Adapting to the New Normal

Educating Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan

Since the start of the civil war in Syria in the spring of 2011, half of the country's population of 23 million has been displaced, with nearly 5 million Syrians fleeing their country to escape the violence. Many are now living in Jordan: as of May 2016, 640,000 Syrian refugees were registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan. This number represents a 10 per cent increase in Jordan's population since 2011, and in fact, the Government of Jordan (GOJ) estimates that the actual number may be closer to 1.4 million, if unregistered refugees are considered.

Throughout this humanitarian crisis, Jordan has generously extended services to Syrian refugees. They have been joined in their efforts by UN agencies, national and international NGOs, and foreign donors that have all contributed through programmes intended to stem the crisis. Among

these interventions is the Emergency Education Response (EER) Programme, launched by UNICEF, the GOJ and multiple partners in April 2012. The EER Programme aims to contribute free public formal education, as well as safe and appropriate supportive educational services, for Syrian refugee children living in Jordan.

RAND was requested to assess the EER Programme's performance in providing public formal education, alternative programmes, and supportive programmes and systems in camps and host communities, while minimizing the impact on the Jordanian host community. The evaluation, which involved interviews, document reviews, focus groups, and survey data analyses, produced recommendations that may help guide future actions by the Government of Jordan, UNICEF, donors, implementing partners, and other UN agencies.

The EER Programme has made significant strides, but longer-term challenges remain

The Programme's first responses to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2012–2013 were designed to meet immediate education needs, enabling many children to enrol in school. However, as the crisis has continued, medium-term, strategic efforts and planning have lagged behind events on the ground. Furthermore, although stakeholders have successfully managed to provide access to public formal education for 130,000 Syrian children, at least 97,000 remain out of formal school. Increasing Syrian access to formal education, as well as ensuring high-quality schooling for both

Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities, will require more attention. Such efforts may call for creative solutions, as evidence shows that accommodating influxes of Syrian students in Jordan's public school system, for example through double-shifting, has led to classroom overcrowding and has diverted resources intended for quality improvements in Jordan's education system overall.

The EER Programme has also provided NGO-managed alternative education to 35,000 Syrian children, with greater access in camps than in

host communities. Alternative education projects have, in many cases, been reported to provide high-quality, child-centered, flexible education to Syrians. However, they have lacked a full-time, structured curriculum and a coherent framework for quality monitoring, as well as clear pathways for entry into formal, certified education.

With respect to efficiency, another goal of the program, RAND researchers found that macro- and project-level data were available, and that data were being “pulled through” into decisionmaking. Improved data on implementing

partners’ activities have also strengthened programme efficiency. However, researchers found little evidence that decisions about the use of scarce resources were being made on the basis of evaluating and comparing options. In addition, there was concern that a lack of clear lines of accountability between UNICEF and the GOJ—related to UNICEF’s changing role in the response over time and ownership of education services in camps— had stymied efficiency and effective planning.

Recommendations to transition to the next phase of crisis response

Based on evaluation findings, RAND provided a number of recommendations to strengthen and improve on EER Programme planning and delivery in the next phase. These include:

1. Develop and implement a medium-term strategy (including funding), with emphasis on building Jordanian government capacity to manage into the future.

Given the protracted nature of the crisis and expectations that refugees may not be able to return home for years to come, the EER Programme should transition to a new phase that places greater emphasis on sustainability. Such a shift will require an explicit medium-term (10-year) strategy that incorporates a corresponding theory of change. Funding needs will also shift, as the programme moves from one focused on humanitarian aid for Syrians refugees to one with a development focus, combining considerations of needs of the Syrians refugees with needs of the Jordanian public formal school system and host communities. While previous donor funding has been predominantly short term and directed toward the international humanitarian community,

a future-facing strategy will require donors to commit to longer-term funding in order to build resilient Jordanian institutions and encourage future planning. The GOJ could support this effort by granting longer-term approvals to partners implementing programs. Beyond current donor support, other funding sources, such as financing education through taxation if Syrians were permitted to work and using Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to pay for needed additional school infrastructure, could also strengthen the sustainability of refugee education programs. In addition, donors might consider placing more emphasis on direct support of MOE operations and capacity building, in addition to directing funding to UN agencies and NGO partners.

2. Expand the provision of public formal education.

Many Syrian refugee children have missed a considerable period of schooling. To address their needs, scaling up public formal education (instead of NGO-provided alternative educational programs) should remain the priority for investment and activities, focusing on the following steps.

- There are not enough school spaces in Jordan, and over 500 schools are already double-shifted to meet Jordanian and Syrian needs. Options to rapidly scale up education provision include: increasing the numbers of double shifts; building prefabricated schools; renting and repurposing other buildings; and using school buses to distribute children among available school spaces. In the longer term, donors and the GOJ should invest in school buildings.
- Donors should provide a 10-year direct funding commitment for teacher salaries to expand public formal education provision, create manageable class sizes necessary for quality education, and provide a living wage to the teachers who will teach the students over the next decade. Syrian teachers should be included in this commitment.
- Ongoing initiatives to develop a database that maps capacity across school districts should provide the data needed to target school infrastructure expansion.
- UNICEF and its partners should continue to play a crucial role in outreach and enrolment, as well as providing catch-up and remedial support.
- A version of public formal education is needed for the 65,000 out-of-school Syrian children who have missed several years of school and cannot enter a traditional, age-appropriate classroom. This may mean, for example, grouping age cohorts and providing those children with the public formal curriculum that is typically offered to younger children.

To support the short-term rapid expansion of education while building long-term capacity, a new delivery model should involve UN agencies and partners supporting the development of these additional education efforts with a planned transition to the MOE taking a greater role to make programmes sustainable. Such a move toward sustainability will require investment in MOE capacity and Jordanian institutions, shifting more direct donor funding to them.

3. Improve the performance of double-shifted schools to meet the needs of both Jordanians and Syrians.

Double-shifts have been controversial because they have reduced instructional time, divided resources unequally between shifts, and separated Syrian and Jordanian children by nationality. As double shifts will remain an important means for providing education in the medium-term, efforts should be made to mitigate their problems. Increasing the number of school

days would enable double-shifted schools to accommodate reduced teaching time per day and keep resources in both shifts equivalent. To promote quality, fairness, and coping for both Syrians and Jordanians, the full RAND-UNICEF report provides criteria for when to use integrated classrooms, separated classrooms, single shifts, and double shifts.

4. Improve the quality and safety of school learning environments.

Understandably, the quality of education has taken lower priority than access to education during the emergency's early stages. However, now planning should incorporate quality. Efforts to improve school learning environments may include reducing class sizes, school monitoring, mixing experienced and inexperienced

teachers, paying teachers adequately, hiring Syrian teachers, training, developing pathways between education and adulthood, creating additional structured psychosocial support in both camps and host communities, addressing bullying, engaging parents, and investing in the classroom environment.

5. Target the different gendered challenges facing girls and boys.

Boys have lower access to formal education at all levels, in part because boys may face more pressure to support families through work and waiting in line to collect aid. For girls, access to education is affected by early marriage, concerns about safety in transportation, and sexual and

gender-based violence. These challenges are often related to wider societal issues, as opposed to education policy; however the education community, in collaboration with the GOJ, can advocate with stakeholders in other sectors in order to improve these circumstances.

6. Ensure planning involves options analysis and takes uncertainty into consideration.

In the face of many and at times competing needs, stakeholders must prioritise programmes and spending based on analyses and comparison of the available options. To this end, developing standardised cost and performance data could help strengthen management of the various efforts. Planning should also explicitly recognise key unknowns and be phased to account for uncertainty about the future needs and circumstances of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Scenario planning can

be used to create plans that embody strongly held values and commitments while being relevant in multiple future scenarios when there are significant uncertainties. Likewise, a maturity model could address where programmes are now, where they could be, and the steps that would move them towards excellence. Stakeholders should take care to develop a phased implementation plan with an emphasis on early “quick wins” to build support for longer-term activities.

Looking ahead

Efforts thus far to educate Syrian refugee children in Jordan have demonstrated clear successes upon which future planning can be built, including: the GOJ's provision of access to Jordanian public formal schools; UNICEF's provision of technical expertise, coordination and mobilisation of funding; the implementation experience of partners; and significant donor funding and contribution to policy dialogue. In the next phase,

transitioning to longer-term strategies—including an increased Jordanian government capacity to provide education to Syrian children—will be needed as both communities adapt to a “new normal.” RAND's recommendations put forward multiple approaches to help ensure that refugee children have a safe, high-quality education as the crisis in Syria stretches on into its sixth year.

Image credits: Marie-Louise Henham

This summary describes work done by RAND documented in *Evaluation of the Emergency Education Response for Syrian Refugee Children and Host Communities in Jordan* by Shelly Culbertson, Tom Ling, Marie-Louise Henham, Jennie Corbett, Rita Karam, Paulina Pankowska, Catherine Saunders, Jacopo Bellasio and Ben Baruch, RR-1203-UN, 2016 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR1203). To view this summary online, visit www.rand.org/t/RB9931. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.. RAND® is a registered trademark.