

# Educating Syrian Youth in Jordan: Holistic Approaches to Emergency Response

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**Cover Photo:** Syrian refugee children attend a class in a UNICEF school at the Al Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq, March 11, 2015. Muhammad Hamed/Reuters/Corbis.

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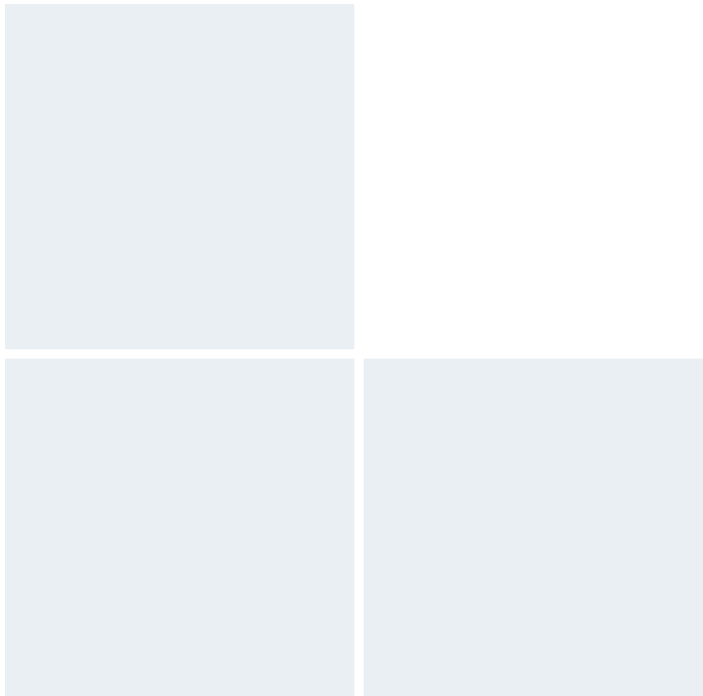
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## Executive Summary

The Syrian crisis has disrupted education trajectories for Syrian youth both inside and outside Syria. The lack of learning opportunities further destabilizes the lives of young refugees, making them more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and susceptible to extremist ideologies. These risks are widely recognized, resulting in a new focus on education as part of the medium- to long-term response to emergency situations. But education programming tends to focus on younger children and basic education, leaving out the education needs of youth (a contested concept, but commonly defined as 15- to 24-year-olds). This study attempts to bridge this gap by focusing on education for Syrian youth in Jordan.

Although the Jordanian authorities have granted Syrian refugees free access to primary and secondary education, more than half of Syrian refugee youth and children remain out of school. Jordan's formal education system lacks capacity to cope with the influx of refugees, leaving many students on waiting lists. Non-formal and informal education initiatives have aimed to address the needs of some of these students. The Jordanian government opened its non-formal education program to Syrian refugees, and various NGOs have opened informal education programs in both refugee camps and host communities. But all of these programs—formal, non-formal, and informal—face challenges in addressing the particular needs of Syrian youth and allowing them to fully realize the benefits of education.

Service providers in Jordan acknowledged economic, legal, social, and cultural obstacles preventing Syrian refugees from pursuing their education and identified three particularly challenging barriers for Syrian youth:

- Humanitarian programming does not systematically target youth. Due to restrictive age definitions and target groups, programs tend to address youth in a piecemeal manner rather than as part of a focused, comprehensive strategy that addresses their specific needs.
- Education programs tend to focus on younger children. This focus produces a gap in programming that leaves the needs of youth unattended.
- The Jordanian government restricts vocational

training programs for Syrian youth. As a result, the few available skills-based programs exclude Syrians or operate only in refugee camps rather than the host communities where most Syrian refugees live.

Syrian youth and their families identified a number of additional challenges they face in pursuing education:

- Differences between the Jordanian and Syrian curricula cause some Syrian students to struggle in the classroom, but Jordanian authorities are resistant to implementing a parallel education system using the Syrian curriculum.
- Many students face bullying in school. Their families feel helpless to respond, and with growing feelings of insecurity, many place their hopes in migrating to Europe or America.
- While school is free of charge, the cost of transportation to and from school is a significant economic burden for many families that keeps their children out of school.
- For older youth, young men are often more concerned about finding work to support their families than pursuing education. Young women often want to pursue higher education but cannot afford it, and scholarship programs are limited. Alternatives, such as attending university overseas or online, come with their own difficulties and risks.

The experience of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan highlights three lessons for improving education and youth programming in emergency responses:

- Youth programming needs a holistic approach. Emergency responses should develop a youth strategy placing the needs of youth at the center and address their connection to other coordination areas such as education, health, and livelihoods. This could take place through youth taskforces at the local, national, or even regional levels.
- Minimum standards for refugee education programs should be established from the start of an emergency. Such standards could tie into an international system for certifying learning achievements.
- A holistic approach to education in emergencies also has to include a transition plan for what will happen next in refugee graduates' lives. This



could include long-term vocational training, income-generating projects, and opening particular employment sectors to refugees.

## Introduction

The Syrian crisis has disrupted education trajectories for Syrian youth both inside and outside Syria. Education is recognized as a human right essential to any individual's ability to grow and reach his or her potential. Further, education is a fundamental investment in future development, economic growth, and poverty reduction.<sup>1</sup> Before the current conflict, Syria was a relatively stable middle-income country that had made education one of its priorities for exactly these reasons—to combat poverty and stimulate development. As a result, Syria had some of the highest enrollment rates and lowest illiteracy rates in the region.<sup>2</sup> Five years into the conflict, these positive achievements have been dramatically reversed, and it has been reported that at least half of all school-age children in Syria are no longer attending school.<sup>3</sup>

A review of education in conflict-affected situations by the independent research foundation Fafo found that education can play a particular role in the healing process of youth during and after their exposure to violence and disruption of their daily lives.<sup>4</sup> Education and learning opportunities define a purpose in young lives, which can prevent vulnerabilities and exposure to extremist ideologies. Education can thus have a stabilizing effect by protecting children and youth from exploitation and abuse in safe environments for learning.

Recognizing the importance of education in conflict settings, several international agencies and

partners initiated the “No Lost Generation” initiative in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite a new focus on education in emergency situations, the focus tends to be on younger children and basic education, leaving out the education needs of youth. This study attempts to bridge this gap by focusing on education for Syrian youth.

This report will focus on the situation in Jordan, which hosts 630,000 Syrian refugees registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the UNHCR, 13.4 percent of these refugees are 11–17 years old and about 14.5 percent are aged 18–25.<sup>6</sup> Jordanian authorities have granted Syrian refugees free access to primary and secondary education, and for the 2014–2015 school year, 127,857 Syrian refugees were enrolled in schools, including 19,108 in the refugee camps,<sup>7</sup> leaving more than half of school-age refugee children and youth out of school. Only 5 percent of refugee youth were registered in formal secondary education, and very few Syrian students have passed the public high school exam (Tawjihi) allowing them to pursue higher education.<sup>8</sup>

Syria offers free university education for all students passing the high school exam, but in Jordan, university studies are out of reach for most Syrian refugees due to high fees for foreign students. In 2014, some 900 Syrian students (both refugees and non-refugees) were enrolled in Jordanian universities, compared to an estimated 4,000 who would have been enrolled under more peaceful circumstances. Moreover, Syrian refugees are currently not allowed to enter technical programs in Jordan due to overburdened systems and political sensitivities and thus depend on scholarships to study such subjects abroad.<sup>9</sup>

1 The World Bank, “Education Year in Review 2012,” available at <http://go.worldbank.org/K3SEZ6EOK0>; The World Bank, *Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011), available at [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/ESSU/Education\\_Strategy\\_4\\_12\\_2011.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/ESSU/Education_Strategy_4_12_2011.pdf).

2 UNICEF, World Vision, UNHCR, and Save the Children, *Syria Crisis: Education Interrupted*, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-crisis-education-interrupted-global-action-rescue-schooling>.

3 Syrian Centre for Policy Research, *Syria: Alienation and Violence* (UNRWA and UNDP, 2015); Save the Children, CfBT Education Trust, and the American Institutes for Research, *The Cost of War: Calculating the Impact of the Collapse of Syria's Education System on the Country's Future*, 2015, available at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/cost-war](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/cost-war).

4 Solveig Hillesund, Tewodros Aragie Kebede, and Jon Pedersen, *The Role of Education in the Transition from Relief to Development: A Review of Existing Knowledge and Suggested Way Forward* (Fafo Foundation, 2014), available at [http://caerus.nilu.no/Portals/10/Docs/Deliverables/CAERUS-D3.1-Role%20of%20Education\\_250315.pdf](http://caerus.nilu.no/Portals/10/Docs/Deliverables/CAERUS-D3.1-Role%20of%20Education_250315.pdf).

5 UNICEF, World Vision, UNHCR, and Save the Children, “Global Champions and \$1 Billion Investment Needed to Prevent a Lost Generation of Syrian Children,” press release, January 7, 2014, available at [www.unicef.org/media/media\\_71701.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_71701.html).

6 UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal,” available at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

7 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, “Jordan Response Plan 2015 for the Syria Crisis,” available at <http://www.jrpsc.org/>.

8 Three out of fifty-two candidates passed in 2013, and only forty-two Syrian refugee students sat for the exam in 2014. Hashem Ahmadzadeh, Metin Çorabatır, Leen Hashem, Jalal Al Hussein, and Sarah Wahby, *Ensuring Quality Education for Young Refugees from Syria (12–25 years)* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2014), pp. 26, 32, available at [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/rr-syria-youth-education-2014.pdf](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/rr-syria-youth-education-2014.pdf).

9 Ibid., p. 34.

Despite increased focus on education as an important part of the medium- to long-term response to the Syrian refugee crisis, meeting the particular needs of adolescent youth remains a gap in the refugee response in Jordan. Non-formal training and education have, however, been popular among international and local organizations to address social exclusion and psychological issues. New concerns related to this age group have also been raised, although mainly as a security risk to Jordan, particularly since idle youth are perceived to be vulnerable to extremist (Islamist) ideology and recruitment by militant groups. A cross-regional assessment of Syrian adolescents by Mercy Corps found that these youths, particularly boys, had lost hope for the future. Many of them wanted to return to Syria and take part in the struggle, confirming such security concerns.<sup>10</sup>

This report will focus on three main topics:

1. Challenges for Syrian adolescents and youth identified by service providers in Jordan
2. Educational challenges identified by Syrian youth themselves and their families
3. How youth programming can be improved as part of an emergency response

The report will begin, however, by defining youth and the education categories used in Jordan.

## Defining Youth and Education Categories in Jordan

### YOUTH

Youth is a contested concept and lacks an internationally agreed definition. It is commonly conceptualized based on age categories, usually 15–24 years old, or sometimes extended to 30 years old because higher education is seen to postpone transition into adulthood. Such age-based definitions often have an instrumental purpose and are useful for statistics. The 15–24 category is commonly used by several UN agencies and other implementing parties but is not mainstream. The UN youth envoy, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Inter-

national Labour Organization (ILO) use 15–24 years as their definition of youth, as do the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), and UN Population Fund (UNFPA). The latter three, however, also define “adolescents” as those who are 10–19 years old and “young people” as 10–24 years old.

UN Habitat uses an extended definition of 15–32 years old for its youth funds, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) defines youth as 16 (or sometimes 18) to 32 years old. The African Youth Charter has an even wider definition of 15–35 years old. In the particular context of the Middle East, which is witnessing what is referred to as a “youth bulge” with up to 70 percent of the population defined as children or youth, large cohorts of young people are confronted with severe obstacles in their transition to adulthood. Despite better access to primary and secondary education and, for some, post-secondary education, transitioning to work and establishing a family have been increasingly difficult. This difficulty has resulted from the economic, political, and social failures of the post-independence development models implemented by the authoritarian regimes in the region. As a result, the experience of being young in many Middle Eastern countries today transcends biological attributes and age cohorts, with many perceiving themselves as “young” well into their 40s. Unable to take responsibility for their own well-being, they are not yet being accepted as adult members of society.

Others, such as Save the Children, do not define youth around an age range but as a transitional period when children start to have more responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> Youth then becomes a social category between childhood and adulthood, where childhood and adulthood have particular attributes like dependency, for children, and independence, for adults. Youth is defined as a state of limbo where a person does not belong to either category but is starting to accept adult responsibilities, such as marriage, establishing a family, seeking employment, and community and civic engagement. The transition from childhood to adulthood varies by gender and cultural context. Traditionally, this period was short and most often related to

10 Mercy Corps, *Syrian Adolescents: Their Tomorrow Begins Today*, 2014, pp. 8–10, available at [www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/advancing-adolescence](http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/advancing-adolescence).

11 Interview with representative of Save the Children, Amman, Jordan, April 26, 2015.

marriage. In a modern context, marriage tends to be postponed due to increased demand for education before an individual is ready to start work and become economically independent, but also because economic constraints sometimes limit the capacity to pursue marriage. This transitional period can extend well beyond the age of 25 or 30, meaning that the social aspects of life as an adult unmarried person define youth, not the biological attributes alone. Yet an understanding of youth as a period of transition focuses on what youth are not; they are not a child and not an adult. It thus neglects what youth currently are—young human beings—as opposed to what they are meant to become—adults.

Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat argue that what it means to be young is constructed in a specific context of time and space.<sup>12</sup> The particular socio-economic, political, and cultural situation generates opportunities and challenges for young people. This leads to an understanding of youth as a socially constructed category where they are seen as social actors constructing their everyday lives on the basis of the opportunities and limits presented to them. Their reactions to the reality of these conditions take various forms, from individual coping strategies to organized collective action fostering new ideas of what it means to be an adult.

Yet youth as a category are highly diversified. Young people experience opportunities, limitations, and social change in different ways according to their class, gender, and experiences, which produce variation in needs and demands. Despite this variation, young people share a common historical experience that creates a sense of connectedness among members of a particular age group still in their formative years. This shared experience develops into a generation with distinctive characteristics from other generations, a concept developed analytically by Karl Mannheim in 1952.<sup>13</sup> Today, most youth all around the world take part in some level of formal education and increasingly have access to information technology connecting youth globally. Such trends are not only forming new identities but are also enabling youth

to compare their lives to what they are not and what they could have been.

In the Middle East, youth can see the contrast between the authoritarian regimes, economic recession, and lack of opportunity they have experienced and the ideals of freedom, democracy, and opportunity they can observe elsewhere. This contrast has formed a distinct generation newly aware of its opportunities and rights. Although it might be difficult to perceive that Allawi and Daesh youth in Syria have anything in common, divided as they are by religion, ideology, and access to opportunity, they use the same modern means of communication to distribute and access information, as well as to stay in touch across disruption and displacement. They also share the experience of war and violence, albeit differently. These experiences are forming them into a distinct Syrian generation. In this context, youth should be viewed not just as in a stage of transition but rather as individuals capable of agency. They cannot be assumed to wait for resources and opportunities to be handed to them, but will develop individual and collective strategies to improve their chances for a better life, whatever a better life means for different individuals and groups.

## TYPES OF EDUCATION

### Formal Education

Formal education can be defined as organized learning institutions that are guided and recognized by a government that develops a standard curriculum, leading to officially recognized achievements such as a high school diploma or degree. Teachers are usually trained as professionals to guarantee the quality of the education programs.<sup>14</sup>

Jordan has a formal education system regulated and certified by the Ministry of Education, which oversees preschools and primary and secondary education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, which is responsible for post-secondary education. Primary school is a mandatory ten-year cycle, while secondary education includes two additional years where students can choose between an academic

12 Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat, eds., *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Karl Mannheim: Essays*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge, 1952).

14 Claudio Zaki Dib, "Formal, Non-formal and Informal Education: Concepts/Applicability" (presented at Interamerican Conference on Physics Education, Oaxtepec, Mexico, 1987), available at [www.techne-dib.com.br/downloads/6.pdf](http://www.techne-dib.com.br/downloads/6.pdf).



track leading to higher education or a vocational track leading to an apprenticeship and a vocational profession.

Public schools in Jordan are free of charge, yet about 30 percent of students attend private schools. Universal access to education has been a priority for Jordanian authorities since independence in 1946 and has been an important element in their statebuilding strategies.<sup>15</sup> Access to school is not considered a major problem in Jordan, and most young Jordanians acquire basic literacy.

The quality of education, however, is uneven, and many students fail to learn the fundamentals needed for continued learning, not least the critical-thinking skills needed to compete in a globalized world. These disadvantages are often associated with overcrowded classrooms and teachers without proper tools to create a positive learning environment. Most Jordanian students continue into secondary school, but this level is experiencing high dropout rates, estimated to be 3,500 yearly<sup>16</sup> or up to a total of 100,000 at any given time.<sup>17</sup> A man working for a charity organization in Mafraq<sup>18</sup> explained how a vicious cycle of fraud and lack of competence undermined the quality of education in many schools in the region:

Before this year, it was common to cheat on the high school exam [Tawjihi]. The students were cheating with the help of the teachers. In this way, the students passed the exam. But two years ago they stopped the cheating on the exam and the number of students that passed the exam [after that] was zero. So after this the student started to leave school, because they cannot cheat and they cannot pass, so there was no use for them to continue going to school. Those that used to pass the high school exam through cheating used to go to university, but they did not cope with their studies because they did not understand enough.... The problem goes in a circle. When this student pass the exam [by cheating] and

go the university, particularly here in Mafraq university, the professor and teachers are from the same place, meaning that they are from the same family. So these teachers will let the students pass the exam and these students will graduate from their studies without real knowledge. You will have graduates without capacity, and [later] they are going to work in the schools as teachers. But when they lack the fundamental knowledge and capacity, they are not really able to teach the young children.<sup>19</sup>

Numbers cannot be considered fact in a country like Jordan that is receiving new refugees every day. According to several studies on the impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian education sector, approximately 60 percent of school-age Syrians have been admitted to formal schools in Jordan.<sup>20</sup> A representative from the Ministry of Education reported in April 2015 that the number of Syrian students in Jordanian schools had reached 130,000, much of which is achieved by implementing double shifts in ninety-nine schools. Yet 35,000 young Syrians are still on waiting lists to continue their education.<sup>21</sup> Funding is frequently declared as the main barrier to admitting these students to schools. In the meantime, non-formal and informal education initiatives are implemented to address the needs of some of these students.

### Non-Formal Education

The concept of non-formal education emerged in 1968 as a reaction to the rigidity in formal education in the West as well as in so-called third-world countries. There was a perception that educational ambitions were failing.<sup>22</sup> Non-formal education was presented as the ideal solution, based on alternative educational thinking, such as Paolo Freire's "education of the oppressed."<sup>23</sup> Alternative and more flexible pedagogical methods were introduced, focusing more on the needs of the students and their deeper involvement and active role in the learning process than formal education.

15 Fida Adely, *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

16 USAID, "Formal Education," last modified November 3, 2015, available at [www.usaid.gov/jordan/formal-education](http://www.usaid.gov/jordan/formal-education).

17 Youth Employment Inventory, "Non Formal Education Program for School Drop Outs (NFE), Informal Education Program for Street Kids (IFE)," available at [www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/386/](http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/386/).

18 Mafraq is a town and a region in the north of Jordan currently experiencing a high influx of Syrian refugees.

19 Interview with management of a local charity in the Mafraq region, April 27, 2015.

20 Mona Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*, International Peace Institute, 2015, available at [www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPI-E-pub-Securing-Education-for-Syrian-Refugees.pdf](http://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPI-E-pub-Securing-Education-for-Syrian-Refugees.pdf).

21 Friedrich Naumann Stiftung and Jordanian Club of Humboldt Fellows, conference on "Young Syrian Refugees in Jordan's Educational Systems – Challenges and Policies," Amman, Jordan, April 16, 2014, available at <http://fnf-amman.org/en/news/young-syrian-refugees-jordan-educational-systems>.

22 Alan Rogers, "Looking Again at Non-Formal and Informal Education – towards a New Paradigm," Infed, 2004, available at <http://infed.org/mobi/looking-again-at-non-formal-and-informal-education-towards-a-new-paradigm/>.

23 Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

The method would, for example, typically include dialogue and practical activities instead of passive lecturing.

Although non-formal education can be defined as organized educational activity that takes place outside the formal education system, the concept quickly became ideologically focused on a learner-centered, participatory approach. The concept was initially related to educational efforts in developing countries. It had its prime in the 1970s and 1980s as a critique of the relevance of formal education in a rapidly changing developing world. Some of the reform perspectives were gradually integrated into formal school systems, and the concept of non-formal education almost disappeared from the education discourse in the late 1980s. It reappeared in the 1990s, however, with an altered meaning, now more related to the concept of lifelong learning opportunities. Non-formal education is now often understood as organized learning taking place outside recognized educational institutions. It often focuses on out-of-school youth who are too old to participate in formal schooling opportunities, offering a second chance to those who missed out on school or, for different reasons, did not complete their schooling.<sup>24</sup>

Jordan's Ministry of Education recognizes that school dropout is a challenge, particularly since students who have been out of school for more than three years, as a general rule, are not allowed to reenroll in formal education programs.<sup>25</sup> The ministry, together with the organization Questscope, designed a special course for long-term school dropouts to offer them a second chance. This government-nongovernment cooperation typically serves youth from low-income communities. A two-year course divided into three eight-month cycles was developed. The students could work during the day and attend evening classes for two hours, five days a week using a curriculum developed with the Ministry of Education. The course uses a non-formal education approach: a participatory learning

methodology and accelerated learning methods. It targets males 13–18 years old and females 13–21 years old. At the end of the course, the students are eligible to sit for an exam equivalent to the official tenth-grade exam (Brevet), which allows former school dropouts to continue on to secondary education. In Jordan, the concept of non-formal education is reserved for this particular course, which is structured, regulated, and certified by the Ministry of Education.

Afterwards, students are eligible to pursue vocational training or the high school exam (Tawjihi), the latter through self-study and homeschooling. Nearly two-thirds of the course graduates have continued on to a higher level of education by reintegrating into formal classrooms or government-sponsored vocational training programs.<sup>26</sup> The program is now operating in all governorates across Jordan except Tafileh and has opened to Syrian students who have gaps in their education. The courses have not, however, adapted to the refugees, who left school for entirely different reasons than Jordanian dropouts. Syrian refugees dropped out because of displacement and war, and many of them are motivated to continue their education, while Jordanian students often dropped out because they lack interest in education and are more motivated to start a working life. This difference creates variations in motivation and interest to continue education that probably should be better reflected in the course design.

### Informal Education

Informal education usually refers to educational activities that are outside the formal education system and less structured than non-formal education. Alan Rogers calls it “incidental learning,” which is unstructured and without a pre-planned purpose yet the most extensive and important learning process for most people—the everyday process of learning from experience.<sup>27</sup> Informal education is often defined in negative terms as what it is not: It does not correspond to organized and systematic education, it does not

24 Rogers, “Looking Again at Non-Formal and Informal Education.”

25 UNHCR, “The Challenge of Education,” in *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, 2013, available at <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/the-challenge-of-education.html>; Kelly Kirk, “Late Registration: Problems Affecting the Access to Education for Syrian Refugees in Amman, Jordan” (thesis, University of Oregon, 2014), available at <http://intldept.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Kelly-Kirk-Thesis-INTL-2014.pdf>.

26 Interview with representative of Questscope, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015; Youth Employment Inventory, “Non Formal Education Program for School Drop Outs (NFE).”

27 Rogers, “Looking Again at Non-Formal and Informal Education.”

necessarily include objectives and clearly defined subjects, it does not have a clearly defined target group, and it lacks control over the activities implemented and thus does not aim at degrees and certification.<sup>28</sup> That said, it is hard to clearly define any of these concepts (formal, non-formal, and informal education); they can instead be seen as a continuum on a scale from informal toward non-formal and formal education. It is the degree of organization and flexibility that places each educational activity along this continuum.<sup>29</sup>

In Jordan, however, where non-formal education is very clearly defined as an organized education opportunity for long-term school dropouts (as described above), all other education programs are defined as informal education. Informal education opportunities for Syrian refugees often focus on providing basic literacy and numeracy classes combined with psychosocial support and life skills. Informal education is not regulated and certified by the government and tends to be less structured and have uneven quality. UNICEF has developed standards for informal education, which are endorsed by the Jordanian Ministry of Education, but since anyone can set up informal learning centers, government officials and others complain about the poor quality of many informal learning opportunities. Only the biggest and most experienced NGOs are able to offer high-quality education that builds skills and competence. Others offer courses that often prove to be useless because they do not follow the required standards or offer skills useful to enter the labor market.

The distinction between non-formal and informal education differs inside and outside the refugee camps. In host communities, the distinction is more rigidly monitored by authorities, as non-formal education takes place in public schools, and informal activities usually takes place in NGOs and community centers. In the camps, international organizations have found more room to maneuver in the informal education sector, partic-

ularly for vocational training, which is more restricted outside the camps.

When the government opened informal education programs for Syrian refugees, it was first of all a way to recognize that young refugees need some learning opportunities. As the Jordanian authorities initially expected the conflict in Syria to be temporary and relatively short-lived, they meant for informal education to be a temporary solution for refugee children and youth while they waited to go back to Syria and restart their “normal life.” Such temporary education programs were called informal because the non-formal sector was so well-defined in Jordan. In other countries, many similar educational activities would be called non-formal education.

As time has passed, there is a growing recognition of the need to make informal education more formal, and a UNICEF initiative called “Mecany” (my place) is looking into how informal education can become more structured and how it can be certified and provide a path to more formal education or skills training better adapted to labor market needs.

Skills training for refugees is highly sensitive in Jordan, and most organizations involved in this area have only been able to operate in the camps (NRC, Save the Children, etc.).<sup>30</sup> There are organizations doing activities for Syrian youth in host communities as well, but these activities seem very limited, and information about them seems hard for refugees to find. However, I found one refugee girl who had dropped out of school and was studying English with an international organization (Caritas).<sup>31</sup>

An important challenge for young Syrians seeking education in Jordan is the lack of opportunities for transitioning into the labor market, as Jordanian authorities have restricted the right to work for Syrian refugees. This point will be elaborated later in this report.

28 Dib, “Formal, Non-formal and Informal Education.”

29 Rogers, “Looking Again at Non-Formal and Informal Education.”

30 Interviews with education experts, Amman, Jordan, April/May 2015.

31 Interview with young Syrian girl, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015.

## Challenges for Syrian Adolescents and Youth Identified by Service Providers in Jordan

A number of barriers can obstruct continued education for Syrian refugees. These barriers can be economic, legal, social, and cultural.<sup>32</sup> The main barrier is the lack of capacity in the Jordanian education system due to economic and organizational limits. Schools are overburdened and thus unable to absorb eligible refugees. Another economic constraint is many refugees' tight household budgets. There is a deficit between aid, available income, and household expenses.<sup>33</sup> The need for additional income can keep children out of school, and reports have raised concerns that many Syrian children are not attending school because they have to work.<sup>34</sup>

Syrian students in Jordan have to follow the Jordanian curriculum, which differs somewhat from the Syrian curriculum. Some Syrian students find the new curriculum to be difficult and demanding, particularly older students preparing for public exams. High dropout rates from Syrian high school students could be related to such challenges, but cultural and social factors, such as early marriage, recruitment to armed groups, bullying, and social tensions also play a role. Having experienced months or years as refugees on the move, many young Syrians have forgotten how to learn and find themselves behind Jordanian peers in school achievement. This can demotivate them from continuing education. Uncertainties about the value of their achievements due to lack of formal certification and grade reports can further demotivate young students.

Legal barriers to education for Syrian refugees relate to registration with the Jordanian authorities

and UNHCR, which gives them access to public education services. Some refugees fail to register altogether, sometimes out of fear of their names being leaked to Syrian authorities or because they do not see themselves as refugees and in need of humanitarian aid. Others fail to re-register every six months, which is required to keep temporary protection status in Jordan. Another legal barrier is what is frequently termed the "three-year rule," which restricts enrollment of students who cannot document previous enrollment in formal school for the last three years. Many Syrian refugees have a prolonged displacement history, making them particularly vulnerable to this regulation.

Social barriers to education are related to visible demographic change in many Jordanian communities and neighborhoods, creating fertile grounds for stereotyping the newcomers. Although many Jordanians are compassionate toward the plight of Syrian refugees, competition for limited resources also creates tensions between the two groups. UNHCR home visit data describe how parents' experience of harassment and discrimination discourages them from sending their children to school.<sup>35</sup> Violence in schools, sometimes from the teachers, is also described as a main reason both for not enrolling and for dropping out of school.<sup>36</sup> Dropout rates among Syrian refugees are twice the national average in both Lebanon and Jordan, according to a World Bank report.<sup>37</sup>

Access to education for Syrian refugees has two sides: supply and demand. Supply is directly linked to the capacity and availability of educational facilities, which are limited. The demand side is more complex and is related to individual opportunities and limitations. Parents individually evaluate factors such as access to schools, economic considerations, knowledge and skills, a wish to normalize disrupted lives, and access to and demands in the labor market against the barriers discussed above.

32 Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*.

33 Mona Christophersen, Cathrine Moe Thorleifsson, and Åge A. Tiltne, *Ambivalent Hospitality: Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (Fafo Foundation, 2013), available at [www.faf.no/index.php/nb/zoo-publikasjoner/faf-rapporter/item/ambivalent-hospitality](http://www.faf.no/index.php/nb/zoo-publikasjoner/faf-rapporter/item/ambivalent-hospitality).

34 Gaelle Sundelin, "60–70% of Working Children in Jordan Are Syrians – Ministry," *Jordan Times*, November 30, 2013, available at <http://vista.sahafi.jo/art.php?id=10f35c44c07dd88f32349210f7deac0196105397>; Ahmadzadeh et al., *Ensuring quality education for young refugees from Syria* (12–25 years), p. 18.

35 UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan: Home Visit Data Findings*, 2013, available at [www.unhcr.org/urban/](http://www.unhcr.org/urban/).

36 UNHCR Education Sector Working Group, *Joint Education Needs Assessment: Za'atari Refugee Camp – Jordan*, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/joint-education-needs-assessment-za%E2%80%99atari-refugee-camp-jordan-april-2013>.

37 UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, 2013, 44, available at [www.unhcr.org/media-futureofsyria/](http://www.unhcr.org/media-futureofsyria/); World Bank, *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, 2013, p. 78, available at [www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/09/24/lebanon-multiple-shocks-syrian-crisis](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/09/24/lebanon-multiple-shocks-syrian-crisis).



When parents find that the opportunities outweigh the limitations, they will try to send their children to school.

These challenges to education have been discussed in more detail elsewhere,<sup>38</sup> and although such obstacles were mentioned in my most recent interviews, I want to focus on three barriers that service providers frequently brought up as particularly challenging for Syrian youth:

1. Youth are not systematically targeted in humanitarian programming.
2. Education programs tend to focus on younger children.
3. Vocational training programs for Syrian youth in Jordan are restricted.

### LACK OF SYSTEMATIC TARGETING OF YOUTH

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, implementing actors in the humanitarian field do not understand the concept of youth in the same way. This lack of a unified understanding helps prevent systematic and powerful targeting of youth and young refugees. Needs of young people often change as they grow older and transition to adult life and responsibilities. The definition of youth, or lack thereof, thus has consequences for how effective and targeted youth programming is.

Many of the international organizations active in the education sector have a mandate to target children and youth up to the age of 18. In many countries, legal frameworks define persons under the age of 18 as minors or underage, while at 18 years old they are legally adults, regardless of social or cultural perceptions of what attributes are needed to be fully accepted as adults. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has this perspective and includes children up to 18 years old.<sup>39</sup> The convention is a powerful United Nations human rights treaty, binding the signatories to international law regarding children's rights.

UNICEF, for example, is aiming for all children to have twelve years of schooling, which might extend beyond the age of 18, yet its programs focus

on basic education.<sup>40</sup> Thus the focus is often on primary and middle school education for children up to about 15 years old. UNICEF has less focus on the 15–18 age group, while being aware that many in this age group have lost years of schooling and, with it, the incentive to go back. This is particularly the case for many young refugees experiencing disrupted lives. Several organizations I spoke to said they lack good programs to reintegrate these youth, particularly when they grow older than 18 years.

Both UNESCO and Questscope are involved in non-formal education programs to reintegrate school dropouts, both Jordanian and Syrian.<sup>41</sup> The programs aim for the middle school exam (Brevet) taken after nine years of school. The Brevet is usually taken around the age of 15, but as the programming targets school dropouts, the students in the program are usually older. Beyond the middle school exam, the non-formal education programs could not offer systematic education.

For youth beyond the age of 18, several organizations said assistance would be outside their mandate and that these youths would be the responsibility of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which, among other things, is focusing on job creation, poverty eradication, and sustainable development. However, the UNDP office in Jordan seemed to have little to offer Syrian youth, something I will come back to below.<sup>42</sup>

These age definitions and target group limitations restrict a particular focus on youth. Implementing partners' organization of coordination areas for the refugee response into sectors or working groups further restricts youth programming. Programs targeting youth come in bits and pieces but are not organized into a youth strategy or a plan to address some of the youths' particular needs. Instead, youth are included in different sectors, such as education, health, child protection, and livelihoods. For youth, however, all these sectors interconnect and influence each other. According to several youth experts I interviewed in Amman, there is a need for a holistic approach

38 Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*.

39 Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 20, 1989, available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx).

40 Interview with representative of UNICEF, Amman, Jordan, April 27, 2015.

41 Interview with representative of UNESCO, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015; interview with representative of Questscope, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015.

42 Interview with representative of UNDP, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015.



toward youth.<sup>43</sup> They need good physical and mental health to be able to achieve in education, they need quality education to be able to find jobs in a competitive labor market, and they need protection mechanisms to avoid exploitation, for example in the labor market. The implementing agencies' sector approach limits capacity to plan for "what is next" in the youths' lives, such as opportunities after they have passed the middle school exam.

UNESCO identified boys aged 12–17 as the most vulnerable group among the refugees.<sup>44</sup> Because of restrictions on Syrians to seek employment in Jordan, families sometimes pressure young boys to leave school and find work. One reason for this is that the calculated risk of being caught without a work permit is less severe for underage children. Yet targeting this group for education requires acknowledging that many of them have to work to support their families. Acknowledging that young children are working also requires addressing the risk of exploitation and other protection issues they face, including health risks. To address the needs of youth, a more integrated approach is needed, particularly if the aim is to look at barriers keeping children and youth from education.

### FOCUS ON YOUNGER CHILDREN

Jordan has generously aimed to provide education for school-age Syrian refugees in its public schools. According to the latest available data from UNHCR, about 60 percent of Syrian refugees, or more than 100,000, are now integrated in Jordanian schools. This tremendous effort was facilitated, among other things, by opening nearly 100 schools for double shifts. I learned, however, that only primary schools do double shifts, and no secondary schools have implemented this system to integrate older Syrian students.

Among the education workers I interviewed, there was a perception that donors tend to focus more on younger children when they allocate funds. They often see young children as more vulnerable in conflict settings and rightly argue that basic education is a prerequisite to pursuing secondary and post-secondary education.

Further, it is easier to integrate younger children in a new school system, as the older ones have gotten accustomed to a different system and find it harder to adjust. Secondary education is also more differentiated and based on individual choices. Alternative tracks for education are introduced, making education programs for adolescents and youth more complex.

Although some programs target adolescents and youth, several education experts claimed this focus on younger children produces a gap in their programming and that huge needs thus go unattended, particularly those of the majority of young refugees living in host communities (outside refugee camps). As previously described, less than a quarter of Syrian refugee youth expected to be found in higher education are actually enrolled. This failure to provide opportunities for higher education can have severe future repercussions, as these cohorts of young Syrians will or should be essential for Syria's future reconstruction into a peaceful society.

### RESTRICTIONS ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many organizations expressed the need for more skills-training and vocational programs for Syrian youth, but as mentioned above, such programs are restricted by the Jordanian government. According to one expert, "They do not even allow vocational training. They do not want the Syrians to get trained so they can get work afterwards. They are afraid of competition with domestic youth."<sup>45</sup>

Most international organizations are thus only operating in the camps, where they find more leeway to combine life-skill programs with some semiprofessional skills learning. None of the education organizations were able to implement such training in host communities, and they pointed to UNDP as the focal point for livelihood development for youth and adults above 18 years old.

Although UNDP is involved in livelihood and youth employment programs, including vocational training and business development, these programs are for Jordanians only. This restriction was

43 Interviews with youth experts, Amman, Jordan, April 26–May 1, 2015.

44 Interview with representative of UNESCO, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015.

45 Interview with education expert, Amman, Jordan, April 2015.

explained as the Jordanian government's current policy, which does not allow vocational training of Syrian youth or integrating them into the Jordanian labor market. Although UNDP programs are part of the Jordan Response Plan<sup>46</sup> addressing the impact of Syrian refugees, its work is under the "resilience" chapter only, meaning that its programs are designed to ease the burden on host communities, not to assist Syrian refugees directly. UNDP could only include Syrians in programs focusing on social cohesion to ease tensions in host communities.

In addition to these structural restrictions on developing vocational training for Syrian youth, many were critical of the few programs that took place, claiming that many only offered six months of uncertified training, which is not enough to be useful in an increasingly skills-demanding and competitive labor market.

## Challenges Identified by Syrian Youth and Their Families

Among the families I met in Amman, all the younger children were attending local schools. Their parents did not report any particular obstacles or challenges for the young primary school children. Their integration seemed to go easily, according to their parents. For the adolescents, however, three particular issues were raised: difficulties in adapting to a different curriculum, bullying in school, and the cost of transportation. The term "adolescents" was frequently used for children from 11–12 years old and up to the age of 17.

### CURRICULUM

The Jordanian curriculum is different from the Syrian one and was often mentioned as a barrier to pursuing education, particularly among middle school students. Taha, who is 16 years old, can serve as an example.<sup>47</sup> She went to school in Syria until sixth grade and was 12 years old when she had to stop due to the violence in her hometown,

Homs. Her family decided to flee. When she arrived in Jordan as a refugee, she had missed about a year of schooling. A placement test in Jordan put her in seventh grade, but she had difficulty following the class instruction: "I had difficulties when I entered school here, because the subjects were different and difficult for me. At the beginning, I did not answer to what they said; sometimes I did not understand what they were talking about," she said. After struggling along with no extra assistance for two years, she gave up before she got her middle school diploma (Brevet). Now she refuses to go back to school if she cannot go back to Syria and be taught using the Syrian curriculum. Against the stalled and prolonged conflict in her home county, this is a bleak option.

An alternative could be to use the Syrian curriculum for Syrian students in Jordan, but the Jordanian government has concerns about creating a parallel education system for Syrian refugees. This was done for Palestinian refugees sixty-five years ago, and some claim it has bolstered refugee identity and prolonged the plight of Palestinian refugees who otherwise could have been more fully integrated in Jordan. Subsequent historical events, particularly the Black September of 1970, when Palestinian militia threatened to take over authority in Jordan, are still prevalent in Jordanian memory and discourse. In a country that is somewhat struggling with its national identity and that simultaneously has accommodated waves of millions of refugees, leaving the original host population as a minority, these are highly sensitive questions.

### BULLYING

Bullying in school has been highlighted in many reports<sup>48</sup> on the refugee crisis and was also mentioned by a Save the Children expert: "There is a huge issue of discrimination, and kids drop out of school because they do not feel comfortable."<sup>49</sup> Parents I met echoed this statement, and bullying could be part of Taha's lack of well-being in school, since as a student with learning difficulties she could be easily singled out by peers. Taha did not go into detail about this, but the mother of Ahmed,

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan, "Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis, 2016–2018," available at [www.jrpdc.org/](http://www.jrpdc.org/).

<sup>47</sup> Interview with young Syrian girl, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015. Taha is not her real name.

<sup>48</sup> Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*; UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees Living Outside Camps in Jordan, Home Visit Data Findings*; UNHCR Education Sector Working Group, *Joint Education Needs Assessment*; UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with representative of Save the Children, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015.

a bright boy of 13, did.<sup>50</sup> Thanks to his mother's homeschooling, he did not fall behind in education when the family fled Syria. He was placed with his age group and continued at a public school in Amman. His results in school are excellent, and this is causing him trouble among peers, particularly on test days, his mother says. She supports his refusal to help academically weaker students cheat on tests. For example, last week he was attacked by a classmate and his head was knocked into a wall in school. He returned home with cuts and bruises on his face and head.

The teacher claims to have no power to stop the bullying and just advises Ahmed to avoid bothering the other boys to prevent further attacks both inside and outside school. Still, Ahmed continues to be attacked by peers at least twice a week. The family feels powerless. Revenge is not an option, because then the Jordanian boys would bring family members into the conflict and start an even worse cycle of violence that could only be solved through traditional mediation, usually involving some form of payment, which the family cannot afford. Without an extended family network to support them, Ahmed's family cannot do anything to prevent further bullying of their son. The family feels the main reason he is bullied is that he is Syrian, which they cannot do anything about. His mother asks him to endure because she wants him to continue his learning.

Educators around the world know that bullying happens in schools everywhere, but they also know that good programs can be implemented to effectively reduce violence and negative experiences. Such programs require knowledge and experienced facilitators, which are in short supply in an already overburdened school system in Jordan. Ahmed and his family have instead put their trust in the United Nations and hope to be selected for transfer to a third country. Right now, they do not feel that Jordan can provide the security they need as refugees.

This claim of lack of protection was repeatedly conveyed during the interviews with Syrian refugees. One woman worried about her husband's fate: "I want you to know and to write about the

situation [for the Syrian refugees] and about these problems. I do not want from you money and I do not want from you cards to pay our food and water. Nowadays this is not our problem. What we matter about is protection. We want to feel safe here, and in Lebanon, and everywhere."<sup>51</sup>

After more than four years of conflict and years displaced as refugees, a combination of stress factors is bothering refugees: lack of protection and safety, as well as insufficient aid and services. Combined with restrictions on finding work to better their lives and become more self-sufficient, these stress factors are making refugees more desperate. Without hope to return to Syria soon and with all their savings spent, many refugees are now seeking options beyond what the neighboring countries can offer. In this context, migration flows toward Europe should not come as a surprise.

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is also frequently mentioned as a barrier to pursuing education. Ahmed, for example, had to ride in a private taxi to go to school, and although school is free of charge, the transportation is not. This is a significant burden on a restrained refugee budget. Additionally, Ahmed's taxi had an accident some time ago in which Ahmed had a head injury and got problems with his hearing. Not being insured, the family also had extra expenses for his medical treatment.

Rima and Rurissa,<sup>52</sup> two sisters in their early twenties, had to leave Syria just when they were about to finish their high school exam. Continuing their education was a priority for their family when they came to Jordan about three to four years ago. After successfully completing their Tawjihi, they were accepted into a private community college to study for a two-year degree. Although the education is free, transportation to the college is a major obstacle for the family. They have to pay 380 Jordanian dinar (\$536) for the two of them for one semester. When I saw them toward the end of the spring semester this year, they had only been able to pay 14 dinar (\$19.75) of this fee. If they do not pay the rest, they will have to stop their education. This is a household where the father, the main breadwinner, was seriously injured in Syria and is

50 Interview with Ahmed's mother, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015. Ahmed is not the boy's real name.

51 Interview with Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015.

52 Interview with Syrian sisters, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015. Rima and Rurissa are not their real names.

not able to work in Jordan. The family lives on money from the World Food Program and a little charity from Islamic organizations from time to time. They also had support from relatives living in Jordan, but this stopped when the relatives recently left the country. The two sisters hope to find informal work when, or if, they finish their studies, but available jobs are low-paid and have low job security since the majority of Syrians in Jordan cannot obtain legal work permits. They will probably be lucky to find any work at all. Being realistic about their limited opportunities in Jordan, they, like Ahmed's family, put more hope in being selected by the UN to go to America.

### CHALLENGES OF OLDER YOUTH

Older youth are often overlooked in discussions on education. They face particular challenges, and there is a need to look beyond education to better understand the situation for older refugee youth in Jordan. The experience of education is gendered and is thus different for young women and young men. Most of the young males I met had stopped school early in Syria and started to work, some even before they had finished middle school. A typical pattern was that they started as informal apprentices to be trained in a skill by a relative or friend of the family.

Mohammad,<sup>53</sup> who is now 23 years old, left school at the age of 12 to work with a family friend who trained him in his workshop. According to his mother, he was only 8 years old when he first started this training. Mohammad developed a hearing disability when he was sick as an eight-month old baby. This disability made it difficult for him to follow class instruction when he started school. He was never offered any extra assistance and never learned to read and write. His mother is literate but claims she never had time to teach him because she was busy with work. They are both happy that he instead learned a craft useful for generating household income. Today, Mohammad is not interested in returning to school. He could, however, be interested in learning about how to

run a business more effectively to earn more money, which, he says, is a prerequisite to fulfill his wish to get married.

Despite the high costs associated with marriage, most of the refugees I met who were past 20 years old were married and had established a family. At this stage in life, the young men had no interest in going back for education. They were more concerned about finding work to be able to support their families. The main challenges they raised were insecurity and risks associated with the illegal nature of their work, due to restrictions placed on Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labor market. A Syrian refugee is considered a foreign worker under Jordanian labor law and thus needs a Jordanian sponsor and is required to obtain a one-year renewable work permit.

A study by the Fafo Foundation and the ILO found that only 10 percent of Syrian refugee workers in Jordan had obtained formal work permits. The main reasons given for not applying for such permits were that they were too expensive or too difficult to get.<sup>54</sup> While such regulations do not stop Syrian refugees from finding work,<sup>55</sup> something most of the young men I met found a necessity, it instilled fear and anxiety. Several conveyed a constant fear of being caught. Mohammad, for example, said, "I am very afraid to work outside the house. I am afraid of the labor union and that they will take me and force me to go back to Syria. So for this reason I want to stay in my house and work with my mother."<sup>56</sup>

There was a perception among the refugees that Jordanian labor unions have increased inspections at workplaces to prevent Syrian refugees without formal work permits from working. Osama,<sup>57</sup> who is 24 years old, stopped school in seventh grade when he was 13–14 years old, but his brother offered to train him in his skill until he could work independently. When he came to Jordan about two years ago, he found a job but faced several obstacles. After ten days, he asked for his salary, but without a formal work permit and contract, his

53 Interview with young Syrian man, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015. Mohammad is not his real name.

54 Svein Erik Stave and Solveig Hillesund, *Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market*, International Labour Organization and Fafo Foundation, 2015, 63–64, available at [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_364162.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_364162.pdf).

55 According to the Fafo-ILO study, labor force participation among male Syrian refugees on average is 52 percent but varied across regions, with the highest participation in Amman at 67 percent. Ibid., p. 45.

56 Interview with young Syrian man, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015.

57 Interview with young Syrian man, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015. Osama is not his real name.



employer refused to give him money. Angered by the exploitation, he decided not to work in Jordan again. However, after he got married and had his first baby, the need for money compelled him to find a new job. This time, the labor union found him working without a formal work permit, and he was forced to sign a document committing not to work illegally in Jordan again. If caught a second time, Osama believes he will be deported back to Syria, a risk he cannot afford. The Fafo-ILO study also reports work permit inspections by the Ministry of Labor but claims that no Syrians have been deported to date.<sup>58</sup> One of my informants, however, named a friend who she said was arrested and deported while working.<sup>59</sup>

Exploitation can also have severe health implications. Ali<sup>60</sup> had a nervous breakdown when the money he earned from working was stolen. Now he is very sick and in need of extended medical treatment, preferably hospitalization, which he and his family cannot afford. These young men do not see many opportunities to improve their situation in Jordan. Education thus does not seem to be a priority as long as it fails to increase such opportunities, particularly the transition to the Jordanian labor market, which remains the main barrier to Syrian refugees bettering their livelihoods in Jordan. All the young men had fading hopes that Jordan could provide security as well as the economic foundation for them to live a decent life. As a result, they had started to look beyond Jordan, and all of them mentioned the United Nations and aspirations to be accepted as refugees in Europe or America.

Girls or young women often had a different story. Although many of them were married and had children, several were interested in continued education. Amal,<sup>61</sup> who is 24 years old, was only 11 when she got married and now has four children. Due to her young age when she got married, she could not take on the responsibility of a separate household and had to live with her husband's family. They were very supportive of her continued education. Despite marriage and childbearing, with

the assistance of her mother-in-law, particularly with childcare, Amal continued to study her school subjects at home. The family even hired a teacher for her. She only had to go to the school to take her exams. Being only a fifth-grader when she got married, she continued her self-study through middle school and high school and had even started university studies when she had to leave Syria and flee to Jordan. At the university level, she tried to go to class twice a week, and her peers helped her by taking notes on the days she did not attend. Amal says this way of continuing education for young married girls was not uncommon in Syria. Mais,<sup>62</sup> who is 22 years old, tells an almost identical story of marriage and continued education into university studies. In Jordan, however, none of them have found a way to continue their education. They still want to get a degree, but it is both too expensive to study in Jordan and too complicated to access Jordanian universities, which demand many papers they left behind in Syria and that are difficult to obtain from Jordan.

Amira,<sup>63</sup> who is even more ambitious, wants to get a PhD and become a researcher. She had to stop school after the tenth grade, however, because of the war. She signed up for homeschooling to take the high school exam, but the school where she was going to take the test was full of refugees and could not practically give her the exam, stopping her plan. In the meantime, she became a refugee herself, got married, and now has a baby. Her ambitions, however, did not change. She still wants to study, but the university's cost put it out of reach for her. The restrictions on vocational training for Syrian refugees do not include university education, which remains open to refugees. The main barrier to achieving such education is the cost, since Syrian refugees have to pay as foreign students.

There are some scholarship programs for refugees, but they are limited and dispersed among many implementing organizations. Access to information about scholarship programs is difficult

58 Stave and Hillesund, *Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market*, p. 64.

59 Interview with young Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015.

60 Interview with young Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015. Ali is not her husband's real name.

61 Interview with young Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015. Amal is not her real name.

62 Interview with young Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015. Mais is not her real name.

63 Interview with young Syrian woman, Amman, Jordan, May 1, 2015. Amira is not her real name.



to find at the moment. Another barrier already mentioned is the document requirements. Additional obstacles are the willingness or ability to travel from home to the university, as well as management of the costs associated with transportation, as seen in the case of Rima and Rurissa.

Some potential students are willing to go abroad to study, and some well-meaning donors are offering scholarships to overseas universities. There are some risks attached to this, however, the most serious being the issue of protection. If a Syrian refugee leaves Jordan to study abroad, this student is no longer eligible to return to Jordan—not for vacation during the studies nor after the studies are finished. This restriction also applies should the studies be cancelled for some reason. Imagine that this student is not allowed to visit family during holidays, nor for a family emergency or death. Potential donors, as well as students and their families, have to be informed about such risks associated with foreign scholarships for refugees with temporary protection status.

Other alternatives are distance or online learning opportunities. For the university level, such alternatives are available but usually require a language skill, often English, French, or German, but also other domestic languages. Online courses also require Internet access. While Internet penetration is high among Syrian refugees, most are online through a mobile device, which is often not suitable for serious university studies. Self-study or long-distance studies further require discipline and study skills that these potential students may need to refresh after three to four years of war and displacement. Regardless, such alternatives are currently too fragmented and difficult to approach for most potential students, and according to education experts in Jordan, the majority of students still prefer a component of face-to-face learning to complement online learning.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion: Improving Youth Programming in Emergencies

Education is recognized as a fundamental right for all people. It is not only an effective way to reduce poverty and inequality and advance development; it is also essential for peacebuilding and reconstruction after conflict. As sustainable peacebuilding must happen before, during, and after conflict, education stands at the core of these efforts. When education is disrupted by conflict, radical groups have proved effective at filling this gap with their own ideology. Education is thus also an important tool to prevent radicalization in conflict situations, although educated youth also have proved vulnerable toward recruitment by extremist groups.

Finance for education in emergencies is trapped between the immediate humanitarian response and longer-term development interventions. For Syrian refugees, the humanitarian response is severely underfunded, and strict prioritization of funds tends to focus on food and basic needs to secure survival. Funds for education and youth programming often lose this competition. Further, when the crisis is protracted, as in the case of Syria, donors shift allocation of funds from emergency funds to development budgets. Because most of the neighboring host countries for Syrian refugees are middle-income countries, many donor countries no longer find them eligible for assistance according to domestic policies.

The Oslo Summit on Education for Development in July 2015<sup>65</sup> addressed the need to strengthen the response to education in emergencies and protracted crises. The conference was followed up by a high-level meeting during the 2015 UN General Assembly on “Ensuring the Inclusion of the Right to Education in Emergencies in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.”<sup>66</sup> Both conferences acknowledged funding as the main barrier to

64 Interviews with education experts, Amman, Jordan, April 26–May 1, 2015.

65 Available at [www.osloeducationsummit.no/home.cfm](http://www.osloeducationsummit.no/home.cfm).

66 Available at <http://webtv.un.org/search/ensuring-the-inclusion-of-the-right-to-education-in-emergencies-in-the-post-2015-development-agenda/4521133252001?term=education>.

education in humanitarian situations and addressed the need to build a platform for education in emergencies that includes a special education fund to secure education for children and youth during and after crisis.

### HOLISTIC APPROACH

In this report, I started to address the gap in the education response to older cohorts of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan, and I have broadened the focus to include more general programming for refugee youth. Experience from Jordan suggests, first of all, that youth programming needs a holistic approach.

Youth are not part of the interagency coordination structure that usually is set up in response to an emergency situation. Instead, the response to youth comes in bits and pieces under the different umbrellas of education, protection, health, and livelihoods. A holistic approach could and should include the connections and interdependence between these areas and put youth and their needs at the center. Needless to say, it is necessary to create meaningful opportunities for Syrian refugee youth. The alternative is that youth start to find alternative coping mechanisms, which sometimes can be negative or even harmful.

There is no doubt that recruitment to armed groups is happening among Syrian refugees.<sup>67</sup> For some, this is a way to find meaning in life. The fighting factions offer money and a livelihood strategy combined with a belonging that many of these young men are missing as refugees. This is increasingly on the radar of the Jordanian authorities and can open paths to new solutions for the refugees. Evidence of early marriage, child labor, and different forms of exploitation has also been frequently reported in various needs assessments.<sup>68</sup>

In Zaatari refugee camp, a youth taskforce has been established to develop a more holistic approach to youth interventions. In contrast to the education working group, which several experts labeled as an information-sharing platform rather than a strategic working tool, the youth taskforce is

described as operative in the field. Further, several education experts stated that it was one of the best-functioning coordination mechanisms for Syrian refugees: “It is an action-oriented, field-based group of practitioners, unlike more formalized structures such as the education working group or the protection working group,” according to one of the group’s members. “We have less of that formal coordinating role, but we can be much more action-oriented. We do coordinate in terms of sharing ideas, but we also have specific goals around youth participation and advocacy.”<sup>69</sup> The idea of working toward some commonly-defined goals is what distinguishes it from the more formal working groups.

Some experts called for a similar youth taskforce on a national level and perhaps even regionally. The youth taskforce in Zaatari camp could perhaps serve as an example for how the UN can mainstream its youth interventions in emergency situations. By taking a holistic approach and putting youth at the center in an inclusive way, it is not possible to separate education, protection, and livelihoods, as is often done in the response we see today.

Although education is identified as a right for all young people, several barriers prevent young Syrian refugees from getting the education they deserve. The main barrier is the lack of capacity of the schools. Among the Syrians who are in school, there is also the issue of discrimination and the fact that many children are working to support their families. An intervention has to look at all these factors simultaneously.

It is necessary to increase capacity and make more spaces available to young Syrian refugees, but also to raise awareness of discriminatory practices and find methods to solve these conflicts. In addition, many of the older Syrian youth feel an obligation to assist in supporting their families, either through work or household chores, which might conflict with their wish for further education. Programming can address such

67 Tone Sommerfelt and Mark Taylor, *The Big Dilemma of Small Soldiers: Recruiting Children to the War in Syria*, Noref (The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2014), available at [www.peacebuilding.no/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/Syria/Publications/The-big-dilemma-of-small-soldiers-recruiting-children-to-the-war-in-Syria](http://www.peacebuilding.no/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/Syria/Publications/The-big-dilemma-of-small-soldiers-recruiting-children-to-the-war-in-Syria).

68 Save the Children, *Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage among Syrian Girls in Jordan*, 2014, available at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Too\\_Young\\_to\\_Wed.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Too_Young_to_Wed.pdf); Stave and Hillesund, *Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market*, pp. 63–64; Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*.

69 For example, interview with education expert, Amman, Jordan, April 29, 2015.

conflicts of interest and provide education opportunities that can be combined with work and other obligations. This can be done through evening or distance learning. Likewise, a concern among the youth who feel obliged to work for their families is the lack of work permits and legal right to work, which again can lead to exploitation and other security risks. All these matters have to be considered concurrently while different strategies are formulated to develop a youth-centered, holistic approach in emergencies.

### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

The second main concern is that of educational standards. When the Syrian crisis started in 2011 and Syrian refugees started to pour over the borders to neighboring countries, many believed, or at least hoped, that the crisis would be short, as in Tunisia and Egypt. For this reason, many programs for youth started as temporary activities to keep youth busy. It was thought that some kind of learning opportunity was better than none, creating an opening for all kinds of organizations to implement whatever training and activity programs they wanted. Now the Syrian conflict is entering its fifth year, and knowing that the average time a UNHCR refugee spends displaced is 17 years,<sup>70</sup> it is important to look beyond temporary solutions from the start. This can be done by setting minimum standards for education programs implemented for refugees.

Due to lack of capacity in Jordan's formal education sector, combined with restrictions on vocational training for Syrian refugees in Jordan, a considerable part of education programming for Syrian youth takes place in the informal sector. The result is a lack of educational standards and thus missing criteria for certification of achievements. This can render education both useless and meaningless for potential students. To mitigate this obstacle in emergency education, there is a need for quality insurance of the educational standards that are offered, as well as an international system for certification of learning achievements that can benefit the refugees both in their host country and when they return to their native country.

### POST-EDUCATION TRANSITION PLAN

A holistic approach to education in emergencies also has to include a transition plan for what will happen next in refugee graduates' lives. As previously mentioned, short-term vocational training has limited benefits. The training has to be useful, relevant, and up-to-standard in a modern and competitive labor market; there is a limit to how many hairdressers a community needs. Additionally, there has to be a plan for how the young can use their newly acquired skills. It is important not only for them to get more experience in the field of their training, but also not to forget what they have already learned. In Jordan, this is a particular challenge as long as the Jordanian government does not allow Syrian refugees to enter the labor market legally. Currently, it is very difficult for aid organizations to receive approval from the Jordanian government for projects, including vocational training, income-generating initiatives, and cash-for-work projects.<sup>71</sup>

One of the recommendations to the Jordanian government from the Fafo-ILO study is to develop a more open approach to work permits for Syrian refugees in certain sectors already open to foreign migrants, such as construction, agriculture, and low-skill manufacturing.<sup>72</sup> If combined with standardized vocational training and income-generating projects, such opportunities could bring new hope to a refugee generation that is either lost or will desperately seek opportunities across the Mediterranean or elsewhere. Without a plan for transitioning to the labor market, education is for nothing, and we might as well ask, why bother to educate these youths at all? This question puts the logic of education upside-down, further emphasizing the necessity of a holistic approach to education that includes hope for a future.

To produce good planning tools for Syrian refugees in general and a holistic plan for refugee youth in particular, serious, high-quality research is needed. This is particularly important for the majority of refugees living in host communities. A report on the education situation in Zaatari camp

70 UNHCR, "Annual Report Shows a Record 33.3 Million Were Internally Displaced in 2013," May 14, 2014, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/537334d0427.html>.

71 Interview with UNDP representative, Amman, Jordan, April 30, 2015; Doris Carrion, *Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Difficult Truths* (Chatham House, 2015), p. 9, available at [www.chathamhouse.org/publication/syrian-refugees-jordan-confronting-difficult-truths](http://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/syrian-refugees-jordan-confronting-difficult-truths).

72 Stave and Hillesund, *Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Labour Market*.

was launched by UNICEF and REACH in June.<sup>73</sup> This is very good, but until now, research has tended to focus on the camps, which are much easier to research than scattered refugees in host communities. Yet at this point, much more knowledge is needed on the vast majority of Syrian refugees living among Jordanians around the

country, particularly on youth. Knowledge is needed on what these youth are doing with their lives as refugees, what hopes they have for the future, and how their energies can be channeled into constructive participation in society, whether in their current host country of Jordan or in a future Syria.

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<sup>73</sup> UNICEF, "Comprehensive Child Focused Assessment: Za'atari Refugee Camp," 2015, available at [http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach\\_jor\\_report\\_comprehensive\\_child\\_focused\\_assessment\\_zaatari\\_refugee\\_camp\\_june\\_2015\\_2.pdf](http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_jor_report_comprehensive_child_focused_assessment_zaatari_refugee_camp_june_2015_2.pdf).

## Appendix

### Project Background: Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Responses

Since the outbreak of the Syria crisis in 2011, more than 220,000 people are reported to have died by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights;<sup>74</sup> the UN stopped reporting on death tolls in Syria more than a year ago due to lack of independent sources on the ground that can verify the numbers.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, 13.5 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, according to OCHA, the UN humanitarian agency,<sup>76</sup> and 7.6 million people are internally displaced. The crisis has had serious regional spillover effects, with 4 million refugees registered by UNHCR in neighboring countries. As of October 2015, 1.4 million Syrians are claimed to be in Jordan,<sup>77</sup> of whom about 630,000 have registered with the UNHCR as refugees. A high-level political impasse has protracted the crisis, requiring the response to look beyond the immediate humanitarian needs to medium- to long-term development strategies. There is a growing need to build true partnership between local, regional, and international players.

IPI started research and discussions related to the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Syria in 2013, with a particular focus on regional cooperation. A research paper was commissioned to assess the responses of regional and non-regional intergovernmental organizations to humanitarian crises elsewhere—the Balkans in the 1990s and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008—and identify strengths, weaknesses, and how lessons learned could be applicable to the Arab world today.<sup>78</sup> Another paper looked into the lessons from Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen as a means to plan ahead for the post-conflict period in Syria.<sup>79</sup> A retreat was organized in 2013 with policy experts and senior government officials from the region, donor countries, and relevant stakeholders to form an informal strategic working group. Two more meetings in 2013 and 2014 addressed the medium- to long-term needs of Syrian refugees. Simultaneously, a series of ministerial-level meetings took place to strengthen dialogue among political players. In 2014, IPI teamed up with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Harvard Kennedy School to explore drivers of vulnerabilities related to Syrian refugees' medium- to long-term rehabilitation needs, with a focus on education, health, and livelihoods, which was presented at an expert roundtable at IPI in December 2014. IPI took particular interest in the field of education and produced a research paper focusing on supply and demand for education services for Syrian refugees in Jordan.<sup>80</sup>

Through this work, IPI identified a gap in service provision for youth, specifically regarding education beyond the primary years. This project aimed to address this gap through a case study on the particular needs of Syrian refugee adolescents and youth in Jordan. Through a fact-finding mission to Jordan in April 2015, we identified and interviewed several relevant stakeholders involved in education service delivery to Syrian refugee youth. The focus was on three education priorities set by the government of Jordan: improving the quality of formal and informal education, giving refugee youth a decent future, and providing more opportunities for post-secondary education. Interviews with refugee youth and their families on attitudes and opportunities to pursue further education were also part of the mission.

74 "More than 220,000 Dead in Syria Conflict: Activist Group," *The Daily Star*, April 16, 2015, available at [www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Apr-16/294648-more-than-220000-dead-in-syria-conflict-activist-group.ashx](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Apr-16/294648-more-than-220000-dead-in-syria-conflict-activist-group.ashx).

75 Kashmira Gander, "UN to Stop Updating Death Toll in Syria Conflict," *Independent*, January 7, 2014, available at [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/un-to-stop-updating-death-toll-in-syria-conflict-9045096.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/un-to-stop-updating-death-toll-in-syria-conflict-9045096.html).

76 UNOCHA, "Syrian Arab Republic: Key Figures," last updated December 2015, available at [www.unocha.org/syria](http://www.unocha.org/syria).

77 For example: "Refugee Crisis Poses Challenge to Stability, National Resilience – Fakhoury," *The Jordan Times*, October 18, 2015, available at [www.jordantimes.com/news/local/refugee-crisis-poses-challenge-stability-national-resilience-%E2%80%94-fakhoury](http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/refugee-crisis-poses-challenge-stability-national-resilience-%E2%80%94-fakhoury); Mazen Homoud, "In Jordan, We Understand a Refugee Crisis," *Telegraph*, September 16, 2015, available at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/jordan/11869777/In-Jordan-we-understand-a-refugee-crisis.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/jordan/11869777/In-Jordan-we-understand-a-refugee-crisis.html).

78 Jérémie Labbé, Lilianne Fan, and Walter Kemp, *Cooperation from Crisis? Regional Responses to Humanitarian Emergencies*, International Peace Institute, 2013, available at [www.ipinst.org/2013/09/cooperation-from-crisis-regional-responses-to-humanitarian-emergencies](http://www.ipinst.org/2013/09/cooperation-from-crisis-regional-responses-to-humanitarian-emergencies).

79 Christina Bennett, *Planning Ahead for a Postconflict Syria: Lessons from Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen*, International Peace Institute, 2013, available at [http://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi\\_epub\\_postconflictsyria.pdf](http://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_epub_postconflictsyria.pdf).

80 Christophersen, *Securing Education for Syrian Refugees in Jordan*.



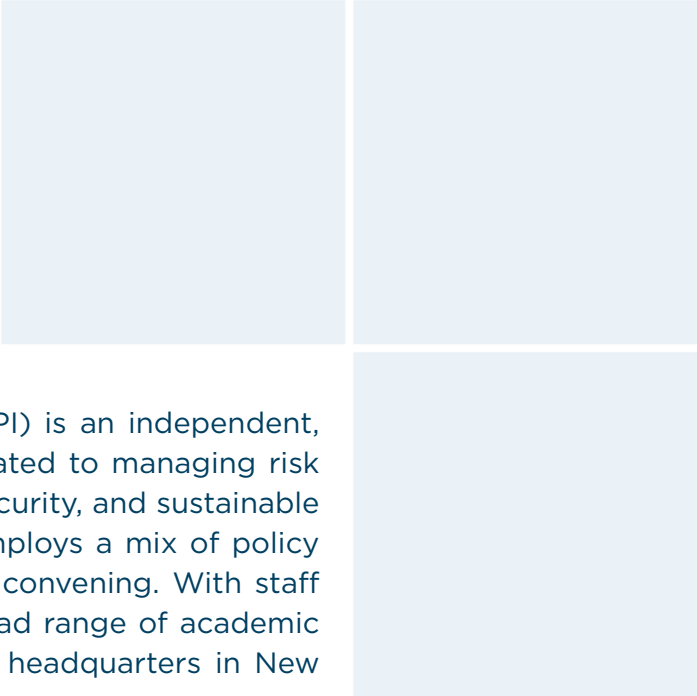












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