

Non-formal education programming in Lebanon

How NRC's education in emergencies response and non-formal education programming facilitates enrolment and retention in the formal education system.



A refugee girl attending NRC non-formal education classes.

Location: Lebanon

Target population: out of school children between 5 and 14 years' old

Intervention type: non-formal education

1. Context

Now in its eighth year, the Syrian Crisis has had a significant impact on Lebanon. As of December 2017, estimates from UNHCR indicate that Lebanon now hosts 631,209 Syrian children and adolescents (between the ages 3 and 18). Access to education remains a dominating challenge for the refugee population.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has responded by consistently scaling up access to formal education for all vulnerable children in each scholastic year since the onset of the crisis. Following the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I) Strategy (2014-2016), MEHE developed in collaboration with the international community, a five-year plan RACE II (2017-2021) that aims to contribute to furthering the equitable right to a quality and relevant education for all children and youth between 3-18 years of age in Lebanon, by addressing policy, systems, quality service-delivery and demand bottlenecks at the national, subnational and community levels.

Considerable progress has been made since the start of the crisis, with one contributing factor being the opening of hundreds of 2nd shift classes for Syrian refugees throughout the country. According to RACEII 27,000 Syrian refugees were enrolled in public education in the 2012/13 scholastic year and this number has now increased to 220,841 Syrian children (MEHE-PMU, March 2018).

However, these efforts have not been sufficient to cover the education needs of all school-age refugee children in Lebanon, with approximately **55%** of school-aged refugee children still not attending any form of formal education. In addition, drop-out rates are quite high, although official data have not been shared, due to a wide variety of challenges around both access to education as well as quality of education. Older children face difficulties catching-up due to language barriers, and because they are often vulnerable to child labor, early marriage and domestic chores, and therefore generally discouraged. Furthermore, the capacity and the geographic spread of the Lebanese public schools is not able to absorb all refugee children and youth as the majority of these children still out of schools live in locations the hardest to reach where systemic interventions needs to be put in place in order to improve absorption capacity to accommodate for refugees' demand and to overcome economic barriers and language difficulties

2. Approach and implementation

- From the start of the Syrian crisis the public education system did not have the capacity to absorb the high number of Syrian refugees into their schools. As a result, and as a bridging period, several NGOs, amongst which NRC, provided immediate **emergency education support** through non-formal education programming. The curriculum was developed in Lebanon and had a strong focus on basic literacy and numeracy, psycho-social activities and referral, and recreational activities (Child Education Pack). The Child Education Pack was later adopted by other NRC countries in the region and beyond. The purpose of such programs was to provide children with a sense of normalcy, help them cope with trauma and ensure teaching and retention of basic educational skills.
- Over the years NRC developed more comprehensive and in-depth curricula based on the Lebanese curriculum in order to ensure enrolment into public education. Currently NRC's **non-formal education** modules are in line with the Non-Formal Education Framework included in the MEHE strategy "Reaching All Children through Education" and aim at facilitating enrolment and retention in the public formal education system.

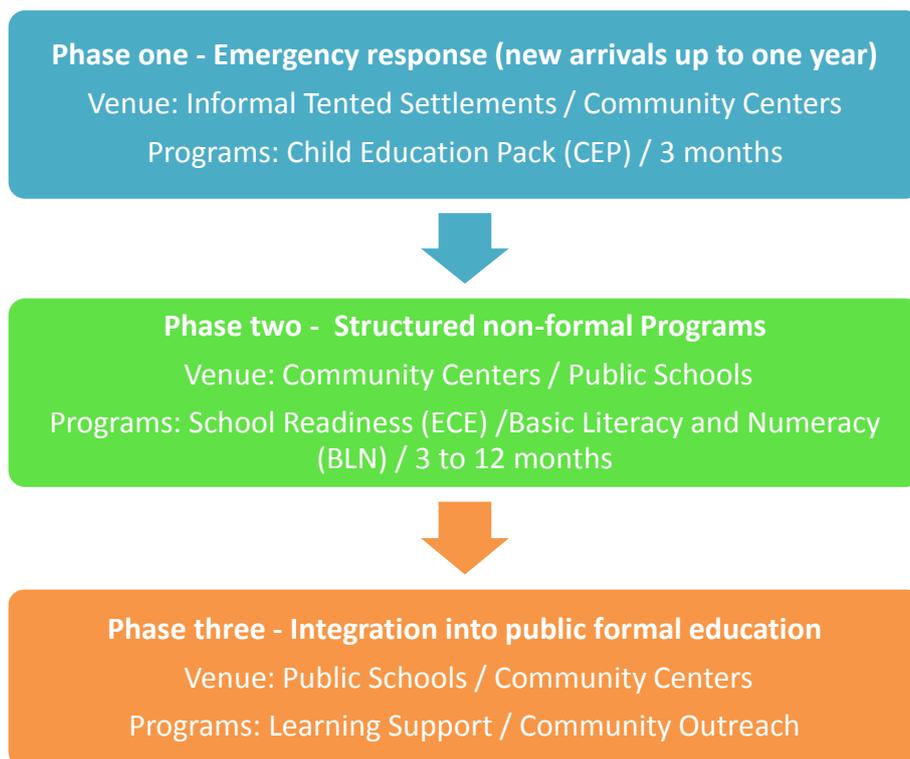
Modules included in the MEHE Non Formal Education Framework and implemented by NRC are

- i) Community Based Early Childhood Education for children or pre-school age;
- ii) Basic Literacy and Numeracy classes for out of school children; and
- iii) Retention / Homework support classes for children at risk of dropping out of the formal public system.

The Lebanese formal grade 1 curriculum and the MEHE implemented Accelerated Learning Program, both presume that children are able to read and write at the point of entry into the public school system. As this is often not the case, drop-out rates are high and retention is low. Therefore, despite gains in terms of capacity of and access to the public system, support to facilitate a smoother transition into formal education is still essential seventh years into the crisis. NRC's non-formal education programs and community outreach efforts aim to support MEHE by facilitating both enrolment and retention in the formal education system.

Over this period the NRC education response strategy followed a three-phased approach

NRC's three-phased approach to refugee education:



In all phases, NRC's holistic education approach includes:

- Facilitating the integration of **children** in school through a comprehensive approach that matches learning and academic skills with psycho-social and recreational support and life skills training;
- Involving **parents** and the wider community through awareness/ information sessions aimed at increased engagement of parents in the learning and development of their children at school. Each learning center has a democratically elected Parent Community Group responsible for creating a conducive learning environment in and around the center. Parent Community Groups are encouraged to initiate community initiatives, such as painting a playground or renovating community gardens in cooperation and to the benefit of the Lebanese host-community;
- Supporting **teachers** and school personnel in adopting child-centered and inclusive approaches inside the classroom. NRC recruits a mix of Lebanese and Syrian teachers who are trained in basic psycho-social support, multi-level teaching and positive discipline, using child centered teaching methodologies. NRC involves teachers in the development of curricula and provides them with feedback through structured lesson observations and feedback / coaching on the job;
- Creating a safe and conducive **learning environment** (school rehabilitations, repairs of learning spaces, distribution of age appropriate teaching and learning materials).

At the beginning of the crisis NRC could implement non-formal (emergency) education activities inside public schools by directly liaising with either municipalities or school directors themselves. With the Ministry centralizing and standardizing NFE programming, access to public schools is now more limited and granted only at central level. NRC therefore implements both their School Readiness and Basic Literacy and Numeracy programs inside their own learning centers, but with approval of central MEHE. The Learning Support program of NRC (remedial) targets public second shift schools, as they specifically cater for Syrian refugee children. As these specific schools are running classes in both the morning and afternoon, they do not have the capacity to provide additional seats for Learning Support classes. As a result, NRC only implements Learning Support inside the targeted schools themselves during the summer break. Head teachers refer children at risk of dropping out due to poor performance to NRC's Learning Support classes.

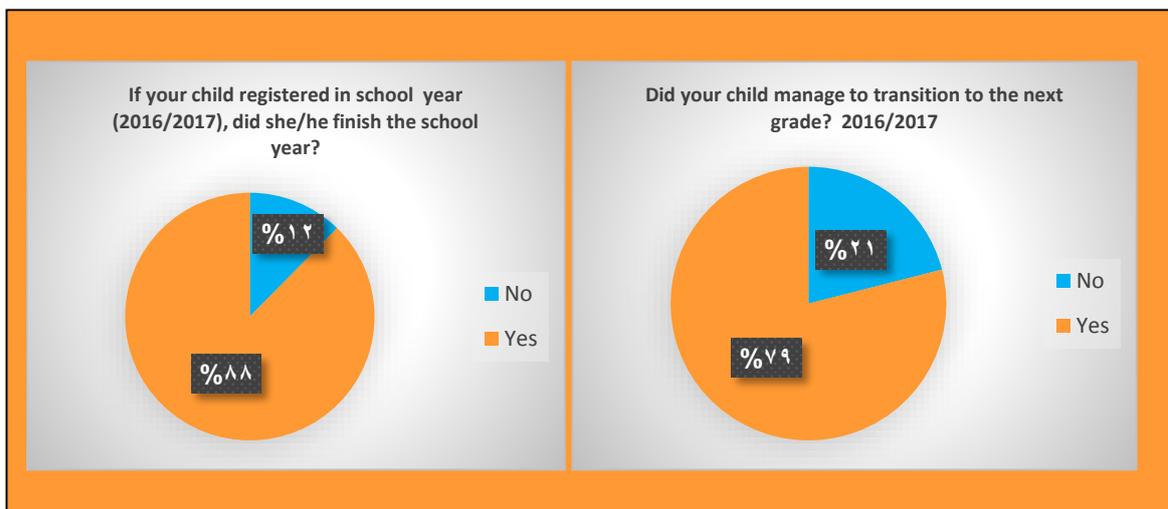
Monitoring of the program is conducted at different levels:

- Child-level Excel based database, including data on each child enrolled in NRC programs (monitoring attendance, retention and completion);
- Pre- and post-tests for non-formal education programs, measuring physical, emotional and cognitive development of children;
- Lesson observations to ensure quality of teaching and to monitor efficiency and relevance of teacher training packages;
- Spot-checks to ensure compliance with donor agreements, conducted by Monitoring & Evaluation staff in order to prevent bias;
- NRC global online database, for tracking monthly progress on output and outcome level indicators versus targets.

3. Key findings

- From 2013 to 2017 NRC managed to enrol a total of 50,712 refugee and host community **children** in their non-formal education programs (on average 10,000 children per year). Over the years the program has adapted to the context by moving from purely emergency education implemented in a non-formal setting, to an approach aimed at facilitating enrolment into the Lebanese formal education system.

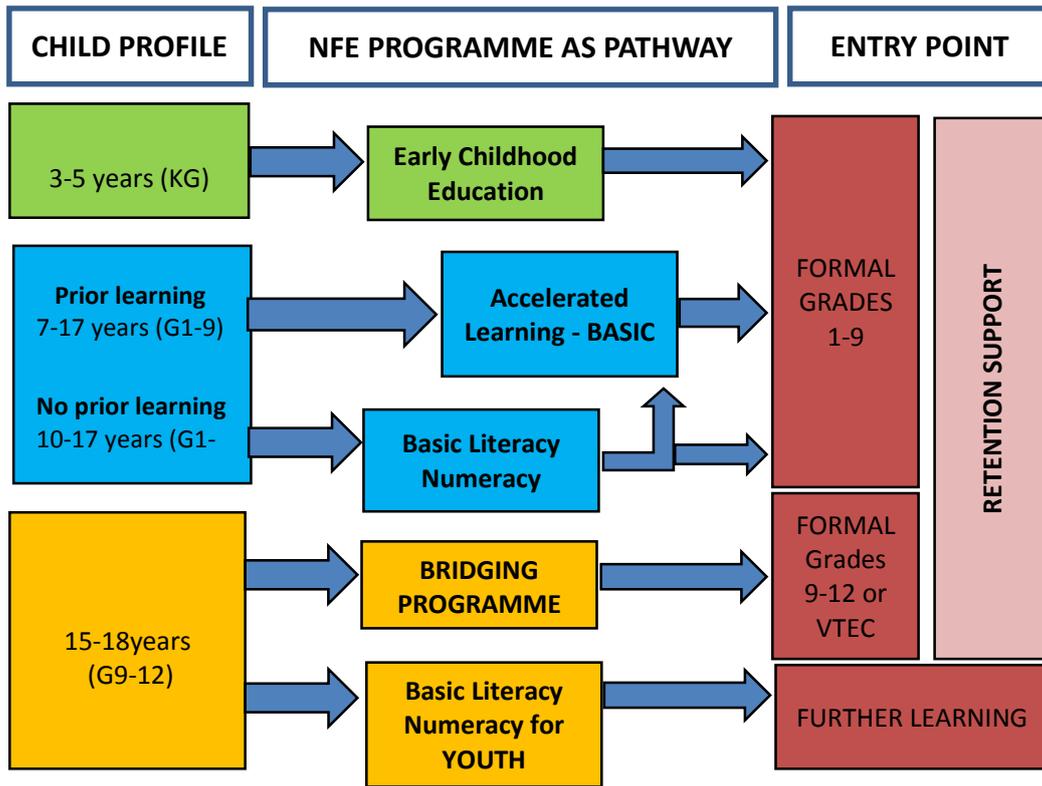
NRC conducted a phone-survey of 1,200 beneficiaries enrolled in NRC NFE classes in 2015/16, to determine whether they managed to enroll, finish the school year and transition to the next grade in the 2016/17 school year. Data shows that approximately 88% of the NRC students who enrolled in formal education managed to complete the year, while approximately 79% managed to also transition to the next grade level. These percentages are considerably higher for those children who also attend NRC Learning Support classes, where 95% of the children manage to finish the year and 85% manage to transition into the next year. These percentages shows the added value of NRCs non-formal education activities in facilitating both access and retention in the formal education system.



- Every refugee child is different! Refugee children have diverse educational backgrounds, diverse needs and diverse dreams which change over time. Hence the need for a diverse education offer flexible enough to adjust to changing realities, targeting different age groups at different levels, and offering both education, recreation as well as psycho-social support.
- Good communication and maximum transparency towards authorities, host communities and refugee children and their parents, in combination with their participation in development, implementation and monitoring of education programs, creates an ideal environment for effective education programming.
- Long-term funding agreements with more than one donor ensures flexibility and sustainability and allows to focus on quality implementation rather than on reaching targets.
- A multi-year governmental strategy requires stable and secured funding in order to systematically address barriers to education, including fees, transportation support and quality of the programme. (In 2017 70% of the funds requested under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan have been secured and receive with a gap of 110 m USD)

Annex 1

Non Formal Education Framework and pathways into formal education



Reaching All Children with Education: RACE II (2017-2021)
 Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Lebanon