

Iraq Spotlight

In this Spotlight, the main focus is on internally displaced children and Syrian refugee children.

Introduction

The Republic of Iraq is an upper-middle income country with a population of 36 million¹ and a per-capita GDP of USD \$15,300.² However, by 2012, nearly 20% of its population was living below the poverty line.³ Demographically, Iraq is a very young country, with 40% of the population aged between 0-14 years, and 19% between 15-24 years.⁴

Iraq is divided in two main regions and has two governments: the Central Government of Iraq, with capital in Bagdad, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with capital in Erbil. The Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) is an autonomous region, governed by the KRG, with its own prevailing language and ethnicity. Throughout the country, Arabs constitute between 75%-80% of the population and Kurdish represent 15%-20%.⁵ The official languages are Arabic and Kurdish.⁶

The KRI first gained autonomous status in a 1970 agreement and its status was re-confirmed as an autonomous entity with the Federal Iraqi Government in 2005. Tensions between Iraqi Kurdistan and the Central Iraqi Government increased through 2011-2012 on issues related to power sharing, oil production, and territorial control. As of 2014, Iraqi Kurdistan is in dispute with the Central Iraqi Government, and is functioning largely outside Baghdad's control and increasingly debating the issue of independence.

Iraq is currently facing a refugee influx crisis caused by the Syrian conflict and since late 2013 its own complex and growing displacement crisis.⁷ On August 2014, the United Nations declared Iraq a L3 emergency (the most severe category) under the global humanitarian system's classification. It is one of the four L3 emergencies in the world. Humanitarian and protection needs rose dramatically in 2014 and early 2015, as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) advanced across swathes of territory. Government forces, supported by an international coalition, have all engaged in military operations aimed at dislodging ISIL.

The displacement crisis has caused about 3.2 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) across the country. By the end of July 2015, the governorates hosting the majority of the IDP caseload were Anbar, Baghdad, Dahuk, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Ninewa.⁸ Displaced persons are currently living in more than 3,000 locations throughout the country: more than 90% are living outside of camps, hosted by communities who have done their best to protect and provide for them.⁹

¹ 2014 estimate, Iraq Central Statistical Organization

² 2014 estimate, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

³ Important disparities exist among the country as the poverty level line exceeds 40\$ in some governorates. UNICEF (2014), Iraq Country Report on Out-of-School-Children, Report Summary, page 1

⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁷ Since 2006, Iraq hosts approx. 4,160,864 (resulting from previous ethno-sectarian violence), which includes the 3.2 IDPs recently displaced as from late 2013.

⁸ International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Round XXIV Report, July, quoted in REACH (October 2015), [Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment of IDPs outside camps](#). Anbar is hosting 18%, Baghdad 17%, Dahuk 13%, Kirkuk 13%, Erbil 9%, and Ninewa 6%

⁹ OCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Response Plan 2015, June 2015

OCHA estimated that by 2016, IDPs will reach 3.8 million, over 13 million people will be affected by the conflict and that more than 11 million will be in need of humanitarian assistance, including about 5.3 million children.¹⁰

As the conflict shows little sign of abating any time soon, most IDPs are unable to safely return home and are facing either protracted displacement in their current location or multiple displacement to safer areas.¹¹ Despite the security concerns, about 440,000 people have returned to their areas of origin by November 2015.¹² This is a clear indicator that support to returning populations will become a major component of the 2016 humanitarian response.¹³

Additionally, as a result of the Syrian conflict, Iraq hosts an estimate of 245,000 Syrian refugees,¹⁴ of whom nearly 42% are children. Most of them, about 97%, are living in the KRI, from which 38% live in camp settings¹⁵ and the rest in host communities. The KRI is also hosting 30% of the total IDP population, which means the region is hosting approximately one million IDPs in addition to nearly 250,000 refugees from Syria.

The Government of Iraq has provided mass relief in the form of cash grants, health and education support, shelter and food but funding is not enough. For the first time in decades, the Government is faced with a massive fiscal gap resulting from the slump in oil prices and the high costs of the ISIL counterinsurgency.¹⁶

While there is a need for emphasis on immediate life-saving assistance such as food assistance and winterization, it should not obscure the need to ensure that children continue to receive education. Children are the hardest-hit victims of the conflict, impacted by violence and deprivations, exposed to abuse, suffering from inadequate health care and at risk of poor nutrition. Education is key for children's future, their protection, psychosocial wellbeing and their health.

Pressure on the education system includes overcrowded schools in areas with high population density, shortages of qualified teachers, lack of financial resources to pay teacher salaries and buy school materials, limited financial resources faced by households to pay children's education materials and cover transportation costs, concerns about the declining quality of education, difference of language and curriculum in different parts of Iraq, lack of documentation/certification of completed studies and violence against children in schools, among others. Consequently, there is an urgent need to address barriers hindering children's access to quality education in Iraq.

Unless education of the current school population is addressed, Iraq faces the risk of losing an entire generation of children. This will have a profoundly negative impact on Iraq's future, its intellectual capital, and potentially keep the country caught in a cycle of instability and conflict. Save the Children's national campaign will focus on ensuring sustained quality education services for children living in conflict-affected areas of Iraq. In this spotlight, the focus will be both children refugees from Syria and IDP children.

¹⁰ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

¹¹ REACH (October 2015), [Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment of IDPs outside camps](#).

¹² International Organization for Migration, [Iraq Mission](#), November 5, 2015

¹³ In Iraq, three types of return have been observed: voluntary, spontaneous return to places of origin; voluntary return to places of origin organized by the government; and involuntary returns which are either forced or coerced by the security forces, armed groups, and/or government.

¹⁴ 244,765 by November 15, UNHCR

¹⁵ UNHCR: General Overview: Refugee Stats & Locations, as for September 2015

¹⁶ OCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Response Plan 2015, June 2015

Overview of the exclusion

Scale of the education crisis

Iraq has approximately 10 million school-aged children, from which two million are out of school.¹⁷ The current crisis in Iraq has affected over three million school-age children,¹⁸ denying their right to access quality education. This includes over one million displaced children and 1.1 million children in host communities affected by the influx of displaced populations and conflict. It also includes 136,000 children who have recently returned to their homes after displacement or in areas newly liberated from conflict, and a further 897,000 children in areas not under government control.¹⁹ Moreover, it includes nearly 45,000 school-aged children who are refugees from Syria.²⁰

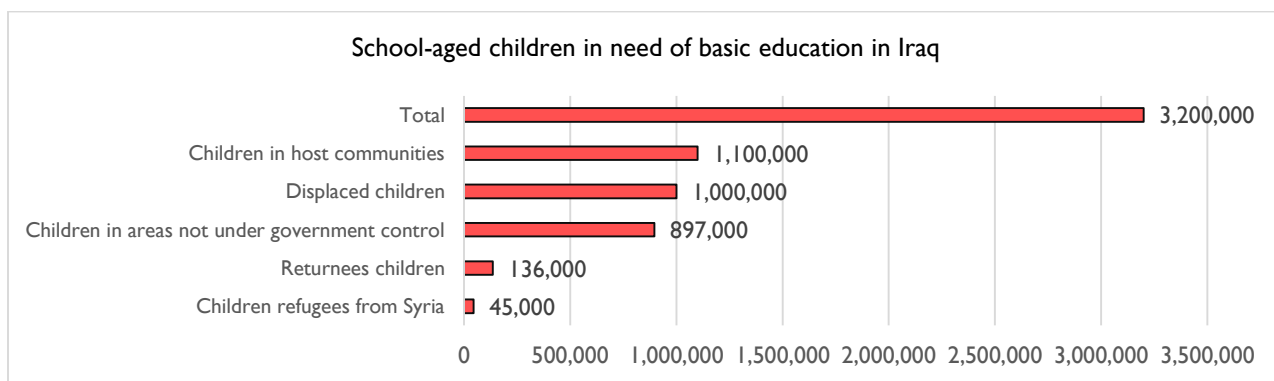


Figure 1 – Almost 3.2 million school-aged children are in need of basic education in Iraq. Source: Iraq 2015 Humanitarian Needs Overview (draft document) and 3RP – Iraq Monthly Update – October 2015

Syrian refugees

Iraq currently hosts approximately 245,000 Syrian refugees, 42% of whom are estimated to be under 18 years old.²¹ There are 44,702 school-aged children between the ages of 6-14 years and on average, only 68% are enrolled in basic education.²²

There are also 13,157 Syrian refugees between 15-17 years old. Opportunities for this age-group are limited to basic primary education, with only a few resources available for secondary or higher education despite high demand, particularly for secondary education. There is a significant decrease of school enrolment for children above 14 years old. In camps, on average only one in five children aged 15-17 are enrolled in formal secondary education, while in host communities the enrolment rate is zero.²³

¹⁷ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document), page 5

¹⁸ Education – Affected Population. OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

¹⁹ Education – Affected Population. OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

²⁰ 3RP – [Iraq Monthly Update Education Sector – October 2015](#). School-aged children refers to children aged 6-14. There are approx. 60,000 Syrian children out of school in Iraq (aged 6-17).

²¹ UNHCR – Iraq data, November 15, 2015

²² 3RP – Iraq Monthly Update – October 2015. There are also 13,157 children between 15-17 years according to the Education Cluster statistics as per November 8, 2015.

²³ While the average enrolment rate is 19%, this number varies substantially. In Domiz I and Gawilan camps, the enrolment rates are 40% and 36%, respectively. As per the other camps, the enrollment rate is zero. Education Cluster Iraq, Refugee Enrolment Rates as per November 8, 2015.

Around 38% of the Syrian refugees live in camps, and the enrolment rate is relatively high at 74%²⁴ but attendance in primary school varies from 95% in Basirma (Erbil) to 65% in Arbat (Suliymaniah) and Al-Obaidi (Anbar). In absolute terms, Domiz 1&2 have the most children attending primary schools in camps, but also the largest number of children not attending.²⁵

In host communities only 62% of school-aged children are enrolled in formal basic education.²⁶ This is particularly worrying because nearly two thirds of the refugee population lives outside camps.

Attendance rates were comparatively lower for boys than girls, with 42% of all school-aged males attending school in comparison to 51% of all school-aged girls. Dropout rates are very high for males 15-17 years of age, and their attendance rate is estimated at 10%, which is the lowest attendance rates of any demographic group.²⁷

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are neglected in some schools. The proportion of Syrian refugee children with disabilities attending schools in KRI is 15% (6% of Syrian refugee children have some form of disability).²⁸

IDP children

In 2013 – before the start of the IDP crisis – about 22% of children in Iraq aged 5-14 were out of school. In the KRI the situation was better, with only one out of ten children not enrolled in formal education.²⁹ Nearly two years since the start of the displacement crisis, attendance in formal education of IDPs not living in camps is extremely low compared to that of their host communities and to attendance rates prior to displacement across Iraq, particularly in the central and southern governorates.³⁰ A big drop in formal school attendance amongst school-aged IDP children since displacement has also been identified in the KRI, especially amongst children aged 12-15.³¹

On September 2014, the displacement of over 1.1 million people has left 340,000 school aged children requiring additional learning support.³² The number of children requiring access to education across Iraq has increased significantly in the past year, especially in non-camps setting in Bagdad, Anbar, Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din.

By July 2015, on average, only 32% of displaced children (both in camps and non-camps settings) had access to any form of education in Iraq, leaving over 600,000 displaced children missing an entire year of schooling.³³ The 2016 Iraq Humanitarian Needs Overview estimates that about one million

²⁴ 3RP – Iraq Monthly Update – October 2015 (14 Nov raw data, which differs from the one in the dashboard) – waiting for the final version to revise the figures

²⁵ In Domiz 1&2 there were 7,796 school-aged children enrolled in formal education and 1,500 not enrolled. 3RP – Iraq Monthly Update – October 2015

²⁶ 3RP – Iraq Monthly Update – October 2015 (14 Nov raw data). The April Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) conducted by REACH indicates that the rate is 46% (as opposed to 62%). The figures below are based on the MSNA aforementioned.

²⁷ REACH (2015) [Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Host Communities](#).

²⁸ UNICEF 2013, 11, 18. In World Bank (2015:40)

²⁹ In Iraq-Centre, this percentage stands for 20.3% and in the KRI for 10.3% - UNICEF (2014), Iraq Country Report on Out-of-School-Children, Summary, page 2

³⁰ In 2007, 91.8% of age-school children were enrolled in school in Iraq (World Bank, latest data available)

³¹ REACH (October 2015), [Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment of Internally Displaced Persons Outside Camps](#), page 15. The assessment was conducted in all governorates except Anbar, Salah Al-Din, Bagdad and Kirkuk

³² OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

³³ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

IDP children would be in need of formal education assistance.³⁴ Future displacements will further stretch the education system and push children at-risk of leaving school.

A recent assessment shows that only one in five of eligible IDP school-aged children living in host communities reportedly attend formal education,³⁵ showing deteriorating conditions compared to the pre-IDP crisis figures. This figure is concerning, given the fact that the large majority of IDPs live in host communities. In camps, about 45% of school-aged children have access to education.³⁶

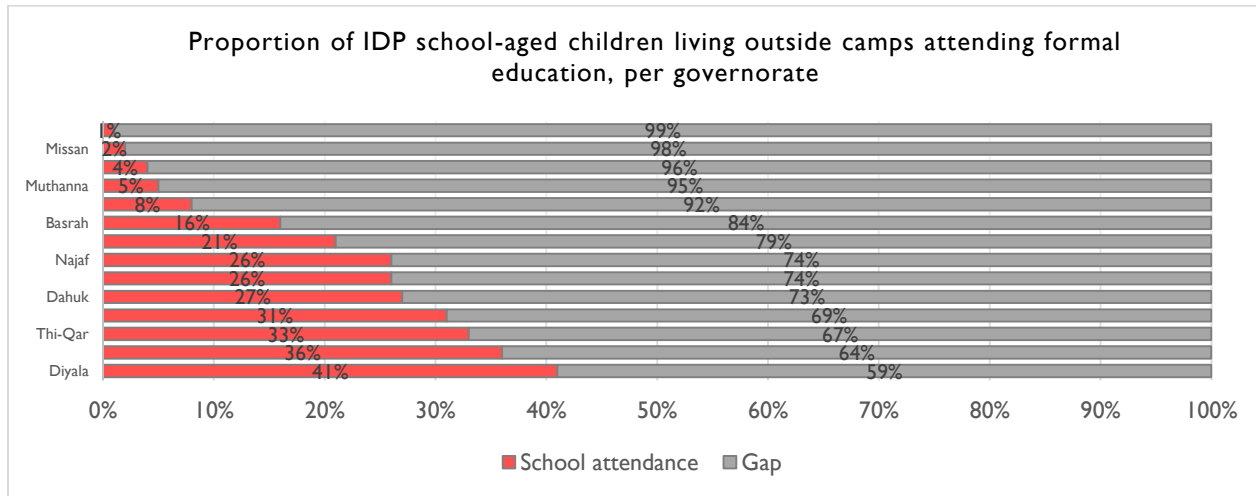


Figure 2 – Total proportion of all school-aged children attending formal education, per governorate. Source: REACH (October 2015), MCNA for IDPs outside Camps in Iraq

Host communities in KRI

There are approximately 1.1 million children (aged 4-17) living in host communities directly affected by the conflict. The education sector, with school capacity shortages and a lack of qualified teachers (even before the crisis), has been stretched to breaking point. The KRI, which hosts around one third of the total IDP population, and most of the refugees from Syria, has been particularly impacted. Apart from host capacities being overwhelmed by demand for education, physical access is restricted by IDPs sheltering in schools across Iraq, with the highest proportion in Anbar and Salah Al-Din.³⁷

Since August 2014, the conflict has resulted in destruction or damage, as well as occupation, of schools. At the height of the flood of displacement, over 650 schools were hosting displaced families.³⁸ The remaining school facilities available are overcrowded, and under-staffed, significantly reducing the quality of education available to children.

With the growing IDP needs, nearly 60% of children are attending double-shifted schools, and some schools even have to operate three shifts. Consequently, the time spent in each shift is reduced, the quality of education has lowered, and the teacher to pupil ratio has increased.³⁹ This in turn may

³⁴ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

³⁵ REACH (October 2015), [Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment of Internally Displaced Persons Outside Camps](#). The assessment was conducted in all governorates except Anbar, Salah Al-Din, Bagdad and Kirkuk

³⁶ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document), page 7

³⁷ OCHA (July 2015) https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_iraq_humanitarian_needs_overview_0.pdf

³⁸ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

³⁹ Pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in primary school divided by the number of primary school teachers. By 2007 (latest data available), the pupil-teacher ratio was 17.

contribute to an increase in dropout rates in the medium term, if the supply of infrastructure and qualified teachers is not increased.

1.1.Barriers to Syrian and IDPs children’s education in Iraq

The KRG is responsible for education of host communities and Syrian refugees in KRI, and the Gol is responsible for the education of IDPs, including in KRI. Annually, the Iraqi Government covered the costs for all education material for the KRI such as books and stationary. However in 2013, all support by the Iraqi central government to the KRI had been terminated due to the cut of relations between the two government entities.

Overview of the main barriers faced by Syrian refugees and IDPs to access to formal basic education
 These barriers are divided in the Government capacity and needs sides. The first ones refer to the educational system itself, and the second ones to households and children’s constraints.

Government Capacity	Social Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of schooling space – not enough schools either because of overcrowding or because schools are being used as shelter • Resource gaps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualified teachers • lack of school materials • lack of cultural/language appropriate materials and teachers, especially Arab speaking teachers • Financial barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of resources to pay teacher salaries • Administrative barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complex administrative procedures for school enrollment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived low curriculum quality • Language barriers for Syrian refugees and IDPs in the KRI • Financial barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households’ insufficient resources to afford school material, clothing and transportation • Lack of family resources/assets that leads to children leaving school for work • Lack of information needed to register and enroll children in schools. • Protection/security concerns with girls above 14 related to attending school. Perceived insecurity and harassment while going to and from school. • Boys above 12 years old engaged in labour • Movement and frequent displacement (IDPs only) • Effects of displacement • Complex administrative procedures for school enrolment and lack of available information

Table 1 – Main barriers faced in Iraq to access formal basic education for both Syrian refugees and IDPs

1.1.1. Description of each barrier

Language barriers

Syrian Refugees: The language barrier is one of the main reasons why Syrian refugee children do not enroll in school. Most of the schools in the KRI teach in the Kurdish language and although some Syrian children speak Kurdish, they are often unable to write and read in this language because while living in Syria they were receiving education in Arabic from the Damascus Ministry of Education (MOE) curriculum. As an alternative to Kurdish teaching schools, Syrian children and their families will look for Arabic ones but they seem to be limited⁴⁰ and far away from the low-rent accommodation areas where Syrian refugees live.⁴¹

IDPs: Language differences are also a constraint as one third of IDP children are located in KRI, and they are generally Arabic speakers. Although displaced children are required to enroll in schools specifically established by the federal government's Ministry of Education, there are not enough schools that can teach IDP children in Arabic language.

Financial barriers/financial constraints

Families cannot afford to send their children to school because of economic factors, even when education is free or highly subsidized. Households are unable to afford costs for learning materials and transportation to and from school.

Syrian Refugees: In an assessment conducted by UNICEF, 77% of refugee children from Syria reported that they were working to support their families.⁴²

IDPs: In host communities, over a third of families assessed reported lack of financial resources to cover the costs associated with education to be the main barrier for accessing education across most of the governorates

Children involved in labour: This is one of the reasons for which boys from 12-17 are not attending education.⁴³ From the 15-17 male cohort, only 10% is enrolled in formal education. A third of males aged 12-17 were reported as engaged in income-generating activities in Dahuk, while 42% were working in Sulaymaniyah city district.⁴⁴

Although the exponential decline in attendance is likely attributable to the high rate of child labour, the rate at which it is reported still fails to account for the full rate of non-attendance. While there are indirect cost of education, such as clothing, transport and educational material, there is also an opportunity costs of schooling (money that could have been earned if the child was not at school), which increases when children and families perceive that they are not getting a quality education and when there is a need to generate an additional income.⁴⁵

Low quality of learning/curriculum and different curriculum

Many factors contribute to a low quality of education, ranging from lack of qualified teachers, language barriers, reduction of time spent in school due to learning in shifts, and overcrowded classrooms. High pupil to teacher ratios exist in schools which are often operating in two or three

⁴⁰ By May 2015, there were only 65 Arabic speaking schools across the KRI, demand far outstrips supply

⁴¹ World Bank (2015), The Kurdistan Region or Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS, page. 40, Available online [here](#)

⁴² UNICEF, Assessment of the Situation of Child Labour among Syrian Refugee Children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq 2014, page 25

⁴³ In Iraq, the minimum legal age of employment is 15 with the minimum age for hazardous work being 18.

⁴⁴ REACH (April 2015) [Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Host Communities](#). Page 31

⁴⁵ While there is a correlation between child labour and school drop-out, it is not possible to determine causation, this means that we cannot tell with certainty if school drop-out is caused because children need to work for supporting their families or if child labour follows school drop-out due to language barriers, low quality of curriculum, and overcrowded classroom.

shifts per day. In camps in Dahuk Governorate, class sizes range from 35 to 60 or more students.⁴⁶ This significantly reduces the amount of time children have to learn.

Syrian Refugees: Low curriculum quality was reported for Syrian refugee children in host communities as one of the main reasons for not attending education. For instance, more than one third of girls above 12 reported this variable as the top reason. Although the Central Government of Iraq (GoI) curriculum is different than the Syrian one, many Syrians insist on being taught using the GoI Arabic curriculum as they were taught on the Syrian based curriculum prior to displacement and fear that if taught on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) curriculum, their certificates will not be considered official if they return to Syria.

IDPs: Children in host communities must be taught under the KRG Ministry of Education (MOE) yet official examination is by the Iraq Central MOE which offers some different subjects that are not necessarily covered in KRG MOE's curricula.

Box 1. Proportion of school-aged Syrian refugee children by top three reported reasons for school non-attendance

While financial barriers, especially the indirect costs related to schooling, are one of the main obstacles that Syrian refugee children in host communities face to be able to attend education, other important reasons for not attending are language differences, perception of low curriculum quality, and children engaged in labour.

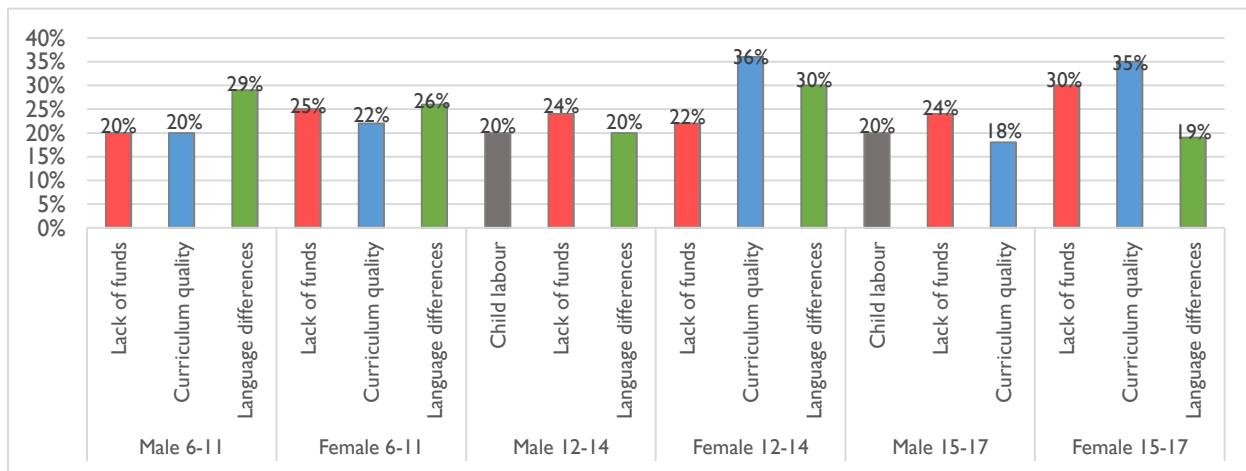


Figure 3 – Proportion (%) of school-aged refugee children from Syria by top three reported reasons for non-attendance of formal primary education in host communities. Source: REACH (April 2015), MCNA for Syrian Refugees in host communities in Iraq

Lack of school infrastructure and school materials

There is insufficient capacity to host children in the existing school facilities, including a shortage of schools, educational materials (in some cases including books and desks), equipment, and trained teachers to provide quality learning. The education system in host communities is overstretched and despite the efforts to accommodate children in the existing schools and the establishment of 480

⁴⁶ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document), page 35

additional schools to provide education for displaced children,⁴⁷ there is simply not enough infrastructure to meet the new demand.

Some schools are not available for teaching or learning activities due to the ongoing conflict or because they are being used, or were used, as shelters. Schools once occupied by displaced families, or destroyed by conflict, require repair and rehabilitation, and clearing of unexploded ordinance to make them safe places for learning.⁴⁸ In South and Central Iraq, 5,351 school buildings, from a total of 23,139, cannot be used during the 2015-16 academic year because of ongoing conflict.⁴⁹ By October 2015, over 250 school sites in Iraq were hosting 37,294 IDPs, with the highest proportion in Anbar and Salah Al-Din governorates.⁵⁰

Insufficient teachers and lack of resources to cover IDP teachers' salaries

There are not enough Arabic schools in the KRI nor secondary level schools and teachers. Additionally, there is a large gap of qualified teachers across Iraq, including those trained on psychosocial support or special needs.

Syrian Refugees: Not all refugee teachers are on the payroll and there is a shortage of funding for them, which has contributed to the shortage of teachers. The KRG MOE paid refugee teacher salaries for the 2014-2015 academic year, however for the 2015-2016 year, the KRG has asked partners to help provide teacher incentives. UNICEF and UNESCO along with other INGOs agreed to provide all refugee teachers inside and outside of camps with \$250, half of what they were paid by KRG.

IDPs: Teachers' salaries are not consistently being paid. Currently, 13,466 teachers and administrative staff registered by the Central Ministry of Education are displaced to the KRI, yet many are located too far from the schools to which they are assigned and unable to secure transportation to work, or they have found other employment.⁵¹

Effects of displacement

Children are affected psychologically by witnessing and experiencing the violent conflicts in their countries – both the Syria and Iraq crises are characterized by extreme levels of violence, and children have borne the brunt of the impact. Children lack psychosocial support, a protective environment where life and cognitive skills are developed, and a return to a state of normalcy after exposure to trauma.⁵² In addition, due to the different ethnic backgrounds of host communities, IDPs and Syrian Refugees, social tensions exist and exacerbate the impact on the community as a whole. This raises a huge need for social cohesion activities and peace education interventions.

Complex administrative procedures for school enrolment and lack of available information

This includes prerequisites in terms of documentation, identification papers or certificates that Syrian children and IDPs need to provide when enrolling for education. Moreover, many children do not find easy to enroll back after they dropped out in Syria as there is a lack of available information needed to register and enroll children in schools.

⁴⁷ Education Cluster, Humanitarian bulletin, 18 Nov 2015

⁴⁸ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document)

⁴⁹ Education Cluster, Humanitarian bulletin, 18 Nov 2015

⁵⁰ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, October 2015, in OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document), page 34

⁵¹ OCHA, Iraq HNO 2016 (draft document), page 34

⁵² UNICEF (2015), MENA Out of School Children Initiative Fact sheets (in https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_iraq_humanitarian_needs_overview_0.pdf)

Lacking any academic certification or documents is a major barrier for school enrollment for both refugee and IDP children. Schools have been refusing to enroll students who are unable to provide the appropriate documentations from their past schooling, and given the context of displacement and in some cases multiple displacements, academic documents were not prioritized by most families.

Safety concerns with girls above 14

In a recent Save the Children report, based on focus group discussions with youth, both refugee and IDP girls in and out camps expressed feelings of isolation, both physical and social. Many spoke of their parents not letting them attend school or even leave their tent/house due to concerns with their safety. Girls in both camps and host communities experience verbal and physical abuse, which has caused parents to prohibit them from leaving their homes and attending schools.⁵³

Policy analysis

Box 2. Save the Children's Education Response

Save the Children is helping ensure that IDP and refugee children get access to quality education by directly implementing programs that give children opportunities to learn, develop and grow, and by close interagency coordination and capacity building of INGOs, local NGOs, the government and communities.

Programs focus on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) for children ages 3-5, Non-Formal Education (NFE), Catch-Up Classes as well as constructing additional learning spaces to strengthen the capacity of the existing education system. Mother Toddler classes provide mothers and their 0-2 year olds with informative sessions on the social, physical, intellectual and emotional development of their children. As part of an integrated program approach, Save the Children education activities are held within the Child and Youth Friendly Spaces.

An integral part of these programs is advocacy, where Save the Children works closely with the Ministry of Education and Co-Leads the Education Cluster in Iraq to address challenges facing children's access to education.

The current challenges faced by the education systems in the KRI and in the rest of Iraq are prolonging the time that children spend out of school and increasing the risks that currently enrolled children drop out as the quality is decreasing. Beyond urgently addressing barriers related to infrastructure, it is important to ensure that teachers are deployed and paid, language barriers addressed, high quality education is provided, textbooks and school material are available, and that safety and security of children is ensured.

It's also very important to take the issue of returnees seriously at the policy level, as families who are returning to Salah Al-Din, Diyala and Ninewa need the support of the international community and the Government of Iraq to ensure that their immediate needs are met and that their children have access to safe learning environments through quick school rehabilitations and the provision of textbooks and school materials.

⁵³ Save the Children (2015), Uncertain Futures (publication pending)

Financial constraints are a significant barrier to both the education system and households. More funding is required to address the needs of the Syrian refugee children, displaced children and host communities. To be able to improve school facilities, pay teachers' salaries and educational materials, an urgent need exists to provide additional funds to the KRG education sector to cope with the impact of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Basic and secondary education in KRI is free; however, the current level of education spending in the KRI is rather modest, largely spent on teacher salaries, textbook, and school equipment. With the pre-crisis delays in paying teacher salaries and procuring school supplies, KRG is not in a position to bear alone the financial costs of the Syria refugee crisis and IDP influx, including those for the education sector.⁵⁴

By the end of November 2015, the revised Humanitarian Response Plan was 48% funded.⁵⁵ With only 15% funded, or 10.1 million USD received,⁵⁶ the education sector is far from being able to reach the children most in need. The Iraq component of the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience plan is just 37% funded.⁵⁷

KRG's policies

With the support of the Education Cluster – co-led by Save the Children, the KRG Ministry of Education has developed an action plan that includes recommendations for the short to medium term. This ensures that beyond infrastructure needs, all necessary conditions are provided to have qualified teachers deployed and paid, textbooks and other school materials provided, language barriers addressed by identifying Arabic-speaking school teachers among Syrian refugees and IDPs, psychological and health services are provided, and security and safety of children is ensured.

The KRG has established a second shift, and even a third one, in some schools for Syrian refugees, with the associated costs, including teachers' salaries, being provided by the Ministry of Finance.

KRG has also built schools for the refugees, although some of them have not opened because no funds are available to cover teachers' salaries and to pay for textbooks and school supplies.

The KRG authorities, together with the donor community, are looking for alternative options to host refugees and IDPs other than schools used as shelters, so that education facilities can be rehabilitated and used for its main purpose.⁵⁸

Government of Iraq's policies

To address IDPs language barriers and difference in curriculum in the KRI, displaced children are required to enroll in schools specifically established by the federal government's Ministry of Education. Arabic-speaking teachers and school instructors are being identified and trained, including

⁵⁴ World Bank (2015), The Kurdistan Region or Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS, page. 40, Available online [here](#)

⁵⁵ The revised HRP refers to the needs from July to December 2015. For the whole 2015 HRP 62% has been covered. OCHA Financial Tracking Service as per 16 November 2015

⁵⁶ OCHA Financial Tracking Service, Iraq 2015, HRP, Requirements and Funding per Cluster, as per 26 November 2015

⁵⁷ Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, UNHCR Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal, Funding Requirements as per November 23, 2015.

⁵⁸ World Bank (2015), The Kurdistan Region or Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS, page. 40, Available online [here](#)

those among the IDPs, and discussions are underway for school textbooks in Arabic to be supplied from the federal education ministry in Baghdad.⁵⁹

Beyond addressing language barriers and improving the quality of the curriculum, there are other issues that should be addressed to boost the demand, such as ensuring that all Syrian refugee and IDPs' households have information available to register and enroll their children in schools.

Other issues

A lack of interest from individuals and households comes to the forefront of the reasons of school dropout, both at the primary education level (49%) and at secondary level (60%) as a result of declining economic returns on investment in education, as well as the decline of the financial return of school certificates in an environment marked by rising unemployment among young people.⁶⁰ Consequently, it is important to raise awareness among households and communities, especially in rural, poor and remote areas, of the necessity and importance of education for both girls and boys.

Policy recommendations

Children, their families and communities regularly prioritize education regardless of their circumstances.⁶¹ Education is one of the priority areas in providing for Syrian refugee and IDP children's most immediate needs. If schools are safe places to learn and play they can provide children with the space they need to access psychological support and begin to regain a sense of normality and heal from trauma. Children in schools are significantly less vulnerable to the increased risks that go hand-in hand with instability, including violence, sexual exploitation, early marriage, recruitment into armed forces or armed groups, and child labour.

The most immediate needs are focused on infrastructures, including school and classroom renovation and expansion, and construction of temporary classrooms and learning spaces within camps, as well as addressing financial barriers to be able to supply schools with appropriate learning materials and to cover teachers' salaries. However, if we aim at being truly accountable to the people most affected by crisis, then we need to ensure quality education is at the centre of any response plans. In general, recommendations to address the barriers preventing IDPs and Syrian children from accessing to formal basic education includes:

- Funding solutions must be found, in the absence of the approved budget at Baghdad level, to ensure that teachers' salaries are paid and on time, and to ensure the procurement of supplies of school materials, including enough books and desks.
- Provision of adequate Arabic language schooling in KRI is essential for Arabic speaking children so that they can understand the language of instruction and build their confidence in the school environment. This includes allowing for more Arabic language lessons to take place in KRI schools, increasing space in these schools or encouraging further construction.
- Increasing the number of school infrastructures available is urgently needed to accommodate more children. This includes renovation and rehabilitation of schools following IDPs'

⁵⁹ World Bank (2015), The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS, page. 40, Available online [here](#)

⁶⁰ UNICEF (2014), Iraq Country Report on Out-of-School-Children, Summary, page 6

⁶¹ Save the Children 2015. [What do Children Want in times of Emergency and Crisis? They Want an Education.](#)

reallocation to proper shelters. The provision of prefabricated mobile classrooms could help to expand the classroom capacity in both host community schools and in camps. Finally, this could also be done by exploring the potential offered by underused schools in rural areas and by operating schools in rural areas.

- Addressing lack of information, including raising awareness and sharing information among Syrian refugees and IDPs about the education system and the availability of spaces so they can enroll back in schools.
- Ensure that education provided is of high quality. This includes addressing the recommendations above regarding increasing the available school infrastructure in order to reduce class-sizes and increase the time spent in school, providing learning materials, as well as finding immediately a resolution to ensure that qualified teachers are paid, further trained and remain in schools so that they don't look for other sources of income and leave voluntary teachers, who often have less experience, in charge of delivering education.

Specific recommendations to KRG and Government of Iraq

- Both Ministries of Education (MoEs) should provide a clear mapping of their current capacity in terms of educational space and related limitations. This will help humanitarian stakeholders to effectively target priority areas/schools and help clarify specific capacity gaps and needs of government and MoEs.
- Alternative learning activities (e.g. non-formal education, accelerated learning programmes, catch-up classes) must be fully integrated in the MoEs' vision of emergency activities and short/middle term response plans.
- Facilitate a process of transition from non-formal to formal education so that children can rejoin the formal education system. This process should be enabled through a clearly formulated policy that is adequately conveyed to the schools and children, and applied in a uniform and transparent manner, to provide opportunities through the school year for children to rejoin the formal system as is feasible for them.
- This can be done by allowing children to enroll in schools even without attending kindergarten; enabling children at non-formal schools to take exams at formal schools; and streamlining other policies that currently offer useful exceptions to assist enrolment of displaced children.
- Criteria for school enrolment, which is sensitive to the fact that displaced populations have often left without bringing key documents, should be made clear and disseminated appropriately.

Specific recommendations to donors

- Acknowledging the strain on the government of Iraq and their call for support, the international community must prioritize the education sector and significantly increase funding to make sure that children receive quality education in emergencies to meet children's learning and development needs, regardless of circumstances and context.
- Education's place in humanitarian responses is no longer a subject to debate – education should always be prioritized in the first phase of a response alongside food, water, healthcare, protection and shelter.

- Donors should prioritize the education needs of children and fully fund requests for education programming in humanitarian responses with significantly greater investment in education in the humanitarian and protracted crisis context.
- Donors must also ensure that non-formal education is an emergency action, sufficiently funded, to make sure that the highest number of children possible can return to education once formal schools are made available.