Background

The crisis in Syria, soon into its fifth year, is having a devastating impact on education access and quality for children countrywide. A generation of Syrian children risks being lost amidst the crisis. It is critical to support education, especially in a time of conflict and for the most vulnerable children.

Prior to the crisis in 2011, Syria had as high as 106 per cent of gross enrolment rate (GER) in basic education, one of the highest proportions in the Middle East region. However, the conflict has set GER down to 78.6 per cent in 2013, far lower than the recorded value of the mid-1990s. This implies that more than two decades of educational progress have been lost.

In Syria, approximately 3.6 million were enrolled at basic education level (grades 1-9) in September 2014. Yet, an estimated 1.3 to 1.6 million children still remain either out of school or attending classes irregularly. Many live in cross line areas controlled by non-state actors. Due to internal displacement and violence, they have missed out on schooling for two to three years.

Out of 19,050 schools which could return reporting forms, a total of 4,676 schools (24.5 per cent) are categorized as ‘not functioning’. Some are in urgent need of classroom rehabilitation and gender-sensitive water facilities, and others are used as shelters, or inaccessible by formal education.

Since 2011, 52,500 teachers, or 22 per cent of the teaching community, are out of the workforce. Some teachers are overstretched with handling overcrowded classrooms with an influx of internally displaced children. Many schools in crisis-affected areas experience a shortage of teachers, congested classrooms, and shorter and often disrupted class hours.

Overall, the lack of safe and protective learning spaces, coupled with a shortage of textbooks, as well as adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, are serious barriers to children’s access to quality learning. It is in this context that the European Union is generously supporting children’s education in Syria. Specifically, the main objective of the European Union support in the 2013-2015 programme is to contribute to improving access to pre-school, primary and alternative education for children and adolescents most affected by the conflict in the selected intervention areas within Syria.

Children in Aleppo

make their way through piles of rubble with their new school bags. The European Union is a major supporter of providing school bags with stationery supplies to conflict-affected children in Syria.

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Key Result Areas

To meet the objective of the European Union support, UNICEF has formulated three key result areas:

1. Children within the selected intervention areas requiring basic education (grades 1-9) who have been affected by the conflict: (a) enroll and attend school regularly; (b) benefit from remedial classes, psychosocial support and other support; (c) have an improved learning environment; (d) the capability of their teachers are improved; and (e) benefit from the self-learning materials and textbooks.

2. Vulnerable children in the selected intervention areas who are less than 6 years old and have been affected by the conflict have access to free of charge school readiness programmes.

3. Remedial education and Technical Vocational Education and Training programmes accompanied with financial support schemes are made available to out-of-school children and children at risk of dropping out, including girls.

Progress towards Key Results:

‘Back to Learning’ Campaign: UNICEF, along with education sector partners, successfully launched the nationwide ‘Back to Learning’ campaign in September 2013. The campaign aimed to improve education enrolment and attendance for internally displaced children through distribution of education supplies in all 14 governorates. The European Union supported the provision of a package of school bags with stationery and education supplies for 200,000 children out of the total target 1 million children. In addition, European Union support also enabled UNICEF to provide 2,600 recreation kits and 1,600 teaching and learning materials, benefiting an estimated 234,000 children. For the 2014/15 Back to Learning campaign, 420,000 out of another one million children were reached by early December 2014 with a package of school bags and supplies thanks to EU support. It is estimated that around 30-40 per cent of the children live in hard-to-reach and cross-line areas. The European Union also supported the development and distribution of public messages about the campaign and encouraging children’s registration. For example, 7.5 million people were reached with SMS messages and 5 million reached via radio.

School Clubs: In areas where conflict has intensified, a large number of children have limited access to schooling and have already missed out on two or three years of education opportunities. School clubs help children who have missed out on education to access remedial classes; prepare children for national examinations and return to school; and provide children with recreational activities as part of psychosocial support and care. European Union support has enabled UNICEF to support school clubs in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama and Dara’a, reaching 48,552 children. This includes children in cross-line areas such as Al Waer and Rastan, in Homs governorate.
School Rehabilitation:
European Union support helped UNICEF to partner with Action against Hunger, an international non-governmental organization to provide school rehabilitation assistance to 14 schools in hard-to-reach Hassakeh governorate, benefiting 11,380 children through improved classroom environment and water and sanitation support.

Self-learning Programme:
UNICEF has developed a self-learning programme that brings education to children who cannot access education any other way. European Union support has allowed the design of self-learning materials across all subjects for 300,000 children in grades 1-9 in some selected governorates which accommodate a large number of out-of-school children, such as Aleppo and Rural Damascus.

Printing of Textbooks:
A shortage of textbooks and teaching and learning materials is a serious barrier to children’s access to learning. The European Union has supported the printing of English subject textbooks which are being distributed to two million primary school students.

Community-based Early Childhood Education (ECD):
ECD is critical to enhancing children's readiness for school and capacity for life-long learning, especially during a crisis. The European Union financed 500 ECD kits, benefiting 25,000 pre-school children in all 14 governorates. In addition, 1,362 children were reached with community-based ECD support. The European Union supported the development, printing and distribution of an ECD manual for use by all ECD partners in Syria.

Vocational and life-skills development:
The ongoing conflict has adversely affected social networks which provide valuable support systems for adolescents in Syria at a time when many are now forced to leave school and find work. European Union support allowed UNICEF to provide technical support and develop the capacity of local NGOs. This involved 186 master trainers, who will train 30,000 young people with vocational training and life-skills support.

Scholarships for girls and boys:
With EU support, at least 1,000 children in hard-to-reach areas will receive cash to cover the hidden costs of their education such as transportation to and from school, examination fees, stationery, lunch, and school uniforms.
Lattakia – As part of the ‘Back to Learning’ campaign underway in Syria, hundreds of displaced children at a Lattakia shelter school have received UNICEF school bags filled with stationery supplies.

Each of the blue school bags contain basic stationery supplies that facilitate children’s learning including coloured pencils, notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers, rulers, protractors and a pencil case.

9-year old Nooran, who was displaced from Aleppo and missed two years of school, proudly shows her new school bag: “I am happy to be back at school. I am happy that my dad enrolled me back in school. I’ve been coming every day and now I am so happy to have all these pens and notebooks because I love to learn.”

UNICEF is providing school supplies for up to one million conflict-affected children in Syria with the generous support of major donors including the European Union. In addition, the European Union supported a media campaign for community mobilization that has reached millions of families with key messages about the new school year, the importance of education for all children and the registration process.

“\nThe children were smiling as they explored what’s in their school bags,\n”

says Reema Istanbuli, a UNICEF Syria Education Officer who witnessed the distribution. “Parents of displaced children expressed their relief that they did not need to buy school materials, which would have created an extra burden on families and could have hindered some children from attending school.”

The Sports City shelter – the largest in western Syria – hosts around 6,000 people displaced from their homes by fighting in Aleppo governorate and other areas of the country. Some 1,000 children, aged between 6 and 14 years, attend a school at the shelter, which runs in morning and afternoon shifts.

Lattakia governorate hosts an estimated 300,000 people – around half children – displaced from their homes by fighting, mostly from places such as Idleb, rural Hama and Aleppo.

EU supports ‘Back to Learning’ campaign

For more information
www.childrenofsyria.info
www.nolostgeneration.org
www.unicef.org/eu/humanitarian aid.html