



"I dream of going to school"
Out of School Children in Lebanon



**Inter-Agency
Coordination**
Lebanon

"I dream of going to school"

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet could not have been produced without the continuous cooperation and support of the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The openness and ambition to constantly improve and expand the provision of education to Lebanese and refugee children is much appreciated by the team behind this production. We also thank other partners for their support, particularly Caritas and Terre des Hommes who helped gather the case studies. It is the hope of Save the Children, UNICEF and UNHCR that this booklet will contribute to the education sector debate and inspire and encourage further improvements for the public education system in Lebanon.

Designed by: [Limelight Productions | www.limelightprod.com](http://www.limelightprod.com)

BACKGROUND

This booklet presents findings from a mapping of existing data on Out of School Children (OOSC) conducted in Lebanon in 2015. Using Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) enrolment numbers and data from the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR¹), it estimates that approximately 255,400 children were out of school in Lebanon at the end of 2015. Whilst the mapping includes children from all nationalities and recognizes the huge unmet education needs of Palestinian children, this booklet focuses mostly on Syrian OOSC.

Many of the Syrian children in Lebanon have been out of formal schools for three years or more. The Syrian influx has increased the pressure on the Lebanese public education system, which was already facing many challenges. Although MEHE has opened its schools to a large number of refugee children (157,984 enrolled in the academic year 2015/16), there are still barriers that prevent children from effectively accessing and remaining in education.

Providing education to OOSC remains a top priority for all education partners. In order to strengthen planning to enable sufficient education capacity and opportunities, MEHE, UN and other stakeholders need to obtain a rigorous understanding of the number of OOSC; i.e. where they live, the reasons they are out of school, and barriers they experience to enrolment and retention.

MAPPING OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

The OOSC mapping started in September 2015, with the aim to better address existing barriers to education. A UNHCR consultant was engaged to gather data and develop profiles of the districts and governorates focusing on the specific situations of OOSC.

The specific objectives of the mapping were to:

1. Establish governorate and district-level assessments of the numbers and profiles of OOSC (Out Of School Children);
2. Identify and analyze the barriers and gaps that contribute to exclusion from education in order to plan future education work, address the barriers and fill the gaps;
3. Through in-depth interviews with six OOSC (case studies), provide examples of the identified barriers to show the human faces behind the numbers;
4. Advocate for the scaling up of efforts to increase access to education for children of all nationalities residing in Lebanon.

¹ Data from the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) was collected in May 2015, from 6,498 children in school age country wide. The assessment surveyed a sample of the Syrian refugee population from 4,105 households in Lebanon (all refugees registered with UNHCR), categorized by districts in order to ensure that the data was representative at this geographical level. Both randomized sampling and proportionality to the geographical level were respected in the selection of targets.

The booklet presents two types of elements:

- Governorate profiles including MEHE 2014/15 enrolment numbers combined with VASyR data (school year 2014/15);
- Case studies of children collected by education partners corresponding to the educational barriers in the different governorates.

Note that both MEHE and VASyR data provide estimates only on the number of OOSC.

The main barriers identified include:

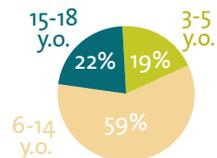
- Insufficient pre-school opportunities;
- Distance between home and school / lack of school within walking distance / not enough existing public school facilities; i.e. where first and second shifts have reached full capacity or where no forms of public formal certified school opportunities exist in nearby areas with high refugee concentration. In particular there is a lack of coverage in the most remote / hardest to reach areas;
- Ability of children to successfully (re-)integrate into formal education due to years spent out of school, language of instruction in Lebanon (i.e. technical subjects in French or English, as opposed to Arabic), initial intimidation by the Lebanese curriculum, and lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills;
- Livelihoods restrictions and economic pressure forcing families to prioritize children and youth working, as opposed to attending education, as well as exposing children and youth to risks of exploitation, such as early marriage and the worst forms of child labour. Internal migration and agricultural work also make many Syrian families highly mobile and thus children are less likely to enrol, more likely to drop out, and are in need of flexible learning solutions.

To address these needs it is crucial to:

1. Enhance access to quality public formal education. More funding is needed for MEHE to open up formal schools and expand classes in some areas in order to reach a higher number of children in need whilst ensuring quality of delivery and assurance of learning outcomes;
2. Increase outreach efforts to identify OOSC and ensure there is sufficient information in the communities to create the clear demand necessary to open more second shift schools;
3. Further increase retention support such as home work groups and keep promoting active parental and community engagement through the involvement of education role-models and creating an enabling learning environment for children;
4. Encourage OOSC to enrol in any public formal certified school or Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP) if they have been out of school for two years or more;
5. Develop and support strategies for increased investment in relevant education opportunities for youth and in early learning opportunities / early childhood education (ECE);
6. Recognize and standardize non-formal education (NFE) as a crucial pathway to formal education to ensure all children can access education and are prepared to re-enter the formal system when possible. Under the RACE / RACE II Strategy, ensure standardization, recognition and certification of NFE programmes by MEHE that can be delivered by qualified, experienced actors - such as NGOs - to target children living in areas that are geographically difficult to reach, or children in need of additional educational support.

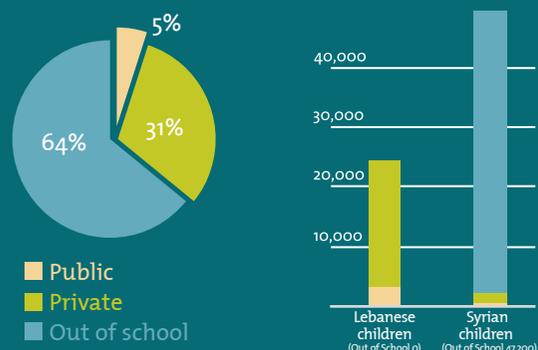
BEKAA

Total children aged 3-18
369,800



3-5 y.o. 71,700

Approximately 47,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in Bekaa

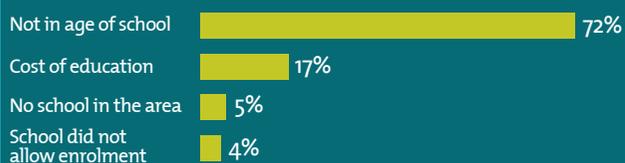


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 45,100 Syrian children aged 3-5 y.o. were out of school

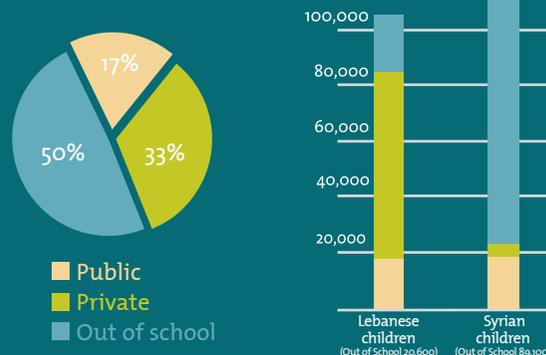


Main Reasons for not attending



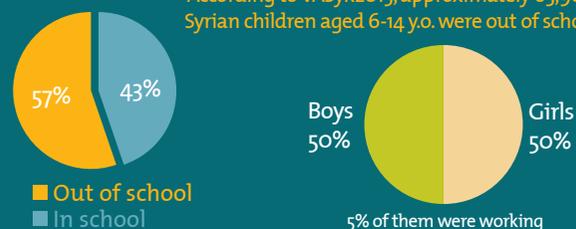
6-14 y.o. 217,800

Approximately 109,700 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in Bekaa

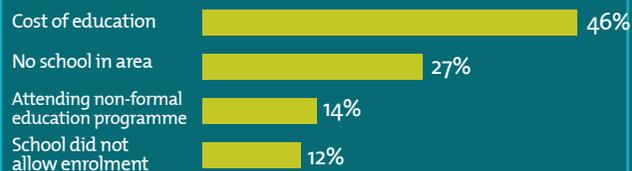


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 63,900 Syrian children aged 6-14 y.o. were out of school



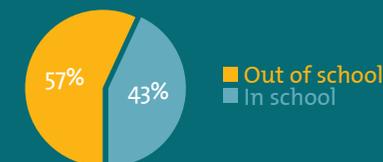
Main Reasons for not attending



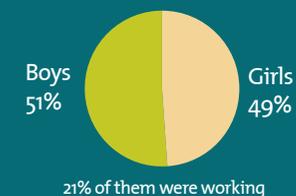
15-18 y.o. 80,300

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoSC. Only estimations from VASyR are available

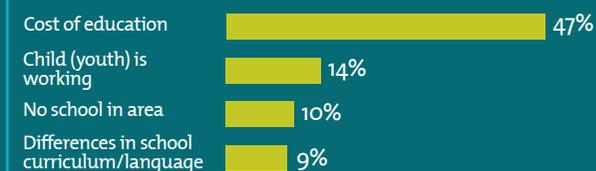
Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



According to VASyR2015, approximately 29,800 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



Main Reasons for not attending



OMAR

Omar - the youngest breadwinner

Twelve year-old Omar was forced to leave home in Aleppo and flee to Lebanon due to the heavy shelling hitting his town. Currently living in an informal settlement with his family of seven, Omar has to work to support his family. One and a half years ago, Omar's father, who used to drive a taxi back home, had an accident and was severely injured and consequently had to stop working. It has been three years since Omar stopped going to school. He was in the second grade in school and would now need to catch up several years of education to be able to re-enrol. After his father's accident, the possibility of returning to school has dwindled even more as his life now is about providing for his family.

"I used to go to school when I was in Aleppo. I used to walk to school holding my siblings' hands. I was so proud I was the oldest. But now I feel much older than my real age," says Omar. "In the war, we lost everything, even my favorite schoolbag," Omar explains.

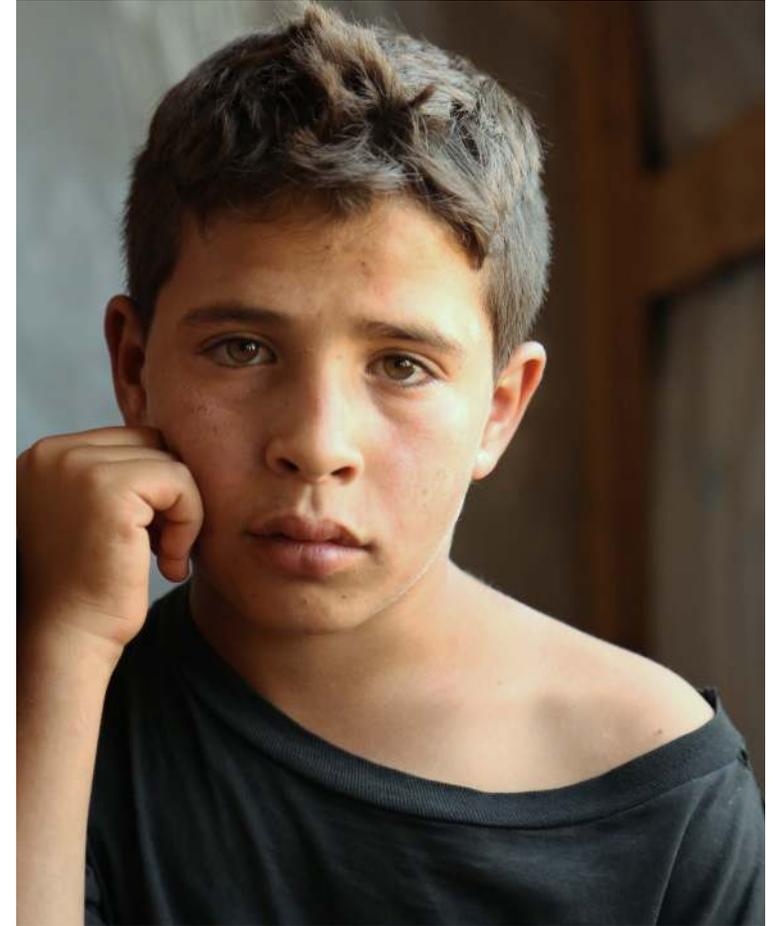
Omar tells about his daily labour routine. "I wake up every morning, wash my face and feet, which are sore, with cold water to refresh them so I can walk to work," says Omar as he points towards his feet.

"I eat a little snack in the morning: thyme and pepper. I love pepper since we can get it for free. Then, I leave home to go buy gum and tissues so I can sell them to passersby on the highway," he adds.

Being the main breadwinner of his family, Omar feels a lot of weight on his shoulders. "Every day, I go to work worried and scared of not being able to sell anything. How could I go back home with nothing in my hands, not even bread, for my family?!" He adds: "Sometimes, when I don't sell anything, I look for stores with glass panels that I can wash so that I can make some money to buy bread. I am worried all the time. I really can't carry this burden all alone."

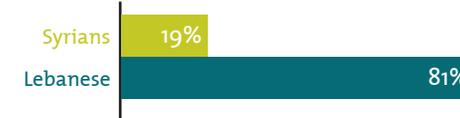
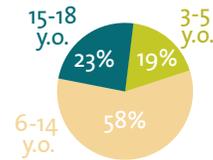
"The other day I got up for work, washed my face and feet as usual. When I stepped out of the tent to put on my shoes I saw children in our neighbourhood going to school. I wish I could accompany them some day."

Omar still dreams of going to school just like in the old days. "I wish I was the youngest amongst my siblings so I could stop worrying. Children are not supposed to worry. I want to hold my siblings' hands again and walk to school," he says, with tears in his eyes. "I miss having homework and I miss playing with my siblings. I want to live my childhood again. When I grow up, I would like to be a teacher, but how can I possibly become a teacher without education?"



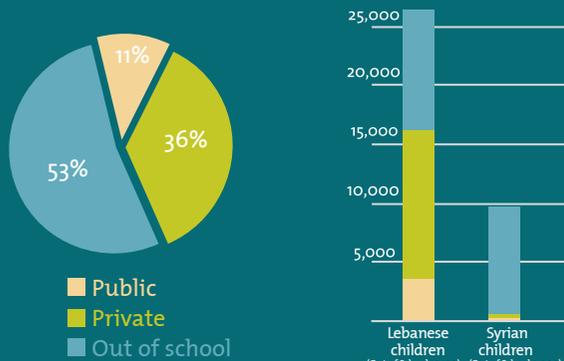
SOUTH

Total children aged 3-18
196,300



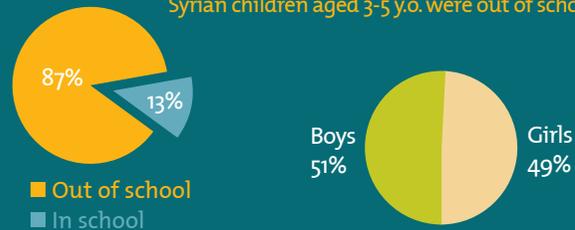
3-5 y.o. 36,100

Approximately 19,100 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in South

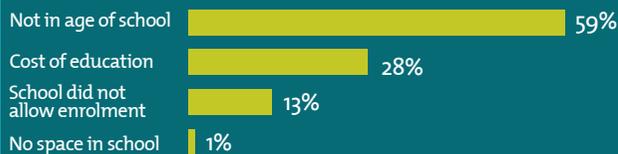


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 8,800 Syrian children aged 3-5 y.o. were out of school

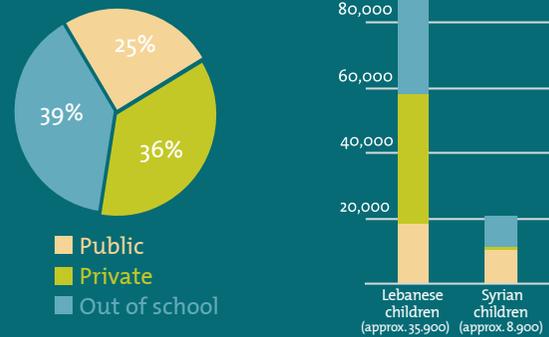


Main Reasons for not attending



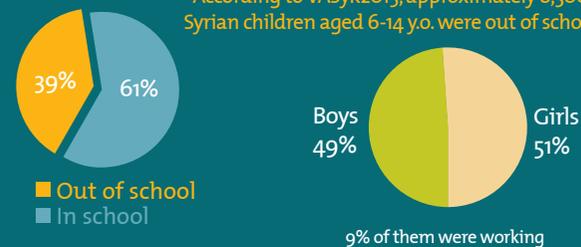
6-14 y.o. 114,500

Approximately 44,800 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in South

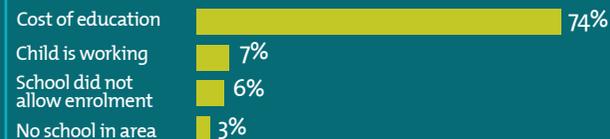


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 8,300 Syrian children aged 6-14 y.o. were out of school



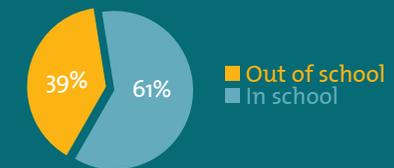
Main Reasons for not attending



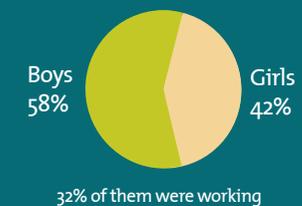
15-18 y.o. 45,700

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoS. Only estimations from VASyR are available

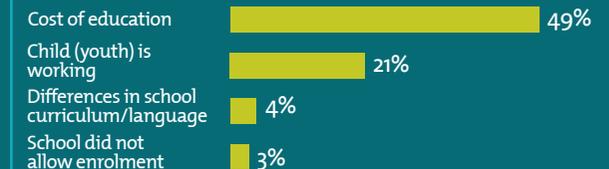
Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



According to VASyR2015, approximately 5,700 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



Main Reasons for not attending



AMAL

Amal fears she will not understand the teachers

The family of Amal, like many others, was forced to escape from Syria due to the intense clashes occurring in their homeland. Four years ago, they fled from Idlib and came to Lebanon in search of security and stability.

When Amal's family first arrived in Lebanon, they expected to be able to return to Syria very soon where she would be able to re-enrol in school. Hence, they first did not look for education opportunities at all. However, when it became apparent that the situation would not change, Amal felt uncomfortable enrolling in a Lebanese public school. "I am afraid that I will not be able to adapt to the Lebanese education system. The teaching language in my school in Syria was mainly Arabic with little English. Here, in the public school, the official foreign languages are English or French."

The language barrier is also causing a major challenge to her brother and sisters who are attending public school but are struggling with their learning. "There are no homework groups or language classes in the area that could help our children in their learning," explains the mother.

Amal's family is composed of her parents and five children aged between 18 months and 13 years. They rent an apartment for 250\$ a month in a rural area. The father is a daily worker in an olive tree plantation. His daily income is approximately 20\$ and it depends on the work available. Thus, the family is never sure whether they can make ends meet. Whilst the father is away all day, his wife takes care of the children, especially the youngest one who is still a baby.

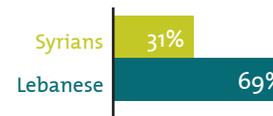
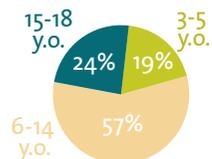
"We did not manage to convince Amal to enrol in public school, fearing it might not be worth investing the money for transportation to school if she is likely not to succeed anyway," the mother goes on. However, both Amal and her mother are eager for Amal to continue her education. "I would never let my daughter marry before she gets a proper education," her mother insists.

Amal helps her younger brother and sisters with their homework to make sure she does not forget what she learned previously. When she speaks about the importance of education, her eyes light up and her voice is filled with excitement. "I really wish to return to school if only somebody could help me with my studies and the foreign language."



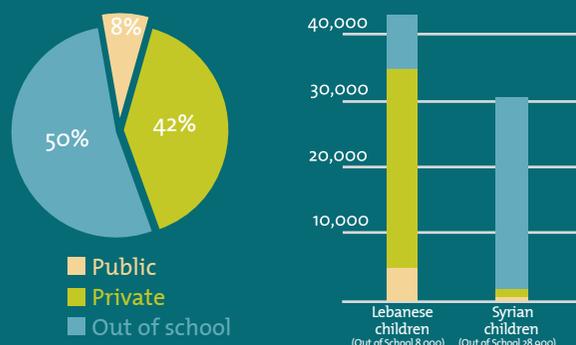
NORTH

Total children aged 3-18
392,400



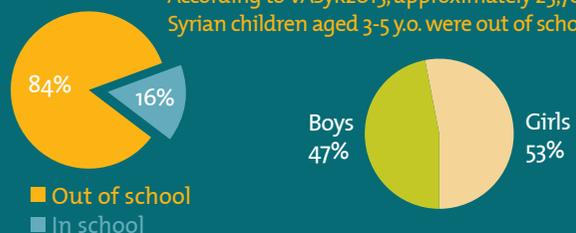
3-5 y.o. 73,500

Approximately 36,900 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in North



Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 25,700 Syrian children aged 3-5 y.o. were out of school

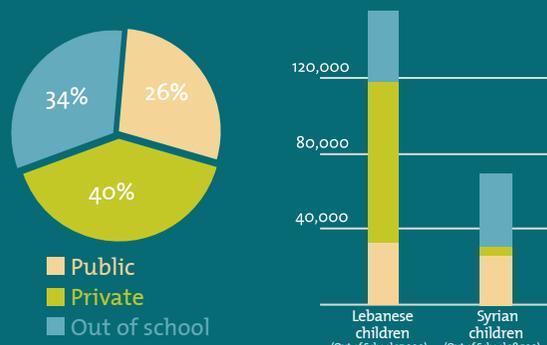


Main Reasons for not attending



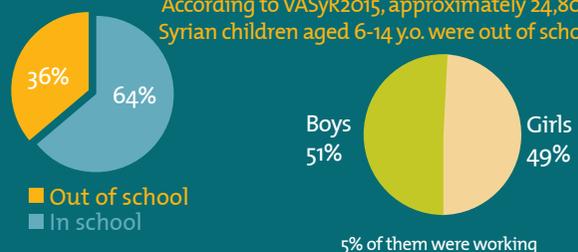
6-14 y.o. 224,700

Approximately 75,500 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in North

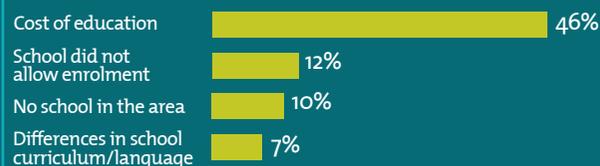


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 24,800 Syrian children aged 6-14 y.o. were out of school



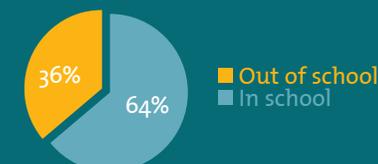
Main Reasons for not attending



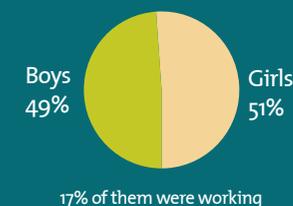
15-18 y.o. 94,200

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoSC. Only estimations from VASyR are available

Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



According to VASyR2015, approximately 18,200 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



Main Reasons for not attending



NOOR

"I play the teacher-student game" - Noor dreams of going back to school

Eight year-old Noor is no longer going to school. Last year she enrolled in the first grade of a public school which is located a one hour's drive away from her house in the North, where a bus used to take children. This year Noor is no longer able to go to school because there is no bus and no school nearby.

"Last year was my first year at school. I learned to write letters and how to read words," she says with sparkling eyes.

Four years ago, Noor, her mother, and her two siblings left Homs in Syria. Her father was forced to stay behind. When they first arrived in Lebanon, Noor lived with her mother and two siblings in their relatives' house. Her mother could not find a job and the family eventually had to move to a small apartment in a village in another region.

"I do not know why I had to stop going to school. It is probably because there is no school around here," says Noor looking disappointed and holding her teddy bear close. She then explains how she spends her day. "I play games with my neighbours, we play hide and seek. I also play with the toys that my grandmother sent me from Syria. I also wander around. I love going out and walking with my friends. Sometimes, I would bring the water gallons just to go on a walk."

Noor's sister and brother do not go to school either. The mother cannot afford sending them to a far away school, yet Noor upholds the dream of going back to school.

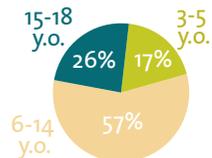
"I dream of going to school. Every now and then, I play the teacher-student game. I write letters and words on the wall just to remember what I learned last year at school. I am good at Arabic language and at French as well," she says with great excitement. "Sometimes I pretend to correct exams by writing on papers with a red pen. It is my favorite colour," she adds while she points at her red sweater.

Noor is determined to pursue her education. "I just want to wear my uniform, put my schoolbag on my back and go back to school."



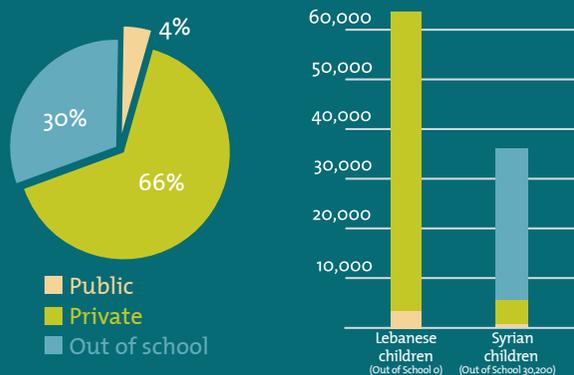
Mt LEBANON

Total children aged 3-18
560,800



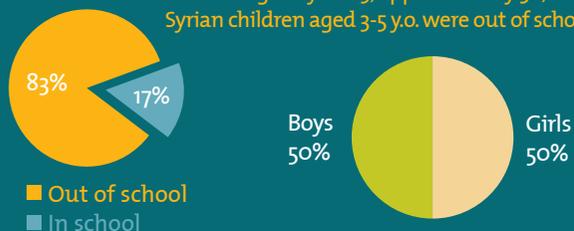
3-5 y.o. 95,200

Approximately 30,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in Mt Lebanon

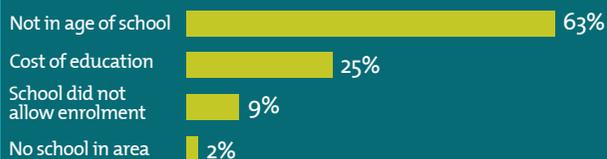


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According VASyR2015, approximately 30,200 Syrian children aged 3-5 y.o. were out of school

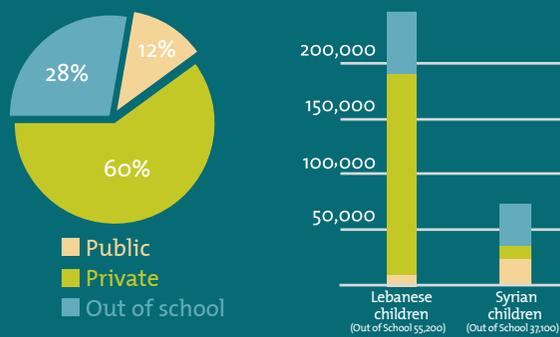


Main Reasons for not attending



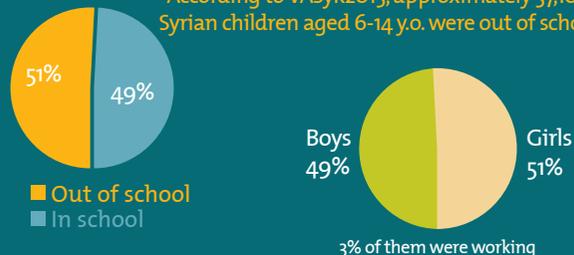
6-14 y.o. 318,200

Approximately 92,300 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in North

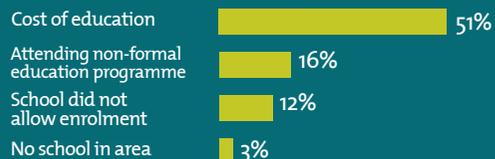


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 37,100 Syrian children aged 6-14 y.o. were out of school



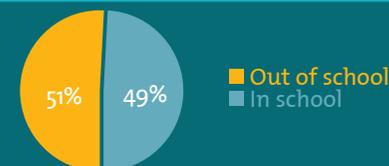
Main Reasons for not attending



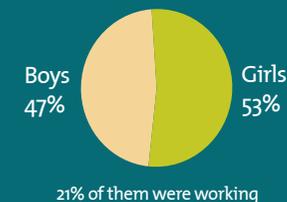
15-18 y.o. 147,400

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoSC. Only estimations from VASyR are available

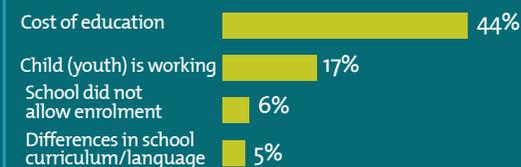
Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



According to VASyR2015, approximately 18,400 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



Main Reasons for not attending



WASSIM

Wassim - a three year-old waiting to put on his Spiderman school bag

Wassim was looking forward to going to pre-school, playing with other kids and getting ready for school. But, unfortunately, none of the public schools with preschool classes would accept him. There is a limited number of public preschools / kindergartens in Lebanon. Despite her eagerness to register Wassim, his mother was unable to enrol him in private kindergarten as well, because she would have had to pay a 200 USD per month tuition fee, an amount she cannot afford.

Wassim and his family initially came to Lebanon from Idlib in 2011 because Wassim's brother was sick with cancer, and there was no adequate medical treatment available in Syria since the outbreak of the war. However, after they arrived in Lebanon, they learned that a missile had hit their home and destroyed it completely - hence there was no home to return to in Syria. Upon arriving in Lebanon, they first lived in a one-room shelter, but due to heavy rain and bad construction, the ceiling collapsed during one night and the landlord moved them to another room where the rent was 450 USD.

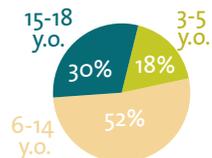
"Wassim was very excited to go to preschool," the mother said. "We even went and bought a Spiderman school bag, notebook and pencils." Wassim has two brothers. They both go to public school and are in the 2nd and 3rd grade. "Every day Wassim walks to the bus with his brothers and then comes back home crying because he is not able to join them," his mother explains. "We can't afford to put him in a private kindergarten due to his brother's high medical bills, my husband's low income and the debt we owe to people. We are barely able to cover the transportation fees of Wassim's brothers. We try to save at least 1 USD each day in order to make sure to pay the bus driver by the end of the month."

Wassim's mother was an English teacher back in Syria; she makes sure to follow up on her older sons' homework and to teach Wassim the basics of reading and writing. "I know how to count till four in English," Wassim says. "One day, I would love to go to school carrying my new bag and play with other children."



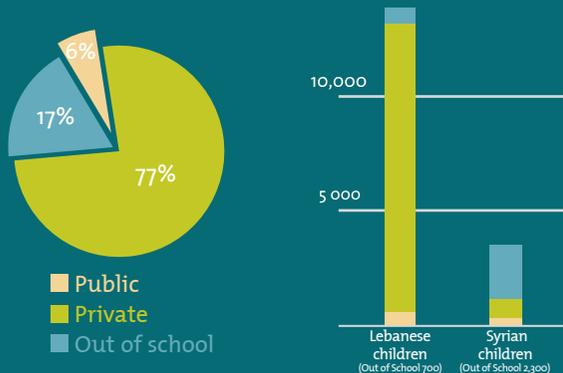
BEIRUT

Total children aged 3-18
96,200

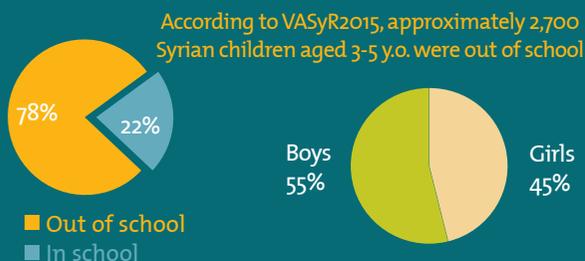


3-5 y.o. 17,200

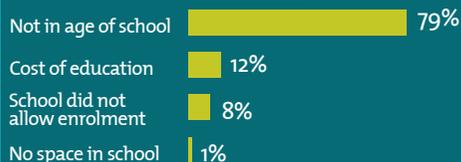
Approximately 3,000 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in Beirut



Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

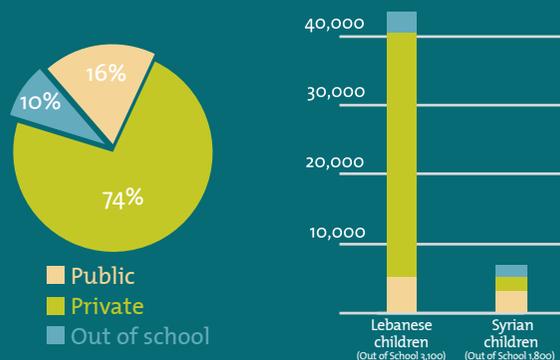


Main Reasons for not attending

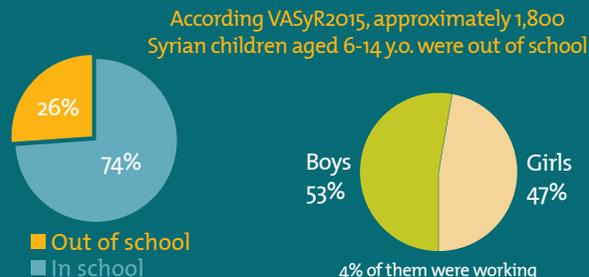


6-14 y.o. 49,900

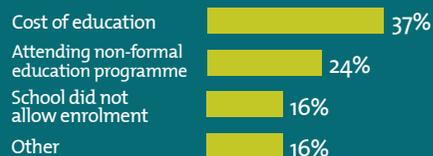
Approximately 4,900 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in Beirut



Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



Main Reasons for not attending



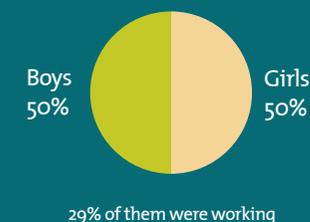
15-18 y.o. 29,100

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoSC. Only estimations from VASyR are available

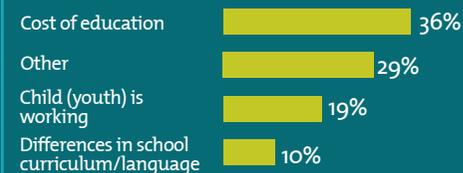
Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015



According to VASyR2015, approximately 1,600 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



Main Reasons for not attending



AHMAD

Ahmad keeps up the hope of a better future

Fourteen year-old Ahmad used to live in the countryside of Homs in Syria. He fled to Lebanon nearly two years ago with his family, finding refuge there. In Syria, Ahmad was enrolled in the 8th grade. However, having been out of school for the last two years in Lebanon, Ahmad was only able to re-enrol in the 6th grade. Since Ahmad was older than his classmates he felt embarrassed that he was struggling to follow the curriculum despite his more mature age. Eventually his self-esteem suffered so much that he dropped out of school.

"I felt out of place and could not integrate with my classmates because they were all younger than me. Now I am out of school again and I am starting to forget everything I have learned before," says Ahmad as he explains the reason he has dropped out of school. "Now I have to catch up two scholastic years and I find this discouraging. Maybe I should rather go to work and provide for my family."

Ahmad is nostalgic about home and remembers every single detail about his life there. "In Syria, I used to go to school every day, do my homework and visit my grandmother during the weekends," he says. "Although we had a big farm where I helped my father after school, I was very dedicated and one of the best students in my class."

Even after the war began in Syria, Ahmad insisted on going to school and doing his homework every day. One day, the raids directed at his town intensified and Ahmad fled his house to another town inside Syria with his father and sister while his brothers stayed with his mother in their hometown. "Although I was concerned that one day I might no longer be able to go to school, I remained convinced that the war would come to an end very soon," he says. But his dreams were shattered only one month later, when he learned that his brother died back home when their house collapsed due to shelling and raids. "From that moment, we lost everything. My life totally changed. I felt hopeless," Ahmad says with great frustration.

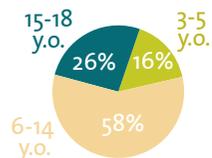
Ahmad is fearful about how the future might unveil. "It is scary how life could totally change overnight. We used to live in peace. We fled to Lebanon looking for hope," he says. "It is my wish to go back to school and reintegrate before it is too late," he adds. But for this he needs to catch up the years lost so that he can join in with children his own age.

Despite his great sadness, Ahmad would never give up. "I dream of becoming a physician. That is the one and only thing to worry about," he says with determination.



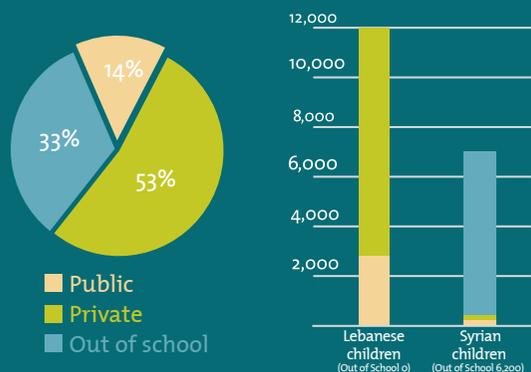
NABATIEH

Total children aged 3-18
112,600



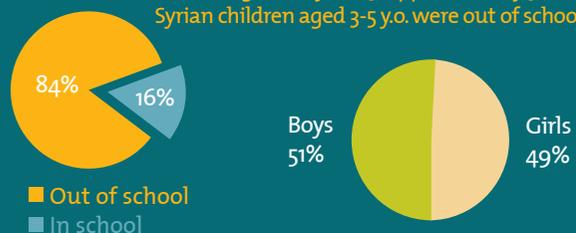
3-5 y.o. 18,600

Approximately 6,200 children aged between 3 and 5 were out of school in Nabatieh

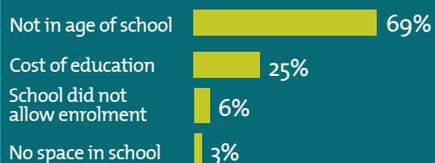


Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 5,700 Syrian children aged 3-5 y.o. were out of school

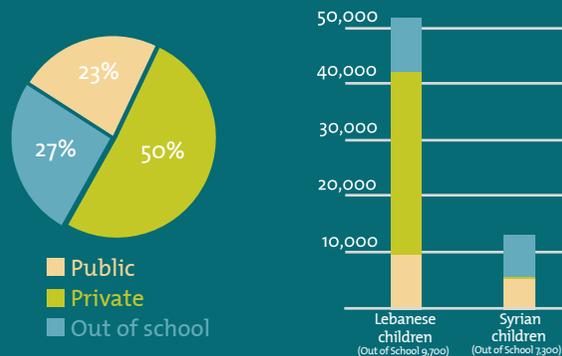


Main Reasons for not attending



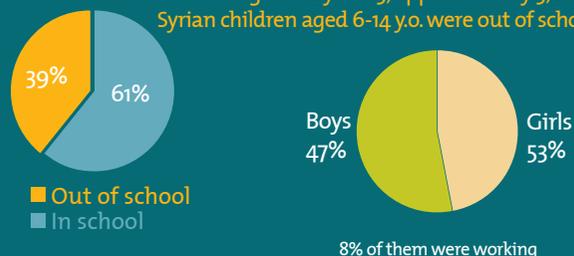
6-14 y.o. 64,800

Approximately 17,000 children aged between 6 and 14 were out of school in Nabatieh



Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

According to VASyR2015, approximately 5,200 Syrian children aged 6-14 y.o. were out of school



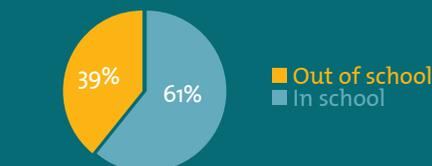
Main Reasons for not attending



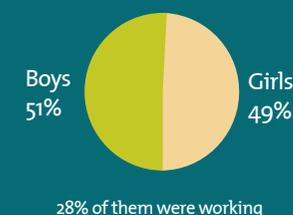
15-18 y.o. 29,200

Not enough data on secondary from institutional sources to calculate numbers of OoSC. Only estimations from VASyR are available

Zoom on Syrian refugee children from VASyR 2015

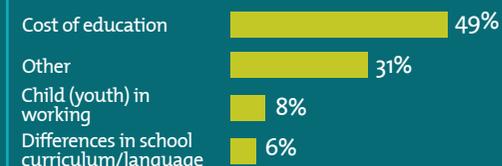


According to VASyR2015, approximately 3,500 Syrian children aged 15-18 y.o. were out of school



28% of them were working

Main Reasons for not attending



GHADA

Ghada was the top of her class before she had to withdraw from school

When air strikes were hitting her town and school around Damascus more than four years ago, thirteen year-old Ghada, who was nine years old then, and her family of eight, fled war torn Syria. The family sought refuge and safety in Lebanon, and Ghada enrolled in a public school in the neighbourhood.

The family values education and constantly seeks to ensure Ghada pursues hers; especially as she was the top of her class in Syria. However, living in a populated urban town in Lebanon was expensive. The family was drowning in debt and consequently forced to move to a rural area. Ghada's parents enrolled her in a public school that she could only reach by bus due to its remoteness. However, the family's growing financial constraints obliged them to withdraw her from school as they were no longer able to afford transportation.

It has now been years since Ghada stopped going to school. "My one and only wish is to go back to school. My parents were always proud of me. Every time we had visitors, they talked about my grades," she says. "I had high expectations and limitless ambitions. I never thought that some day I would end up like this," she adds.

Ghada is concerned about her future and annoyed by the loss of time. "I am worried because time is flying. I do nothing all day. When the time comes and I will be able to return to school, it might be too late. I do not want to end up marrying and having children at an early age. I will only be happy and fulfilled when I can go to school just like my friends," she adds.

Ghada misses school terribly. "I miss going to school every day and learning English in spite of the challenges I was facing in assimilating. I miss having school friends and socializing with them," she says. "There is no one here except my family."

But Ghada is not giving up on her dreams. "I teach my younger brothers to read and write, so that I do not forget what I have learned, and for them not to stay without education," she concludes.



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