

# Mapping the Expertise and Skills of the Displaced Syrian Teachers in Lebanon

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<b>Location</b>	Lebanon: Beqaa, Beirut and North regions
<b>Teacher Profile</b>	Refugee teachers
<b>Topics</b>	Teacher professional development and teacher well-being

## DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Lebanon has succeeded in extending its support to refugees while maintaining levels of access to and quality of services for Lebanese students with the support of the international community. It is estimated that approximately 60% of Syrian refugees between the ages of 3-18 are out of formal schooling. A number of factors have contributed to the challenge of enrolling and keeping children in school, among which is the limited number of teachers. Non-governmental organisations have been key to efforts to reach children outside the scope of the public-school system.

Teachers within the public-school system have received training to help them cope with the challenge of working with refugee children through professional development. As well as coming from diverse professional backgrounds, teachers within NGOs, particularly Syrian teachers, do not necessarily have any structured professional development. This situation is far from ideal. Current policy innovations advocate raising teaching performance as the most likely factor to lead to substantial gains in student learning (OECD 2005; OECD 2009). Displaced refugee teachers working in the non-formal sector could be a vital resource for stretched education systems in protracted crises – in Lebanon and elsewhere.

## BRIEF OVERVIEW

### Purpose

In this collaborative study, Education Development Trust worked with the American University of Beirut (AUB) to examine profiles of displaced Syrian teachers working in Lebanese non-formal education settings in Beirut, Beqaa, and the North region. The intention was to build a profile of the teachers and to understand the main challenges they faced. We also wanted to assess

the skills and development needs of the teachers and to see what opportunities, if any, there have been with regard to their own professional development.

### Methodology and methods

The study included a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, a survey, and Participatory Action Research (PAR). In the PAR work, teachers assumed the role of research partners and worked with the research team in order to identify the key issues they believe are critical to understanding their stories, professional experiences, and professional development needs. The data collection was conducted in two main rounds:

1. **First round:** focus group discussions with Syrian teachers, survey administration, PAR activities;
2. **Second round:** individual semi-structured interviews with Syrian teachers who participated in the PAR, first round focus group discussion sessions, and NFE representatives.

This study focused on the Beqaa, Beirut and North regions in Lebanon. The research reached a large number of participants, including:

1. 70 teachers who participated in the PAR (organised in 12 working groups);
2. 30 teachers who participated in the focus group discussions;
3. 24 individual interviews (5 NFE representatives; 19 Syrian teachers); and
4. 130 teachers who responded to survey questions.

An event was also held at AUB where the teachers were able to present their PAR findings to an international audience. It was the intention that the short-term beneficiaries of this research would be the teachers

themselves, the pupils they teach, and the whole Syrian refugee community in Lebanon.

The analysis of qualitative data (individual interviews and focus groups) included (a) transcription and coding using NVIVO, and (b) inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The examination of quantitative data (survey) was conducted by running descriptive statistics and distribution analysis. The software used for this purpose was STATA.

The outcome of this project will include a report, policy brief, and two videos; an infographic and a short documentary.

## EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

### Profile of the teachers

- The majority of the teachers were male (70%).
- In total, 90% of the teachers were educated to degree level in a range of subjects, such as Arabic (20%), Mathematics (10%) and English (16%). Just 5% of the teachers held a postgraduate qualification and among this number, less than a fifth had any previous teaching experience. Out of those with an undergraduate degree, two thirds had some teaching experience.
- Overall, 39% of the Syrian teachers had no previous teaching experience at all, which is not uncommon in NFE settings. The other 61% were working in the teaching profession in Syria before the war.
- The average amount of teaching experience held by these participants is nine years. On average, female teachers have almost eight years' experience, whereas the male teachers have six years.

### Professional development

- Syrian teachers had attended training opportunities, some of them were directly related to teaching (e.g. class management, time management, leadership, English, etc.), and others complementary to teaching (e.g. Stress Management, Human Rights, Film Making, etc.). Almost 85% of the survey sample has undertaken

professional development activities in the last 18 months, including professional development training or reading professional literature. Only 15% of the sampled teachers have not taken part in any professional activities.

- The majority of the training is delivered internally by civil society organisations (CSOs) for whom they work (65.19%) or by other organisations: international organisations (20%) or other CSOs (34.84%). Conversely, the number of training opportunities delivered by the Lebanese Government is limited (9.63%). Our analysis of data from the survey suggests the contents of the training is in line with key recommendations and evidence coming from existing literature. Indeed, the great majority of Syrian teachers (55.56%) are trained on emergency related pedagogical approaches and the 45.19% of them receive training on emergency related topics. This implies relevance and appropriateness of some professional development.
- The data about training in line with traditional subjects and pedagogical strategies suggest that few Syrian teachers receive training on teaching traditional subjects (13.33%) and traditional pedagogical approaches (26.67%). This result is in contrast with the main recommendations coming from the literature and the background information of the teachers. Indeed, the 38.52% of teachers started their career as teacher after 2011, as a consequence of the displacement and do not possess the necessary knowledge about the subject they teach and traditional pedagogical methodologies. Additionally, 36.30% of the Syrian teachers are currently working in an area of specialization different from their education, meaning that they would need support in the new teaching area.
- The need for further training on how to address socio-emotional issues was highlighted by the teachers.
- Teachers called for training to be relevant to their needs. They wanted more specific workshops for facing emergency-specific problems (crowded, mixed age classes, resource poor learning environments, language of instruction, etc.).

## The personal situation of refugee teachers:

- Interviews showed clearly that many of the concerns of the participants were not about their professional lives, but more about their personal lives outside their work.
- The main concerns included residential and legal status in the host country, financial security and being able to provide even the most basic things for their families and children, and their own personal safety as well as the safety of their families.
- Teaching with NGOs has offered some income which has helped support families and is seen as an opportunity.

The Syrian refugee crisis has resulted in unprecedented social and economic challenges in Lebanon. There are nearly a million school-aged refugee children in the country who need access to education. Despite the efforts of the Lebanese government to accommodate these children within their formal education system, there are not enough places. The alternative for many children has been to attend non-formal schools and classes established by other organisations.

The backgrounds of those who teach in these settings varies considerably, with a mixture of experienced and qualified teachers and those who have no previous teaching experience. Despite the importance of refugee teachers in emergency contexts, there is a distinct lack of attention paid to the professional needs of refugee teachers and those who teach in non-formal education settings. Our research has tackled this issue head on. We have worked with refugee teachers directly and provided them with a platform so that their stories can be heard. The full study (to be published in early 2020) will be of interest to a wide audience, including UN agencies, the donor community, and other organisations who are taking an active interest in the Syrian refugee crisis or other examples of protracted crises.

## LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Resources limited the number of teachers we could involve in the study. There were also issues with attrition of participants. It was difficult to locate all the teachers after the first round of interviews. We know that some teachers also found it challenging to join the meetings and fieldwork due to family commitments.

There were challenges relating to the delivery of some research methods, such as the PAR approach, which are harder to control once 'live' in the field. The priority of some research themes was amended which, if reflective of the true issues and challenges faced by participants, is useful. The researchers had to be responsive to the things that participants wanted to tell us and this was not always in line with our questions. Given our initial desire to understand the professional development needs, this resulted in less depth within the data than we would have liked.

## LINKS

- Our response to the Syrian refugee crisis: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/commentary/our-response-to-the-syrian-crisis>
  - Teachers of refugees: a review of the literature: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/research/teachers-of-refugees-a-review-of-the-literature>
  - Education in emergencies: Who teaches refugees?: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/about-us/news/education-in-emergencies-who-teaches-refugees>
  - Who teaches refugees?: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/commentary/who-teaches-refugees>
  - Educating refugees: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/commentary/education-in-emergencies-educating-refugees>
  - English language teaching in the Middle East: <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/case-studies/english-language-teaching-in-the-middle-east>
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