unrest was identified as being related to the emergence of violence among students, reported by almost a quarter of the respondents. This points to an urgent need for psychological counselling.
- These key informants from **government-controlled areas** also reported dropping out of school and vandalizing schools as risks facing children.

In terms of safety experienced within the school community and school preparedness, enumerators in **government-controlled areas** found the following:

- Outside observers deemed that in 60 per cent of neighbourhoods, all or most of the schools provided a safe environment.
- In 22 per cent of neighbourhoods, less than half the schools appeared safe.
- Most key informants (88 per cent) judged their nearest school to be safe, although a smaller percentage (78 per cent) reported the nearest school had a safe play area. Almost all enumerators saw schools' play areas being used for collective sporting activities.
- According to principals, 19 per cent of the surveyed schools did not have a secure perimeter wall.
- Fifty-one per cent of the surveyed schools were described as "fully" weather protected.
- Few key informants had suggestions on how the school environment could be made safer beyond "fencing camps and paving roads" (14 per cent) and appointing psychological counsellors to the staff of schools (12 per cent).
- Parents (54 per cent of groups) believed they could minimize risk to their children by accompanying them to school or ensuring a secure transport arrangement. They also mentioned guidance and counselling, raising the question whether this was something they themselves could provide.
- Only eight per cent of the groups appeared aware of the importance of regular communication with the school on matters of security.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, the study found the following:

- Forty-two per cent of principals acknowledged that there had been security problems either at their school or between students' homes and the school during the 2014/15 school year.
- Forty-one per cent of schools reported the local neighbourhood was bombed. Thirty-eight per cent reported that schools were actually bombed. Twenty-two per cent of schools reported local ground fighting occurred in the vicinity.
- More than half of the parents' groups reported that children disliked attending school because they felt unsafe. Sixteen per cent of parents' groups believed that security would have to improve if out-of-school children were to return to school.
- Over 60 per cent of teachers' groups believed security concerns were the main reason for children being out of school.
- This survey, as noted by a teachers' group, did not reach the schools with the most severe security problems.
- While 22 per cent of head teachers declared that their school had a security plan, only nine per cent of schools rehearsed their plan at least once a semester. Suggestions about ways in which the community might help the school to improve security showed little evidence of prior thought or planning.
- The need to protect schools from looting and vandalism was mentioned.

During times of conflict, discrimination becomes a particularly salient topic. Tensions are high and not everyone is treated equally. The survey for the **opposition-controlled areas** revealed:

- Over a third of students' and parents' groups reported discrimination in the school (36 and 39 per cent of groups, respectively). Contrastingly, only 16 per cent of teachers' groups reported discrimination within the school.

- Among the students, boys were more conscious than girls of discrimination.
- Secondary students were more conscious than primary students of discrimination.
- Students perceived the most discrimination directed against girls (20 per cent), with boys listed next. Parents and teachers failed to see boys as victims of discrimination.
- Parents were most conscious of discrimination on the account of an individual's "family connections" (20 per cent).
- Teachers, but only six per cent of them, saw discrimination most directed against internally displaced persons, with girls and family connections listed next (both five per cent).
- In identifying the perpetrators of discrimination, 26 per cent of students identified other students. Only 17 per cent blamed teachers. However, 33 per cent of parents identified teachers as perpetrators of discrimination and only 21 per cent identified students. Eighteen per cent of teachers' groups saw students as responsible for discriminatory behaviour, but 12 per cent admitted that teachers behaved discriminatorily.
- Bullying was ranked second by students' groups (43 per cent) as a reason for disliking school (after "school not properly equipped"). A small number of groups, both parents' and students', complained of physical and verbal abuse from teachers.

In the literature, harassment and violence directed against students holding the "wrong" political views were identified. The literature also states girls' attendance is affected by the threat of violence and insecurity.

- For **government-controlled areas**, 85 per cent of principals did not believe their students were at risk of gender-based violence (GBV). Four referred to the threat of kidnapping, three to girls subjected to violence by men and one to domestic violence.
- In **opposition-controlled areas**, objections to having girls and boys in the same school or the same class were raised at only six per cent of the schools surveyed. At none of these schools was a request made for female teachers to teach female students.

Students' well-being is inextricably related to their school performance and engagement. When this subject was explored in **government-controlled areas**, it was found that 93 per cent of principals reported they noticed behavioural changes in the children at their schools. Yet, only 15 per cent of school principals reported that counsellors provided services to students in all grades during school hours, and 10 per cent reported that guidance was given to all students "outside the curriculum". This highlights the large gap between the need for counselling and psychosocial support as a component of education and the currently low levels of provision. In **opposition-controlled areas**, only 23 per cent of local councils, 18 per cent of parents' groups and 15 per cent of head teachers raised the need for psychosocial support – numbers that are disconcertingly low. An even lower proportion of head teachers (14 per cent) indicated that "mental health care" was "always" available to their students.

Life skills and risk education have been identified in the literature as useful for promoting student well-being. However, in the surveys, such interventions, if any, appeared to be small-scale.

The literature also identifies recreational and other extracurricular activities as helpful for children who have experienced trauma and improves mental health, as it promotes socialization and decreases children's sense of isolation. However, within **opposition-controlled areas**, the frequency of such activities as reported by principals was low: Only 30 per cent of principals reported that sport and games were offered frequently. The low frequency of other activities is concerning: 21 per cent for life skills,<sup>24</sup> 21 per cent for creative skills and 14 per cent for arts skills. Only nine per cent of schools offered "catch up" classes as an extracurricular activity. In some **government-controlled areas**, children were forbidden to play outside because there were no safe play areas.

There was little reference to health and hygiene activities at surveyed schools in **government areas**, and only five schools (out of 59) provided snacks to children.

<sup>24</sup> In the current context of Syria, life skills education programming aims to increase self-esteem and peer support, eventually strengthening positive coping strategies in children.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education has become dangerous. In many areas, children are at risk of experiencing violence on their way to and from school. While they are in class, they still are at risk. The traumatic effects of violence experienced, violence witnessed and displacement often have a negative effect on children's behaviour and on their ability to concentrate on their school work.

Many suggestions from survey participants, such as relocating schools and ending fighting within the vicinity of the school, lie beyond the capacity of education authorities and sector coordinating bodies. Rather, efforts should be expended from the MoE. The MoE should implement a methodical assessment procedure, an investigation of addressing safety deficits and a plan to make schools weatherproof.

At the school and local levels, communities have done little to ensure workable emergency plans exist. Schools should draw up such plans in collaboration with parents, students and community members. The plans should be practised regularly, and training should be provided on first aid, firefighting and other safety procedures. Sector coordinating bodies should prepare a templated emergency plan for schools and advise schools on how to adapt it.

Discrimination and bullying appear to be more widespread in schools than teachers are aware of or willing to admit. Dealing with external threats to safety is more difficult when the students and teachers cannot rely on one another for support. Thus, group discussions should be organized for both school personnel and youth to address discrimination. The education sector, in collaboration with the child protection sector, should prepare guidelines on conducting these discussions. Because more than half of these parents' groups did not identify either students or teachers as victimizers, further investigation is needed on who the bullies are and what forms bullying takes.

Physical, emotional and verbal abuse occur in a number of classrooms. Every school should have a code of conduct which has been negotiated with students, staff and parents. Teachers should receive training in staff meetings on how to implement the code without resorting to abusive behaviour.

Information on psychosocial services in schools is confusing, partly because psychosocial support is not clearly defined. However, the need for such support for students, teachers and parents is well documented from both the survey data and literature. Students who are unable to work with their trauma are unlikely to engage effectively in learning. At this point, it is not clear whether schools regard recreational and cultural activities as a form of psychosocial support. Currently, many schools do not regularly offer psychosocial support, recreational activities or cultural activities. It is encouraged that schools offer at least supportive group sessions to students and staff. Moreover, education sector partners seem to have done very little to facilitate these services. Thus, education sector members who have already provided training or guidance on psychosocial support should pool their resource materials, agree on a standardized approach (in cooperation with education authorities) and scale up training to empower as many schools as possible to provide such services to students and teachers. Education authorities should make schools aware of procedures to help seriously stressed staff members and students.

Additionally, schools should review their recreational activity programme to ensure all students can participate regularly. Parents should be drawn in to help with supervision and coaching.

Lastly, the general decline in community values can be countered only if there is close cooperation among the school, parents, community leaders and wider community.

## Facilities and services

As the Syrian crisis continues with its frequent threats of fighting, shelling and bombardment, special attention and care should be paid to the quality of educational facilities and services.

Almost half of key informants in **government-controlled areas** listed infrastructure deterioration as a noticeable change. Indeed, they stated damaged schools should be rehabilitated and school overcrowding should be alleviated. Over a third of the principals responded that schools needed additional classrooms. Almost one third noted that maintenance work was required. These observations were supported by enumerators and children's groups.

All 59 of the surveyed neighbourhoods in **government-controlled areas** had water and sanitation facilities. At eight schools, water and sanitation facilities were shared by girls and boys. Seven schools had water and sanitation facilities with wheelchair access. However, even though all schools had water and sanitation facilities, a third of the principals stated they required rehabilitation. If these facilities are in need of maintenance, it is most likely that the entire school is far from adequate. Indeed, eight schools had no handwashing facilities. Three neighbourhoods did not have electricity. Half of the surveyed schools had lost furniture and equipment to looting. Nearly a third of the principals reported a shortage of furniture and equipment.

With regards to educational services, 46 per cent of key informants in **government-controlled areas** believed schools had insufficient supplies of teaching and learning materials. Indeed, two-thirds of enumerators placed additional textbooks and teaching aids at the top of their list of school needs. Half of the schools expected parents to purchase learning materials. Shockingly, at three schools, parents were expected to purchase furniture. Parents unable to provide materials from their own resources appealed to charity, relatives or international aid organizations. A principal reported that students without materials shared with others, stole or worked after school for funds. Some simply attended without any materials.

When surveying **opposition-controlled areas** about what kinds of structures served as schools, two-thirds of local council representatives reported typical school buildings. The other third reported private buildings, temporary structures, mosques and tents serving as learning spaces. Forty per cent of respondents reported that all school buildings in their area were used, properly, as schools. The rest indicated that, in 24 local council areas, a total of 186 school buildings were not being used as schools.

The INEE states that 40 students per teacher is the maximum acceptable limit for a student-to-teacher ratio. In 12 per cent of the schools (all single shift), the average number of students per classroom exceeded 40, with the highest being 76. In 40 per cent of the schools (both single and double shift), the average number of students did not exceed 20. The data suggest that many schools could easily absorb more students.

The state of school utilities in **opposition-controlled areas** is very worrisome. Only 29 per cent of schools adequately provided potable water. Only one quarter provided adequate heating during winter, while 12 per cent had adequate electricity and eight per cent had Internet access. Only 40 per cent of functioning toilet facilities (single-sex or shared) at schools were adequate. Less than 60 per cent of schools had functioning handwashing facilities. However, there was no clear evidence that inadequate toilet facilities kept girls from attending school: At the 10 schools with mixed enrolment and no toilet facilities, the total girls enrolled outnumbered boys.

Classroom furniture adequacy was difficult to quantify in **opposition-controlled areas**: It was not clear whether tables and chairs were only for teachers' use or used as alternatives to desks. If the furniture was intended for student use, as many as 71 per cent of the schools might have an adequate supply of basic classroom furniture. If these tables and chairs were not intended for student use, the number of schools with adequate writing surfaces fell to 40 per cent. Therefore, it is possible that completing written assignments is extremely challenging for many students.

Few schools indicated they could accommodate students with disabilities. Respondents suggested that children with disabilities should be placed in special schools or special classes. Some responded they could teach them only if the building were modified, additional equipment provided, specialist teachers provided and/or training given to current staff. Only two principals stated they could possibly include the children in regular classes.

Surprisingly, 21 per cent of principals stated that transport services were always or sometimes available for their students. This is rather counterintuitive, for if so many schools struggled with furniture shortages, it would be unlikely they would have vehicles at their disposals.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School management and parents should prepare a prioritized list of rehabilitation projects and furniture required. In this list, projects that can be completed by community members should be identified. These plans should work towards achieving classrooms with sufficient seating and tables. Efforts should be made to ensure adequate toilet and handwashing facility availability.

Moreover, the school environment should be clean and, ideally, attractive. If the school lacks cleaning staff, users of school facilities should clean classrooms and ablution facilities daily. If school environments are in a state of disorder, students, teachers and parents should strategize clean up and maintenance plans.

## 4 Teaching and learning

### Curricula

From 2008 to 2012, the Government of Syria phased in a new curriculum, with further modifications made to the Grade 8 curriculum. These changes, which took place as the crisis unfolded, have generated numerous challenges for teachers, students and parents. Overall, the literature reports a general dissatisfaction with the new curriculum, with many expressing the curriculum is too difficult and not reflective of Syrian society's richness and diversity. The survey results in **government-controlled areas**, where only the new, official curriculum was taught, reinforces the literature's findings:

- About one third of key informants believed the curriculum was better before the crisis.<sup>25</sup>
- About one third of key informants criticized the new curriculum for being too difficult.
- One fifth of the parents' groups noted the curriculum's difficulty as a concern.
- In children's groups, 24 per cent linked the difficulty of the curriculum to the style of teaching.
- Fifty-three of the 59 principals reported that their schools had received guidelines, teaching materials and learning materials for the new curriculum. This raises a concern that should be addressed: Do untrained teachers and/or newly recruited staff all have the tools they need to teach effectively?
- Students reported the subjects they liked best were Arabic language and mathematics. Liking the subject was linked mainly to the teaching style (86 per cent) or perceived importance (71 per cent) of the subject.

In **opposition-controlled areas**:

- Fifty-four per cent of schools used Government of Syria's curriculum; 43 per cent used the SIG curriculum; and some schools incorporated a "religious" curriculum or included religious elements into the curriculum.
- Sixty-four per cent of local council representatives indicated a preference for the SIG curriculum, and only 17 per cent preferred the official curriculum.
- Opposition groups making changes to the curriculum in their areas of control were accused by some of undermining the concept of Syria as a national and geographic entity.
- In parents' groups, 34 per cent preferred the official curriculum, with 31 per cent preferring the SIG curriculum. Six per cent favoured the religious curriculum; these respondents appeared to understand the religious curriculum as a complete alternative to the official and SIG curricula.
- The strong support for the official curriculum in opposition-controlled areas may be attributed to a desire for children to obtain certificates officially recognized by the Government of Syria.

<sup>25</sup> Because the crisis began in 2011 and the new curriculum did not fully take effect until 2012, it is presumed that these key informants prefer the old curriculum.

- In the open-ended response section, almost all comments expressed dissatisfaction with whatever curriculum was offered. Respondents desired a curriculum that was “improved”, “more modern”, “developed by specialists”, “appropriate to the community’s culture”, “standardised”, “shorter” or “less complicated”. There was one request for “some educational subjects” to be dropped; there were several requests for subjects to be added, including foreign languages, crafts, practical subjects, information technology, art, music, public health and first aid.

For children who left school without obtaining a Grade 12 certificates, parents wished that there had been vocational training opportunities available so that their children could find work in areas such as carpentry, motor mechanics, electricity and blacksmithing.

Respondents in **opposition-controlled areas** suggested curricula should be more practical, with appropriate equipment available to the teachers. One students’ group requested shorter lessons and longer breaks, while another asked for an increase in the length of the school day. A parents’ group echoed the call for a longer school day.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, principals were asked about the subjects taught at their schools. The most common subjects taught (Arabic, geography and mathematics) were taught at over 80 per cent of the schools. English, history, religion and science were taught at 70 per cent or more of the schools. Civics was not taught at 90 per cent of the schools: It was regarded irrelevant and/or schools were forbidden to teach it. Home economics, philosophy and psychology were also described as no longer relevant. The availability of computer studies was affected by a lack of equipment, while English, French, history and religion were most affected by a lack of qualified teachers. Fourteen per cent of the schools reported that they were also teaching other subjects, such as the Kurdish language or the Holy Qur’an, but most schools did not specify the extra subjects.

For Syrian refugee children in neighbouring countries, those hoping to reintegrate into the official system upon their return to Syria might experience challenges, as their host country’s curricula teach different subject content and often use different media of instruction, the most notable of which is language. Some Syrian refugee students are unable to engage fully in class because the instructional language is English, French, Kurdish and Turkish.

Within Syria, there are various initiatives allowing children who have been out of school to catch up on learning. These programmes include remedial courses and the use of self-learning materials. These approaches tend to trim the curriculum to what may be regarded as “core” subjects. The MoE recognizes self-learning as a viable strategy to ensure out-of-school children have access to education opportunities. UNICEF, UNRWA and the MoE developed the Self-Learning Programme, which is a condensed curriculum in the core subjects of Arabic, English, math and science for Grades 1 through Grade 9. The programme aligns with the national curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A substantial number of respondents judged the new official curriculum to be too difficult, an unsurprising finding. Many factors have made teaching this curriculum feel unmanageable: Schools have had to reduce their teaching time to accommodate a second shift, many teachers are working with classes that are too large and instructors cannot effectively teach with shortages in furniture, equipment, and instructional materials.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, the modifications made to the official curriculum are concerning, for students may not be fully prepared when taking the official national examinations.

Schools should ensure that they are fully covering the curriculum in core subjects and other topics that will be tested in certificate examinations. Full coverage of the curriculum requires sufficient contact time between teacher and students. If the school day is shortened, either for security reasons or to accommodate a second shift, it might not be possible for the teachers to complete the curriculum or to cover it in sufficient detail. Thus, consideration should be given to extending school hours to ensure students are adequately prepared and teachers have ample time to teach the curriculum fully.

A small-scale study should be undertaken to determine which components of each subject is perceived to be too difficult.

DoEs should review these difficulties and ensure that all schools have, and utilize, official curriculum guidelines.

Curricula adapted for home-study, or self-study, often reduces curriculum to core subjects. These curricula should ensure that upon completion, a level of literacy and numeracy is achieved such that successful students can read more widely on their own.

Regarding vocational education, neither surveys for government-controlled areas nor opposition-controlled areas canvassed this subject well; it should be investigated further. In one publication within the literature, orienting failing students to vocational education was criticized as neither appropriate nor equitable. A study of students' interest in vocational subjects should be undertaken.

## Training, professional development and support

Currently, the literature does not report how teachers are initially trained or provide data on teacher competence since the crisis began. There only exist mentions of organizations providing a small amount of training to teachers on pedagogy, education in emergencies (EiE) and psychosocial support.

According to the MoE, in the 2009/10 school year, the Ministry began in-service training with the new curriculum's phasing-in process, with the intention that every teacher would receive 36 hours of training annually. Currently, the programme does not appear to have been sustained, possibly because of the crisis.

According to principals, from 2011 to 2015, training opportunities were provided at 45 of the 59 surveyed schools in **government-controlled areas**. In 2015, 19 schools reported that they received training, with 18 in 2014, 3 in 2013 and 10 in 2012. A further 115 "courses" were reported without a clear indication of the year in which they were conducted. Seventy-seven per cent of the courses were provided by the MoE. The others were delivered by UNICEF, the Danish Refugee Council, the Boy Scout Organisation and NGOs. Teachers in these areas also reported that short training courses in child-centred active learning were offered to staff.

Of the 59 schools surveyed in **government-controlled areas**, 41 schools provided training courses; 17 schools provided "other" courses.<sup>26</sup> Thirty-two teachers' groups felt the training courses were useful, while 20 groups felt they conferred no advantage, as what was learned could not be applied "due to current circumstances". Eighteen felt that their teaching competency was improved because they could prepare lessons better, and 12 thought the training helped them adapt to current circumstances.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, principals consistently referred to one particular need: The proper training of "new" teachers, presumably those who do not hold a teaching qualification. Moreover, when asked what skills their teachers lacked, principals responded with:

- 1 Classroom management, at the top of the list (56 per cent);
- 2 Teaching in a crisis environment (48 per cent); and
- 3 Planning, pedagogy and presentation (47 per cent).

Teachers, on the other hand, were less concerned than their principals about their classroom management, ranking the stress of teaching in a crisis environment at the top of their list:

- 1 Teaching in a crisis environment (62 per cent);
- 2 Planning, pedagogy and presentation (54 per cent);
- 3 Teaching traumatized children (52 per cent);
- 4 Reacting in an emergency (43 per cent); and
- 5 Classroom management (37 per cent).

<sup>26</sup> The distinction between training courses and "other" courses is not clear.

It is possible that teachers regard their deficiencies in classroom management a direct result of the crisis and not a result of their personal abilities.

Additionally, teachers expected “high-level experts” to train them and recognized certificate provided at the end. This perspective should be addressed, for it precludes teachers from being receptive to training, criticism and feedback from their peers, many of whom have valuable skills to share.

When asked about what principals felt were their three greatest training needs, those in **opposition-controlled areas** responded differently, depending on whether they were paid or volunteering. Paid principals identified education in emergencies as their greatest training need, followed by managing trauma, and “leadership and negotiation”. Unpaid principals named managing trauma as their greatest training need, followed by “leadership and negotiation” and education in emergencies. It is a concern that leadership and negotiation appears on these lists, as these skills should already be held by principals, especially the paid ones.

Students’ groups complained that teachers did not explain information sufficiently, did not take missed schooling into account when teaching, used “very traditional” methods and were too frequently absent.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The need to train teachers and principals is well established, and the reasons why are many. Some teachers were trained on modern teaching methods while in college; many schools in both government-controlled areas and opposition-controlled areas have not received training from the MoE on the new curriculum; instructors and administrators need new skills to effectively work during the crisis; creative teaching strategies need to be developed in the face of insufficient furniture, equipment, textbooks and stationery; and, most important, trainings conducted actually need to be effective. Forty per cent of teacher respondents saw little relevance in the training courses that they attended. There is also scant evidence of teachers having benefited from NGO trainings.

The overall picture suggests that few teachers have been benefiting from relevant in-service training. Consequently, class observation in a number of classes should be undertaken by competent teacher trainers, who will then be able to prepare a prioritized list of skills in which teachers need training. Sector coordinating bodies, in cooperation with the MoE, should review and adopt training materials to address the most serious teacher needs and carry out short training courses. Currently, the data indicate all teachers need training on how to teach effectively “under current circumstances” and how to provide psychosocial support to their students. The MoE’s in-service training on the new curriculum should be revived. Training courses, focusing on methodology rather than subject content, should be presented in an interactive style. This would allow teachers of various subjects to work together in improving their skills.

If possible, self-learning materials on these skills should be developed so that teachers from neighbouring schools may work together to improve their skills even if trainers are not available.

Where possible, all teachers at a school and the principal should be involved in a training programme at the same time so that learning may be enhanced through peer support.

Providing teacher training should also come with sound coordination and record-keeping. In reporting, sector partners should not give only the number of trainers trained, but also the number of teachers actually reached through the training.



## Instruction and learning processes

Schools exist to provide instruction and learning. Thus, every component of a school exists to allow teaching and learning to occur effectively and efficiently. However, since the crisis began, the literature reports that the quality of education has deteriorated, even in the safest areas.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, parents' groups named the poor quality of education as a primary reason for why students were not in school. Key informants in **government-controlled areas** echoed these thoughts, with a quarter expressing that teaching practices were better prior to the crisis.

The reasons offered for the decline in educational quality are varied. Teachers most often named overcrowding and multiple shifts (35 per cent), the culture and behaviour of the students (27 per cent), shortages of equipment and supplies (24 per cent) and the "educational level" (20 per cent) as challenges to their instructional quality. Principals and children supplemented the teacher's most common responses, naming overcrowding as a major challenge to quality learning. Indeed, key informants reported that close to 60 per cent of schools with which they were familiar had class groups in excess of 40 students. A difficult curriculum that required changes in teaching practices was also named as a challenge to providing quality education, with 28 per cent of teachers' groups naming this factor.

Teachers in **government-controlled areas** were asked how they solved certain challenges, such as addressing security issues, large classes, double shifts, the shifting behaviours and psychologies of students and other challenges. For all topics, teachers named "providing material and moral support" as their method to address difficulties, a somewhat unsatisfying answer. For example, it is not clear how providing moral support to students properly addresses large classrooms. Additionally, material and moral support are vague terms. Without specificities, the teacher responses indicate that they may not fully grasp, or have not fully thought about, the challenges facing them. There were some encouraging answers: 80 per cent of the groups named "activating the role of psychological and social counsellor" as their method of addressing behavioural problems and 71 per cent of groups named using "alternative methods" to address a lack of teaching equipment.

Of the schools surveyed, only two reported having combined classes: One had Grades 11 and 12 in one class, while another combined Grades 1 through 4 in a single class. While teaching combined classes (essentially, teaching multiple curricula simultaneously) would pose its own challenges, it is imagined that these challenge are also exacerbated by a large number of students.

Forty-seven per cent of surveyed schools ran double shifts, a frequency that reflects the literature. More than half of the schools (56 per cent) ran shifts of five hours; 15 per cent of schools ran longer shifts; and 29 per cent of schools had a school day of four hours or less. The survey data did not report what proportion of the school day (or shift) was used for teaching and what was used for other school programmes, such as assemblies or school announcements. In any case, these reports are concerning, as the ability to properly cover the curriculum, implement effective activities and ensure quality learning takes place is related to the amount of time available for instruction.

Using the EMIS data to measure the student-to-staff ratio of schools surveyed, the ratios did not exceed 25 in at least 79 per cent of schools in **opposition-controlled areas** and at least 88 per cent of schools in **government-controlled areas**. The INEE identifies a student-to-teacher ratio of 40 as the limit for acceptable class size. While it may be encouraging that a majority of schools have a student-to-staff ratio that is less than 40, it must be remembered that overcrowded classes have been frequently cited by all survey participants. As aforementioned, key informants in government-controlled areas named 60 per cent of schools had classes in excess of 40 students, meaning some serious discrepancies exist. Thus, these EMIS figures should be evaluated with caution. Things to keep in mind are: The EMIS counts both teachers and administration without distinguishing among them in its data, meaning the number of teachers available is inflated (student-to-staff ratio, as opposed to student-to-teacher ratio). Moreover, these ratios are only meaningful if all teachers teach every day and have low absenteeism rates – a fact that is not true from many respondents. Because teachers frequently do not show up for

<sup>27</sup> See UNRWA's "Alienation and Violence: Impact of Syria crisis report 2014", available at: [http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/alienation\\_and\\_violence\\_impact\\_of\\_the\\_syria\\_crisis\\_in\\_2014\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/alienation_and_violence_impact_of_the_syria_crisis_in_2014_eng.pdf)

class, another teacher's classroom size increases drastically (either that, or students receive zero instruction). On the other hand, it could be that some overcrowded claims, especially from teachers, are not justified. When respondents blame large classes on poor outputs, such as poor learning outcomes, it may be that class sizes are actually manageable and that a teacher's poor classroom management or poor pedagogy is the real issue. For example, two major challenges to classroom management relate to children who have re-entered school and are older than other students. In **opposition-controlled areas**, 32 per cent of teachers and 28 per cent of teachers reported developmental differences and bullying as difficulties affecting their ability to manage classrooms.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, each classroom was, on average, shared by two teachers. Often, classes were not taught simultaneously. Thus, unless some of these teachers were teaching assistants, no teacher in a single-shift school was spending more than half the day in the classroom on average. This would mean that during a 30-hour working week, teachers are with students for no more than 15 hours. Another alarming finding is that within Aleppo, there was a double-shift school where each classroom was shared by an average of 6.3 teachers. In Idlib, there was a single-shift school where 5.5 teachers, on average, shared a room. Further investigation is needed on how teaching responsibilities are allocated and what differences there are from school to school.

Effective teaching is partially dependent on the availability of equipment and supplies. Only 46 per cent of surveyed schools in **opposition-controlled areas** had writing boards described as adequate.<sup>28</sup>

For textbooks and stationery, respectively, only 30 per cent and 22 per cent of the schools in **opposition-controlled areas** had adequate supplies. To address textbook shortages, teachers summarized textbook contents on the board and/or reused old textbooks. Assuming students have stationery, copying textbook content from the board reduces educational quality, as more class time is spent writing down content instead of reinforcing it through discussion and interaction between teacher and students. Moreover, fewer than 20 per cent of the schools had an adequate stock of teaching aids. Depending on the subject, the teacher's task might become near-impossible without these tools, such as maps for geography lessons and laboratory apparatus for science lessons.

The study also examined parents' roles and participation in their children's education. In **government-controlled areas**, textbook shortages were also reported, though not as prevalent as in **opposition-controlled areas**. For Grades 1 through 4, approximately one quarter of schools did not have enough textbooks for every student in the four main subjects (Arabic, English, mathematics and science). This shortage increased slightly for Grades 5 through 9, in which 30 per cent of schools did not have enough textbooks for every student in the four main subjects. The survey only had data for four schools providing Grades 10 through 12. Of these four schools, only one had enough books for every student across the four main subjects.

When teachers in **government-controlled areas** were asked to suggest ways in which students' learning might be improved with resources currently available, they steered away from discussing improvements to be made within the classroom, with 40 per cent proposing remedial classes. The second most commonly named suggestion, the "activation" of teaching aids and equipment, leads one to wonder whether they were not using what was already available. Only 15 per cent named cooperating with parents (which ranked as the most infrequent suggestions) to improve student learning. For students who had missed school, teachers recommended the vague suggestion of "educational courses", which may mean remedial courses. Overall, the impression is that teaching deficits should be addressed through classes or courses presented by others.

Sixty-three per cent of surveyed schools in **government-controlled areas** reported that they offered remedial classes during the summer holidays of 2014. However, there was no indication that these reached all the children in need of such support, or that the students were "up to standard" by the end of the holidays. Another concern: If the availability of remedial work is delayed until the school holidays, students who are already behind during the school year will slip further behind in their work. Private tutoring, while an option, would be available only to those students whose parents could afford it.

<sup>28</sup> "Adequate" is presumed to mean that the board area is at least about a square metre in extent, that the teacher has chalk or markers with which to write on the board, and that the surface is such that students at the back of the class can easily read what has been written. For schools reporting they had inadequate boards, it may be that respondents had perfectly adequate boards, but only in some of their rooms.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, more than 80 per cent of parents' groups said they consulted with teachers about their child. Participation rates in school meetings was lower, but this could be attributed to the infrequency of meetings being held. Over 70 per cent of the students' groups said that their parents helped them with their homework. This mostly aligns with what parents reported: Between 80 and 100 per cent of the parents' groups across all governorates claimed to help children with their homework (with the exception of Lattakia Governorate, where only one third reported they helped children with their homework). However, these percentages may not be representative of parents in general, as it is possible parents who chose to participate in this study have a higher commitment to their children's learning. Indeed, fewer than 30 per cent of teachers' groups believed that "all or the majority" of parents either assisted their children with homework or acted on feedback on their children's work.

Additionally, teachers mentioned that their motivation to continue teaching was strengthened when the community gifted equipment and materials. Thus, the community should continue to provide this kind of support, if feasible. International donors should provide textbooks, stationery and teaching kits.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not a question that many schools are operating under conditions that make providing quality education difficult. Shortages of textbooks, stationery, classroom furniture, and teaching equipment due to damage, looting, the destruction of print shops and warehouses, the devaluation of Syrian currency to finance supplies, and transport difficulties present teachers with almost impossible challenges to overcome. Despite this, efforts should be made and consultations should be held with parents and other interested community members.

All classrooms should have a writing board with a good surface, as well as an adequate supply of chalk and markers. Sector partners have been providing textbooks, stationery and teaching kits on a fairly extensive scale. These efforts should be maintained. Where new and used textbooks are not sufficiently available, realistic arrangements for sharing should be negotiated with the students.

Possibilities for increasing the amount of time spent on tasks should be explored. Daily homework tasks should be set. Teachers should regularly discuss with parents the progress of their children. Parents should monitor their children's school work every day.

Remedial and catch up classes for those who have missed schooling on account of the crisis should be provided through the school at no cost to the student.

For children unable to attend a regular school for reasons of safety or health in government-controlled areas, a self-learning programme in the four core subjects of Arabic, English, mathematics and science from the official Government of Syria curriculum was developed jointly in 2015 by the MoE, UNICEF and UNRWA. These materials can be used in areas where parents considered it unsafe for their children to attend school. Community learning centres (CLCs) have also been envisaged, as students can visit these CLCs from time to time for additional support. The community would be encouraged to play a role in managing, implementing and monitoring the use of the materials. For such a programme to be attractive to parents and students, it should allow the student to reintegrate into the formal school system or to enter for national certificate examinations.

It is important to scale up these initiatives and document their challenges as they expand.

## Assessment and learning outcomes

Apart from the certificate examinations taken at the end of Grades 9 and 12, all students are evaluated at the end of the academic year for promotion to the following grade. Certificate examinations at the end of Grades 9 and 12 are normally taken at the students' own schools. However, many students have been displaced due to the crisis. Because of this, the MoE has made a concession that students in areas affected by the conflict (both government- and opposition-controlled) are allowed to take their examinations at other centres. However, this has not always been safe or possible, particularly for students attending schools in opposition-controlled areas.

The MoE's statistics for national certificate examinations and number of successful candidates over a four-year period, clearly demonstrate that further investigation is required to truly understand the factors influencing examination statistics, especially pass rates:



- From 2011 to 2012, the number of exam takers for all major national certifications, Grade 9, Grade 12 Humanities and Grade 12 Science, **increased** (by 2 per cent, 16 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively). The pass rates from 2011 to 2012 **increased** substantially for all three exams (by 9 per cent, 16 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively).
- In 2013, the number of students taking the national examinations all **decreased** compared to the previous year, falling below 2011 levels, with Grade 9, Grade 12 Humanities and Grade 12 Sciences dropping 33, 15 and 6 percentage points, respectively. Yet, curiously, the pass rates of the national exams continued **increased**, exceeding the 2011 pass rates. For the Grade 9 examination, the 2013 pass rate was 78 per cent (compared to the 2011 pass rate of 70 per cent). The 2013 Grade 12 Humanities and Grade 12 Science examinations pass rates were 63 per cent (from 55 per cent in 2011) and 92 per cent (from 73 per cent), respectively.
- In 2014, the number of students taking the Grade 9 and Grade 12 Humanities examinations **increased**, but did not meet 2011 levels. However, the number of Grade 12 Science exam takers **spiked** – the number of 2014 exam takers was higher than any of the preceding years, an unexpected finding.
- In 2015, the number of students taking each exam **reached historic lows**, with fewer students taking the exam than any of the previous years. Yet, pass rates remained relatively constant from the previous year, with 71 per cent passing the Grade 9 exam (three per cent decrease from 2014), 64 per cent passing the Grade 12 Humanities exam (one per cent decrease) and 77 per cent passing the Grade 12 Science exam (two per cent decrease).

These trends require further investigation. With the well documented deterioration in almost all areas of education (facilities quality, equipment availability, materials availability, the proportion of qualified teachers, trauma experienced by students), a drop in the pass rate can readily be accounted for, but not for some improvements of the magnitude reflected in the MoE's data.

There are also concerns by children and parents about education certificate recognition. Since the 2012/13 school year, the SIG has conducted Grade 9 and 12 examinations based on a modified curriculum.<sup>29</sup> However, certificates issued for this exam are not recognized by the Government of Syria. Because of this, Syrian refugee children and their parents outside the country are expressing their own concerns, for they follow the curriculum and take exams based on their host country's standards. These refugee families outside of Syria worry that they will be treated similarly to those in opposition-controlled areas, and the Government of Syria will not recognize the education certificates from host countries.

Ninety-five per cent of key informants in **government-controlled areas** reported that, in their neighbourhood, students had been able to take the national examination at the end of Grade 9, and 92 per cent reported students had taken the Grade 12 examination. In 93 per cent of the neighbourhoods, the examination had been taken at the local school. Others had to complete exams at nearby schools or in another district.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, taking formal exams is particularly challenging, as most students must travel to another centre to take their examinations. Fifty-four per cent of teachers' groups identified threats to the safety during travel as the greatest barrier, and 43 per cent identified the logistics as a problem. Twenty-seven per cent of the groups noted that the certificate might not be recognized, and just under 30 per cent mentioned the additional costs which the student would have to bear for transport and accommodation while away from home as barriers.

Repetition rates for year end examinations in **government-controlled areas** showed an increase since the crisis began. Of the 57 neighbourhoods surveyed, prior to the crisis, only two areas reported repetition rates above 20 per cent. Since the crisis began, this number has increased to nine neighbourhoods.

<sup>29</sup> During the 2012/13 school year, the Higher Commission for Education, an educational entity that functioned as a Syrian education ministry abroad prior to the formation of the SIG, conducted Grade 9 and 12 examinations based on a modified curriculum. In the following years, the MoE of the SIG was designated to conduct these examinations and take over all education related issues.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, when teachers' groups were asked to identify the most serious factors negatively affecting student success, they most frequently identified being "behind" in the curriculum (34 per cent) and migration (25 per cent). Notably, 17 per cent of teachers cited a lack of examination materials, suggesting that, in these circumstances, no student was able to take exams to advance to the next grade.

Seventy-eight per cent of school principals in **opposition-controlled areas** reported that report cards were regularly issued. In areas where this was not the case, the reasons given were that materials were not available or that these grades would not be recognized.

Parents in **opposition-controlled areas** expressed concern about the lack of opportunities for, and about the risks of, tertiary (or university) education. Registering at an institution in an area under government control is perceived as unsafe. Moreover, studying abroad might be financially beyond the means of the family. The need for tertiary training institutions in opposition-controlled areas was stressed.

In **opposition-controlled areas**, school leavers, or those who have completed secondary education, experienced great difficulty when trying to secure employment. This applied even to those who received a certificate for their examinations. Forty-seven per cent of parents' groups complained that there were no opportunities available for those with a certificate, neither for further study nor for securing a job; eight per cent complained that the opportunities were "few". Those parents who hinted at the possibility of work mentioned freelancing, volunteering, teaching, or joining a military group. According to parent respondents, the inability of young people to find a job or to study further is a concern, as it may induce frustrations due to no apparent opportunities, a sense of marginalization and a "miserable psyche", which may lead to "psychological problems". The boys might "kill time by playing cards and loafing in the streets", while the girls "wait for a good husband".

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure students are ready and confident for exams, thorough coverage of the curriculum should be done in an interactive way, with sufficient opportunities for students to regularly practise what they are learning.

Standardized testing in literacy and numeracy conducted at the end of primary education (at the end of Grade 4 or during the course of Grade 5), should be considered. This could allow for early certification and an assessment of learning at an early stage, thus allowing valuable information for early interventions.

To ensure students are able to take examinations leading to a recognized qualification, sound work has already been done and should continue.

The improvement in national examination results for the years 2012 and 2013 despite reports of deteriorating teaching standards requires further investigation.

## 5 Teachers and education personnel

### Recruitment and selection of teachers and other education personnel

The survey did not explore the criteria for selecting school staff, recruitment procedures or job descriptions.

According to the literature, recruiting teachers has been affected by displacement, challenges with remuneration, emigration and loss of life. In 2013, almost 500 educational workers were killed. Others were injured, kidnapped or arrested. Some teachers avoided schools for security and personal safety reasons. Some teachers were permitted to relocate to a school closer to their places of residence.

With regards to teacher quality, holding a formal qualification does not necessarily equate to actual competence. However, schools will normally desire a fully qualified staff, as this more likely ensures a higher number of competent teachers.

The majority of principals (70 per cent) reported that, within their school, over 90 per cent of their teachers were qualified. However, a discrepancy exists between what principals report and what key informants perceive, as only 40 per cent of key informants reported this high level of qualified staff at their nearest school. When it comes to schools with a low number of qualified staff, the numbers are more consistent: 12 per cent of principals and 17 per cent of key informants reported that, in their schools, fewer than half the teachers were qualified.

Enumerators judged that in 48 out of 59 neighbourhoods (81 per cent), at least three quarters of schools in the neighbourhood had sufficient staff. Nine neighbourhoods (15 per cent) did not have adequate staff at the majority of schools.

From a general perspective, 2,586 out of the 3,045 teachers (85 per cent) surveyed were both formally and properly qualified.<sup>30</sup> Of the unqualified teachers, discussion groups revealed 18 per cent held a university or institute qualification and 76 per cent had attended training or “other” courses, presumably of short duration.

At surveyed schools in **opposition-controlled areas**, 78 per cent of the teachers were qualified. For those teaching primary grades (Grades 1 to 6) 73 per cent were qualified, with the percentages for lower secondary (Grade 7 to 9) and upper secondary (Grades 10 to 12) respectively 78 per cent and 89 per cent.

Twenty-one (out of 59) key informants in **government-controlled areas** were of the opinion that, at their “nearest school”, more than 90 per cent of female teachers who had been at the school prior to the crisis were still able to work, but only 15 felt that this proportion of male teachers were still working.

When key informants were asked why teachers employed before the crisis were no longer teaching, more than half of the respondents named emigration, displacement, or travel; two-fifths named security conditions and fear.

When examining the gender makeup of teachers and head teachers in **opposition-controlled areas**, it was found that there were slightly more female education professionals than males. Overall, the teaching force was 54 per cent female. This slight majority was somewhat reflected within individual schools. Forty-three per cent of the 122 schools had a gender parity index (GPI) of 1.2 or more, meaning these schools had a female-majority teaching staff. Eleven per cent had a GPI falling within the range of 0.9-1.1, indicating near quality. Only 21 per cent of schools reported a male-majority teaching staff (GPI less than 0.9), 11.5 per cent had a male-only teaching staff and 6.5 per cent of schools reported a female-only teaching staff.

When respondents had the opportunity to raise general concerns, there were, noticeably, few comments about the teaching staff’s gender. At only three of the 122 schools (from one principal and two students’ groups) were there requests for female teachers instructing female students. None of the eight schools with single-sex classrooms made any reference to their teaching staff’s gender.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerns expressed about schools needing a fully-qualified staff should be understood as the need for a fully competent staff.

The literature broadly recommends that schools prioritize appointing sufficient, well-trained teachers. The literature also recommends international funds be allocated for recruiting additional teachers and teacher training. Schools wishing to appoint displaced teachers should have access to a database of teacher qualifications. Such a database is held by the MoE (education authorities in opposition-controlled areas would, understandably, not be able to access this database).

<sup>30</sup> “Qualified teachers” means that instructors hold all the correct formal requirements for teaching their assigned subjects and classes. Unqualified teachers may be unqualified in a number of ways: They may hold recognized university degrees and certifications, but not for the subjects they currently teach; some unqualified teachers may not have the proper prior teaching experience; some may have degrees related to their subjects but no training in being instructors. There are, naturally, other ways in which teachers are unqualified to instruct their assigned classes.

## Conditions of work

The literature urges schools to continue assured payments to teachers, and, if possible, steps should be taken to assist teachers with maintaining their standard of living, particularly because the cost of essential commodities is escalating. Teachers perform vital work, and if their compensation does not help them maintain their purchasing power, they may cease to teach. On the flipside, the literature reports that some teachers attended non-functioning schools to continue receiving a salary, as a 15-day absence cuts the teacher off from payroll.

In **government-controlled areas**, key informants reported that teachers at 57 (out of 59) of their nearest schools were receiving their salaries. At the surveyed schools, 3,860 staff members received payments from the government and 165 received payments from another source. Only at two schools were salaries received late. Apart from some teachers being redeployed due to their community's displacement, principals did not note any substantive administrative problems.

Seventy-seven per cent of principals in **opposition-controlled areas** reported that all, or most, of their teachers were at school when they should be. This is a surprising survey result, given that teacher absenteeism is considered a problem. Because the survey did not collect formal data from other school staff, who keep formal records of actual teacher attendance, it is hard to verify what these principals report.

When principals in these **opposition-controlled areas** were asked about why teachers were most often absent, respondents reported:

- 1 Illness most often (52 per cent);
- 2 Financial difficulties (44 per cent);
- 3 Security issues (38 per cent); and
- 4 Personal reasons (30 per cent).

The numbers of days missed was not recorded. One head teacher stated substitute teachers for staff paid by the Government of Syria "during their extended absences to collect their pay" were needed. In **opposition-controlled areas**, teachers have to travel significant distances to receive their payment. These trips not only detract from class time, but they also present safety threats and the risk of detention.

Twenty per cent of principals reported teachers missed school because of another job. This corroborates the aforementioned survey finding, as "financial difficulties" was the second-most cited reason for teacher absences. Thus, it is clear that adequate, regular remuneration affects many teachers' commitment. Indeed, a teachers' group drew attention to the need for financial and material support for poor teachers.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, another group reported that teachers were shown less respect than formerly because they had to rely on handouts (irregular, unpredictable material and financial offers from others).

Teachers were asked to list the three most important reasons that motivated them to continue their work. Unsurprisingly, almost 90 per cent of the teachers' groups stated income. However, over 60 per cent stated a commitment to work with children, and over 40 per cent stated a commitment to helping their country.

It should be noted that not all teachers are paid and the gender analysis of paid workers does not reflect full equality. Forty-one per cent of the 1,281 paid teachers were female and 68 per cent of the 1,103 unpaid teachers were female.

For teachers receiving payment, almost half received their salary from the Government of Syria, and a quarter received remuneration from NGOs.<sup>32</sup> Others received pay from a local authority or from a private benefactor. Less than five per cent received salaries from the SIG. Many principals reported

<sup>31</sup> Teachers whose finances are stretched extremely thinly, often for a variety of reasons.

<sup>32</sup> It is not yet known how teachers in opposition-controlled areas are paid by the Government of Syria.

untimely payments. Only 20 per cent respondents described payment as “always on time” and just over 20 per cent reported “more often (than not) on time”.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many teachers in opposition areas struggled because of erratic payments, or no compensation entirely. Teachers should be paid. Not only that, they should also be paid equitably and transparently.

Each school should keep an accurate record of teachers’ attendance which includes late arrivals, early departures, and reasons for absence.

Teachers are working under difficult circumstances. Teachers felt that the local and wider community could motivate them by supporting the students and school. Teachers envisioned student support as encouraging their attendance and strengthening discipline. Support from the wider community would mainly manifest as financial aid (ideally, for teacher remuneration), providing equipment and improved security. Consistent parental support should be provided to them. Opportunities should be created for teachers to meet with parents and discuss ways in which collaboration between parent and teacher might be strengthened.

## Support and supervision

Support and supervisory mechanisms are important for maintaining teacher motivation and quality. However, the literature did not reveal any information on this aspect of education in Syria. When queried by the authors of this report, the MoE reported that within its plans to phase in a new curriculum, it envisioned that each teacher would receive 36 hours of cascade training annually, as well as a minimum of two classroom visits a year from a subject supervisor.

Surveys of schools in **government-controlled areas** revealed that supervisory visits during the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years were conducted at just over half of the schools (32 out of 59 schools). Observers only evaluated the teaching process and teacher preparation in only 16 and 10 instances, respectively. According to the MoE’s guidelines, each teacher should be visited by a subject supervisor at least twice every academic year. It would appear these guidelines are not being met.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts should be made to reinstate the supervisory programme by the Directorates of Education. Additionally, principals should conduct supervisory visits themselves and have meaningful discussions on challenges teachers face.

## 6 Education policy

### Law and policy formulation

The survey did not directly address law and policy formulation. In response to the crisis, the MoE relaxed its regulations on school uniforms, admission procedures and national examination regulations. To accommodate those who had lost their school records (and could consequently not prove their grades completed), as well as those unable to write examinations, the MoE administered placement tests for students seeking admission to new schools. Because schools have been closed and because the Government has lost control over some schools, candidates have been permitted to take their exams outside of their assigned locations. Respondents from **opposition-controlled areas** illuminate a particular policy need: Students need to be able to take their examinations safely, and successful candidates should be able to receive recognized certificates allowing them to proceed to tertiary studies without having to put their lives at risk.

## Planning and implementation

Providing education effectively during crises requires careful planning and implementation. Naturally, because it is uncertain how long the crisis will last and how it will unfold, detailed and realistic planning is understandably difficult. However, efforts are still under way. The most recent literature reports NGOs and international agencies are planning to address the immediate needs of Syrians, as well as some long term planning. These plans include assisting with the availability of competent teaching, providing psychosocial support to students, the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure, the provision of teaching and learning materials in sufficient quantities, and strategies to allow children to catch up on schooling they had missed and return to school or to engage in self-learning activities.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both schools and the public at large should be reminded that there should be no discrimination against students who do not have school uniforms.

## 7 Donors' and sector partners' response

In 2014, the ESWG in Damascus and the Education Cluster in Gaziantep, Turkey undertook multi-sectoral responses to the crisis. Both groups developed plans to address education and strengthening human capacities in the sector. In 2015, the planning processes were merged, with a joint process to be implemented jointly by both organizations. The 2015 Strategic Response Plan (SRP) required US\$224 million, of which US\$137 million was allocated for "priority" requirements.

The number of adult beneficiaries targeted in the 2014 plans totalled 22,000. This included trainers, teachers, and community workers. However, only 5,500 teachers were to be trained in skills which would be required for daily interaction with students in the classroom, with a further 1,600 trained in psychosocial support concepts. In the 2015 plan, the number of adult beneficiaries targeted rose significantly, from 22,000 to 480,000. The plans currently do not indicate what proportion will undergo "professional development".

Interventions to increase equitable access and improve the quality of education were proposed. Vocational training was included in the plans for both years.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sector partners have been making efforts to meet the educational needs of the Syrian children in a variety of ways. This could not have been done without the support of international donors. However, the support falls far short of the actual needs.

In programming their activities, the sector partners have to balance clearly articulated needs against a shortage of human and financial resources. Many of the recommendations made under the INEE standards will be only partially implemented, or not implemented at all, because of insufficient resources. Despite this, every effort should be made to extend in-service training programmes, at least in interactive classroom practices and in supporting traumatized children.

Information should be provided beyond the level of input and output statistics on the implementation of the previous year's plan.



# Conclusions and recommendations

Summary recommendations are included in the table below. Conclusions and recommendations are based on a survey of a small number of schools selected for convenience, as well as observations in the literature. Again, implementing these recommendations should be contextualized for the areas in which it is to be applied.

None of the recommendations directed at school management will be implemented unless conveyed to school principals in greater detail and accompanied by support or training from the authorities, an NGO, or another sector partner. All recommendations are consequently for the initial consideration of the sector coordinating bodies.

INEE DOMAIN, STANDARD AND RECOMMENDATION		IMPLEMENTER
<b>Community participation and resources</b>		
1	Conduct meetings with parents and students to find ways to improve the learning environment.	School management
2	Explore ways in which to draw greater concrete support from the wider community.	School management
3	Provide guidance to school management on how to organize effective meetings with parents, students and community.	Sector
4	Use parent and community meetings to address safety concerns and the state of the school environment.	School management
<b>Coordination</b>		
5	Ensure that all recommendations in this report are considered and that those judged feasible are prioritized for implementation.	Sector
6	Regular occasions at which cluster members share qualitative information on activities implemented, with a focus on the possibilities of scaling up interventions that work well.	Sector
7	Brief annual qualitative reports on assistance to education of each sector organization.	Sector
8	Prepare draft templates on: Activating community support. School emergency plan.	Sector
9	Provide training to school management on activating community support.	NGOs
10	Standardize psychosocial support training material already in use and attempt to scale up training for teachers.	Sector
11	Non-governmental organizations train their members to act as catalysts in getting school management to: Activate community support. Adapt (contextualize) and implement an emergency plan. Conduct discussions with students, staff and parents on addressing discrimination and bullying in the school.	NGOs
<b>Analysis</b>		
12	EMIS' data collection capabilities should be strengthened by: Creating district and sub-district codes for each reporting point (school). Using new technology such as mobile phone platforms to collect data from schools.	EMIS and Sector
13	EMIS' scope should be extended to cover such aspects as running water, sanitation, school governance and security.	EMIS and Sector
14	Training on the completion of EMIS data collection instruments should be provided to head teachers.	EMIS and Sector
15	Definitions should where necessary be clarified or simplified (e.g., teachers are represented by multiple variables in the current EMIS questionnaire).	EMIS and Sector
16	Follow-up surveys of damaged infrastructure should be conducted for targeted investment in reconstruction.	EMIS and Sector



INEE DOMAIN, STANDARD AND RECOMMENDATION		IMPLEMENTER
<i>Analysis (continued)</i>		
17	Follow-up studies should be conducted to determine why so many children are not attending school and to examine reasons for repetition and dropping out.	EMIS and Sector
18	Make use of sector partners to extend coverage of the annual education census to areas in which the MoE has lost contact.	EMIS and Sector
19	The EMIS questionnaires should be expanded to collect information on deficiencies in the school's facilities and furnishing.	EMIS and Sector
20	"4Ws" reporting should be complemented by detailed reporting of interventions that work and the way challenges with implementation are addressed.	Sector
21	A follow-up qualitative investigation should be conducted to investigate the further drop in the Gender Parity Index in vocational education (especially in Rural Damascus and Quneitra).	Sector
22	Schools should keep detailed records of teacher and student attendance.	School management
<i>Equal access</i>		
23	Enlist parents of children who have returned to school to help develop strategies to get other out of school children to return.	School management
24	Make information available within the community to encourage out-of-school children to enrol.	Education authority and School management
25	Provide remedial teaching in core subjects to all students who return to school after displacement or after dropping out.	School management
26	Draw parents into supporting remedial instruction for children who have returned to school.	School management
27	Provide evening classes in core subjects for children who cannot return to school because they are working.	Education authority and School management
28	Provide study opportunities for girls who have dropped out of school because of early marriage.	Education authority and School management
29	Remedial or catch-up classes in school holidays should continue to be offered.	Education authority and School management
<i>Protection and well-being</i>		
30	Awareness-raising activities among teachers on inclusive approaches to the schooling of children with disabilities.	Sector
31	Assess the safety of school facilities and develop implementable plans for remedying deficiencies.	School management
32	Undertake a survey of schools to determine what repairs are essential to make schools safe and weather-proof.	EMIS and Sector
33	Include modifications to schools to make them safe and weather-proof in the MoE's building programme.	MoE
34	Draw up workable emergency plans in collaboration with parents, students and community members, regularly rehearsing plan implementation.	School management
35	Provide guidance on how training in first aid, firefighting and other relevant emergency procedures may be undertaken by schools.	Sector and School management
36	Every school should have a code of conduct for staff and students.	School management
37	Teachers should receive training in staff meetings on implementing the school's code of conduct without resorting to abusive behaviour.	School management
38	An outline training programme on classroom management practices should be provided to schools.	Sector and MoE

INEE DOMAIN, STANDARD AND RECOMMENDATION		IMPLEMENTER
<b>Protection and well-being</b> <i>(continued)</i>		
39	Clarify the availability and role of psychosocial counsellors at schools.	MoE
40	All schools should offer psychosocial support to the students and teachers, at least in the form of group sessions.	School management
41	Provide information to parents on psychosocial services available at school.	School management
42	Expand the programme of training in psychosocial counselling for teachers to reach all schools.	Sector and MoE
43	Standardize the curriculum for life skills education and make parents aware of what is taught.	Sector and MoE
44	All schools should provide a structured programme of recreational and cultural activities for their students.	School management
45	Encourage education authorities to make schools aware of the procedures they should follow in dealing with seriously stressed staff members or students.	Sector
<b>Facilities and services</b>		
46	Provide sufficient classroom furniture such that every student has a seat with a suitable writing surface.	Education authority and School management
47	Every effort should be made to ensure that every classroom has a writing board with a good surface and an adequate supply of chalk or markers as appropriate.	Sector
48	Efforts by education authorities and Education Sector members to supply personnel, educational resources and school construction should be focused in basic education and districts of governorates which have received displaced children.	Sector
49	Add toilet and hand-washing facilities to those schools that lack them.	Education authority
50	Prepare a prioritized list of rehabilitation and furniture that is required. School management, in collaboration with the parents, can determine what can be done by the school community members (parents and students) to make repairs.	School management
51	The users of school facilities should assume responsibility for keeping the environment clean and attractive.	School management
<b>Curricula</b>		
52	Provide curriculum guidelines to those schools that do not have them.	Education authority and School management
53	Undertake a small-scale study to determine which components of the curriculum's subjects are perceived as too difficult and also determine the amount of classroom time spent on each subject.	Sector and MoE
54	Undertake a study of students' interest in following vocational training courses and on the availability of such courses.	Education authority and Sector
<b>Training, professional development and support</b>		
55	Competent teacher trainers should conduct class observations in a number of schools. The trainers will then prepare a prioritized list of skills (methodology, rather than learning content) for which teachers need training. A series of modules to cover these skills should be prepared and teachers should be trained to cascade the training to as many schools as possible.	Sector
56	The possibility of online support for teacher in-service training should be explored.	Sector
57	The MoE's programme to train teachers on the curriculum should be revived.	MoE
58	All teacher training should be presented in an interactive style, practising skills teachers would be expected to use in the classroom.	Sector and MoE
59	All teachers at a school, including the school principal, should receive training at the same time to allow them to provide mutual support to one another.	Sector and MoE
60	An effective system of record-keeping of in-service training and of follow-up visits to teachers should be maintained.	Sector and MoE
61	Reporting on the training of trainers should be supplemented with information on the number of teachers reached by those trainers.	Sector and MoE

INEE DOMAIN, STANDARD AND RECOMMENDATION		IMPLEMENTER
<b>Training, professional development and support</b> <i>(continued)</i>		
62	All teachers should receive training on how to teach effectively "under current circumstances" and on how to provide psychosocial support to their students.	Sector and MoE
63	The teachers of a school, or teachers from neighbouring schools, should meet to discuss MoE guidelines on the curriculum and the challenges they face, and jointly develop ways to deal with them.	School management
<b>Instruction and learning processes</b>		
64	Schools should ensure that they are fully covering the curriculum in core subjects and other subjects which will be tested in certificate examinations.	School management
65	Maintain efforts to provide every student with textbooks and stationery.	Sector and MoE
66	Where there are insufficient textbooks, negotiate practical sharing arrangements.	School management
67	Increase teaching time to allow full coverage of the curriculum.	School management
68	Opportunities should be created for teachers to meet with parents and discuss ways in which collaboration between parents and teachers may be strengthened in the interests of the children.	School management
69	The use of self-learning materials should be carefully monitored and support mechanisms be adapted in light of what is learned.	UNICEF
<b>Assessment and learning outcomes</b>		
70	Consideration should be given to the introduction of a random sample standardized test in literacy and numeracy to determine whether the competencies of the first cycle curriculum are being mastered by the end of Grade 4.	Sector
71	The changes in the pass rates of the national certificate examinations from 2011 to 2015 should be investigated to determine how the improvements in certain years were possible against the background of deteriorating conditions in the classroom.	Sector
<b>Teachers: Conditions of work</b>		
72	Teachers should be paid equitably and transparently.	Sector and MoE
<b>Teachers: Support and supervision</b>		
73	Supervisory visits from the district office for all teachers should take place regularly, as intended by the MoE.	MoE and DoE
74	Educational seminars should be held regularly.	MoE and DoE
<b>Law and policy formulation</b>		
75	Schools, and the public at large, should be reminded that there should be no discrimination against students who do not have school uniforms.	MoE
<b>Donors' and sector partners' response</b>		
76	The in-service training components of the sector plan should be expanded.	Sector
77	The sector components of the multi-sector annual plan should be supplemented with detailed reporting on what has been achieved to the level of output and outcomes.	Sector









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**UNICEF Middle East and North Africa**

Regional Office

P.O. Box 1551

Amman 11821

Jordan

Tel: +962-6-550-2400

Fax: +962-6-553-8880

Email: [menaro@unicef.org](mailto:menaro@unicef.org)