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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND KINDERGARTEN FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE HOST COMMUNITY CHILDREN IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

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INTRODUCTION

Social scientists like Freud, Jung, Skinner, Piaget and Erikson & Erikson have differed and even contrasted in their approaches to understanding how humans develop and grow from birth. One common element in their established theories, however, is that experiences from birth have a significant and potentially lifelong effect on the individual's growth. Moreover, an early childhood that is nurtured, stimulated and protected supports the development of citizens that contribute to economic growth, social justice and sustainable development. However, children by nature are most vulnerable to the harmful conflicts and injustices like poverty, deprivation and violence. Consequently, the traumas from such experiences hinder and even damage physiological and psychological domains for healthy growth. Therefore, like health services and therapeutic interventions, the role of education during early childhood development becomes another critical means for ensuring healthy and capable human beings for prosperous communities.

The significance of education for children who have forcibly been displaced, deprived and traumatized from war has probably never been greater than now in recorded history. The UNHCR (2016) reported 65.3 million people forcibly displaced in 2016, declaring this figure as the greatest number of people displaced by war in their history of recorded data. Over half of these displaced people are children under 18 years of age, 4.9 million are from Syria while Lebanon and Jordan make the list of top six countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees (UNHCR, 2016). Education for these children and those born into a life of displacement becomes a vital source for rehabilitation and the only source of learning to socialize, learn, manage emotions and live with other people. Despite donations of billions of US dollars, however, host countries like Lebanon and Jordan have limited resources and capacities to ensure provisions of education for all refugee children. Moreover, nearly all funding for providing education and psychosocial support has targeted school-age children, marginalizing the pre-school children from birth to six years of age.

In this report, we investigate the few yet growing initiatives of providing early childhood education (ECE) for pre-school Syrian refugee children (SRC) and vulnerable host community children in Jordan and Lebanon. Early childhood is defined by UN agencies like UNESCO and UNICEF as birth to eight years of age. In this report, we refer to children in their early childhood stage of life who are below the age required by the governments of Jordan and Lebanon to enter first grade, which is six years old. We also define vulnerable children as children who are victims of poverty, deprivation and/or war. In this report, vulnerable host community children are those from low-income families who have difficulty accessing social services like health and education.

In this study on ECE for SRC and vulnerable host community children in Jordan and Syria, we set to explore the six research areas listed below (see Appendix A for research questions).

Area 1. Theory and practice of ECE/KG

Area 2. Institutional frameworks for ECE/KG in Lebanon and Jordan

Area 3. Organizations providing ECE/KG for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan

Area 4. Programme outcomes of ECE/KG for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan

Area 5. Indicators of successful ECE/KG for Syrian refugee children

Area 6. Recommendations and implications

Through a review of contemporary literature on child development, we define fundamental variables in early childhood development (ECD) and extrapolate key approaches and issues in education for the most vulnerable of children. With the support of research teams in Lebanon and Jordan, researchers gathered qualitative information about government policies and existing ECE initiatives for SRC through desk research and by interviewing program directors, teachers and parents and visiting schools and education centers. From the observations and conversations, we map out agencies and organizations that have designed and implemented ECE programs for pre-school Syrian refugee and vulnerable host community children. We also highlight the key variables that have either hindered or helped in achieving the program outcomes. Although this report does not present an ECE curriculum for children extremely vulnerable to deprivation, stress and armed-conflict, it does identify approaches that have apparently supported fundamental areas of ECD. The report concludes with recommendations for developing effective ECE programs for refugee and vulnerable host community children.

METHODOLOGY

A core research team comprised three principal investigators. Dr Muna Amr is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan. In Jordan, Muna led the field visits and coordinated with the field researchers. Alexandra Chen is a post-graduate researcher at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Alexandra experiences with Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan and scholarship in ECD were instrumental in designing the surveys and reporting. The principal investigators (PIs) were supported by a team of research assistants: Mohammad Al Khawaldeh and Jalal Al Husseini in Jordan and Reem el Soussi and Sara Frodge in Lebanon.

Desk research was a key starting point in this study in order to develop an analytical framework and learn about existing institutional frameworks and policies in Lebanon and Jordan. For the analytical framework, we gathered literature that provided theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on ECD, ECE and ECE for vulnerable children. Established research centers like the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provided a library of resources available for public access. Collecting government documents on ECE policies required intensive searches online, sharing of materials from peers in the field and translations of policy statements from Arabic to English.

The PIs developed three instruments to record and present information gathered from interviews and visiting schools and education centers. The first was a set of semi-structured questions designed for first meetings with program directors (see Appendix B). For the field visits, a survey pack included an outline for basic observation field notes and prompts for conversations with principals, teachers, social workers and, when possible, children (see Appendix C). Participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet that ensured anonymity and freedom not to participate at any point in time (see Appendix D). Finally, we produced a reporting template to ensure some uniformity in the writing of field research reports (see Appendix E).

In Jordan, we reached out to all possible organizations that are involved in either providing educational programs and services to Syrian refugee children, or carried out research studies about the status quo of such programs in the country. As ECE for Syrian refugee children is relatively a new field, only seven ECE programs were found, namely those provided by Caritas Austria in Jordan, in addition to few research projects on Syrian refugee children, carried out by different organisations, which are not published yet. Eventually, our sample set comprised two

of the five schools that Caritas Austria supports ECE for SRC and vulnerable children from host communities, a representative at the Ministry of Education and six non-governmental organizations providing services to those children (see Table 1). Three of the organizations were approached but did not provide sufficient information for the study. Two organizations had carried out studies on ECE in Jordan, but one claimed that their report was at the moment for internal use and the other has not yet prepared their findings for dissemination.

In Lebanon, the sample set comprised one of two schools that Caritas Austria supports ECE for SRC and vulnerable children from host communities, a representative from the Lebanon Ministry of Education and Higher Education (LMEHE), eight non-governmental organizations and two university professors in the field of ECE/ECD (see Table 2). Unfortunately, we did not receive replies from email requests made to LMEHE. The interviews at two international NGOs mostly provided information on policy frameworks and organizations who are actively involved in ECE programs for SRC.

When gathering information, the research team experienced a number of limitations. We highlight the major five. Field researchers whom we contracted had good experience in conducting interviews and reporting in a timely and comprehensive manner. However, with stronger academic backgrounds in ECD and ECE, they would have been able to probe deeper and, thus, could have yielded better data. Secondly, access to camps in Jordan are regulated by the Jordan Ministry of Interior who rejected our application to visit one of the camps to observe an initiative in action. We also could not access certain reports, especially the proceedings of the LMEHE conference in February that we requested directly from LMEHE. Thirdly, we had to rely mostly on self-reports and anecdotal evidence when trying to learn about children's first grade experiences after a pre-school ECE program. Measuring the extent to which the ECE program was indeed beneficial requires experimental and longitudinal research designs, which no one has yet prepared. Time was also another limitation. Field work visits were carried out in June where most schools were in summer holidays. Another limitation, also, was the

Table 1. Jordan sample set

Date	Body	Data Collected
Government	Interview	05-Jun
School	Interview + field visit	15-Jun
School	Interview + field visit	13-Jun
NGO	Interview + field visit	13-Jul
NGO	Interview	14-Jul
NGO	Interview	08-Sep
NGO	Interview	14-Jul
NGO	Email	09-Aug; 15 Sep
NGO	Email	14-June; 18 Sep

Table 2. Lebanon sample set

Date	Body	Data Collected
School	Interview + field visit	04-Jun
Government	Email, no reply	21-Jul
NGO	Interview	07-Jun
NGO	Interview	20-Sep
NGO	Interview	18-Jul; 15-Sep
NGO	Interview + field visit	07-Jun; 31-Aug
NGO	Interview	07-Jun
NGO	Interview	09-Sep
NGO	Interview + field visit	19-Jul
NGO	Interview	25-Jul
Academic	Interview	02-Aug
Academic	Interview	31-Aug

inaccessibility of some governmental documents and data which are not made available to the public.

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This section presents the basic concepts behind the science of early childhood development (ECD) and the particular circumstances for children vulnerable to poverty and war. It then outlines how early childhood education (ECE) can support and hinder healthy ECD, especially for children victims of violence, trauma and deprivation.

Basic dimensions of early childhood development

The science of ECD is built on a history of developmental theories put forth primarily by psychologists from Europe and North America since the late 1800s. The literature typically defines ECD as the development of children from ages 0-8 across four key domains – cognitive development, linguistic development, socio-emotional development, and motor development and physical growth (Naudeau, Kataoka, Valerio, Neuman, & Elder, 2011; Vegas & Santibáñez, 2010). However, most of the focus tends to be on the pre-primary 0-5 years or the "critical period" of 0-3 years. The field of ECD seeks to maximise the potential of each child in the above domains in order to produce healthy, competent, productive and, recently, happy adults who can contribute positively to society.

Classical and contemporary theories of child development present diverse perceptions of children's capacities and potential, definitions of "typical" versus "atypical" child development, as well as opinions on what approach can best advance children towards various "milestones". Classical developmental theories include Piaget's cognitive-stage theory (2001), Skinner's behavioural theory (1966), Bandura's social learning theory (1977), Vygotsky's emphasis on play and scaffolding (1978), and Bronfenbrenner's ecological and contextual theory (1995). Despite their positive contributions to clinical and educational programs that support child development, some of their applications can bring out challenges. For example, Piaget's work has provided educators with benchmarks for cognitive growth but has also created a rigid universal education system that categorizes learners by age and learning by subject-matter. Also, Skinner's behavior modification techniques have informed Applied Behavior Analysis, a process that supports children with certain special educational needs. However, children become far more extrinsically than intrinsically motivated when learning is driven by rewards and punishments.

Contemporary theories of child development are led by neurodevelopmental science and the emerging importance of socio-emotional learning and executive functions. Prenatal and postnatal brain development influenced by the interplay of genetic and environmental factors determines how children learn to learn, socialize, manage emotions and communicate during their childhood and future years (Black, Jones, Nelson, & Greenough, 1998). Receiving proper nutrition, for example, during prenatal and the first years of life influences how children manage stress, regulate emotions, socialize and learn to communicate (Cyr, 2016). Among the few institutions dedicated to the science of ECD, the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (CDC) has advanced understandings of child development within the realm of brain architecture. During the first three years of life, the child's experiences with the surrounding people and environment (i.e. relationships, nutrition, stress) construct the brain's architecture for future cognitive, social, linguistic and physical abilities (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016).

Research at the CDC identifies five key concepts that frame the science of brain architecture and child development. First, brain plasticity is a special attribute of the brain that allows it to create and reshape its circuitry. Over time, replacing old circuits with new connections becomes more difficult (Keuroghlian & Knudsen, 2007); hence, "a weak foundation can have detrimental effects on further brain development, even if a healthy environment is restored at a later age" (ibid, p. 7). Second, the child's environment (i.e. relationships, nutrition, security) can trigger either positive or negative genetic predispositions that affect their physical and mental health (Bernstein, Meissner, & Lander, 2007). Third, the "quality and stability" of their relationships with parents, caregivers, family members and other people they interact with "lay the foundation" for capacities in later years, like self-confidence, non-violent conflict management, moral judgements and healthy relationships (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p. 1). Fourth, circuits in various parts of the brain develop in a sequential manner, each with sensitive age-related critical periods (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Werker & Hensch, 2015). Hence, learning can become superficial and even harmfully stressful when activities are introduced prior to forming prerequisite circuits (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). Among the most critical of initial lifelong social and cognitive building blocks is the development of executive functions, which include working memory (retaining and using new information), inhibitory control (think before act) and cognitive flexibility (adjusting to changes) (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). And fifth, brain circuits are built from the simultaneous development and coordination of various physiological and socio-emotional elements (hearing, mobility, nutrition, communication, affection, etc.).

Working papers and research summaries published by the CDC outline how experiences can either nourish or damage the development of the child's brain architecture (http://www.developingchild.net). Table 1 presents selected examples from these publications. The examples illustrate the critical need for qualified experts in early childhood development and education and continuous support for parents and other caregivers. What is increasingly clear is that children and particularly the aged from birth to eight are not in fact "mini adults", but whose early years are a critical period that present a unique and almost magical window of unprecedented growth and potential that can even "correct" for certain developmental disorders if identified and addressed early on (Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010; Klingberg, 2010; Nelson & Sheridan, 2011). Furthermore, development in early childhood is a multidimensional and sequential process, whereby progress in one domain simultaneously catalyses and depends on development in other domains (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Thus, early childhood is arguably the most important stage for human development. The success or failure of countries to invest in ECD will shape not only the life course of young children, but also the productivity and stability of nations (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2015).

Early childhood development of the most vulnerable children

Around the world, healthy early childhood development is dependent on actions taken and investments made by adults. Among the most vulnerable children are those suffering from poverty, deprivation and war. Globally, over 200 million children under the age of five will survive childhood but risk never reaching their full developmental potential due to deficits during the early years (Walker et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2007). In terms of physical development alone, one out of four children under five (159 million) are stunted due to poor nutrition, with numbers significantly higher in parts of Africa and South Asia. Children in developing countries with stunted growth as a result of poverty (malnutrition, poor sanitation, poor stimulation at home) in utero and during the first three years of life are less likely to enrol and stay in school, score poorly on achievement tests and demonstrate lower cognitive abilities during childhood and throughout adolescence (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007).

Table 1. Healthy and harmful influences on brain architecture during child development

Healthy influences	
Description	Effects
Serve and return: Babies initiate a sound or facial expression and the adult imitates	Builds foundation for learning to read other people's emotions better, which enhances how they work, learn and play with others later on
Caregivers provide sense of security, stimulate children, help make friends	Develop higher-level thinking skills and pro-social behaviors
Children learn to manage emotions, identify own and others' feelings and sustain relationships	Strengthened neural circuits connecting areas that regulate emotions with those for higher-level cognitive functioning like thinking critically, making decisions and solving problem
Adults scaffold activities by facilitating routines and assigning small tasks and provide continuous encouragement and guidance to help children build executive functions and self-regulation that they try when playing with peers	Children acquire the emotional intelligence (independence, self-control, sociability), intrinsic motivation and capacities to learn later on (i.e. literacy, numeracy) and form healthy relationships

Harmful influences	
Description	Effects
Children exposed to toxic stress like living in chronic fear, a violent environment and unstable home	Neural development for foundational executive functions is impaired. Children lack capacities to learn with peers and feel unsafe in safe places and experience low temperament and difficulty controlling impulsive behavior
Neglect: Responses from parents and caregivers to children are continuously disrupted or absent. Neglect is more harmful and prevalent than physical abuse	The stress and released chemicals harms brain architecture for executive functions and cause long-term chronic mental and physical illness
Caregivers require pre-school children to master tasks that are inappropriate for their age	Children experience harmful stress to achieve and miss out on the critical period of developing executive functions (3-5 years)
Parents do not address personal mental health and marital issues	Children can develop behavioral disorders and poor self-concept

Children exposed to toxic stress either in the form of threat (such as domestic violence, sexual abuse) or deprivation (such as neglect or low or poor-quality nutrition, social support, cognitive stimulation) can severely impair the neurological foundations of development for children and adults (Luby et al., 2013; Nelson, Fox, & Zeanah, 2013; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Controlled neurological studies on the effects of chronic stress from violence and neglect on ECD are limited mostly to animal studies because of ethical issues. Nevertheless, studies on adults and animals reveal that chronic stress (e.g. maternal separation, severe trauma) releases glucocorticoids raising cortisol levels that impair the development of the amygdala, frontal cortex and hippocampus – critical areas of the brain that develop during early childhood and have lasting effects throughout adulthood (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009). Indirect factors that also release cortisol to further increase young children's sensitivities to stressful situations (i.e. first day of school) include maternal depression during pregnancy (Trautman, Meyer-Bahlburg, Postelnek, & New, 1995) and after birth (Ashman, Dawson, Panagiotides, Yamada, & Wilkinson, 2002).

As in the case of this study, the vulnerable children are mostly war-related refugees and displaced who have witnessed armed conflict and violence, lost close family members like parents and siblings, journeyed through hostile territories to find refuge and lived in unstable and insecure shelters. In addition, children of refugee parents are born into environments where not all basic provisions like clean water and shelter from harsh weather are available and parents and family members suffer from war-related mental and physical illnesses. Refugee children are, therefore, extremely vulnerable to conditions that are detrimental to the brain architecture of cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional development, namely neglect and toxic stress.

Recent advances in neuroscience and psychology illustrate that early childhood is not only a critical period for brain development, but that early experiences have significant consequences for children's brain architecture (Fox et al., 2010; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014 ,2007 2005]]; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Young children exposed to armed violence and chronic war-related stress have demonstrated healthy coping mechanisms when forming close attachments with parents or caregivers and adults around them demonstrated healthy responses to traumatic events (Loughry & Eyber, 2003). Rigorous impact evaluations from around the world show that children who receive cognitive stimulation, nutrition supplements, and pre-primary education in their first 60 months lead healthier lives, stay in school longer, and earn more than children of similar socioeconomic backgrounds who did not receive such interventions (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2015).

Approaches to early childhood education

ECE typically refers to the care and formal and non-formal learning of young children from ages birth until eight. ECE is commonly known as early childcare, infant/toddler education and nursery for children for children under two and nursery, kindergarten, preschool or pre-primary education for children over two. Classical theories of development have largely shaped educational systems for children. ECE curricula, for example, often adopt approaches that are play-based (cf Piaget, 2001), involve exploratory learning (cf Dewey, 1938), require intentional adult scaffolding (cf Vygotsky, 1967). Also, Piaget's stages of

ECD have instituted the classification of age to grade level, which makes education far less costly than providing the close mentoring support that Vygotsky argued as effective for learning (Moore, 2000).

Approaches to ECE are also determined by the values and ideologies of the policy makers. Most governments and private sectors around the world have adopted essentialist approaches to education to ensure that children en masse learn what higher authorities deem to be essential (information, character, etc.) and demonstrate their learning by successfully achieving standardized tests. Consequently, ECE in these schools aim to provide pre-school children with the literacy and numeracy skills they will further master in grade one. Philosophical elements of pragmatism and existentialism have informed child-driven curriculum models used around the world, including the Montessori, Waldorf, Project EHigh/Scope®, and Reggio Emilia approaches. These schools facilitate environments that encourage children to explore their interests and express and fulfil their socio-emotional needs. Overall, most ECE aim to establish early language, literacy and numeracy, and, more recently, are designed to enhance children's executive functioning – including inhibitory control, working memory, and long-term memory – and socioemotional learning – including emotional regulation, empathy, pro-social behaviour, and conflict management.

In recent decades, studies have shown that ECE is critical in preparing children to enter and succeed in the primary school classroom, diminishing their risk of social-emotional mental health problems and increasing their selfsufficiency as adults (Aber, Brown, Jones, Berg, & Torrente, 2011; Jones, Brown, Hoglund, & Aber, 2010; Morris, Millenky, Raver, & Jones, 2013). However, preparing pre-school children for learning literacy and numeracy in first grade does not necessarily mean to focus on practicing basic literacy and numeracy in nursery and kindergarten. Indeed, the socio-emotional experiences that build the foundations for executive functions and healthy relationships prepare children for learning in school far more effectively than practicing the literacy and numeracy competencies of first grade (Barkley, 2001; Blair, 2002). Children's socio-emotional experiences of stimulation and support will come from an ECE that provides a safe and caring environment where children can explore, initiate and play (Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2007).

The literature, therefore, suggests two dominant approaches to ECE, which we refer to when analyzing the information gathered in this report. These approaches are in line with the two schools of ECD: (1) classical theories that elaborate on cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral development and (2) contemporary theories of neurodevelopment of inter-related areas of child development. Schools of ECE, whether as rehabilitative or mainstream, follow similar suits. ECE programs, namely pre-school, based on classical approaches to growth and development adopt a scholastic approach. A pre-school scholastic approach prepares children for first grade by introducing them to literacy and numeracy competencies they will learn in the first year or two of school. This is a dominant practice in an essentialist philosophy of education – one that basis the establishment and practices of most schools around the world – and can also be described as a near-sighted approach to ECE. The second approach also aims at preparing children to excel when they begin schooling but is slightly more far-sighted in its emphasis on setting the foundations of brain architecture for lifelong learning. This foundational approach to ECE implicates a more holistic approach to child development where play, expression and close relationships foster the necessary capacities to formally learn literacy and numeracy and build healthy relationships in school.

What constitutes an ideal intervention for different contexts and children is still being tested, evaluated and refined. Nevertheless, what we do know is that (1) the earlier the intervention the better (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Siegler, 2) ;(1991) investing in caregivers, and particularly their relationship with their children, must be a priority for practitioners (Luby et al., 2013; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 3) ;(2015 ,2012) the benefits of ECD programmes are particularly strong for children who are disadvantaged or vulnerable (Heckman, 2008a, 2008b; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Naudeau et al., 2011); and (4) efforts to improve ECD are an investment, not a cost, for society as a whole (Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman, & Wodon, 2015; World Health Organization, 2007). Thus policy-wise, investing in young children is one of the best policies that governments can make – a realization now reflected in ECD's growing prominence internationally. Its recent inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals marked the first time ECD was explicitly included in global development goals. ECD is also featured in the World Bank's Education Strategy 2020 "Invest Early" and the establishment in April 2016 of a new alliance between both agencies that aims to "make ECD a global policy, programming and public spending priority, to give all young children access to quality services that improve their health, nutrition, learning ability and emotional well-being" (World Bank, 2016). living in poverty, armed conflict or other unstable contexts, education for ECD is critical to safeguarding the dignity of the child as a human being and enhancing equity and social inclusion.

As children's brains are vulnerable to stress and trauma, brain plasticity during this period of development is optimal for rehabilitation. Providing emotional and social support to children victims of poverty, chronic stress and trauma can trigger reorganizations of brain circuits and healthy genetic predispositions that rehabilitate the areas of the brain critical for resilience and other cognitive and emotional functions that carry on to adulthood (Lupien et al., 2009). A recent study on orphans in Romania is among the paucity of research that shows the effect of ECE on children victims of poverty and war. In Romania, the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceau-escu and the 1989 revolution led to the institutionalization of thousands of children in orphanages. Nelson et al. (2013) received access from the government to experiment on the effects of foster care with parents who received support from social workers and for basic child expenses. The randomly selected sample of children who started foster care before 24 months, consistently showed in subsequent years higher levels of developmental quotient than the other children who started foster care after two years of age and significantly higher than the children who remained in the institutions. Although the children in foster care still carried degrees of trauma from their institutionalization in government orphanages, their improvements in emotional attachments and other areas of development demonstrated the value of education and care intervention during the critical period of 2-0 years.

ECE also has the capacity to address the social injustices associated with children vulnerable to poverty. Research shows that children from less-resourced backgrounds often begin school already behind their peers of higher socio-economic status (SES) (Alba & Holdaway, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Lareau, 2002). Among key indicators, literacy is a prime area of early inequality. For example, on average, by the time children are three, those with high levels of SES have three times the number of words in their vocabularies as children with a low SES (Hart & Risley, 1992). However, just as an ECD program in Indonesia successfully reduced the achievement gap between rich and poor children (Jung & Hasan, 2016), expanding public pre-primary has been identified as the

education policy with the largest impact on reducing earnings inequality (Checchi & Van De Werfhorst, 2014). Thus, early cognitive stimulation and socio-emotional skill-building can preemptively close the academic achievement gap between advantaged children and children vulnerable to poverty. ECE for vulnerable children prior to former schooling can increase high school graduation rates, improve performance on standardized tests and reduce both grade repetition and the number of children placed in special education (Morris et al., 2013; OECD, 2011).

The provision of ECE for children in contexts of armed-conflict, deprivation and chronic stress do not necessarily guarantee children the environment they need for healthy and consistent development. ANERA (2014), for example, found that ECE teachers in Palestine often have low levels of education and low wages. Consequently, ECE teaching is perceived as a low-status profession and with high turnover (ANERA, 2014). Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, teachers in the Nyarugusu Camp did not receive any education on early childhood development or education, and refugee children lacked the spaces for play. The above examples illustrate that any intervention to provide ECE programming for children affected by armed conflict requires intentional investment in not only the child him/herself, but also in the coordination and resources to ensure safe spaces for play, appropriate teacher education, and active support for and involvement of mothers, fathers or other caregivers at home.

Early childhood education for vulnerable children and social justice

A review of ECD interventions in development and humanitarian contexts (Sayre et al., 2015) provides a comprehensive overview of existing early childhood intervention models. Listed in approximate order of target age groups from 8-0 yrs, they include *early childhood health interventions*[1] , *early childhood nutrition interventions* [2], *early stimulation*[3] , *early childhood care and education (ECCE)* [4], *preschool/preprimary/early childhood education (ECE)*[5] , child and *social protection interventions*[6] , and integrated ECD services combining various elements of the above. ECE for vulnerable children is critical because it provides the opportunity for intervention to rehabilitate and recover areas of the brain critical for

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1   This includes initiatives in health care, including health service provision, disease prevention, and health promotion to provide the continuum of maternal and child pre- and postnatal care. Services include standard health screenings for pregnant women, skilled attendants at delivery, childhood immunizations, and well-child visits.

2   This includes initiatives to ensure that pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and young children are adequately nourished. Interventions may include breastfeeding promotion, responsible and appropriate complementary feeding, dietary diversity, salt iodization, and micro-nutrient supplementation.

3   This includes opportunities for young children to interact with caring adults and to learn about the environment from the earliest age; this generally refers to interventions for children ages 24–0 months and to programs designed to teach parents how to engage in early stimulation activities with young children.

4   This includes care (typically for children ages 24–0 months) and education (typically for children ages 83–24 months). Quality programs address both care and education for these age groups.

5   This includes interventions that provide opportunities for children to interact with responsive adults and actively learn with peers to prepare for primary school entry; this generally refers to interventions for children ages 83–36 months of age.

6   This includes initiatives targeted to protect the well-being of children by supporting the extremely poor and vulnerable (social protection) or focusing on measures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence affecting children (child protection). Interventions can protect children in marginalized communities and those who are excluded due to gender, disability, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), or other sociocultural factors. Services may include birth registration, tracking and preventing child abuse, cash and in-kind transfer programs, and parenting programs to promote positive caregiving

executive functions and self-regulation that ensure healthy cognitive, socio-emotional and linguistic development. Nearly half of all three- to six- year olds globally lack any access to pre-primary or early childhood education (World Bank, 2016). Thus, particularly for children living in poverty, armed conflict or other unstable contexts, education for ECD is critical to safeguarding the dignity of the child as a human being and enhancing equity and social inclusion.

As children's brains are vulnerable to stress and trauma, brain plasticity during this period of development is optimal for rehabilitation. Providing emotional and social support to children victims of poverty, chronic stress and trauma can trigger reorganizations of brain circuits and healthy genetic predispositions that rehabilitate the areas of the brain critical for resilience and other cognitive and emotional functions that carry on to adulthood (Lupien et al., 2009). A recent study on orphans in Romania is among the paucity of research that shows the effect of ECE on children victims of poverty and war. In Romania, the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu and the 1989 revolution led to the institutionalization of thousands of children in orphanages. Nelson et al. (2013) received access from the government to experiment on the effects of foster care with parents who received support from social workers and for basic child expenses. The randomly selected sample of children who started foster care before 24 months, consistently showed in subsequent years higher levels of developmental quotient than the other children who started foster care after two years of age and significantly higher than the children who remained in the institutions. Although the children in foster care still carried degrees of trauma from their institutionalization in government orphanages, their improvements in emotional attachments and other areas of development demonstrated the value of education and care intervention during the critical period of 2-0 years.

ECE also has the capacity to address the social injustices associated with children vulnerable to poverty. Research shows that children from less-resourced backgrounds often begin school already behind their peers of higher socio-economic status (SES) (Alba & Holdaway, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Lareau, 2002). Among key indicators, literacy is a prime area of early inequality. For example, on average, by the time children are three, those with high levels of SES have three times the number of words in their vocabularies as children with a low SES (Hart & Risley, 1992). However, just as an ECD program in Indonesia successfully reduced the achievement gap between rich and poor children (Jung & Hasan, 2016), expanding public pre-primary has been identified as the education policy with the largest impact on reducing earnings inequality (Checchi & Van De Werfhorst, 2014). Thus, early cognitive stimulation and socio-emotional skill-building can preemptively close the academic achievement gap between advantaged children and children vulnerable to poverty. ECE for vulnerable children prior to former schooling can increase high school graduation rates, improve performance on standardized tests and reduce both grade repetition and the number of children placed in special education (Morris et al., 2013; OECD, 2011).

The provision of ECE for children in contexts of armed-conflict, deprivation and chronic stress do not necessarily guarantee children the environment they need for healthy and consistent development. ANERA (2014), for example, found that ECE teachers in Palestine often have low levels of education and low wages. Consequently, ECE teaching is perceived as a low-status profession and with high turnover (ANERA, 2014). Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, teachers in the Nyarugusu Camp did not receive any education on early childhood development or education, and refugee children lacked the spaces for play. The above examples illustrate that any intervention to provide ECE programming for children affected by armed conflict requires intentional investment in not only the child him/herself, but also in the coordination and resources to ensure safe spaces for play, appropriate teacher education, and active support for and involvement of mothers, fathers or other caregivers at home.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ECE/KG IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

Jordan, Lebanon and all other countries in the region of West Asia and North Africa have demonstrated their commitment to enhancing the quality of early child development. In addition to ratifying the legally-binding UNCRC, the Arab League of Nations has set up the Arab Institute for Childhood Studies. In Lebanon and Jordan, agencies in civil society and government have established and continue to develop ECE curricula and guidelines. Pre-school (nursery and kindergarten) in these two countries is not mandatory, but their legislature requires that all children by age six attend school starting with grade 1.

Institutions, curricula and guidelines in Jordan

Community-based organizations and international agencies have developed national strategy documents that aim to continuously review and improve pre-school curricula and raise the stakes of investing in early childhood care and education. In 2000, Queen Rania established the National Team for Early Childhood Development[7]. Subsequently, the National Early Childhood and Development Strategy (2000) and National Early Childhood Plan (2007-2003) were published. Even the two phases of the national development strategy "Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy Project" (2009-2003 and -2010present) aim to improve the infrastructure and vocational capacity of early childhood education. The recent Jordanian National Action Plan for Children (2013-2004) aims at increasing enrolment of children in KG1 and KG2, providing early childcare for children of working mothers, defining expected developmental outcomes per stage of development, building professional capacities of experts in ECD and ECE and empowering parents to provide healthier living environments for their children (UNICEF, 2004).

In 2000, Queen Rania commissioned a national strategy for early childhood development. The Strategy classified early childhood into (1) pregnancy, (2) birth to below one year, (3) one year to below four years, (4) four years to below six years and (5) six years to below nine years. These age groups also fall within defined pre-school education levels. Prior to starting primary school at age 6 (or 5 years and 8 months), children can enrol in kindergarten as early as 3 years and 8 months. The different pre-school levels also have distinct jurisdictions and key service providers. Table 2 outlines the providers and jurisdictions of the three pre-school levels: nursery, KG1 and KG2.

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7   You can visit the Queen Rania Foundation website (http://www.qrf.org/initiative/early-childhood-development).

Table 2. Pre-school levels, jurisdictions and main providers in Jordan

Pre-School	Age to enter	Jurisdiction	Main provider
Nursery	Birth to 4 years	Ministry of Social Development	National Council for Family Affairs
KG1	From 3 years 8 months to under 5 years	Ministry of Education	Civil society, private sector
KG2	From 5 years to 6 years	Ministry of Education	Public schools, private sector, civil society

For parents and the pregnancy stage, the Better Parenting Program (BPP) that launched in 1996 targeted parents – mostly mothers – and women as young as high school students planning on becoming mothers. With time, various civil society organizations tailored the program to work with mothers, mothers-to-be, homemakers, those who cannot read, parents of children with special needs and widows. Even Imams have learned more about the significance of fathers' roles in ECD with the support of the "Imam Guide on Early Childhood Development" and regularly disseminate sermons and publications to empower fathers as active caregivers (UNICEF, 2008). In addition, Al-Azhar University and UNICEF (2005) published "Children in Islam: Their care, upbringing and protection" that refers to values and practices in Islam to provide guidance on early childcare from prenatal to infancy advocating for unconditional gender equality and post-natal recovery for mothers. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs also invests great efforts in educating fathers for responsible parenting. The BPP aims at raising parents' awareness in supporting the child's physical (nutrition, sleep), cognitive (how to learn), linguistic (language learning), socio-emotional (showing affection, building self-confidence) areas of development. Evaluations of the low running cost BPP suggest that the program has reached out to more than 130,000 families and parents involved in the program have broadened their concept of neglect, spent more time with their children playing and reading and communicating clearly and calmly when disciplining (Al-Hassan, 2009; Al-Hassan & Lansford, 2011). Organizations in Lebanon piloted the program, but did not appear to expand the way it did in Jordan (UNESCO, n.d.).

From birth to four years, children can attend nurseries. Jordan hosts 1300 nurseries, all under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development (The Jordan Times, 2016). Statistics nearly a decade ago showed that 57% of the nurseries are governmental, 38% from the private sector and 4.6% run by NGOs (UNESCO IBE, 2006). The Ministry of Health also supports families in improving how they care for their babies. Even through the Ministry of Labor, a report (USAID, International Youth Foundation, & Government of Jordan, 2013) advocates commitment to article 72 of the Labor Code that requires the provision of childcare centers for working women. Although the licensing instructions pertained specifically to daycares for working women, it remained the only document available online that presented legal guidelines for establishing a childcare center. The guidelines require:

- strict adherence to building safety
- separated facilities for babies and toddlers
- central or electric heating instead of fuel
- furniture to include beds, curtains, fridge, first aid box, toys, books
- display of ministry certificate
- accessible and clean toilets and diaper changing stations
- kitchen with gas cylinder placed outside, fridge, bottle sanitizer
- accessible water coolers
- electric sockets covered
- complete documentation and records of children
- caregivers to hold, at minimum, diploma in field related to ECD
- at least one caregiver for every six children under one year and one caregiver for every 10 children between one and four
- mothers to only enter the daycare for a maximum of one nursing hour and in the exceptional circumstances to comfort the child

The only two guidelines that clearly proposed particular behaviors with children asked to encourage and support children to independently use the toilet and for mothers to comfort their children when in distress. According to community-based organization representatives, the NCFA has developed a curriculum for nurseries and childcare; however, we were unable to access this.

By 4, or as early as 3 years and 8 months, children can enrol in kindergarten, up until they are six or as early as 5 years and 8 months before they enrol in primary school. Most government documents on pre-school education in Jordan do not specifically distinguish between KG1 and KG2. It does appear, however, that provisions for KG(4-5 years) are through civil society and the private sector. Moreover, interviews with civil society actors in Jordan revealed that Save the Children International developed a KG1 curriculum and the KG2 curriculum was written by the Jordan Ministry of Education. Both were inaccessible online. However, we learned about the curricular scope and aims of the government KG curriculum by accessing the KG teacher's guide (Ministry of Education [Jordan], 2007). The KG teacher's guide presents detailed learning objectives and lesson plans organized in seven units that cover an academic year of two semesters. The activities for children aim to develop their understandings and skills in the following areas:

Moral and Religious (Islamic)

Social-emotional

Linguistic (Arabic and English)

Physical health

Cognitive

Aesthetics (Fine arts)

While all public pre-schools adhere to the government KG curriculum, the principals or directors of pre-schools in the private sector apparently prefer to purchase books from independent publishers. These books become the KG curriculum in these private pre-schools.

Institutions, curricula and guidelines in Lebanon

Similar to Jordan, children begin the first grade at age 6. What differs, however, is an additional kindergarten year after nursery. The MEHE added a third year to Kindergarten in 2010 (Decree No. 20 ,5046 Sep 2010). So, after nursery, children can begin KG1 at 3 years of age, KG2 at 4 years and KG3 at 5 years.

All nurseries in Lebanon are accessible through the private sector while some public schools across the country provide Kindergarten. Also, similar to Jordan, nurseries and kindergartens fall under distinct ministries. The Ministry of Public Health regulates all nurseries. The MOPH decree 4876 approved in 2010 (Ministry of Public Health [Lebanon], 2010) lists a number of basic requirements in the establishment of nurseries. For example, nurseries must:

- be on the ground or first floor and no less than 200m2

- have separate rooms for children (a) under a year and a half, (b) between a year and a half and two and a half years and (c) between two and a half years and three and a half years.

- have a play area at least the same size of the classrooms for 2.5 – 1.5 yrs and 3.5- 2.5 years combined

The MOPH (Ministry of Public Health [Lebanon], n.d.) with support from the NGO Beyond Association and the Italian Cooperation produced a toolkit "National Guidelines for Early Childhood Care" that provides detailed checklists of "structural", "operational" and "health" requirements. The toolkit is in English and accessible online. Table 3 presents examples of the three main areas the MOPH finds essential to operating a safe and nurturing nursery. The extensive list of basic requirements for high standards of health and safety noted the risk of frequently changing practitioners on the emotional stability of children. The document also describes basic qualification requirements of supervisors and caregivers. Supervisors, for example, should demonstrate the necessary skills for designing individual and group learning activities and manage a safe and stimulating environment for the children and caregivers. The caregivers should be able to apply their understandings of "child issues" when interacting with children

as individuals or groups. They are also expected to maintain "respectful relationships" with parents and colleagues. At least one caregiver present should be certified in first aid. However, one ECD/ECE academic expressed during an interview that the amount of detailed information still overshadowed the significance of relationships and supporting emotional development through play and care.

Table 3. Examples of structural, operational and health requirements for nurseries

Structural
Indoor spaces (doors, garbage bins, windows, infrastructure for heating, pesticide control and no-smoking policy), kitchen (color-coded chopping boards, trash cans with step-pedal and separate sinks for hands and food), bathrooms (changing tables near sink, containers for dirty clothes, 1 toilet per 10 children), outdoor area (impact-absorbing surface, no exposed trees, playgrounds are fenced), electricity (sockets are covered), toys (lead-free, washed after use) and safety equipment
Operational
Skills and qualifications of personnel (supervisors can manage learning programs that fit children's needs, at least one caregiver certified in child first aid, low-level staff turnover), emergency management (accessible fire extinguishers and first aid kits, children's emergency numbers posted near phone, trained personnel) and sanitation and cleanliness (floors mopped and cleaned daily, fresheners not allowed, toys cleaned weekly)
Health
Safe health practices (medicine stored with child's name and expiry date and out of children's reach, parent consent forms for administering medication, document all incidents, food allergy awareness, sun protection, regular monitoring during sleep, regular hand-washing) and health forms (updated medical records and vaccines, parental consent, recommended vaccination for personnel

Since 2010, great investments have been made to improve the quality of Kindergarten in public schools. At the MEHE, the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2015-2010 identified "Early Childhood Education" as one of ten priorities for national education reform. Through this priority component, the ESDP aimed to establish new kindergartens, restore and rehabilitate existing kindergartens, develop and implement new KG curricula and develop and implement an Early Screening Scheme and family awareness program (MEHE, 2010). To support the ESDP activities for ECE, the World Bank loaned 40 million US dollars to MEHE to enhance the quality of education, which involves the reconstruction and rehabilitation of public school Kindergartens (MEHE, 2011). MEHE (2011) also reported on revising mechanisms of hiring KG teachers with qualifications in ECE.

Through CERD – the agency responsible for curriculum development – a new three-year kindergarten

curriculum was approved by the Council of Ministers under Decree 21 ,8917 Sep 2012 (Lebanon Council of Ministers, 2012, September 27). The KG 3-1 curriculum document (MEHE, 2015) identifies the pre-school child as 6-3 years of age and outlines principles of ECE including the significance of "close interrelationships", the use of senses, equal opportunities and play "whether free or guided" as the "most effective" approach to learning and growth (p. 5). The curriculum lists three general objectives:

1. Develop the child as a social individual who is open to new ideas and actively participates with others.

2. Learning how to use "sensory, physical, emotional, social and intellectual skills" for self-expression, discovery and creativity to "build up their information base".

3. Adapting to the school environment and being prepared for subsequent stages.

These main aims are followed by a list of competencies to be achieved under each of the five defined areas of ECD: linguistic expression, scientific development, social development, psychomotor growth and artistic education. The curriculum then presents a list of resources, learning content, and suggested activities for each of the five areas under KG1, KG2 and KG3.

The curricular rhetoric prioritizes the development of socio-emotional foundations for learning later in school. It calls for the provisions of working in groups, free space for expressing feelings and exploring, interpreting pictures in storybooks, propose endings to stories, growing plants and collect items that are similar to each other. The design of the KG curriculum also suggests to a greater degree a scholastic approach to prepare children for school; in other words, a miniature version of grade 1. Many of suggested learning activities ask children to recite ("memorize limericks and songs"), demonstrate numerical applications (greater than/less than; adding and subtracting), and classify living and non-living things. Table 4 illustrates how some descriptions of curricular content, activities and remarks suggest, on the one hand, direct training for grade 1 literacy and numeracy and, on the other hand, an emphasis on foundations for self-regulation and executive functions. The former, described as scholastic approaches to ECE, present close-ended activities and suggest an emphasis on mastery of certain skills. The activities described as a foundational approach to ECE suggest a more open-ended learning environment of self-expression and exploration. However, some of the descriptions under the listed open-ended activities suggest narrow understandings of subjective expressions. For example, the activity title "free drawing" includes "connecting dots" and "copying some shapes and words". Also, a few activities like "identify a rhyme of limerick", "specify the criterion of classification" and "identify the concept of homeland" in KG2 may indeed be age-inappropriate while a few others like "crossing the intruder", "work the segmental dissociation" and "coding and decoding paths" seem unclear.

Table 4. Examples of foundational and scholastic approaches to the "Linguistic Expression" section of KG1 (age 3) Lebanese national curriculum

Foundational	Scholastic
• Encouraging the child to express needs ensuring a degree of freedom for the • Child • Using terms to identify feelings • Coloring, painting	• Answer questions correctly ask questions correctly • Recite a story, memorize songs • Identify alphabet letters and sounds • Read certain words

Following the endorsement of the KG curriculum, CERD made available on 8 September 2015 a KG3 resource pack comprising a student book, activity book and teacher's guide (CERD, 2015b) and, in 2016, the same for KG1 and KG2. The titles of the books for KG 3-1 are uploaded on the CERD website, which shows Arabic, French and English version[8]s. According to a press release by CERD (2015a), these resources focus on teaching young children basic literacy and numeracy and engaging them in activities for social and psychomotor development, learning about science and fine arts.

Following the growing number of Syrian refugee children under six years and their limited or no access to any formal ECE, civil society and non-governmental organizations gradually started to explore how they could provide non-formal ECE. The government, namely MEHE, has stepped up efforts to monitor any provisions of non-formal education that could risk national security through the promotion of fundamentalism or extremism. Still in support of civil society's role in alleviating burdens on government resources, the MEHE agency CERD is currently working closely with NGOs and ECE experts to develop a non-formal ECE curriculum to ensure that [vulnerable] children are prepared to enter the formal trilingual basic education system. CERD has outsourced the design of the non-formal ECE curriculum to a group of teachers in secondary and higher education with a background in ECD/ECE who receive technical support from a representative at UNICEF. In February, MEHE hosted a conference where various actors in civil society and the government shared their blueprints for ECD/ECE activities and programs. The team of teachers drafted a curriculum that CERD disseminated by email to a long list of civil society organizations involved in education for SRC. They provided feedback and, on 16 September, the teachers along with the UNICEF support member presented their responses to the feedback and amendments made to the curriculum outline. They invited the same organizations to provide feedback on the second draft. Further consultations on developing learning and teaching resources and monitoring and evaluation will follow. Efforts in ensuring an inclusive process of curriculum development are highly commendable. However, the learning objectives outlined in the curricular framework still appear to focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills despite the development team's defence of a holistic approach to ECD.

Other active organizations working on ECD/ECE in Lebanon but target mostly Lebanese children

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8   For list of KG3-1 books published by CERD, visit http://www.crdp.org/en/our-books?tid=18.

include the Lebanese Association for Early Childhood Development (LAECD, www.laecd.org), Syndicate of Nurseries Owners in Lebanon (SNOL) and the Syndicate of Professional Daycares in Lebanon (SPDL). The LAECD was established in 2001 and works closely with the MOPH and mostly focuses on children from 5-0 years of age and within the scope of human growth and continuous professional development to healthcare providers. Four main activities take place at the LAECD:

1. Organize workshops to improve infant mortality rates by assessing risks during delivery and deciding and acting on interventions

2. Develop curricula for nutrition and public health university programs on essential care of newborns by drawing on international models of childcare

3. Disseminate information and facilitate workshops on optimal nutrition of the first 1000 days

4. Develop "Mother to mother" education programs where mother volunteers facilitate workshops to other mothers who had not completed basic education.

Although we were unable to communicate with a representative from the SNOL, information from their website shows they are actively involved with nursery owners around Lebanon, host public events at the UNESCO Palace and organize workshops for professional development and first-aid. In a series of posted TV interviews (http://spgl.org/media/), the SNOL president explains the complexities of operating nurseries, especially concerning health and safety. An online news article reported it held a conference on 17 September 2016 that covered key topics including diabetes in children, separation anxiety and nutrition.

The role of higher education in Lebanon in building the professional field of preschool caregivers is limited in provision and scope. Based on interviews and a desk review, we found only two universities in Lebanon that provide written qualifications for preschool – the Lebanese University and the Lebanese American University. However, the Lebanese American University only awards a certificate, "Preschool Education Certificate". MEHE recognises only teaching diplomas as written qualifications for teachers and caregivers. Also, the programs of study at both universities emphasise the learning of only classical theories of ECD and instruction of literacy and numeracy. By and large, contemporary concepts of ECD and their foundational approaches to ECE have not yet become essential components of initial teacher education.

ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING ECE/KG FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

In this section, we present the activities, approaches and experiences of organizations that are providing ECE/KG and evidence of change or influence that the programs have on the children.

Jordan

In Jordan, provisions of formal and non-formal ECE to SRC and vulnerable Jordanian children have started to take place in private schools and through community-based organizations and international NGOs. In this section, we present our findings from the interviews and field visits at two private schools that Caritas Austria is supporting and a non-formal education program led by a local NGO.

ECE/KG in two private schools

Caritas Jordan, with the support of Caritas Austria, runs an ECE program for SRC at private school A (PSA) located in a populated area of East Amman and at private school B (PSB) in the Al Balqa' governorate. The schools are run by the private sector. The two schools already have an ECE program running in the morning for children ages four and five years from the local community. So, Caritas Austria uses the school's facilities to run an ECE program for SRC in the afternoon. This afternoon program provides KG1 and KG2 for children ages four and five, respectively. At each of the schools, data was collected during a one-day visit by two researchers who interviewed staff and collected fields notes and observations. The information gathered showed similar experiences and outcomes when working with the children but quite different reports when reflecting on relationships with parents.

The principal at the PSA reported that this year (2016) is the second year that Caritas Austria runs a program for SRC at the school. The previous program started in November 2015 and lasted for four months serving 40 students. That program ran for three days a week, four hours a day in the afternoon. The second program started at the end of May 2016 and ran until the end of August 2016 for five days a week as a morning shift because the school was on summer holiday and, so, its facilities are available during the day. At the time of our visit, 38 students were enrolled in this program, but the principal expected at least five more students to join. The program comprised one KG1 class with 17 students and two KG2 classes with 15-13 students in each. Caritas Austria also supports an SRC pre-school program for KG1 and KG2 at PSB where close to 50 SRC children are enrolled and distributed evenly between the two levels.

School structure and resources

At PSA, the kindergarten is located in the basement floor of the school building. It consists of three classrooms, a multi-purpose room, a bathroom, the principal office and a storage room. The school also has an outdoor playground with a shaded sand playing area and an indoor playing room that had all

playing equipment (i.e., slides, swings, etc.). The size of this room appeared relatively small and playing equipment were set quite closely next to each other allowing limited space for children to move and play freely. The playgrounds at the PSB are more spacious and appear safer. The PSB kindergarten is in a separate building located behind the main building of the school. The KG building has a ground floor surrounded with an outdoor playing area. The building has four classrooms, the principal's office and the teachers' room. The PSB also has two outdoor playgrounds; the front, which is used for morning assembly and as a football court and car park and the back, which is equipped with different playing equipment (e.g. slides, swings) and a shady area to protect children from the sun. Children in both schools can play in these playgrounds during the playtime scheduled in the timetable and under the supervision of their teachers.

In both schools, the classrooms are arranged so children can sit in small groups. Each group of children sat at a round table, allowing for free movement for each of them. They also allowed for the teacher to freely move between children to provide individual assistance and support during lessons. The classrooms had some storage space (shelves and cupboard) where learning and playing materials were kept and within reach. The learning materials seen in the classrooms included; flash cards, stories, playing dough, abacus, puzzles, crayons and colouring pencils, some other educational toys and, in PSA, a TV set. According to the principals, learning materials were used when needed, and children can only have access to the playing equipments and toys (i.e., Lego) during the playing sessions. At PSB, some of the materials are locked away because, as the principal said, they were expensive and, thus, teachers take them out for specific activities. The classrooms had shelves that children used to store their own belongings. Also, the sizes of the classrooms against the number of the children seems fair. Light and ventilation inside the classroom are maintained to a good level and school environment and building appear fairly safe.

At the PSA, the supervising principal is the same principal who manages the kindergarten during the academic year. She has been working as a kindergarten principal for the last 18 years, but worked before that as a primary school teacher for four years. She holds a university degree in accounting but has also a teaching diploma. She works as the coordinator of the Caritas program at the school and her duties, as stated by her, include: supervising the teachers, managing the preparation of the school meals, providing support to children to help them adapt to the school and feel safe, helping children learn discipline, supervising the learning plans and running all the administrative tasks in the program. In addition, there are three teachers who work with the SRC. They all hold a teaching diploma and have teaching experience ranging from 15-4 years. Other staff in the school includes a bus driver and an assistant.

The program at the PSB is managed by the computer teacher who works at the school. She has a degree in computer science with 24 years of teaching experience. Previous to working in this ECE program, she assisted a principal of an educational program for Iraqi refugee children. As principal to this program, she explained that her duties involved supervising the teachers at the program and the learning processes, following up on the students' progress and supporting them psychologically. The principal did not have training in social work, counselling, ECD or ECE. In addition to the principal, two teachers work in the program. Both hold a diploma in ECE and have over seven years of teaching experience. Each of these teachers has a teaching assistant who helps and supports the children

during the day. The program also has a counsellor who supports the SRC and holds a university degree in counselling and works as a counsellor at the same school.

The program's educational goals and curriculum

The educational goals for this program, according to the principal and interviewed teachers in both schools, aim at providing children with the necessary skills and knowledge (such as literacy and behavioural skills) that prepare them for primary school. The curriculum, therefore, is divided into two components; academic and behavioural. The academic component aims to provide children with the basic skills for literacy (i.e., reading and writing the Arabic and English alphabet), numeracy and science. These skills are taught through a series of textbooks covering four subjects – Arabic, English, math, science – with one session allocated daily to learn one of these subjects, as shown on the school timetable. The textbooks are chosen by Caritas Jordan and provided to each child upon joining the program. They are published by a Jordanian publishing house that specialises in children's books. The Arabic and English textbooks focus on learning the alphabets and constitute a number of learning units that focus on the reading and writing of letters. The phonetic approach is used in both textbooks where children move from reading the letter to reading syllables and words. Math textbook focuses on learning numbers and some basic math concepts. The science textbook focuses on learning concepts that are relevant to children's life such as their bodies, the farm animals and the importance of food and water to our lives.

The behavioral component focuses on teaching children life-functional skills that are regarded as important to the development of their behavior. Examples given by the principal and teachers include the importance of eating healthy food, how to keep our places (bedroom and classroom) clean and tidy, taking care of our personal hygiene and discipline and respecting the rules. Unlike the academic component, this component does not have a textbook or prepared materials or resources. The school follows a more spontaneous approach to teach these skills where teacher discuss them with children during a session dedicated daily for this subject. During the session, teachers can use a story or a film to talk to the children about these behaviors and demonstrate their importance.

The program also has a slot allocated for playing. According to both principals, playing is an important part in the learning process and development of the children. The timetable of the classroom specifies the playing activity chosen for each day in the week. These activities include playing with Lego, watching TV, playing with playing-dough and playing in the playing room or playground. Other activities such as drawing and singing are also sometimes used at PSB as a method that enables children to express themselves.

A normal school day in the program at the PSA starts at 9:00 A.M. with the morning assembly where children sing and do some physical exercises. Children then move to the classroom where the first session, which is usually an academic one, starts and lasts for half an hour. The academic session is followed by another exercising session where children have to practice the literacy or numeracy skill they learned earlier. Children break for breakfast at 11:00 A.M. for half an hour, and then play for an hour. The behavioral session starts at 12.30 and lasts for about half an hour, followed by the lunch break which finishes at 2:00 P.M. just before the school day ends and children go home.

The school day in the program at PSB during the summer time starts at 11:00 A.M. with the morning assembly where children sing and do some physical exercises. The daily timetable includes an academic session, and then an activity session (includes drawing, art and handcraft work and story telling), students have also two breaks and a playing session that is usually scheduled as the last session, where students play in the outdoor playground before they leave the school at 4.30 P.M. In the winter time, the program runs as a late afternoon shift starting at 4 P.M. and lasting for only two or three hours, but the activities span over a longer period.

Working with children

In our visit to the schools, we spent some time with the children and their teachers in the classrooms. We spoke to the students to gain some insights about them, their behavior and their interaction and communication with their teachers, each other, and the outsiders. We asked them basic questions such as their names, names of their friends, their favorite subject/activity at school and their favorite games. At the start, we had some difficulty starting a conversation because they appeared shy and reserved with their responses. After a few minutes, few of them started to engage with us and more followed after that. They spoke with low voices and limited ability to express themselves. Their sentences were basic in terms of structure and number of words. Many of them did not make any eye contact and some did not speak at all. It was also noticeable that girls were shyer than boys.

After a few weeks into the program at PSA, the children did not seem to know the names of their classmates and did not name any of their classmates as their friends. Children in this group, however, were new as the program had just started when we visited the school. Therefore, our observations of their interaction should be interpreted with reservation. Nonetheless, the staff at PSA, based on their experience with the previous group of children, said that children were gradually able to develop a good level of interaction by playing together, making friends and enjoying their time at the school. The children at PSB seemed to have developed more visible relationships with each other. They knew each other's names and some of them identified other children as their friends. As we played games with them, we noticed that most of them interacted while a few, however, showed signs of withdrawal refusing to talk or participate in the games. One of the teachers at PSB said that the children have come so far in developing their social communication skills as they now play together and respect each other and the rules in the school.

Relationships observed between the children and their teachers appeared quite positive. Children seemed to communicate and interact with their teachers openly and without reservation or fear. Teachers appeared motivated and compassionate working with SRC. During the interviews, the teachers highlighted the importance of making the children feeling loved and accepted, and how that has significantly helped most of them loving to come to school and overcoming their fear and emotional distress. The school principals emphasised the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment to those children since many of them developed insecurity problems after witnessing and living the war and its violence.

The teachers in both schools believed that the children improved significantly since the beginning of the program as a result of the ECE activities. They also reported that the children overcame most of their emotional and behavioural problems, were more able to express themselves and communicate their needs and emotions and made friends and progressed in how to interact with each other and with the staff. Moreover, their behavioural problems decreased as they became more able to express themselves and their needs without needing to be violent or shy. Another area of progress reported by the staff is the academic area. Teachers said that children by the end of the program learned literacy skills such as the alphabet and the numbers which will help them later when entering primary school.

After working with SRC in the ECE program, teachers and principals and the counselor at PSB reported challenges. They said that the children expressed different levels of stress and fear and behavioral problems such as aggression (physical and verbal), withdrawal, lying and sometimes stealing. While visiting the school, we noticed that children, in general, were shy and did not make the initiative to talk to us and some even refused to talk at all. The girls, especially, seemed to engage and interact less than the boys with what is happening around them. Most of these problems, according to the school staff, are mainly due to the war that forced them to flee their homes and having to adjust to a new life and environment. More challenges are linked to the families, which we illustrate in the next section.

Working with families

The school principal described their relationship with the families as generally positive. Many families feel appreciative and express their gratitude for the services the school is providing their children. The school constantly tries to communicate with the families via phone calls, sending notes them with children, and parents meetings to encourage their involvement in the education of their children. The principal also said that their doors were always open for parents to visit and discuss any issues concerning their child. However, some parents at the PSA showed low levels of collaboration, which stood out as a challenge to the school. According to the principal, the absence or passive participation of parents makes it harder to help the children, especially those who demonstrate developmental problems. The PSB principal, however, added that many of those families who were not communicating enough at the beginning, started gradually doing so when they noticed their children's progress. At PSB where communication with parents is restricted to the principal only, the principal reported greater collaboration from parents; for example, when responding to teachers' notes sent home. Teachers at PSB stated that they were not allowed to call or meet the parents if they faced any issue with the child. They can only refer to the principal who will contact the parents and work out the issue with them.

Most of the families, according to the PSA principal, face psychological and financial hardships that create unstable environments for children to grow up in and result in children developing behavioral problems. At the PSA, the principal and teachers suggested different challenges they faced when working with the families of children with concerning behaviors. For instance, some families neither regularly nor constructively communicate with the school; they do not attend parent-teacher meetings or reply to phone calls. Also, staff at PSA reported that most of the parents are either illiterate or have a low level of education making their contribution to the education of their children limited. Thus, they cannot help their children with their homework, which adds more workload on the school to help the children mastering the different skills. That being said, the PSA principal, however, emphasised that some families, despite being illiterate, still try to help their children and encourage them to do their homework. Staff at the PSB school organized activities for the families that helped raise awareness

of issues important to them and their children like how to deal with stress and take care of children's hygiene.

Another issue that the teachers and principal considered as a challenge was the conservative culture some families appeared to come from. The principal at PSB argued that the school always needs to consider the social, religious, cultural backgrounds and political positions of the families when planning any activity. For example, some of the parents are reserved and very protective of their daughters and do not accept them to participate in some school performances. The PSB principal said that they tried to discuss such issues with the families but at the end they had to go with the family's needs and values. Similarly, at PSA, the principal reported that, in some families, the husband does not allow his wife to visit the school or leave the house to follow up on their child. This leaves the communication between the school and the family strictly limited to the father, who sometimes is busy at work and does not have the time to call or visit the school.

As for the relationship between the children and their families, the principal and teachers stated that it is generally positive. Most families love their children and they want them to go to school. However, the staff at both schools reported incidents of domestic violence that they had noticed. The PSB principal reported that families use physical punishment sometimes in order deal with their children's behavioural problems. According to the counselor at PSB, the relationship between some children and their families follows an authoritarian style. This style has contributed, along with other factors, to the development of different behavioural problems among children such as fear, stress and aggression. The financial difficulties and abusive home environment, according to the PSB staff, clearly affects the children and may explain many of their social and psychological problems. The PSA principal said that some children witnessed their fathers being violent towards their mothers, which causes theses children to feel sad and anxious or becoming sometimes violent. Some children at PSA were also apparently beaten by their parents as a method of discipline.

Negligence is also another problem that the staff in both schools expressed concerns about. They explained that some families do not take care of the hygiene of their children. PSA staff reported that many of the children, for example, have head lice and strong odors of accumulated sweat. The PSA tried to raise awareness about the importance of children hygiene by talking to the parents and send them notes to remind them to take care of their children's hygiene. The PSA school also held a weekly inspection where children were notified that they were going to be inspected the following day and to ensure that their parents bathe them and wash their clothes. At the PSB, the staff tried to constantly work with the families by talking to them or sending them notes with their children asking them to improve it. The PSB, also, held a day for families to discuss the importance of hygiene and how to maintain it.

Providing ECE/KG through a non-formal educational program

The Program was launched in 2009 by a Jordanian educational non-profit NGO registered with the Ministry of Culture and is now present in 27 countries. The Program's main goal is two-fold: positively impact children and women throughout Jordan (and the Arab world) by empowering women to become community leaders and by creating a generation of children that love, respect and enjoy reading books.

The founder explained that many people in the Arab world read mostly for work and spiritual purposes because children are not read to in early stages of their life. So, the founder wanted to foster a stronger culture of lifelong learning and intrinsic motivation to read. They have reached out to public schools, homes and the Za'tari refugee camp. Their work, especially with Syrian refugees, is dependent on close coordination with INGOs and the Ministry of Interior to access refugee camps and the Ministry of Education to access public schools.

The initiative supports volunteers and parents to read aloud to children and start to build a library in their local community. Building a library means to create a space for people to read aloud to children and build a collection of books to select from. Each volunteer is given 25 books to start and receives training on social entrepreneurship and reading to children. They carefully select the volunteers by first asking NGOs to advertise and recommend individuals and parents. Then, they facilitate two days of training the primarily focus on (1) the art of how to read aloud and (2) how to be a social entrepreneur in order to build and sustain their library. Trainings also use feedback from previous volunteers to guide new volunteers on how to encourage families and children to participate. While communities have shown that parents have different motivations to participate, some common incentives have been the reference to religious values, support for children's learning and significance of building the future. The Program requires volunteers to sign a non-legally bound contract of commitment. Rana observed that this selection process that has undergone many developments has improved the rate of those who start libraries. Most volunteers are women, but they have seen more young men choosing to volunteer in refugee communities. Finally, the main field operating costs have been the purchasing of the initial 25 books and the trainers.

The founder reflected on significant impacts that reading aloud has had on children. Although not an ECE/ECD specialist, the founder referred to research that shows how reading aloud to children results in improvement in academic achievement, getting better jobs, able to engage in constructive dialogues, gaining exposure to different cultures and having role models from the stories who show confidence and courage. The 2015 annual report lists partnerships with UNICEF and universities to study how reading aloud has influenced the relationship between parents and children (Harvard University), brain development of children (Brown University) and social inclusion of children (University of Chicago). Some highlights of these studies include reading to children at an early age showed an increase in desires to read later on, especially when the early intervention was a pleasurable experience. They also created stories on themes of sustainable development (energy conservation) and, after two months of regularly reading these stories, the children showed increased levels of empathy towards the natural environment. This study has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

The program experienced a number of challenges. The volunteers keep requesting for more books, which was described as a double-edged sword with regard to sustainability because they do not want the volunteers to be dependent. While they can give discounts to books, they invest more in training for social entrepreneurship. Volunteers have also requested to be in more communication with the program's head office and the network of community-based libraries. The founder also reported that women find limitations in participating because some women object to reading aloud in public spaces (perhaps a consequence of a larger stigma associated with women's participation in a conservative public sphere). Finally, many volunteers do not commit and, thus, leave shortly afterwards. Retention

rates, however, have improved after a more developed selection process.

They have only recently reached out to Syrian refugees, namely through the three refugee camps: Za'tari, Emirati Jordanian Camp (EJC; Mrajeeb al Fhood) and Azraq. All volunteers who read inside the camp are refugees residing there. Having volunteers to visit the camp would be "against our model". The volunteers are mostly young adults, but include parents. The camps have a total of 132 volunteers, which also means 132 libraries because each volunteer is responsible for building a library (Za'tari = 106, EJC = 27, Azraq = 19). They have run for longer in the Za'tari refugee camp. To date, they have distributed across the three camps a total number of 3,300 books. Over the past year (November 2015 to November 3,168 ,(2016 reading sessions have taken place to an average of 20 children per library.

The children are from ages 12-3. The impact of reading to children was reported to be far more noticeable in the refugee communities than in normal contexts. Volunteers not only read stories to SRC, but the children also draw the stories. They noticed that children's drawings changed from violence to non-violence after engaging in the program. For this report, the Ministry of Interior rejected our application to visit the Za'tari refugee camp. We did, however, have the opportunity to visit one reading session as part of a public reading project.

The public reading project (PRP)

The PRP, in its third phase (2018-2015), mainly relies on young female and male volunteers of Jordanian and foreign (mostly Syrian) nationalities. In order to be selected in the project, the volunteers must be 18 years old minimum, enjoy reading and express their will to convey the love of reading to children. No specific educational attainment level is required. They offer a two-day training session to the volunteers who are then free to choose whether they want to continue in the project or not. Since 2009, some 1,000 people have been trained, but only half of them (about 510) have volunteered for the program across Jordan's ten governorates in over 800 locations.

The volunteers in the PRP project are tasked to read aloud books to children from 10-4 years and foster the love of reading. The books used are chosen in coordination with the Ministry of Education according to several criteria. The books must be appropriate for the children's age; convey notions of empathy, integrity, equality and respect for all human beings; and be devoid of any partisan, political or religious contents. Every volunteer also functions as a "library" that lends books to participating children willing to read books. The borrowers are asked to return the book a week later.

From an administrative perspective, the volunteers are in charge of gathering children to participate, usually children (Jordanian or any other nationality) living in the same catchment area that are met through direct contact (volunteers' neighbours for instance), attending kindergartens and elementary schools; in contact with social/educational NGOs, or through the program's Facebook page. They are also tasked to find a proper place to accommodate the reading sessions outside school hours. Usually, these sessions take place once or twice a week in kindergartens, schools, social centers, mosques, the volunteers' homes, or any other suitable and safe place. Their headquarters requires from the volunteers to monitor and report on the children's reading progress on a bi-monthly basis. Staff from Headquarters also monitor and evaluate the volunteers twice a year. Writing is not yet included in the PRP activities but it may be in the future. Ultimately, the project induces an extracurricular and decentralized educational process that mainly lies on the volunteers' shoulders.

A library in a parking lot

The observed PRP session took place in a popular neighbourhood, al-Bayadir, located in West Amman, on the 3rd of September 2016 between 12 and 1 p.m. Participants in the session included:

• Two volunteers, both Syrian female refugees in their early thirties that had the tawjihi (Baccalaureate) level. Both of them were trained in early 2015 and have kept volunteering with the PRP project since then.

• 23 children (12 girls and 11 boys), aged 12-3 years old, about half of them Syrian refugees. The children's nationality was not a selection criteria. The children above 6 were all to be enrolled in Jordanian formal schools for the 2017-2016 school year; hence, their participation in the project is purely extra-curricular. They all live in the same Bayadir neighbourhood and some of them in the same building as one of the volunteer's. The volunteers recruited them through direct contacts and local civil society organizations. About 18 of the children belong to the same core group that has participated in the program session since 2015. Five were newcomers to the group.

• 2 staff members from Headquarters to show the location of the session, which was in a remote area and difficult to find. They also found this an opportunity to meet with the volunteers and visit a reading session.

The session took place in the empty parking lot of one of the two volunteers' residences. The volunteers explained that the kindergarten that usually hosted the PRP sessions was still closed because of summer holidays and they had not yet managed to find a proper location. Also, for unknown reasons, traditional alternative locations such as the Muslim Brotherhood social centers or mosques had refused to host them again. Indeed, a parking lot is an unsafe and inappropriate space for young children to participate in activities. The session could have been interrupted at any moment by incoming cars, or by any group of children or youths willing to use the parking lot for any recreational activity. Under such adverse conditions, however, the "parking lot experience" reveals the volunteer's ability to respond to "emergency" situations. The facilities (chairs and tables) were appropriate and the children were comfortably sat on plastic chairs and the two tables were height-appropriate.

The activities: reading, stimulation and interaction

The activities were divided in two parts. The first part (20 minutes) was devoted to reading. Each of the volunteers read a booklet illustrated with images. One volunteer read the book rather swiftly, interrupting the reading now and then to briefly show the images to the children. There appeared to be little interaction between the volunteers and the children. All children listened to the story; the girls seemed more interested than the boys. The second volunteer aroused more interest among children by using a puppet. However, despite the fact that most of whom are literate and enrolled in the Jordanian school system, the children were not asked to express their opinions about the two stories or even read. Perhaps the exceptionally odd location and situation made the volunteers quite anxious

to complete the session. They reflected after the session that finding a more appropriate place to host the activity was a concern.

The second activity lasted 25 minutes where the two volunteers distributed sheets of paper, glue and cotton to the children to form a mutton head. This activity triggered much more interaction between the volunteers and the children and amongst the children. The volunteers did kneel at the level of the children to speak to them and help them. These interactions generated an atmosphere of working together. The fact that the two volunteers have been working with the same core group of children since 2015 helped restore that cooperation after the apparently "botched" reading session.

Early Childhood Development Program (ECDP)

One international NGO (INGO) set up ECDP to provide a supportive environment that fosters the cognitive, social, emotional skills of pre-school aged children so that they are prepared to transition smoothly to grade 1. Initially, they targeted only children who were five and six years old (KG1 and 2) and living in the Zaatari camp. During this first intervention, the ECDP provided structured learning activities and psychosocial support for children over a course of six months for two and a half hours a day and three days per week. The education representative believes this provision insufficiently responded to the enormous demands for pre-school education.

The ECDP currently runs in three centers in Zaatari camp and one in Azraq camp. All four centers follow the same program, which aims at improving basic literacy and numeracy, supporting psychosocial wellbeing and developing socio-emotional skills. The program comprises a blend of structured and open learning activities developed for children in emergency situations (natural disasters, armed conflict, AIDS, orphans, poverty). Snacks are provided. Alongside children, the INGO also works with parents who attend a program of 10 sessions designed to raise awareness and enable parents to support their children's learning and wellbeing at home.

The team comprises mostly an education advisor who oversees all education interventions as humanitarian response and development at a strategic level. There is an international team who designs the program and its learning objectives based on the JME pre-school curriculum, produces a capacity building program for teachers, develops learning and training materials and coordinates with donors. The implementing team works directly in the centers.

In monitoring the progress of the ECDP, the organization uses the "International Development and Early Learning Assessment" (IDELA), an instrument developed for measuring various dimensions of cognitive, social and emotional areas of development. Their experience with IDELA is still new; they administer IDELA to the children as a pre and post test to monitor progress. They also use the measures in IDELA to design some of the ECDP activities, which as reported by the education advisor has also been very useful. Nevertheless, they still modify the IDELA depending on the program they have designed because the learning cycles in the camps are less intense (time and scope) than more formal and comprehensive programs. For example, the program in the Zaatari camp does not cover all letters of the alphabet that are measured in the cognitive section of IDELA and, so, they modify the

instrument accordingly. Results from IDELA also indicated a poor-quality learning environment in the refugee camps. The education advisor observed how the poor stimuli in the SRC's environment limits their ability to respond to items in IDELA that children in neighboring host communities can easily perform. For example, some children who live – and especially born – in the camps cannot recognize colors or fruits because they have either never seen them before or had someone point them out. This is more severe in Azra camp than in Zaatari.

The quality of learning activities in ECDP resulted in an outcome that demonstrates a success and a challenge at the same time. During the program, the ECDP facilitate learning opportunities that allow the children to practice, express themselves and work with peers. However, the education advisor reported that they do not have the same opportunities in the formal schooling, namely grade 1. Indeed, parents reported to the education advisor that levels of "interaction and engagement" are less in grade 1 than in the ECDP.

The education advisor also observed indications of success and challenging moments with parents. In 13-2012, at the start of the program, they found great resistance from parents because they neither wanted the service nor did they want to settle down in order to return quickly to Syria. However, now INGO has overcome this challenge as parents are now very engaged in the ECDP service and really want it for their children. The education advisor reported that they have children in a waiting list, especially in the densely populated Zaatari camp where children wait behind a fence.

For the Fall of 2016, the INGO will shift its program in the ECDP to support children with pre-KG (4-3 years old) and KG5-4) 1 years old). The Jordan Ministry of Education (JME) will now take lead in providing KG6-5) 2 years old) in the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps and host communities. The education advisor praised this as great progress and a successful outcome of advocacy work by the INGO and other organizations. The JME, with support from donors and UNICEF, will construct classrooms and provide ECE and support for children 6-5 years old.

When concluding the interview, the education advisor briefed us on two other interventions that the INGO supports in Jordan. They run a project in host communities for Syrian and Jordanians to prepare the child and parents for school. So, for twice a week over two months, they inform parents on approaches to support their child's learning. A second initiative is the support for developing nurseries and daycare centers for children from 3-0 years old. By supporting local communities to establish nurseries and daycares, the education advisor highlighted that they also build on the capacities of local caregivers and supervisors from the Ministry of Social Development. Support by the INGO also includes setting up standards for a high quality ECE physical environment for children 3-0 and facilitating entry points for women into a competitive and male-dominated labor market.

Lebanon

ECE/KG at a semi-private school in Mt Lebanon (SML)

We visited SML, a small to medium sized semi-private school run by nuns and located about a 30-minute drive up the mountain from the coast in quite a rural mountainous setting. During the visit, we spent some time with the children during their break, observed and interacted with children in a classroom, spoke with the KG classroom teacher, interviewed the psychologist who visits once a week and had an informal chat with the director.

Visiting the school

We approached the school and the children were outside for their break time. Some scurried over to the gate to welcome us. A teacher slid open a large metal gate and let us in. The school appeared to have originally been a large residence with a somewhat spacious outdoor space. A fraction of this open area was sheltered by a roof. In the children's outdoor area, we did not see play equipment like balls, jump ropes, swings or a jungle gym. The children seemed busy, nevertheless, speaking to each other. Indeed, we observed children apparently making up their own games and teaching the rules to other kids, a particular strength probably due to the apparent limited resources like play equipment and technological instruments like tablets. Upstairs were the classrooms and administrative offices that were actually rooms in a historic home with high-ceilings and home furniture. These offices included a kitchen, the Director's office and an office for the psychologist's weekly visits. During the tour, the psychologist did express some reservation for having a bed in the closed counseling room.

In the middle of the open space, teachers had taken out their chairs to sit in the sunshine. None were occupied with their mobile phones. The children seemed quite comfortable around the teachers. After meeting with the Director, we returned to the playground where she lined up the children in rows so that we could meet them. Marching down the aisles of children, she lightly tapped their heads stating their nationality. As a senior administrator, she impressively called out nearly all their names and inquired about children she noticed were absent. The majority of children were from Syria and the youngest was four years old with the majority around six. We knelt down and spoke to some of the children asking them their names and who their friends were. Some of the children's apparent sense of curiosity and confidence seemed to help overcome any suspicions of who we were and told us that they like to play with their friends and, in class, they write, color and, "if we do well, they give us clay". They also named some of their friends. Interestingly enough, the children who took the initiative to introduce themselves and make physical contact were almost always Lebanese. The refugee children from Syria were curious but did not engage in neither much conversation nor physical contact. We observed this also in other similar sites.

Some of the children carried sandwiches they said their mothers made, chatting and eating with each other. However, other children were eating foods with refined sugar, like chocolate. While such snacks may be more affordable (time and money) for parents to provide their children, they clearly take a toll and their body, brain and, as we clearly saw, their teeth that were disfigured and discolored.

Inside the classroom

Entering the classroom, we could smell an odor of days-old bodily sweat, a stench familiar only to those who have visited the refugee camps. The issue of hygiene was clear and recurring in nearly all site visits. All the teachers and psychologist in this school maintained that more efforts needed to be put into parent education to ensure that children are cleaned and groomed daily. The physical setup of the classrooms was, as expected, like

a mini version of a traditional class with desks aligned in rows facing the front of the class. However, their levels of engagement suggested that the classroom was functioning in an orderly manner. The children seemed to be quite organized and committed to the rules of the class. Whenever the teacher wanted them to return to their seats, she would merely ask them. The teachers, during our visit, did not raise their voices to scream or shout.

After the children came in from the break, the teacher got their attention by acting out a song called, "Heads, shoulders knees and toes". The class then followed the same storybook in French and read aloud together, which only some of the children were able to do. While quietly walking around the tables, we asked some of the children what they liked the most in class, many replied, "learning". They went on to saying that they love their notebook, showing off the neat handwriting and the drawings they do when asked to draw. They were able to reply in French to almost all questions we would ask; but when asked in Arabic, they still replied in French. We observed this in other classrooms – secondary, Kindergarten, without refugee children. Teachers mixing languages during classroom dialogues and instruction is quite typical; however detrimental to mastering more than one language.

We did notice three children in the classroom who sat in the corner not really participating. It did not appear that anyone noticed them and nobody approached them. The three did not seem particularly distressed, but for about half an hour, they were there, withdrawn the entire time. The other children seemed to be learning together. We observed them helping one another out and also showing sensitivity to each other's' feelings. For example, one of the children was asked to identify the letter "d" but struggled by replying "c". The teacher tried to clue her by asking "who's its sister letter"? She still struggled and replied "a". One of the nearby children leaned in and whispered to her the letter in a way, most likely, not wanting to embarrass her.

While talking to the Kindergarten (KG) teachers, they appeared relaxed. We conversed about the general aims of KG. The most important were learning literacy (Arabic and French) and numeracy. Apparent secondary objectives of KG also included learning to follow instructions and make friends. The classroom learning activities are mostly supported by textbooks produced for Kindergarten levels. For KG1-2, they use books for French and Math published by popular French scholastic publishers and Arabic by the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), the curriculum development agency for the LMEHE. For KG3, the French and Math books are from Arc en Ciel and the Arabic book, Rawdat al Farah, Dar el Mufid. When reflecting on practice, the teachers explained how working with SRC is a challenging experience on two levels. At one level, most of the children have not seen a pen and paper. The teachers are mostly used to children starting KG with at least some psychomotor ability to hold a coloring pencil and try and color. The second is that they are instructing in French, which many of the children struggle to learn. The teachers added that they would like to have a space like a carpeted area where the kids can sit and play. They did mention that they are adding two more classrooms and will create a play space for the children.

The special cases of SRC

We met the psychologist who visits the school every Wednesday. She had started nearly a month ago when we met her. We spoke mostly about issues that she has encountered. She referred mostly to the children in grades 6,7, and 8. The psychologist administers the IQ test and the Family Apperception Test (FAT) [9]. The FAT is a series of images that children use to interpret. From the stories, she can learn about conditions at home and understand the child's behaviors. According to the psychologist, the FAT has been most effective for

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9   The FAT was developed by Sotile, Julian, Henry & Sotile in France in 1988 but called for conceptual review following Roskam et al (2010).

children who do not like to speak, mostly out of fear. Moreover, the FAT has been important for children under six because she avoids administering to them IQ tests. Instead, IQ tests are reserved most for children above six; especially when teachers express their concerns over the children's apparent low levels of intelligence and abilities to perform tasks, which teachers often do. Their concern of the children's level of intelligence reveals two important findings. First, the teachers' observations and experiences with children who have not experienced war-related trauma provide valuable evidence that suggest the cognitive development of SRC in their classrooms have been hindered due to war-related experiences and environments. Second, continuous expression of concerns over cognitive abilities also suggests that teachers, in practice, prioritize learning to read and write over intervening to foster war-related psychological rehabilitation.

The psychologist shared with us two key highlights of what she learned from the children's stories that she believes directly and indirectly results in peer-to-peer violence and influences their capacities to learn and socialize at school. It is important to note that this evidence has not emerged from recorded data and corroborated with variables related to home and school; instead, the findings are a result from observations that the psychologist has made based on her conversations with children and their parents and teachers. First, she has learned that most of the children are victims of domestic violence, whether as shields between parents or direct targets. For example, a mother who wanted to avoid sleeping with her husband or being beaten by her husband would have her child sleep next to her in bed. When approached, many mothers deny they force their children to sleep with them in bed and claim that their children want to. Similarly, in other sites, some mothers breastfeed longer than others to avoid their husbands. Sometimes children are also beaten and, so, they insist on sleeping next to the mother. She has related the children's aggressive behavior amongst each other during play with fathers hitting either those children or their mothers and, consequently, turn to the playground to channel their learned aggressiveness and frustrations. Another child who is beaten by his father comes to school in a constant feeling of fear. A second recurring issues noticed by the psychologist is the learned-helplessness or overprotective parenting that mothers fostered at home. She noticed that children who have scored low on IQ tests are not encouraged to be independent, still sleep with their mother and are more prone to be used as a shield at home. She recalled a child's testimony where the child insisted on bathing alone, but the parent refused.

The psychologist called for continuous parent and professional education. She believes that teachers could benefit from professional development that promotes approaches to working with vulnerable and refugee children. She also advocated for parent education but cautioned about resistance from parents. In another center, she has seen some parents remove their child(ren) from the program after being approached about concerns that the psychologist has raised.

INGO 1

We interviewed the director and, at the pre-school center, interviewed the principal and a KG teacher with a BA in elementary education and observed a KG2 classroom. INGO 1 also has an education officer who has a BA degree in education and ten years of teaching experience in a KG in Aleppo. INGO 1 started their KG1-3 program in 2012 to prepare children to enter public schools after closing down its classes for the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). INGO 1 also provides a remedial program for Syrian refugee children who are enrolled in Lebanese public schools to support them mostly in English or French. Each of their two centers has five KG classes in the morning, five in the evening and a learning support program for language, homework and psychosocial support in the morning for students who attend public schools in the second shift. INGO 1 focused on the KG program after close coordination with MEHE who strongly advised to support pre-school education because they claimed they already had prepared a program for children 7-17 years of age. The organization values its coordination with MEHE so that it ensures sustainable development by "empower[ing] the public system and then we leave".

Developing the KG program

The education team at INGO 1, led by an education officer, adopts a holistic, bottom-up approach when developing their education program by working closely with the families at home. The director stressed on the value of "accompaniment" in the organization's mission when developing any educational program. By "accompaniment", they "walk with the refugees" by visiting them regularly, informing them about the services they provide and providing social workers to support them. Based on this approach, they have a team that regularly carries out home visits to meet with parents and children to get to know their particular needs, inform them about the KG program and encourage them to send their children to public schools. Needs have ranged from food assistance to psychosocial support. They also invite parents to focus group sessions where they talk about ways to support their child at home, mostly with homework. One of the teachers believes that working with parents is critical because some parents neither have the patience to manage behaviors nor take initiatives to play with their children, do not know how to encourage their children, underestimate their children's intelligence and "are really aggressive with punishments". Nevertheless, the director recalled a mother's appreciation to these group meetings who said, "I came here without any hesitation…because with [this organization] I feel I'm a human being". The director also reported that parents ask the home visit teams to keep coming because, in addition to the assistance, they also need someone to talk to. Creating these close connections to build trust, reflected the director, is much easier in camps than urban settings. While building these connections, work becomes easier because communication channels between parents and the organization become two-way.

The KG program also required teachers specialized in ECE, which the principal highlighted was very difficult to find. One of the teachers interviewed has a Bachelor's degree in elementary education, but still feels unprepared to work with pre-school children – especially refugee children. She recognized that the age group of Kindergarten children requires approaches "totally different" from elementary school children. As they had closed the ALP, they provided their existing teachers with a great deal of training. The INGO 1 international office is developing an international teacher formation training program that covers its mission and concepts and approaches in education in emergencies and education psychology. The teachers have already received two training sessions, each lasting five days. However, the director reported that some of the teachers said were not prepared to teach pre-school children and, so, quit. Moreover, finding teachers with a professional and academic background in ECE was reported as a great challenge. The staff that has remained receives regular professional development. The social workers receive training from psychiatrists at a prestigious hospital center in Beirut and further support from the education officer. The education officer, social worker and psychologist work together in facilitating periodic workshops to teachers on how to respond to children with psychological issues. The education officer regularly reviews with teachers approaches to prepare and facilitate activities for ECE.

The main objective of the KG program as explained by the director is to prepare children for grade 1. He recalled the MEHE official responsible for education projects for refugees expressed concern after finding Syrian children in grade 1 neither knowing the alphabet nor how to behave in a school. INGO 1 follows the Lebanese KG curriculum and the supplementary textbooks and teacher's guide produced by CERD. The organization follows this program in order to meet the main objectives that apparently prepare children for grade 1. In a separate interview with an academic in higher education who specializes in ECD/ECE finds the grade 1 curriculum exceedingly demanding on literacy and numeracy skills and, thus, incongruent with the activities of the pre-school program. While following the government proposed curriculum, the education officer encourages teachers to be creative in designing activities for the children. A teacher found that varying the activities from worksheets to playdough, etc. really engaged the children. The principal reported that they give homework for KG3 and not for KG 1 and 2. For the summer, they created a summer program. The teachers present their monthly plans and lesson plans to the principal and then with the education officer. The teachers, according to the principal, do not really prepare their plans together, but they do talk about challenges and solutions during the weekly teacher meeting. In

addition to receiving teachers' requests for supplies, namely games, they also recently showed the teachers a catalogue of supplies to order that could support their work in the KG classrooms. The education officer relies on the teachers' feedback to continuously review its aims and activities.

In both centers; the morning KG program runs from 8am to 1pm and the afternoon program from 1:30pm to 6:30pm. Each class has one main teacher and a teaching assistant for every two classes. The daily schedule follows the program set in the Lebanese curriculum and teacher's guide. The children begin with a warm-up and then a literacy or numeracy class followed by play, theatre and music. They have two breaks. From their experience with the ALP when parents sent their children unfed, they now provide children in KG a sandwich, a fruit and a vegetable during their two breaks. The children also have naptime.

Visiting the KG program in Center Beirut

Center Beirut is on a quiet street behind a busy neighborhood surrounded by apartment buildings and small businesses like car shops and supermarkets. The education center surrounds a playground with the classrooms on two sides and the office on the third. The playground is an open space that is mostly in the sun with one part in the shade. It is paved and the children were running around playing. There was no equipment on the playground or balls being played with.

The center has eight teachers per shift; a main teacher for each class and an assistant for every two classes. After the morning shift, a different group of eight teachers arrive. Teachers come from Lebanon and Syria; once they had a teacher from Sudan. The principal considers the one month it takes to advertise and recruit a teacher a very long process. Once a week, they meet with the principal to discuss the curriculum, issues and administration. On a few occasions, teachers planned with their teaching assistant. The center has a computer room that is mainly used by older children and teachers. KG children do not access this room. Teachers have access to the Internet, which the principal says they use for gathering additional materials. There is also a small library with mostly Arabic books along with English books donated by a private francophone university. We were told that each classroom has a projector and a computer. Although they were not seen in the classrooms, it is possible that they were stored outside of the classroom. There is a social worker at the center who refers cases to the psychiatrist who visits once a week. The psychiatrist gives prescriptions and free medication to children when needed. The psychiatrist travels between the different INGO 1 education centers and so is not always present at one particular location. A teacher mentioned a need for a speech therapist, which they may get with their partnership with the university. The social worker also trains teachers on how to work with small children and identify cases that need more attention.

Each shift has about 150 students with 22-27 children per class – all Syrian refugee children. During the first break, they receive a sandwich with za'tar and at the second break they get a sandwich with chocolate spread. Some of the children's mothers prepare these meals; all paid for by the center. They also receive apples, cucumbers, pears and, in the summer, fresh juice. When working with the children, the principal noted that the lack of exposure to a second language during early childhood requires them to focus on literacy, although "I know in KG they should not…know how to read and write". A teacher reported that the children entering KG1 could not hold a pencil and seem to have never colored or played with playdough before and, thus, appear to have had virtually no exposure to coloring or playing with toys at home. This teacher found that they had to focus more on developing certain skills (i.e. psychomotor development) and expressed concerns for leaving out other areas of development defined by the curriculum (i.e. scientific development) and, thus, not finishing the curriculum. The teacher also explained that the children need more time to play, specifically free play; however, she felt that more time for play would mean even less coverage of the curriculum. To this teacher, the curriculum appears to, on the one hand, puts pressure on ensuring all objectives are met but, on the other hand, lacks

specific objectives for KG3 making the general guidelines provided difficult to teach and plan.

Despite the apparent improvement of children's behaviors in the classroom as reported by the principal, this teacher explained that behavior management has been a great challenge, especially when trying to control the class. She found many of the children to be hyperactive and not able to sit "on a chair…and work"; especially at the start of the program, and show signs of trauma and stress. She believes that this is partly due to the war, but also their current home environment where their parents constantly talk about the war and watch it on TV. There also seems to be a lack of structure at home which makes it difficult for the children to follow rules at school. However, she says that the children's behavior has improved over time. She believes the students are really bright and love to learn. However, she feels that supporting these children is a slow process because they spend so much more time in their home environment than in the school environment.

Moreover, the teacher attributed an ongoing environment of violence that the children seem to keep living in to the news their parents continuously watch and talk about at home. She recalled one child who repeatedly builds figures out of playdough and decapitates them saying this is what they do, referring to the militants of the so-called Islamic State. She also wanted to illustrate from this example that each child has their own unique special needs, "Each one has a story; each one has his own experiences, his own fears, his own challenges".

The center welcomed one of the researchers to observe a KG2 English lesson where they covered colors, shapes and patterns. The classroom was decorated with the children's artwork and learning materials such as the days of the week and months. The teacher welcomed the class back to the lesson and gave instructions for the activity of sticking the correct color and shaped itemed stickers in a specific pattern. She demonstrated the first two and then gave students time to do it. She monitored the classroom and helped students who did not understand. For those who finished early, she presented their work to the class and told them that they had done a good job. The children seemed fairly well behaved, participated in the activity and quite motivated as they got out of their chairs to see what their friends were doing. The atmosphere was friendly with the teacher speaking in a pleasant voice at a moderate tone.

Reflecting on the KG program

INGO 1 gathers feedback by facilitating focus group sessions with children who have started grade 1 and their mothers. INGO 1 is unable to access Lebanese students in public schools or Syrian children who were not in the program to better evaluate the impact of their KG program. Nevertheless, they are still able to gather enough information from parents and children to continuously develop the pre-school activities.

The principal seemed quite hesitant to reflect on successful outcomes because the program was still relatively new to them. However, she did want to highlight that she observed positive changes in the students' behaviors at school, parents' attitudes towards education and school and even the teachers' approaches to managing the challenges of a classroom. A teacher described the children's progress by how they held the pencil and completing English language worksheets that have complex concepts. Probably the most significant impact reported of the KG program was the mere entry into public schools' grade 1. Only this year (2-15-2016) had children from their KG program entered first grade, even though accessing public schools is still difficult and not a guarantee. Based on the parents' feedback, the program apparently gives a great deal of psychological support to parents by encouraging them to keep their children in public schools. Also, parents' appreciation for language support suggests that their children have been able to perform better in a bilingual primary school curriculum than had they not participated in the KG program. Indeed, a teacher noted their improvement in English as well as being able to sit and color for a period of time. In addition, children who participated in the arts also allowed teachers to monitor their changes over time through their drawings and the colors that they used (e.g. black and red to show violence).

The children built positive relationships with the caregivers and peers. A teacher reported that, over time, she noticed children caring more and playing better together. She attributes this change in behavior to modelling how teachers care for the children and reading stories about sympathy. The principal described how about 120 of the 150 children used to cry at the start. She explained that it might have been the first time they separate from their parents. With time, however, the principal noticed how the children appear to prefer staying in the center than going home because of the lack of places to play at home. They live in Beirut and, because of the expensive rent, you will have two to three families sharing one room. Cramped living conditions may also result in children sleeping late. The principal observed that children in the afternoon shift are much engaged while those in the morning shift come to school very sleepy.

INGO 1 tries to monitor the progress of the children who complete their KG program and move to public schools. Although they cannot access the report cards or records from the public school, they do try and learn about the children from the parents. The older children who receive learning support do report back on their experiences in school.

The principal believed that the teachers need a great deal of support. Many of them are refugees and, so, they also suffer from the struggles of any other refugee in Lebanon, so, "you have to be patient". Professionally, the teachers are also in need of continuous professional development for learning to teach the Lebanese curriculum, managing classrooms, working with very young children and supporting children with special cases, even though a social worker is available.

INGO 2

At INGO 2, we interviewed the project manager of education projects, and visited a learning center in Tripoli where we also interviewed the center director, a parent and three teachers. During the time of the visit, the center had been running the ECE program for three weeks.

The problem with ECE for vulnerable children in Lebanon

Access to pre-school education for Syrian children in Lebanon is extremely limited and essential for schooling, argued the Project Manager. She explained that there is neither the outreach nor the capacity to give all children a KG education. Second shifts in public schools do not provide Kindergarten as they do for elementary levels. In addition, the first-grade curriculum in Lebanon expects children to have acquired some ability to read and write. So, the Project Manager found that as soon as SRC enter first grade, they are already behind in school. The absence of preparation for grade 1 for SRC prompted the INGO 2 to revise their education strategy because they have long focused on primary school children and youth.

In summer 2016, the INGO 2 launched a two-month ECE program in the Tripoli region targeting five-year-olds. They designed a condensed KG curriculum drawing on the aims and scope of the pre-school curriculum produced by CERD. The Project Manager explained that they mostly elaborated on the design of learning so that children would meet the curricular learning objectives but through play rather than traditional didactic methods. The teachers are Lebanese who have some background in ECE. The INGO 2 plans to provide the teachers professional development on ECE and hire teachers with more experience working with children under six. They hope that the trainings would help change the ECE methodology to include more "learning through play and interactive learning" which are not necessarily part of the formal KG programs. However, the Project Manager expressed concern that the short time period of their program will force them to only focus on school readiness rather than other early childhood development components. They do, however, want the teachers to be aware of the developmental needs of the children.

The INGO 2 also provides childcare for young parents in some of the youth centers for their participants. She noted that the nursery does not have a specially designed educational curriculum, but it does support the youth parents by providing supervised space for young children while the parents attend the programs. The INGO 2 has no plan to incorporate educational goals for this daycare, but are open to the possibility. According to the Project Manager, the organization maintains its commitment to the guidelines set by MEHE and it looks forward to the non-formal ECE program that CERD is developing.

Visiting the ECE center in Tripoli

The center rests in a calm neighborhood. When you enter the building, you must go up some stairs. The center has two floors of the building, with the ECE classrooms on the bottom floor and the ALP programs on the top floor. Upon arriving to the center, several parents were waiting to pick up their children from the ECE program. They had with them some of their younger children. There are three classrooms for the ECE programs. Each has desks and chairs, a large rug, a whiteboard and teaching aids like felt posters to tell the weather and months in English and French. In the classroom, all the children were sitting together in rows on the rug listening to the teacher reading a story who was sitting on a chair in front of them. All the children were wearing plastic ponchos to protect them from getting paint on their clothes. The ponchos are provided by the center and remain at the center. They were color coordinated for boys and girls – boys in blue and girls in purple or pink. When prompted by the teacher, the children could repeat the story verbatim, in unison.

At the center, the director of the center and northern region shared her views and experiences. She described the ECE program as a school readiness program that focuses on well-being. This is done by encouraging the children to express themselves and their feelings, using quiet voices, identify others' feelings through facial expressions, identify healthy and unhealthy foods, work independently, participate in group work, maintain a clean class and respect property and each other. A main goal of the program is to establish routine and bring a sense of normalcy to the children's lives. They hope to give them a sense of childhood and provide activities that are appropriate for their age, even when they must act differently or take on responsibilities that are above their age when they are not at school. They see that some of the children suffer from isolation and they hope to foster a sense of universalism by helping them understand that others are going through similar difficulties as them. When talking with a parent, the mother shared a similar appreciation to supporting her son's socio-emotional development, but appeared to have valued performing well in first grade more.

There are two shifts for the program. The first one runs from 9-11:15 and the second is from 11:30-1:45. They each have 3 sessions for 45 minutes each: Literacy, Numeracy and Recreational Activities. Each day ends with the students on the carpet with the teacher reading them a story. Each class has approximately 20 children. The same teacher is with the students for the entire time. The classrooms have access to stories, creation materials, CD player, projector and teaching aids. The children spend the entire time in the classroom. This center does not have a playground for them to play in. Although other centers do have a space for outside play, they were described as small. The children do not receive any food as they are expected to go right home after their class. Additionally, the center sees feeding as problematic in Lebanon as fresh fruits are expensive and there are often expired foods on shelves.

The center provides awareness sessions with the parents on good parenting practices. They plan to have parent-teacher meetings, although those have not happened yet. The education officer believes that working closely with parents is important because it allows them to understand the home life of the child and the child's unique personal experiences and relationship in order to better reach out to and teach them. The parents must come and pick up their children from the center; the children cannot leave alone. She also finds this policy instrumental in bringing parents to the center as well as keep the children safe in transit.

The teachers are Lebanese public school teachers. Although the education officer tries to recruit teachers with a background in ECE, finding such teachers has been difficult. By hiring the public-school teachers, the INGO 2 believes it can build the capacity of public school teachers so that they also help children who do not attend their ECE program.

The education officer tried to reflect on challenges but explained that the ECE program was new, so it was difficult to identify any main ones so far. However, that the most expected challenge was low attendance, which would fluctuate at different times. She believes that their greatest success so far has been the observable changes of children's behaviors. They were worried that behavioral change would take much longer, but after three weeks they have seen how children know what to do in the classroom and how to follow rules. One of the parents also testified a change in her son's behavior at home. The mother said that her son appears calmer in general. He sings the songs he learned in school. She explained that before the program, her son did not know how to play with his little sister and would hit her. Now, he plays with her more gently and seems to be more interested in playing with her. Finally, the offer reported that they had more children who wanted to enroll in the program than they could accommodate. In order to keep the class size small, they introduced a second shift. The INGO 2 are looking for other organizations to partner with to accommodate more children in the area.

During the school visit, three female teachers also shared their reflections on their work so far. One teacher has a background in Arabic literature, which she taught for two years. The second teacher has a background in early childhood and taught KG for 9 years. The third teacher has a background in Arabic literature and taught for 3 years. They described the curriculum as easy and simple and believed that it would help the children become ready for school. The believe, however, that the SRC will face a number of challenges when starting grade 1, such as being separated from their parents for longer and adjusting to the concept of school. They expressed concern over children having to be more independent and responsible at school, so they have tried to apply school-like rules in their classroom. Nevertheless, they believe these children will face fewer challenges than those who have never been to pre-school.

For monitoring and evaluation, they have developed a formative approach that reports on each child's individual progress. Teachers complete an observation sheet for each child at the beginning and again at the end of the program. The indicators are mostly based on the general areas of human development: cognitive and socio-emotional. Overall, they have found that the children learn very quickly. When they first entered class, the teachers reported that the children did not have great fine motor skills like holding a pencil. In a matter of three weeks, the children could hold a pencil, play with playdough and color. The children seem open to learning a new language without pushing back. They have seen behavioral changes as well. The children are sharing better now and when they misbehave they accept the consequences. For example, a child cursed in class, and when the teacher asked him to apologize to the class, he did. Before this would have been harder. They see the children working together more and appear more motivated to participate. The teachers reported they still see few incidents of fighting, but the teachers see this more as a normal form of play than a problem. Furthermore, they reported positive relationships with and support from parents, whom they believe are essential to the children's learning. They try to encourage parents to replicate the activities they do in school at home, motivate their children and make them like going to school. The parents also seem to be interested in their child's learning and have apparently asked teachers how they can support their children at home.

When discussing ways to improve the program, the teachers would like to better prepare the children by gradually increasing the hours of the program so that the children get used to being away from their parents for longer. Moreover, they believe that if the goal of the program is to prepare the children for grade 1, the summer program is enough and the children will be prepared. However, they would like to have the full 3 years of KG programming and that children who go to the full 3 years would be slightly more prepared than the children

currently enrolled. They did not believe this was an essential development to the program because they were confident that the classroom teacher would be able to support their adjustments.

INGO 3 in North Lebanon and Bekaa governorates

We interviewed the Director of the INGO 3 on two occasions; during the start of the pilot program and then a month afterwards.

A program with learning stations

The INGO 3 designed an ECE program after learning from MEHE that the government was appreciative of NGOs working on preparing children to go to school and called for resources to support pre-school children, or ECE. They also believe that investing in ECE programs is among the most cost-effective interventions to creating significant change in children, especially among refugee children. So, in April 2016, the INGO 3 piloted their program for four months (Apr – Jul) providing KG 1 and 2 to children 3, 4 and 5 years of age. They ran the program in the North Lebanon and Bekaa governorates for 300 children. The ECE center is within the community, whether in a tent in a settlement or a building in the neighborhood. Hence, the children walk to the school taking no more than 5 minutes. In November, they are expanding to 1,000 children and adding KG 3.

The program is developed at its headquarters and is regarded as quite expensive to run because it limits each classroom to only 22 children with one teacher and one assistant. Provisions of non-processed foods as snacks also add to the costs. For the pilot, they provided a bread cracker called kaak, it costs under $1 but still a great expense. For November, they are considering fresh fruits, but could pose logistical challenges.

The ECE program runs for 3.5 hours a day, 5 days a week. The classroom has one Lebanese teacher and one Syrian volunteer teacher. One teacher acts as the head teacher and the other assists by taking the children to the toilet, helping them play the games and acting as a second pair of eyes in the classroom. The program is based on an approach that focuses on the social and emotional well-being of the children. The INGO 3 also believes in creating a positive learning environment for the children, increasing their self-esteem and sense of community.

The classroom setup is structured for a play-based approach, with different learning centers or stations. They begin the day with circle time and then break into teams where the teacher assigns them different roles, like the helper. The children then are free to choose to go to any of the stations: art, math, literacy, exploratory and peace corner. All the centers focus on the same theme. For example, one theme is "night and day". So, each of the centers has activities related to "night and day". The themes change every week. During this time, the teacher and assistant float around to support the children. In the classrooms, they have large books where the children can see the letters and begin to understand how reading happens. The books are in Arabic and either English or French depending on what the local school will teach. The ECE centers also all have playgrounds.

The INGO 3 monitors children's progress by using IDELA. The Director appreciates that the tool does not have a quotient where "healthy" children score 100. The tool is designed to monitor the progress of various domains of the child's growth. They used this instrument to build a baseline and then measured progress after the four months. The INGO 3 has prepared their outcomes in a presentation showing different types of changes among the children as a collective. Also, once a week, its staff visits the school center to monitor the program.

When recruiting teachers, they shortlist teachers who have experience in teaching and a written qualification to teach KG. They later get trained in the approach that INGO 3 developed. Trainers also come in from New York to train on different approaches. In addition, the team in Lebanon has an early childhood officer who facilitates

teacher learning circles where teachers meet on a monthly basis and share challenges and ideas. The objective is to share and develop best practices for classroom management, positive discipline and engagement. The Director believes that this approach to continuous professional development works.

Observing successes and challenges

In addition to quantified measures from the IDELA showing positive change, the Director spoke of observable differences in children's behaviors. The Director described the beginning of the program as "negative chaos" where children did not respect any rules, shouted in class and pushed peers. About a month and a half into the program, the Director described "positive chaos" where children were freely moving around the class and busy with their peers and the activities. They also acclimatized quickly to the norms of the class by removing their shoes when entering and knowing how to talk with their peers without being reminded by the teacher. This, argued the Director, is part of school readiness.

The Director said she was fortunate enough to find a teacher who stood out as a model ECE teacher. She trains in the government technical schools and has been a valuable human resource to the program. The Director recalled the way she reads stories during circle time and captured all the children's attention. She never raised her voice; in fact, she would lower her voice to capture the children's attention. The Director also described her as very creative with the little resources that were available (reusing materials for art, etc.). Other teachers were neither as patient with their children nor as tolerant to distractions in the classroom (e.g. a child getting up to get a drink of water while the teacher was reading). Nevertheless, some other teachers brought in their own materials and one teacher created a garden outside the school. She brought seeds and soil for the children to learn while physically working with the materials. The Director recalled that this teacher created an environment where children became very interested in participating and paying attention.

The INGO 3 team has also faced numerous challenges when piloting the program. The Director reflected mostly on the qualification of teachers to work with children under six years of age. While some teachers demonstrated abilities to creatively engage the children with each other and the activities, the Director expressed concerns over the other teachers' traditional approaches, whether intentional or unintentional. For example, the Director reported that some teachers wanted more activities, which she believes is a result of being dependent on a highly structured, top-down approach to lesson design. Indeed, these teachers have already received support in writing out the duration of activities in the lesson plans and outlining the weekly plans. Furthermore, the system of freely choosing learning stations has apparently caused degrees of anxiety among a few teachers who complained of difficulty managing the children and called for a more structured approach to facilitation. Even some of the teachers' approaches towards children with special behavioral needs (e.g. disruptive behavior) have promoted debates at higher administrative levels. While the mission at IRC is to ensure that all children are included in the provisions of educational opportunities, some teachers argue that keeping certain students compromises the quality of education for the other children. Therefore, the Director argues that continuous teacher professional development on ECE is critical to ensuring the inclusion of all children.

At the community level, not all communities were as welcoming to provisions of ECE. Some communities were very welcoming and actively inquired about the program. In other places, parents did not seem to value education for their children under six. She recalled them "laughing at us saying, do you want this child? Take it". The Director felt like parents were doing her a favor by enrolling the child in the ECE program. She strongly believes that, regardless of the need for pre-school education, the program can only function when the community members really want it.

Finally, the poor consistency in attendance also emerged as another challenge to providing ECE for all children in the community. The older pre-school children who are five years old help their parents by going to the fields.

Families also migrate within Lebanon and, so, the IRC has great difficulty tracking children or providing support by recommending another center they could start attending.

Next steps

While preparing to roll out a program of KG 1, 2 and 3 to 1,000 children in November 2016, the INGO 3 is also developing a parent education program for:

- communicating with children

- sustaining the learning at home

- examining the significance of play and playing at home

- ensuring provisions of good nutrition at home.

By providing home learning support to include parents in their children's learning process, parents and their children would sing songs at home and count dishes as they wash them. This initiative could also include monthly meetings between teachers and parents.

The INGO 3 is also keen on partnering with other organizations as part of their community strategy. They plan to complete a mapping of organizations by the end of 2016 to identify local partners. The mapping exercise will also include a capacity assessment to see what kind of training they would need.

Local NGO 1

For over two decades, this local NGO has organized opportunities for children to learn and improve their lifestyles through reading activities like being read to or learning to read. A "balanced literacy" approach frames their curricular development work. They believe that literacy is cross-curricular and, so, learning to read also helps children learn math and science better. In an interview with the program director, the activities not only provide a safe environment to develop a healthy standard of living, but also prepare children for school. Since the war in Syria, they started working with children refugees as young as four years old by teaching them basic literacy skills and providing them with psychosocial support through play.

Designing a program for pre-school children in the Bekaa governorate

Only one year ago, in September 2015, they developed a non-formal ECE program for pre-school children ages 3-6, which they ran as a six-week summer program in selected public schools around Lebanon. They developed their ECE program mainly because ECE is neither compulsory in Lebanon nor available in all public schools. The program director also described the age group of 3-5 as the most critical age group. Many SRC at this age are neglected at home and, consequently, have very little knowledge and experience that are critical for communication and learning.

This ECE program has been running at a center in the Bekaa governorate, which comprises six classrooms and operates a morning and early afternoon shift. They have 16-18 children in each classroom. The classrooms are designed so that children sit in groups and not in rows. Although they "outreach for everybody", Out of

the 200 children, around 5 are Lebanese while the others are SRC. She explained that one reason for such a low enrolment of Lebanese children could be a result of parents preferring private pre-schools that hand out certificates of attendance that they believe are highly valued by private schools.

Normally, the programs at this local NGO are delivered in rounds, each round lasting 12 weeks (three months), 3-4 days per week and 2-3 hours per day. After finding that children, especially SRC, were not entering school after a round, they received further support from a London-based NGO to rent the space and enrol children in sets of three rounds (nine months). The children can leave the program anytime they have an opportunity to start school. They have biweekly meetings that parents must attend. They highlight a "mutual contract" with the parents where the organization helps their children learn with others and the NGO needs the parents to reinforce the themes and activities at home, like hygiene, non-violent approaches and literacy (alphabet, songs, colors). Some parents also volunteer.

The program manager described the routine at the center. Every morning, all teachers are on-site before the children arrive. Once the buses bring the children in, the teachers walk them to their classrooms where "soft music" is playing and they settle into circle time. They all sit on the carpet to say hello, talk about what happened yesterday and go over communication norms like taking turns. To prompt discussions about a topic or issue the teacher wants to cover with the children, the teacher selects a storybook with relevant themes and reads it aloud. The teachers then facilitate a reading session where, after reading a story, they ask questions about comprehension. Afterwards, children move on to independent work by choosing one of three learning centers. Different materials are found at each center: books at the reading center; blocks and counting sticks at the math center and colors, days and seasons at the science center. She explained that the children have their freedom to explore, especially when the teacher speaks for only about 7 of each 40 minutes to give instructions and then follow up with individual children, particularly with those who need extra help. The program director attributed the positive development in children to the strong commitment to a routine.

The program for the 3-6 year-olds does not provide food because "we wanted to test a non-dependent program". However, if children bring their breakfast with them, they can eat it during circle time. They do provide water. Parents send snacks with their children and, to date, none of the parents have removed their children because food was not provided. This local NGO pays for transportation.

The team

The center has a team of teachers, specialists, assistants, curriculum development and a security guard who makes sure children do not wander out of the center and only authorized people enter the center. Each of the six classrooms has one teacher and all six share three assistants and two helpers who assist the children, such as going to the bathroom. The teachers begin with three days of training and then start teaching with the support of a coach who visits once a week. Teachers receive follow-up training workshops depending on the feedback received and observations made. On average, they receive two to three follow-up workshops per round (12 weeks).

While they are in the process of hiring a psychologist specialized in early childhood and special needs, they currently have a psychosocial support specialist who visits the center at least once a week. The program is preventive and, so, the provide support at levels 1 (preventive and engaging activities with the children), and 2 (raising awareness with parents and partners to get them involved). They do not provide level 3, which she described as therapy intervention; but they do refer the children to specialists in such cases. The center learns about each child through a form that parents fill out. According to the director, the children have, more or less, similar experiences. Most are born in Lebanon to refugee parents. In rare cases, they receive children from a generation who was born in Syria and just migrated into Lebanon. This new generation of children may have

resulted in the rare cases that the director reported who need individual therapy. Nevertheless, the center has children with different abilities, especially after lowering the age of youngest children from four to three years. She observed that they need to play and sleep more, more care and attention and to be talked to more. Some able to use the bathroom on their own and communicate fluently while others the same age have still not yet developed those competencies. Through their teacher training program, teachers focus on program and supporting children with different abilities at the same time.

The NGO hired a consultant identified as an expert in ECE from a "well-reputable school in Lebanon" with over 27 years of experience in teaching, training, and curriculum development and familiar with the grade 1 national curriculum. So, they designed their activities based on the aims of education set in the government's grade 1 program of study. According to the program director, the activities also aim to empower children to be independent learners (e.g. being aware of how and why they learn, making choices in the classroom, etc.). Moreover, while themes of the activities change, the program director illustrated the routine of activities as a particular strength in the program. She found that the adherence to a timetable gives the children a sense of time and allows them to engage better and manage their emotions. For example, the children know that the teacher will read now and playing with the clay will happen later. The director observed that children take about two weeks to adjust well into a routine and teachers need about the same amount of time to learn the children's individual needs really well.

The program director is mostly engaged in monitoring the quality and impact of the activities. She visits the center at least once a month to see if resources are sufficient, children are progressing and the support provided and program and appropriate. The program director reported that they are still trying to find an expert who can design and lead the monitoring and evaluation of the program. Meanwhile, they rely mostly on input from teachers, minutes from parent meetings, observation reports from coaches and the child's portfolio. Occasionally, they will hear from a school principal about a child who, after completing a program, enrolled in a public school.

Positive impact and some challenges

Some of the feedback received suggested positive contributions to the children's development. A school principal observed that some of the children from an earlier program were more punctual when arriving to school, readier to learn and engaged more in the classroom than other children. Moreover, some seven-year-olds who took the entrance exam and never been to school performed well enough to be placed directly into grade 2. This grade promotion may have also been assisted by the strict placement of age groups per grade levels. The program director illustrated what was meant by "independency" when giving examples of children being able to work with others in the classroom and follow class norms. In addition, they sometimes receive information on the effectiveness of their program when talking to parents. In one case, a parent reported that their child at home said, "talk to me, don't hit me".

A key objective of the program is to enable children to initiate and express themselves. The program director explained how the quality of participation was critical when observing the success of the program. During the interview, she showed me pictures of children presenting their work in front of their peers highlighting their confidence and smiles while presenting. She also pointed out that parents attended these events, which, according to her, was a key indicator of success. While the program director seemed pleased to report that she has observed this in the children, she also expressed concerns over some of the teachers' responses towards the quality of expression. For example, when children doodled or scribbled, some teachers were disappointed in the child's ability to accurately portray an image instead of ask the child what the scribble was. She found that some children go into great lengths explaining their scribbles, which is a critical component of learning how to communicate. The program director, therefore, related teachers' reactions like these to the lack of qualified ECE teachers in Lebanon.

Among the most serious challenges reported by the program director include the sporadic movement of children and difficulty in finding qualified teachers. Not all children complete the rounds they enrol in. Sometimes parents move to find new jobs. In another case, the center had to move and the children, at such a young age, could not take the bus on their own. Some parents, regardless of how much they were informed of how much care their children need, did not consistently pick up their children from the center. For those who did take the bus, some of their parents were not home when the bus dropped them off and the bus drive had to return them to the center. So, a staff member had to accompany them in the bus so that the children are not left alone. The staff member has often found a parent visiting a neighbor's house; but when they cannot find a parent around, they bring the child back to the center.

The program director then shared a concern with the lack of coordination among NGOs despite the support from international organizations to help civil society coordinate efforts. NGOs offering various services and, often, with provisions of basic needs like food attract parents who are constantly looking for the best offers. Consequently, they lose children mid-program. Furthermore, when parents move, they change their phone number and, so, it becomes difficult to follow up on the child's progress.

The program director has also found it difficult finding teachers who are qualified to teach children under six years of age. The Local NGO 1 is, however, working closely with an international NGO that provides specialized training and continuous professional development to university graduates who are interested in a teaching career.

In reflection

When discussing major lessons learned, the program director argued that a focus on the social and emotional development of the child has been the most important change so far. The main reason, as the program director explained, was that for too long the emphasis on child learning has been on how to hold the pencil and write. Such literacy skills also including listening and speaking already get developed when they participate in circle time, for example. While the program also helps children develop social skills, feel safe and welcome and make friends, "some teachers block that". She believes that this literacy-focused approach stems from the social and individual constructs of who a teacher is, adding that these teachers did not experience such explicitly directed support for social and emotional development. For example, during break time, teachers facilitated an activity where children can dance and jump, but the teachers do not although should because they are as much role models as the children's parents.

When concluding, the program director described the design of pre-school ECE curricula as a "double-edged sword". On the one hand, the program director tries to ensure that the children engage in activities that holistically support their growth and developmental capacities. On the other hand, however, there is pressure to design an ECE curriculum that prepares the child for the grade 1 program, which expects children to have some mastery of literacy and numeracy. It, therefore, becomes difficult for pre-school curriculum developers to "loosen up on the children" because ECE could backfire and children could enter grade 1 and struggle with planned literacy and numeracy activities. In summary, the program director believes that the time and space for children to develop socio-emotional capacities could compromise the learning of literacy and numeracy expected by the grade 1 program. Indeed, a number of professionals interviewed for this report, including a teachers college professor at the Lebanese University, have described the grade 1 national program as extremely demanding following the government KG3 curriculum. Moreover, children in grade 1 can have up to five different teachers (e.g. a teacher for each of the languages, a math and science teacher), which can be quite interruptive in elementary education. So, trying to align a pre-school ECE program with the grade 1 curriculum is a sensitive balancing act when trying to prepare the child for grade 1.

INGO 4

At INGO 4, we were only able to access an interview with a senior representative. The information we gathered provides a general overview of their work and approaches. With a field visit, we could have learned more about their critical reflections of the program and its activities and outcomes.

INGO 4 developed an ECE program for children ages 3-6. Their program began in 2015 and will continue into its third year. It operates in seven centers in Lebanon, spread across Beirut, Mount Lebanon and the South. The program runs for three hours per day, five days per week. According to the representative, its curriculum is child-centered and based on concepts of brain development and the activities promote active learning. There are around 450 children enrolled across the seven centers with about 12-15 children per class. Each classroom has a teacher and a teaching assistant. They are Lebanese and Syrian with experience and a diploma, preferably with an ECE background, but that can be hard to find. Additionally, they provide training for each teacher.

The daily routine begins with an activity for the entire group. The children then children go into different corners where they have different activities, materials and topics, like reading or free play. In addition to free play, the children also benefit from assisted learning. They receive refreshments like milk and fresh fruits. Also, as part of the curriculum, they learn to prepare healthy snacks and meals.

They report to their donor agency by measuring the quality of the learning environment using the Quality of Learning Environment (QLE) framework. To measure the development of the child, they use the IDELA, which measures the learning outcomes by looking at six components of early childhood learning. Through focus groups, they gather information on the quality of learning, extent to which the environment is safe and if the program aligns with standard operating procedures. They also talk with the parents and create Parent Community Groups (PCGs) to gather constant feedback. These are accompanied by the Positive Parenting program, which comprises five sessions.

The representative reported that there is an urgent need for developing ECE and that MEHE has been quite slow to respond to this need. One challenge that emerged so far has been the inability to provide early childhood education to all the children who need and want it. The representative argued that so many children need this program and, because they cannot accommodate all children, they must turn away some children and families. The centers are initially supposed to be small community-based centers, but they keep expanding and become very large centers to address other needs of the hosting community. At the end of the program, all children who were enrolled are then referred to the local public school, which is a goal of the program. Unfortunately, INGO 4 does not receive any feedback from the public schools and, so, is unable to see how the children are performing at school. The representative pointed out that a government policy prohibits NGOs from entering the public schools unless they receive authorized access.

Programme outcomes of ECE/KG for Syrian refugee and vulnerable children

The information gathered for this study revealed the absence of evidence comparing the impact of various approaches of ECE/KG, namely foundational and scholastic, on child performance and growth in first grade. Only a highly controlled experimental design would yield the valid and reliable findings comparing the approaches and practices. Moreover, the organizations who provided ECE/KG for Syrian refugee and vulnerable children were unable to access any information from the school regarding performance in first grade to evaluate the impact of their ECE programs. Nevertheless, evidence of the effect of ECE/KG on Syrian refugee and vulnerable children

are still available (yet in limited form) through (1) observations made by teachers and program directors, (2) parents and children who have maintained communication with the pre-school service providers and (3) pre- and post-test results from IDELA.

We can learn from anecdotal evidence and results from IDELA that:

1. ECE programs with components for parents are more likely to establish relationships that sustain communication even after the child leaves the pre-school ECE program

2. Designing pre-school ECE programs using learning stations that children can independently choose to engage in are feasible (culturally accepted) and effective in supporting areas of development measured by IDELA

3. Changes in behavior (emotional and social) and learning (cognitive) are observable before starting the first grade, as early as the first month of the program

4. Access to first grade does not depend on the outcomes of the children's pre-school education experiences; access depends mostly on the child's age and availability of spaces.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS AND REPORTED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

In this section, we summarize key findings from the information we gathered and outline indicators of success reported by ECE program providers that fall within the parameters of contemporary understandings of ECD and their foundational approaches to ECE.

Highlights of findings in policy and practice

In policy

Government institutions and civil society and non-governmental organizations in Lebanon and Jordan have recently invested great efforts in improving policy frameworks for ECE. Such advances demonstrate these actors' growing values of investing in pre-school ECE. We see how the two governments have assigned the early stages of growth to their ministry of health and the years just prior to schooling to their ministry of education. This distribution in itself could reinforce a scholastic approach to ECE, especially in a cultural context dominated by traditional approaches to learning and teaching.

A number of concerns, however, arise that we believe are important to at least name. Below, we outline six observations of existing ECE policy frameworks for further exploration and discussion:

- Guidelines for nurseries (pre-Kindergarten) are mostly technical. They focus mainly on the importance of health, safety, access and operations. They give little or no guidance on facilitating free and structured play; nor do they give an adequate presentation of the significance of play on ECD.

- Curricular aims of formal and non-formal ECE appear to mostly (1) ensure that children are in an educational setting away from harm and (2) fulfil a social and moral obligation to care rather than support children who have experienced stress, trauma and deprivation (local or refugees).

- ECE in formal settings (e.g. schools) appears to be a mini version of grade 1. The emphasis on activities in cognitive and linguistic areas of development mostly focus on introducing children to literacy and numeracy programs of grade 1 and subsequent cycles.

- Curricular material shows measureable learning objectives that may either be too early for pre-school (rather than process-based objectives) or create some standards for promotion to the next pre-school level. For example, "can throw a ball" rather than "throw a ball"…with little attention to social emotional development and relationships.

- The two countries appear to have a shortage of ECD/ECE expertise. A study that evaluates pre-school education in Jordan (Nabulsi, 2010) found that some KGs are overcrowded and need [more] outdoor space, purchase resources with little or no consultation with ECE/ECD experts and follow rigid curricula that leave little room for input from teachers and children.

- Qualifications to work with pre-school children appear quite limited. Formal written qualifications focus mostly on classical theories of ECD. Moreover, the lack of recognized university degrees in childcare lower the professional status of working the field of ECE.

- Absence of guidelines or policies for most vulnerable children under 6 years of age. Based on our desk review, we were unable to find any clear policies or guidelines that could inform the design of educational programs specifically to support the rehabilitation of war-affected pre-school children.

In practice

Educational programs

ECE for SRC and vulnerable children in formal schools provides the children with a structured daily routine they most likely do not experience at home. Unlike the second shift system in public schools where afternoon classes are only attended by SRC, preschool KG provisions in formal school settings integrate host community children with SRC. This unique arrangement provides the children with the diverse environment critical for learning to live with other people. However, this does require a careful balancing act in meeting individual child development needs between refugee and local children, which many teachers may not be fully prepared to do. Indeed, rehabilitative intervention is typically devolved to a social worker or counsellor. Despite the critical need for expertise in psychosocial support, the absence of collaboration between teachers and counsellors further reinforces a scholastic approach to ECE that physically separates achievers from underachievers. Hence, the strong emphasis on academic achievement in ECE dismisses the development of educational activities that support the rehabilitation and integration of refugee children.

Access to spacious play areas, distribution of desks into rows or groups and availability of open-ended materials for play depend on the resources available as much as the teachers' understandings of a stimulating and rehabilitative ECE and the availability of expertise in ECE. For example, the seating in rows, the same teacher mixing languages of instruction and restricted access to playing equipment were more visible in formal school settings than in non-formal education ones. In non-formal education settings organized by non-governmental and international organizations, the preschool children were more exposed to learning activities that required self-initiative and choice. The distribution of activities in roundtables and time given for children to explore seemed to have resulted in more instances of self-expression and collaboration with others.

Regarding non-formal education programs, most have relatively short cycles in comparison with formal education

programs that cover a scholastic year. In Lebanon and Jordan, many non-formal ECE programs run for periods that average three months. Such blocks suggest that pre-school children risk further deprivation of care and stability when provisions discontinue after short periods. Furthermore, non-formal education programs are vulnerable, not only to funding and changing donor agendas, but also relationships with resisting local communities when trying to find spaces to facilitate or host the program.

In formal school settings, we observed provisions of friendly and safe environments and basic academic materials like books, stationary and, in some places, meals. However, their programs are based on a dominant scholastic approach to ECE that closely follows a literacy and numeracy-based curriculum to prepare children for school. We described this as a mini version of first grade. In modelling a school system, formal KG classrooms required children to mostly follow close-ended tasks in books, followed a timetable organized according to subjects, and provided play-dough and other play equipment as rewards for finishing literacy and numeracy exercises. The programs apparently neither tailored to support the individual growth of each child nor adapted strategies that foster learning autonomy. Some teachers even expressed anxieties of not completing the curriculum on time. According to Smith (2011) this could be viewed as a "do no harm" (Smith, 2011) or even harmful (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) model of education for children who have experienced war-related trauma and forced displacement.

Personnel and parents

Teachers and caregivers – whether in formal or non-formal educational programs – rely mostly on their experiences as mainstream teachers, individual capacities for being compassionate and philosophies of education and growth. Even higher education institutions that provided professional training continued to base mostly education interventions on classical theories of ECD. We found an absence of personnel qualified to design, facilitate and manage educational programs for refugees and other vulnerable children who face multiple challenges at the same time like trauma, stress, domestic violence and discrimination. Moreover, many of those who did initiate and lead non-formal educational programs for refugees and vulnerable children had various training backgrounds, including accounting, engineering and biochemistry research. Even a teacher who held a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education found herself unprepared to work with pre-school children and refugees.

Parents have been a source of harm and support in providing a healthy environment for their children's developmental needs. SRC coming from unstable homes experienced neglect and/or abuse. The lack of hygienic practice at home was evident in the children's rotting and disfigured teeth and teachers' reports of foul body odor in the classrooms. The counsellors and some teachers reported that the most troubled of children in school shared with them incidents of domestic violence between the parents. Many of the SRC were exposed to routine beatings at home by mothers and mostly fathers. They witnessed regular violence inflicted onto their mothers by fathers. Another form of harm appeared to be neglect when parents did not seem interested in having their children participate in ECE programs. Other parents received a great deal of intervention from social workers, such as regular visits to the house and parent education activities at the school or center. Keeping close contact and ongoing conversations with parents facilitated continuity of school activities at home (e.g. doing homework, introducing hygienic practices, encourage or did not prevent children to read at home), yielded valuable feedback for revising the educational program and provided formative information to monitor the progress of the children during and after KG.

Monitoring and evaluation

Measures of impact have so far looked at immediate effects of preschool ECE. In some cases, this is the only opportunity because volunteers and children can stop participating at any time. In a scholastic approach to ECE, "immediate" is defined by end of activity, term or academic year while performance in the first year of school

would indicate longer term effects. The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have so far measured impact through this approach. IDELA appears to be a reliable, valued and accessible instrument for monitoring changes in the developmental areas of refugee children. It is, however, subject to regular validation exercises. Information regarding performance in the first year or two of school is still unavailable to many programs because they have only recently started providing ECE. Programs whose children have moved on to formal school levels gather mostly formative information through parents because schools protect information of the children from non-governmental organizations. Clearly, the lack of expertise in contemporary theories of ECD has impeded any development of instruments that individually and longitudinally track the progress of self-regulation and executive functioning following provisions of rehabilitation and learning in ECE of refugee and other vulnerable children. Nevertheless, reports from quantitative instruments like IDELA and formative feedback from stakeholders revealed a number of success indicators that future programs can consider.

Reported indicators of success

The two most commonly used quantitative tools to measure the success of the pre-school ECE program have been, so far, the IDELA instrument and school entrance exams. The IDELA comprises measures that cover a range of developmental domains. School entrance exams focus mostly on the child's mastery of literacy and numeracy. The ECE programs have also relied heavily on formative feedback from teachers, parents and, through observation, children. We report below the key indicators that ECE providers reported on when monitoring and evaluating their preschool program. We drew indicators from the information we gathered through observations and interviews and selected those that were mostly in line with foundational approaches to ECE from the literature. Probably the most commonly reported indicator of scholastic success was holding the pencil and completing difficult English language worksheets.

ECE program design and activities

- Children show independence and security when a program has and follows a routine

- The curriculum has a blend of activities that support learning literacy and numeracy and foundational development. Emphasis on literacy and numeracy is minimal in KG1 and stands out slightly more by KG3.

- Children have opportunities for free play

- Spaces protect children from danger (railings on stairs, access to clean water) and emotional harm (bullying)

- Resources for learning and play are available and accessible rather than reserved as rewards

- Educationists engage regularly and proactively with parents

- Teachers and caregivers provide children with choices and avoid using authoritarian approaches

- Teachers and caregivers facilitate appropriate spaces to play (low tables and chairs), use the toilet (small size toilet seats and sinks) and speak (kneeling down).

- Girls who participate are either equal number or more than boys.

Immediate changes in performance

Over a period of two to four months, teachers and caregivers observed desirable changes in children's behaviors and performances, such as how they:

• Made and sustained friends

• Controlled temper by either talking to peers or teacher

• Taking turns

• Listening to instructions and following the rules

• Initiating by sharing new ideas with caregiver and friends

• Exhibiting positive attitudes towards school (comfortable versus nervous), peers and teacher

• Are cared for at home (cleaned, bathed, spoken to and disciplined in a calm and informed manner, absence of domestic violence)

Long-term

ECE providers reported on some information they gathered several months after the child completed the KG program and started school. They noted indicators of success that suggested possible long-term changes like:

• Performance in grade 1 and onwards and on standardized assessments

• Attitudes towards reading (loving reading)

• Attitudes towards sustainable development (themes of stories that pre-school children were read to)

• Reading abilities

• Parents encourage or at least do not prevent children from reading at home

• Teachers demonstrate improvement in professional practice (evidence presented in portfolio, participation in continuous professional development)

• Public schools gradually adopt activities (materials and practices) introduced by non-governmental actors

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our recommendations for improving preschool ECE for Syrian refugee children and local vulnerable children in host communities draw from classical and contemporary theories of ECD to provide a blend of scholastic and foundational approaches to ECE. Emphasis during KG will consistently be made on the latter in order to rehabilitate war-related traumas and strengthen brain architecture for lifelong self-regulation and executive functioning. We recognize that the host education systems are, to a great extent, based on traditional pedagogies shaped by pressures to excel in academic subjects. We also acknowledge the pressures put on the limited resources in Lebanon and Jordan, two countries that have among the highest ratio of refugees per capita in the world.

Reconceptualizing the preschool ECE curriculum

• Establish aims of ECE to [re]build brain architecture and foundations for self-regulation and executive functioning.

• Design activities through drama, play and art so that aims of ECE and ECE for SRC are cross-cutting, participatory and collaborative

• Organize activities in a timetable according to themes rather than academic disciplines (replace "science", "English", "Arabic", "Math" with, for example, "Art", "Discovery", "Play", "Building").

• Develop approaches for positive discipline that provide children with guidance through positive reinforcement and one-to-one attention

• Restructure geography of classrooms to:

o allow children and teachers to move more freely,

o focus more on learning centers (e.g. round tables) than on teachers' spaces (e.g. desk in front of class) and rows

o ensure all play and learning resources are accessible

o provide sufficient light, access to drinking water and sanitation (washing hands)

• Ensure that each "session" or activity is fully immersed in a single, selected language.

• Consider at least one caregiver per six to eight children.

Building the professional field

• Bring together team of experts in ECE and ECD of refugee children to develop a caregivers curriculum that includes approaches to:

o diagnosing socio-emotional developmental and rehabilitative needs,

o seeking professional guidance for individual cases that may need clinical intervention

o design and facilitate activities that are learner-driven, collaborative and exploratory

o building healthy relationships through routine, unconditional appreciation of efforts and freedom to express oneself

o sustain a healthy diverse environment of vulnerable and mainstream children.

• Coordinate with and advocate to agencies like the British Council, Said Foundation and US Embassy to build expertise in ECD of refugees and ECE for refugees by offering scholarships for teaching diplomas and graduate and post-graduate studies.

• Collaborate with higher education institutions in establishing continuous professional development programs and hosting international conferences to disseminate and develop practices

• Support universities in reviewing ECD and ECE programs of study at undergraduate and graduate levels (including teaching diplomas).

Parent education

• Coordinate with existing NGOs, schools, ministries and municipalities to provide nationwide family support mechanisms for family planning, pre/post natal care and childcare at home.

• Include parents in activities for teacher professional development, school improvement and curriculum design.

• Build on existing parent education curricula to include reconstructions of "school readiness" and promote significance of self-esteem and relationship building on ECD from a neurodevelopmental dimension.

Advocacy

• Work closely with CERD in developing non-formal ECE for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon to shift the emphasis on literacy and numeracy to socio-emotional development

• Support and disseminate studies on ECE interventions that examine evidence of change, influence and experiences. This would require longitudinal studies and experimental designs.

• Work with government agencies to include (or continue including) SRC in mainstream ECE programs

ECE-based monitoring and evaluation

• Create mechanisms to capture and record formative information on each child's progress and follow-up on individual growth throughout school. This would require established relationships with families and coordination with each country's respective ministry of education.

• In consultation with expert in ECE for highly vulnerable children, validate IDELA instrument in Lebanon and Jordan.

Community and school empowerment

• Coordinate with NGOs to support local stakeholders like teachers, principals, parents and the youth to organize safe public spaces where adults and young adults can play and read with children from birth to 5.

• Revisit aims of ECE to construct an idea of "school readiness" different from learning literacy and numeracy

• Promote significance of self-esteem and approaches to fostering self-regulation

• Developing a public code of conduct for parents, teachers and caregivers that ensures unconditional provisions of safety and nurture for all children.

FURTHER READINGS

Leading journals that publish empirical and theoretical studies on ECE and ECD:

• Early Childhood Education Journal

• Early Childhood Matters

• European Early Childhood Research Journal

• International Journal of Early Childhood

• International Journal of Play

• Journal of Early Childhood Research

• Journal of Research in Childhood Education

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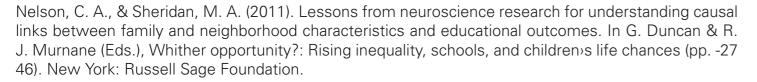
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