



## CARE RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

# EXAMINING THE ROLES OF CAREGIVERS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEE AND VULNERABLE HOST COMMUNITY CHILDREN IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

By

**Dr. Bassel Akar**

Center for Applied Research in Education,  
Notre Dame University-Louaize

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is the third of a series of three commissioned by Caritas Austria in order to inform the development and implementation of the Regional Holistic Education Programme (RHEP) designed and launched by Caritas Austria in 2015 in Lebanon and Jordan. The qualitative study examined relationships between caregivers and Syrian refugee and vulnerable host community children in Jordan and Lebanon and how these relationships foster or hinder an early childhood education (ECE) for healthy development. The young children are in early childhood from infancy up to eight years old. Caregivers included parents, teachers, school counsellors, psychologists and social workers. Through purposeful and opportunistic sampling, we visited four formal schools in Jordan and, in Lebanon, seven formal schools and seven non-formal education initiatives provided by civil society organizations. Information was gathered from three main sources: (1) education staff like teachers, principals/directors, school counsellors and psychologists, (2) parents and (3) children. Semi-structured interviews and observations revealed complex and often overlooked cultural layers behind the interactions between caregivers and children in their early years. The findings allow us to: (1) identify evidence-informed approaches for caregivers of and in vulnerable families to provide the optimal support for children's learning, growth and psychosocial/socio-emotional well-being, and (2) describe how organizations can support caregivers in providing vulnerable children the necessary support for a healthy, stimulating and rehabilitative upbringing.

## Evidence highlights

### **Key support needs of vulnerable children**

- a. Stability and consistency: avoiding turnover of caregivers and ensuring that caregivers do not only display extreme expressions of emotions. Most urgently, the children need a sense of stability through routine so that they can gradually shift out of "survival mode" to a degree of well-being that enables them to express curiosity and forge healthy relationships.
- b. Providing basic needs: basic nutrition; protection from sexual, drug and physical abuse; and security. These needs will also help the children avoid being part of an income generation based on child labor and begging on the streets.
- c. Cognitive stimulation: From three years and older, children need access to other caregivers who behave as parents and opportunities to play with peers, learn and discover and make new friends. When spoken to, adults must be conscious of using language properly.
- d. Trust: Feel safe with caregivers so that they can explore. Parents must receive support, at least at the socio-emotional level, in order to provide the stable, safe and supportive environment at home critical for the children's healthy growth and brain development.

### **Perspectives of parents and guardians on how to support their children's education**

The majority of caregivers see preschool as a place to learn basic literacy and numeracy. Very few seem to expect ECE as an opportunity for children to make friends, spend the day in a safe place and have fun. For some parents, transportation is still an issue. Parents voiced the need to recover from their experiences of war and to socialize. Parents should not be expected to provide psychosocial support, especially when they need it the most.

### **Teachers' approaches to working with caregivers to support students' learning and development**

By and large, teachers and directors from the host community hastily generalize parents as disengaged, uninterested and negligent. The teachers who are also refugees showed much more empathy and understanding towards the children. These teachers put emphasis on hygiene, not to hit each other when they get mad and how to take off their shoes. Working with refugee children takes an emotional toll on teachers, especially those who are refugees themselves. Teachers in schools and some NGOs saw parents more as harmful and negligent caregivers who ignore and hit their children, do not help their children with homework and do not prioritize their children's schooling.

### **How civil society organisations promote parental involvement in the education of their children**

Mostly mothers participate in NGO-related activities. NGO activities appear to view families as parts of the whole (children, mothers, fathers) and often overlook the family as a whole component. Many NGO workers cannot say how they will measure how they have succeeded. Some will say they have learned their letters and numbers. Others put some value on retention, a quantitative variable that is valuable for funding. Few will identify success when children do not steal from the classroom, control their impulses (e.g. getting the ball only when they have permission), raise their hand when they want to answer a question and take responsibility in cleaning the classroom.

## Three critical discussion areas

1. Dominant developmental theories: Dominant theories of child development are based on staged development that overlooks individual and cultural differences. Most of the classroom observations in Lebanon and Jordan showed teacher-child interactions trying to reinforce the learning of literacy and numeracy set for a particular age group. Even admission procedures appear to exclude children who potentially threaten sequential learning processes because of their special needs. Hence, psychosocial support activities emerge as possibly the most appropriate educational intervention that prepares preschool children for grade one.
2. Healthy and harmful relationships: Certain cultural variables in conflict-affected areas disrupt fundamental reciprocated interactions between early years children and their caregivers. Many parents demonstrated an expectation of their children having to behave as adults. The dominant top-down dynamics of disciplining children give virtually no room for constructive interactions when children display curiosity and playfulness.
3. Concerning positions and emotional state of caregivers: Conversations with various caregivers suggest that their poor state of mental health is indeed a risk factor to the child's well-being. Many children have observed their mothers suffering from violence at home and fathers expressing frustrations in finding work. Although children demonstrated some degree of resilience to parents' short temperaments, the interactions with parents are, in many cases, traumatic.

## Four recommendation actions

Segregation versus integration as school design: Despite the administrative practicalities of designating Syrian-only children for afternoon shifts, the design is a form of segregation that reinforces divisions between the refugee and host community. Evidence from this study suggests that cases where Lebanese and Syrian children were integrated in educational settings allowed for greater interactions and demonstrated the vision of inclusive citizenship stipulated



in the Lebanese national curriculum. Furthermore, any tensions that may arise from fully inclusive school settings can provide valuable opportunities for both communities to develop new approaches to conflict transformation. Hence, educational contexts can increase the diversity of teachers and further public discourse to question the potential harms and benefits of segregation and integration of refugee and host community children.

2. A foundation-based curriculum for early childhood growth and development: The social activities designed in ECE appear to maintain a pedagogical culture that targets the learning of literacy and numeracy as a primary objective in preparation for first grade. Children prior to first grade already experience fears of failing or disappointing their parents. Hence, teacher colleges, preschools and policymakers can reconceptualize an ECE curriculum that focuses on foundations of ECD, including healthy attachments, emotion management, language stimulation, managing stress, structured and unstructured play and executive functions.

3. Mothers, fathers and ECD/ECE: Regarding ECD, most refugee parents view their children as young adults by punishing them for child-like behaviours, viewing them as burdens who should be more independent and feeling a sense of failure when they cannot manage their behaviours. Parents also show little affection at best and violent reactions at worst. None of the parents described the preschool as a place to play, socialise and grow; it was mostly to learn how to read and write for better work opportunities. Hence, civil society and government agencies can produce a series of information guides on early childhood learning, healthy growth and brain development and the roles of caregivers. Schools can define forms of parent engagement in preschool and when children begin primary school.

4. Reimagining the school as a community center: Parents are suffering from war-related traumas. Some expressed appreciation towards the interviews as spaces to talk. All parents also expressed struggles in managing their relationships with each other and their children. Teachers either rely on instinct to respond to children with disruptive behaviour or find that working with difficult cases goes beyond the scope of their knowledge of ECD/ECE. Hence, schools can serve as community centers where parents and their children spend time to play or read books. As public centers, they can also provide spaces for parents to meet in group therapy activities and participate or even lead in educational workshops on parenting or vocational skills. The school can also host a caregiver education program and teacher professional development workshops.



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the relationships between caregivers and Syrian refugee and vulnerable host community children in Jordan and Lebanon. The young children are in early childhood and include infants (0 – 1 years), toddlers (2 – 3 years) and preschool-age children up to eight years old. This study aims to:

1. Identify evidence-informed approaches for caregivers of and in vulnerable families to provide the optimal support for children's learning, growth and psychosocial/socio-emotional well-being, and
2. Describe how Caritas can support caregivers in providing vulnerable children the necessary support for a healthy, stimulating and rehabilitative upbringing.

This study is the third of a series of three commissioned by Caritas Austria in order to inform the development of the Regional Holistic Education Programme (RHEP) designed and launched by Caritas Austria in 2015 in Lebanon and Jordan. The first study (2015-2016) focused on holistic approaches to education programming, mostly in the form of non-formal education and through civil society organizations. The second study (2016-2017) investigated provisions of education and healthy growth of the most marginalized of children, who were identified as Syrian refugee and vulnerable host community children in preschool years (0-8).

This third study tried to investigate and reflect more into the cultural context of caregivers and their relationships with children in their early years and with other caregivers that also interact with these children. The results of examining caregivers' positions and experiences will also be used to review and advance the RHEP. Hence, we designed the study to address the following seven research areas and questions:

- RQ1. General overview of the impact of trauma and stress on caretaker-child relationships, and how it impacts children's cognitive, social-emotional development – with a focus on the learning environment
- RQ2. What are key support needs of vulnerable children in RHEP partner schools in a learning environment?
- RQ3. What are perspectives of caregivers on how to support their children's education?
- RQ4. What are teachers' perspectives and approaches in working with caregivers to support students' learning and development?
- RQ5. Which mechanisms are in place in Lebanon and Jordan to encourage involvement of caregivers in education?
- RQ6. How do civil society organizations (CSOs, including Caritas Jordan and Caritas Lebanon) promote parental involvement in the education of their children?
- RQ7. Recommendations to enhance Caritas' involvement of caregivers in support of children's academic performance and psychosocial wellbeing.

To answer these questions, we begin with a review of published research on relationships between caregivers and children in their early years, with a particular focus on vulnerable children and children in West Asia and North Africa (WANA). Another body of literature reviewed comprises government policy documents in Lebanon and Jordan that outline minimum standards expected by legal authorities. We also draw attention to a number of initiatives taken by civil society organizations that provide support to caregivers of very young children. Subsequently, a methodology chapter describes the sample set of education programs and centers in Lebanon

and Jordan that participated in the study and the caregivers (e.g. parents, teachers, social workers) and children who were approached. We employed only qualitative methods of inquiry; in addition to conversations, we also observed how caregivers and children interacted with each other inside the classroom and at home. The findings are presented in four main chapters, each illustrating approaches and positions from (a) the education programs and their curricula, (b) teachers and social workers, (c) young children and (d) parents and guardians. The findings reveal complex and even overlooked factors that influence the extent to which parents and teachers provide a healthy environment for early years children to grow and develop. They also suggest feasible approaches to provide nurturing environments at home school but could require a committed population of parents and teachers to pioneer them as cultural norms.

## DESK REVIEW

Primary caregivers play a pivotal role in children's development, learning and wellbeing in the earliest years (Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013; Brion-Meisels & Jones, 2012; Fox, Levitt & Nelson, 2010). Depending on the context and culture, caregivers may include their parents, grandparents, older siblings, neighbours, domestic helpers, and once they enter preschool, schoolteachers as well. Caregivers who provide early stimulation, enrichment and supportive care can positively impact children's learning outcomes. Indeed, quality caregiver-child relationships and interactions are most critical during the earliest years of life (birth to five) and build the foundation for healthy early childhood development (ECD), early childhood mental health, early childhood learning and eventually more formal early childhood education (ECE).

The review of literature below highlights key concepts and research gaps in examining relationships between caregivers and the growth and development during early childhood. First, the review identifies indicators of relationships that support healthy ECD and ECE. It then examines the few studies that investigate natures of caregiver-child relationships in areas affected by conflict. The review shows a paucity of research on relationships between caregivers and healthy early childhood in Lebanon, Jordan and the wider region and, more specifically, conflict-affected areas within this region. The final section gathers evidence of existing policy documents and evaluation reports defining the roles of caregivers in Lebanon and Jordan. In addition to research databases published in English, this desk review also drew on academic literature published in Arabic ([www.shamaa.org](http://www.shamaa.org)) and websites of NGOs and government ministries in Lebanon and Jordan.

### Caregiver Relationships as a Foundation for Early Learning

Caregivers can support their young children's growth and skill acquisition by establishing a foundation of healthy relationships. While a traditional developmental approach to ECE often focuses on literacy and numeracy and other academically-demonstrable skills, particularly for children under the age of five years, the development of healthy motor, language, cognitive and socioemotional skills can only be ensured through first developing healthy relationships. Indeed, the dominance of traditional developmental theories (e.g. Piaget) have misled educators and parents to using child developmental stages as the universal norm and distracted them from more holistic paradigms that recognize the significance of the cultural context that determines how children's capacities and



abilities build and change over time (Walsh 2005). Relationships, for example, play a central role in every major theory of human development, from Bronfenbrenner to Vygotsky (Brion-Meisels & Jones, 2013), and a synthesis of five decades of research on resilience in development concluded that, “Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships” (Luthar, 2006, p. 780). This highlights the additional importance of caregivers in helping their youngest children to survive and even thrive in challenging and stressful contexts such as that of armed conflict and displacement pertinent to this research.

During infancy and early childhood, young children must develop dependable, reciprocal relationships with their primary caregivers. Known in the developmental literature as “attachment,” the building of these primary, reciprocal relationships between child and caregiver is the foundation from which young children explore and understand the world (Bowlby 1969). Healthy and secure attachment (in which caregivers provide children with a sense of safety and the ability to regulate their emotions) is a fundamental prerequisite which children need to be anchored in in order to develop more advanced skills and achieve their stage-salient milestones in all domains – motor, language, cognitive and socioemotional – of early childhood development (Brion-Meisels & Jones, 2012). For example, children with secure attachment may show some distress when their caregiver leaves but are able to manage their feelings knowing that their caregiver will return. Caregivers’ emotional stability is also critical for helping young children manage stress, develop resilience and establish solid foundations of mental health. When caregivers are consistently responsive and sensitively provide for their infant/toddler’s need for attention and comfort, this dynamic is considered developmentally and socioemotionally supportive (Belsky, Garduque, & Hrcncir, 1984; Egeland & Sroufe, 1981).

Rigorous evidence demonstrates how caregiver education, knowledge of ECD, perception of schooling and caregiver behaviours (e.g. home cognitive stimulation) also have an impact on preschool children’s development, particularly in terms of cognition and language learning. Research from North America and Western Europe among parents from low income backgrounds suggests that caregivers who are more knowledgeable about early childhood report more optimal parenting behaviour and less parenting stress (Belcher, Watson, Johnson & Jalongo, 2007). Evidence from developing contexts indicates that caregivers’ perception of education as being valuable for their children is related to their children’s intrinsically oriented profiles of motivation and higher attendance at school (McCoy, Wolf & Godfrey, 2013). Multiple studies have identified caregiver and particularly maternal education (McNally & Quigley, 2014) as a significant factor associated with child language development and language environment quality (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean, & Huston, 2009; Phillips & Morse, 2011; Soderstrom & Wittebolle, 2013). However, it is possible that caregiver educational background is merely a proxy for advanced caregiver behaviours and interactions that contribute to a child’s language skills and overall development (Rowe, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Parent’s levels of education, knowledge of ECD and approaches to attachment are even more prevalent risk-factors that threaten children’s healthy growth and development in areas affected by conflict.

## Caregivers and Children in Conflict-Affected Areas

Through early primary relationships, children learn how to regulate their affect and emotions in a systematic manner that determines their behaviour when confronted with stress. Specific to children and caregivers in armed conflict, existing literature indicates that the nurturing caregiver-child relationship is even more critical in potentially traumatic and destabilising contexts of armed conflict, violence, and displacement. Specifically, the emotional state and behaviour of the mother can serve as a primary mediator between traumatic experiences and the child’s psychological functioning (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 1995; Qouta, Punamäki, Montgomery,

& Sarraj, 2007). Further, supportive and non-punitive parenting practices (e.g. sympathetic behaviours such as talking through a child’s aggressive outbursts or hugging them) have been shown to prevent children who have witnessed violence and aggression from developing aggressive and inappropriate behaviours themselves (Punamäki, 1987). These studies are significant for practitioners as they indicate that supporting the mental health of the caregivers is a priority intervention in support of children’s psychological wellbeing. They also show that in the wake of traumatic experiences, supporting parents who are gentle and not physically disciplining their children can prevent or break a cycle of violent behaviour developing in their children in the long run.

While sensitive and emotionally responsive caregivers have the power to mediate children’s levels of psychosocial distress and build their resilience in spite of adversity (Nelson & Sheridan, 2011; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013; Wuermli, Tubbs, Peterson & Aber, 2013), research also demonstrates that when caregivers are neglectful and/or unresponsive to their children’s distress, infants and toddlers may learn instead to distance themselves from or avoid their caregivers and “come to view the world with anger, mistrust and hostility” (Brion-Meisels & Jones, 2012, p. 58). If these patterns persist long-term, children’s brain architecture and physiological neural development and wiring may even alter (Sheridan et al, 2012). Indeed, children who lack healthy early relationships may fail to develop appropriately responses to key interpersonal interactions – and instead either miss key social cues or become hyper-vigilant or -sensitive to hostile triggers in relationships later in life (Ibid).

However, it is important to note that caregivers are also at risk in contexts of armed conflict and protracted displacement and may thereby become an indirect source of risk for children’s wellbeing. Adult victims of war have little reprieve from the extreme violence and destruction of conflict. Refugees additionally suffer daily from discriminatory policies, difficult access to services, and the loss of personal dignity, social roles, community fabric and family relationships (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Mercy Corps, 2013). For caregivers in armed conflict, prior research illustrates their challenges when the caregiver’s mental health is compromised, whereby negative psychosocial impact of the conflict on refugee children is compounded by the suffering of their parents, whose own overwhelming emotional challenges, lack of psychological support or familiarity with traumatic stress in young children can hamper their emotional capacity to respond to their children and even lead them to inflict violence on their children (Betancourt, McBain, Newnham, & Brennan, 2015; Panter-Brick, Grimon, & Eggerman, 2014; Psarros, Malliori, Theleritis, Martinaki, & Bergiannaki, 2016).

For caregivers in forced displacement, however, very few studies have systematically investigated the associations between caregiver and child development (El-Khani, Ulph, Peters & Calam, 2016; Betancourt, Yudron, Wheaton, & Smith-Fawzi, 2012; Thielman, Ostermann, Whetten, & O’Donnell, 2012), and whether caregivers’ own experiences of wartime trauma and displacement stress have resulted in heightened or compromised caregiving. To date, there is virtually no published evidence of caregivers in sites of conflict being harmful to infants. The grey literature does document, however, how discriminatory policies or social exclusion (particularly for the forcibly displaced) compromise the roles and capacities of caregivers to provide the most basic of provisions and protection for their children – for instance, by making it illegal for adult refugees to work (Mercy Corps, 2013). On the other hand, Chen’s (2018) clinical observations over the years found that overt provision of needs such as the daily distribution of food can in the long term disempower caregivers, especially fathers, and lead to depression and disrupt power dynamics in the family particularly when even the youngest children need to beg and become the primary breadwinners instead of their parents.

No studies thus far have examined the role of refugee caregivers in supporting (or, for that matter, negatively impacting) early childhood development specifically. Further, the overwhelmingly narrow focus on child individual outcomes by both scholars and practitioners in these contexts rather than on family-, community-, or environment-level influencers has come under fire by notable scholars in recent years (Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, Charrow, & Tol, 2013; Panter-Brick, Goodman, Tol, & Eggerman, 2011; Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012), and



is slowly being addressed. Nevertheless, available and rigorous data remains sparse in WANA, but this literature review will attempt to parse existing literature, and ultimately this research aims to begin to fill this gap.

## Caregivers and early childhood in West Asia and North Africa

Turning to the literature relevant to WANA, this region has one of the lowest rates of ECCE enrolment globally and, on average, only 27% of children in the region access any ECCE services (El-Kogali & Kraft, 2015). This is reflected in the limited literature on the role of caregivers (both parents and kindergarten teachers) in supporting early childhood development and education, with even more sparse literature on caregivers in conflict. Nevertheless, we provide a brief overview of caregiving for early childhood as well as children's developmental milestones in the region, including sites affected by conflict. Unfortunately, however, most studies were not conducted with children exposed to armed conflict and displacement and were often from families with middle- to high-economic status.

### Parents

Parental knowledge of ECD, mindsets or expectations of their own roles of parents, and actual parenting behaviours and family dynamics all contribute to children's learning and development. At a fundamental level, parental knowledge of ECD provides the basis for their appropriate expectations of their child's developmental stage and progress. To this end, one study in Jordan (Safadi et al., 2016) assessed 400 mothers' knowledge of infants' childrearing and developmental milestones, in Amman. Mothers were found to be more knowledgeable in physical and safety skills, and less knowledgeable in cognitive, emotional, and parent-infant interaction skills. Parents drew information from both formal and informal sources, including cultural traditions; interestingly, their age, education, and planned pregnancy had limited influence on their level of knowledge. The authors suggest that (a) structured parenting programmes for mothers and culturally accepted sources of information for fathers are essential to enhance parenting skills among Jordanian couples; and also (b) encourage healthcare professionals, nursing schools and policy makers to develop and institute a holistic approach encompassing physical, cognitive, emotional and parent-infant interaction domains in childrearing educational programmes.

Parental behaviours or habits can enhance young children's literacy and language learning. In a print-rich environment at home, for example, children can easily access books and objects have labels that children can clearly see words and letters in their capital and lowercase forms (e.g. table and Samira). In Jordan, two studies (Al Sa'di & Mansi, 2011; Ihmeideh, 2009) investigated the effect of print-rich home environment on developing preschool children's awareness of the written language and the role of family literacy in the development of reading interests of children, respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, children living in print-rich home environments had a higher written language awareness test (WLAT) scores than those who did not (Ihmeideh, 2009). Al Sa'di and Mansi (2011) showed a moderate level of the role of family literacy in developing children's reading interests; specifically, parent's beliefs about reading, instruments (tools) provided, reading-related activities, and home-school connection predicted children's reading interest, in that order.

Perhaps the one study that most closely examined the role of caregivers in determining children's socioemotional wellbeing was conducted in Egypt. By investigating the relationship between parental treatment styles and learned helplessness with kindergarten children aged 5-6 years old, Sadeeq and Mohamad (2014) examined the potentially negative impact that caregivers can have on their preschool children. Results showed that fathers' and mothers' parenting styles that involved continual care, equality, and democracy negatively predicted for learned helplessness, whereas mothers who pursued parenting styles hallmarked by rejection, neglect, cruelty, totalitarianism and

subjectivity predicted learned helplessness among kindergarten children. These findings only confirm the critical role that parents have in the socioemotional wellbeing and learned behaviours of their children, and also highlight the significant margin of behavioural change (from 'totalitarian' to 'continually caring') that needs to be overcome in this region.

Finally, regarding parents' roles in supporting children to achieve academically in kindergarten (KG), both parents' knowledge as well as their relationship with the KG were found to be important in research in Syria (Saad, 2012). Findings indicated that (1) parents' perception of the importance of kindergarten for children's academic success; (2) parents' knowledge of their role in preparing their children for KG; (3) parents' own education; (4) the partnership between teachers and parents and particularly the respect that teachers extend to the parents; and (5) parents' efforts to follow-up on teachers' notes in their child's notebook all contribute to children's success in KG. These findings provide guidance for intervention design and confirms the importance of building family-KG partnerships in order to help their children better develop language skills, social values and good health.

### Teachers

As children begin to be enrolled in nursery, preschool and kindergarten, their primary caregivers begin to include not only parents and close relatives but also educators. Studies conducted in the WANA region on kindergarten teachers' role in the development of young children primarily examined their own background and training, and its relationship with various aspects of child development – from life skills and emotional intelligence, to creative thinking skills and leadership behaviours. For example, kindergarten (KG) teachers in Iraq were studied recently (Al Shouk & Thijeeel, 2016) to examine the relationship between their educational competencies and children's life skills. Results showed that KG teachers' competencies were very weak and, overall, the Iraqi KG students were not equipped with life skills. It also underscored the urgent need to build the capacity of the KG teachers. Related, a study in Jordan (Mohammad, 2014) investigated teachers' roles in developing children's emotional intelligence. Its results indicated that the development of the student's emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with the teachers' education levels, working experience, and specialization in all areas except for empathy and the privatization of the KG.

In one study that explored teachers' roles in developing children's creative thinking skills, Al Rashid (2016) examined public and private kindergartens Saudi Arabia. Results showed a strong correlation between the type of qualification and the performance competencies required for the kindergarten teacher and children's creative thinking skills. The findings suggested that maintaining high standards for preschool teachers' background education/training and their years of experience is critical to enhance young children's learning. While this may seem to be an obvious finding, there is a perception in the region that because young children are learning only basic skills, anyone can be a KG teacher, and there is little knowledge regarding the critical importance of early learning for all future learning and development, much less on the level of skill required of excellent early educators and pedagogy. Thus, this research is key to convincing practitioners and policymakers to maintain high standards of qualification and continuous professional development for their ECE teaching staff.

Regarding teachers' roles in helping young children's healthy socioemotional development, we found only one study that examines a population affected by poverty, armed conflict and forced displacement. AwadAllah (2010) examined the role of the teacher in helping children achieve educational security in Sudan. Although the children and caregivers studied were at primary and not preschool level, the results are nevertheless pertinent for the study at hand: 1) children who are living in difficult conditions need a teacher who helps them to feel safe and has a sense of belonging to school as part of their community; and 2) children's primary areas of psychological discomfort in the camps that require teachers' awareness and support include the incidence of infectious diseases, feeling of insecurity (e.g. expecting attack at any time), and frustration in school. The paucity of research in WANA and areas



affected by armed conflict on relationships between caregivers and children in their early years reveals numerous gaps in the knowledge field that can inform ECE program development.

## Research concerns and gaps

Scientific literature to date has characterized healthy relationships between caregivers and children in early childhood across a number of domains. Through healthy and secure attachments, caregivers ensure that children feel safe and received the support needed to regulate emotions. Caregivers themselves demonstrate emotional stability by exercising consistency in the attention they give to the children and sensitivities to ensure children feel safe and secure. Also, caregivers' levels of education, qualifications or even understandings of ECE and ECD is critical to ensuring healthy forms of support; although, written qualifications such as teacher education are not always reliable. In sites of conflict, caregivers provide support through non-threatening acts of affection and talking and listening to children's explanations of difficult experiences or aggression. They also make sure to condemn harsh forms of discipline like corporal punishment and verbal abuse (i.e. shouting, cursing, insulting) to ensure that children have some space free of violence. If caregivers do not provide the active support and attention that children need, the children risk normalizing violence, distancing themselves from caregivers and developing antisocial behaviours. Furthermore, caregivers in areas affected by armed conflict and forced displacement are extremely vulnerable to stress, suffering, trauma and other forms of poor mental health that, consequently, risk projection of harm onto young children. The distressing social ecology that children affected by conflict live in is indeed prevalent for many in Lebanon, Jordan and the wider region.

The extremely limited knowledge we have on caregivers and early childhood support in this part of the world, particularly as an area ridden with conflict, calls for an immediate demand of quality research investigating the life conditions of caregivers, caregivers' approaches to vulnerable children and existing programs that aim to provide a healthy ECE/ECD through supporting caregivers. We can, however, extrapolate understandings and knowledge of caretaker-child relationships in conflict-affected areas from literature published by government agencies (e.g. legal frameworks) and civil society organizations (e.g. program reports).

## POLICIES AND PRACTICES: GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Lebanon and Jordan share a commitment to an international legal framework through their ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Selected articles below define the State's responsibilities in upholding children's rights that relate to their parents or legal guardians. The State must ensure that parents or legal guardians provide the necessary "protection and care" (article 3)

relevant to the child's developmental capacities and needs (articles 14 ,5) and respect the "responsibilities, rights and duties" of caregivers determined by culture (article 5). Children have the right to know who their parents are and be cared for by them (article 7). Anecdotal evidence by humanitarian and primary healthcare workers in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and some countries in Africa indicate that some of the young women in the camps sometimes do not know the father of their child, as a result of rape by strangers, including soldiers and militants. The State can only separate children from their parents under legal review based on evidence of "abuse or neglect" (articles 19 ,9); however, in the case of arrest or deportation of parents, the State must inform the children of their parents' whereabouts (article 9). Both parents have "common responsibilities" to the child and receive appropriate support through services that care for the child (article 18). Especially for children refugees, the State – also through cooperation with non-governmental organizations – is expected to provide "appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance" to ensure the provisions of their human rights, even if they are in the care of their parents or legal guardians (article 22); a similar responsibility is also highlighted for children with special needs (article 23). Finally, but not lastly, the State must ensure that parents and children receive information or education regarding "child health and nutrition, "breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents" (article 24).

Unconditional commitments to these articles by State parties may be difficult to uphold. In the cases of Lebanon and Jordan, for example, government authorities have repeatedly expressed the burden of limited resources by hosting, according to (UNHCR 2016) the largest numbers of forcibly displaced people per capita in the world. In addition, certain provisions of international legal frameworks including the UNCRC and 1951 Refugee Convention have conflicted with nationalist ideologies secured in government policy and laws. Lebanon and Jordan, for example, are among the majority of Arab League nations that have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention.

## Policy, research and practice in Lebanon

The Government of Lebanon (GoL) does not appear to have decreed requirements or standards that define responsibilities of caregivers, whether at pre-school or at home. Indeed, interviews with four leading academics in ECE/ECD in Lebanon confirmed the absence of clearly defined qualifications of early childhood caregivers. One academic recommended to search the job descriptions database found at the Ministry of Labor. Nevertheless, very few government-endorsed publications define and examine responsibilities and roles of caregivers. The website of the Centre of Educational Research and Development (CERD; the curriculum arm of MEHE) has posted research briefs and pre-school training programs on ECE/ECD. The three accessible research briefs address critical themes in early childhood development and education: (1) synergies between home and nursery in supporting social and physical development during early childhood, (2) the roles of caregivers at home and school in preventing and delegitimizing child abuse, and (3) reviewing parent-child attachments during transitions from home to preschool. The researchers address key concepts like attachment, emotional developmental risks and milestones and individual personality development. However, their claims appear to reinforce socially constructed gender roles of females as the primary caregivers. Also, many claims lack sufficient evidence to support the authors' proposals, interpretations or ideals of ECE/ECD. For example, in one research



brief, prolonged crying of a child in preschool indicates an unhealthy attachment to the mother. CERD has also posted preschool training programs that pay close attention to first days of school and physical and language development. They do suggest, however, a general emphasis on literacy and numeracy in order to ensure that children are academically prepared for school. The near absence of empirical evidence and evidence-informed literature in these research briefs supports the observation made in the desk review suggesting the need to support quality ECE/ECD research studies.

The Ministry of Public Health presides over the running of all nurseries (children up to 3.5 years of age). In collaboration with two non-governmental organizations, it published the National Guidelines for Early Childhood Care, a document listing basic requirements for the structural, operational and health standards of nurseries in Lebanon. The toolkit defines the skills and qualifications of supervisors and caregivers. Supervisors are expected to “have a range of skills and techniques” that enable them to “mediate children’s learning and development” and respond to “children’s needs and interests”. Caregivers are defined as adults over 18 years of age who have a “relevant and educational background”. At least one caregiver in the nursery should have certified training in first aid and CPR for children. They are also expected to show affection to children, know about “various child issues”, respond to children’s needs and support the children’s learning and development and foster positive relationships with children’s parents. The descriptions of roles and responsibilities of caregivers are broad and, to an extent, vague enough to indicate an understanding of ECD based on ensuring safety and security.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has also played a role in producing knowledge of ECE/ECD in Lebanon. The World Bank’s database on education systems around the world – Systems Approach for Better Educational Results (SABER) – commissioned and published research papers that surveyed ECD in countries around the world. The report for Lebanon was not published in the final database. It is currently at MOSA pending approval and delivery back to the World Bank. For country reports, see <http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm?indx=8&pd=6&sub=2>.

Other agencies and organizations are also mandated to enhance provisions for early childhood through research, advocacy and educational programs. The Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECA), an initiative by the Arab Resource Collective (ARC), carries out a number of activities that enhance the network of ECD/ECE professionals in the Arab region and knowledge of ECD/ECE approaches in this region. Their “Resources” page includes a collection of guides and research that aim to inform ECD/ECE programs. Probably the most relevant studies to this report include a mapping of teacher education programs for ECE (in Arabic)<sup>1</sup> and the ANECD newsletter<sup>2</sup> where issue 2 reported on a training program (26-21 March 2017, Jordan) on the science of early childhood development focusing on five themes: brain development, coping and competence, communication and learning, ecology of childhood and developmental health. The ARC also developed the “Health, Early learning and Protection Parenting Programme” (HEPPP) that was inspired by Adults and Children Learning: A holistic and integrated approach to early childhood care and development, a working manual first published in Arabic in 2002 (Sfeir et al. 2002). The HEPPP was first piloted in Lebanon and Egypt during -2012 2014. It targeted mothers and fathers and provided them with seminars to enhance their knowledge

<sup>1</sup> See <https://anecd.mawared.org/en/paper/mapping-pre-service-and-service-training-and-educational-programs-professionals-early>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://anecd.mawared.org/en/article/anecd-newsletter-2>.

over pregnancy, nutrition, personal hygiene, toilet training, safety, infections and diseases, inclusion, healthy communication, child development, play, school-readiness and holistic approaches to raising children. Some elements of HEPPP were innovative for the Arab region because it required mothers and fathers to work together as a couple, focused on early childhood developmental needs (6-0 years of age) and generated a discourse in Arabic on early childhood among parents (Issa, Aoudeh, Maalouf, & Hajjar, 2018). The program has been extended to Syrian refugee and vulnerable host community families in Lebanon and Jordan from 2014 to 2018. In Lebanon, the partner NGOs were the Women’s Programs Association (<https://www.wpalebanon.org/about.html>) and Baraeem (Buds) Association (Issa et al., 2018, p. 72). In Jordan, the partner NGO was Plan International (<https://plan-international.org/jordan>). The two-phase initiative began with training 70 parents in Lebanon and 40 in Jordan. For the second phase, parents worked with parents; eight parents in Lebanon and four in Jordan were selected and given facilitation skills training and trained a new cohort in their country. The process and outcomes of HEPPP were evaluated using a series of instruments that measure mental health and focus group discussions, which have not yet been published.

## Policy, research and practice in Jordan

Government policies in Jordan present slightly more specific expectations of caregivers than policies in Lebanon. Based on the Ministry of Education website ([www.moe.gov.jo](http://www.moe.gov.jo)), kindergarten teachers must hold a Bachelor’s degree in early years education or early childhood development and have taught at least three classes and taken a course in preschool curricula. As kindergarten teachers, they are expected to:

- ensure for the safety of the children in and out of the classroom,
- inform the school administration of presence and absences,
- resolve problems by collaborating with parents and the administration,
- considering individual differences among children
- model behaviors and appearance
- meet with parents at least once a semester
- follow up on the children’s personal hygiene
- avoid asking children to carry out personal tasks outside the classroom

Evaluations of kindergartens are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Low enrolment figures in kindergartens in Jordan are recognized as a problem with only %13 in KG1 and %59 in KG2. In 2016, the MoE in Jordan with support from UNICEF published a national strategy



document, *Early Childhood Education and Development Executive Plan (2025-2016)*<sup>3</sup>. Action points in this plan place parents as key stakeholders by engaging in reading at home and ensuring close alignment between school and home when promoting health and safety. The strategy document also calls to build on the work of initiatives carried out with parents, namely *Outreach, Better Parenting* and *Early Learning Readiness*. The Better Parenting Program (BPP) has probably received the most attention by academics and practitioners (e.g. S. Al-Hassan, 2009; S. M. Al-Hassan & Lansford, 2014; Al-Hassan & Lansford, 2011; UNESCO, n.d.). An in-depth overview of the BPP was presented in a UNICEF (2008) report and, most recently, in a 2017 evaluation report of *Ma'An (Together) towards a Safe School Environment Programme (2016-2009)* suggest that the BPP is ongoing through the collaborative work of MoE and UNICEF. The BPP is also delivered by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. While there is a great deal to learn from the BPP, it is still unclear if the program is still ongoing today.

Government policy documents in Jordan and Lebanon suggest limited understandings of how much parents determine healthy ECD. Reports on civil society initiatives demonstrate various degrees of investment into promoting approaches that support parents and other caregivers in how they nurture children in their early years. Overall, the literature shows a concerning gap in understanding the support mechanisms needed for parents in areas affected by conflict ensure their early years children learn to forge sustainable relationships with others and [re]gain the capacities to learn. This study delves into the cultural context of caregivers and their positions and abilities to support healthy ECD.

## METHODOLOGY

The knowledge field of caregivers of children refugees under eight years of age is limited and, for the Arab region, extremely scarce. Hence, qualitative research methods were designed to produce a knowledge base of understandings and experiences of caregivers and highly vulnerable children in Lebanon and Jordan. The research team comprised two co-principal investigators (co-PI): Bassel Akar and Alexandra Chen. Dr Bassel Akar mostly carries out research in citizenship education in areas affected by armed conflict and has led studies on examining education programs for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan. Alexandra Chen is soon to defend her doctoral thesis at Harvard University on the effects of war and violence-related traumas on early childhood growth and development. The co-PIs were supported by a team of field researchers in Lebanon and Jordan.

## Sample, instruments and procedures

In this study that took place in Lebanon and Jordan, we closely explored the approaches and experiences of caregivers in providing vulnerable preschool-age children an environment for healthy development and growth at home and school. We tried to learn how civil society organizations and schools engage parents in their children's early childhood education. We visited schools and their preschool classrooms and playgrounds to interview teachers and social workers and observe early years children interacting with each other and their teachers. In some cases, we were fortunate enough to visit homes in camps and have conversations with parents and relatives about their needs and experiences in trying to provide their children a healthy life. During these visits, we also tried to gather children's perspectives and reflections of their experiences in preschool and at home through friendly conversations. We visited four formal schools in Jordan and, in Lebanon, seven formal schools and seven non-formal education initiatives provided by civil society organizations. In the formal schools, we met with and spoke to three main sources: (1) education staff like teachers, principals/directors, school counsellors and psychologists, (2) parents and (3) children. See appendix A for the questions and observation schedule for each of the three sample sources.

The research team members allocated a number of formal and non-formal programs to investigate in Jordan and Lebanon. The sample set was selected through purposeful and opportunistic sampling. From the schools that Caritas Austria support, we visited four in Jordan and two in Lebanon. The remaining formal schools in Lebanon were selected out of geographic convenience as they were located in the same province as the field researchers. The participating NGOs were selected through existing work connections between the co-PIs and organizations that work with Syrian refugee families in Lebanon. During interviews at the NGOs, the directors and teachers also named other organizations carrying similar work; we also approached these organizations. We prepared Participant Information Sheets in Arabic and English to provide details about the research project's objectives and seek voluntary informed consent (see appendix B). Permission was also granted to take pictures of the classroom walls and furniture and visit some of the classrooms during their activities. Below is a more detailed description of how we approached each of the participating schools, organizations and families (see Table 1 for full list of sample set). Furthermore, in the conclusion section, we reflect on the ethics and approaches to speaking to parents and children forcibly displaced from the war in Syria.

<sup>3</sup> See [https://anecd.mawared.org/sites/default/files/ece\\_flagship\\_presentation\\_eng\\_final\\_9jul17.pdf](https://anecd.mawared.org/sites/default/files/ece_flagship_presentation_eng_final_9jul17.pdf).



**Table 1.** Sample set of formal and non-formal education centers in Lebanon and Jordan

*Jordan*

| Organization | Person   |
|--------------|--|
| School (MSA) | Principal (1); Teachers (2); Children (1)                                    |
| School (MSH) | Principal (1); School counsellor (1); Mothers (3); Children (1)              |
| School (MSN) | Principal (1); Teachers (2); Mothers (2); Fathers (1); Children (2)          |
| School (MSN) | Principal (1); School counsellor (1); Teachers (2); Mothers (2); Fathers (1) |

*Lebanon*

| Organization | Person  |
|--------------|---|
| NGO (BAA)    | Principal (1); Psychologist (1); Teacher (1)                            |
| NGO (ULYP)   | Director (1); Psychologist (1); Teachers (2); Mothers (2); Children (3) |
| NGO (RR)     | Director (1); Teachers (5)  |
| NGO (JSR)    | Director (1); Teacher (1)   |
| NGO (SLM)    | Teachers (2); Mother (1); Child (1)                                     |
| NGO (CDR)    | Social worker (1); Mother (2)   |
| NGO (CVM)    | Director (1); Teachers (2); Mothers (3); Children (3)                   |
| School (LNL) | Principal (1); Teachers (2); Psychologist (1); Mother (1); Children     |
| School (DnB) | Principal (1); Social worker (1); Teacher (1); Children (1)             |
| School (TCS) | Principal (1); Teachers (2); Mother (1); Children                       |
| School (StJ) | Teachers (2)  |
| School (BCS) | Director (1); Teacher (1); Mother (1); Child (1)                        |
| School (FAD) | Director (1); Assistant (1); Mother (1); Child (2)                      |
| School (SGA) | Director (1); Social worker (1); Father (1); Children (2)               |

**Jordan**

We visited four Melkite schools that provide ECE for Syrian refugee children. Melkite schools are private with generally high tuition fees. Caritas Austria has partnered with five of these schools to provide quality early childhood education for preschool years through a KG program. Only four of the five participated in this study: Al Ashrafiyyah (MSA), Hashmi (MSH), Houson (MSN) and Mafraq (MSM). The MSA and MSH schools are located in east Amman. MSN and MSM are over 70 kilometers north of Amman. Their neighbourhoods are considered home to low-income people, mostly vulnerable Jordanian and Syrian people.

In Jordan, the researcher scheduled the school visits through Caritas personnel. At MSA, the researcher interviewed the principal for one and a half hours and spent approximately 30-40 minutes with each of the two KG teachers and then chatted with one of the Syrian children. She did not interview parents of children in this school because Caritas personnel were not able to schedule appointments in time; however, they assured her that they will schedule appointments with parents in other schools. At MSH, the researcher interviewed three mothers (two hours), a child, the psychologist (one hour) and the principal (45 minutes). En route to MSM, the researcher met the parents at the Caritas center near the school for 30-45 minutes each. At MSM, the conversation with the principal ran for an hour and fifteen minutes and she had enough time to meet with the two teachers and psychologist together at the same time but was unable to speak to any of the children. The MSN school staff (principal and two teachers) initially asked not to record the interviews. After further reassurance of anonymity, the principal accepted. Caritas personnel at MSN requested to be present during the interviews with teachers, parents and students. The researcher noted that this presence may have caused a general feel of discomfort and, thus, resulted in mostly short responses and lack of anecdotal evidence, despite probing questions. Also at MSN, the Caritas personnel requested to be present during each of the parent interviews. Finally, meeting with the children was often complicated. In MSA, the principal called a young girl from the class to meet the researcher in the principal's office with two other teachers present. The young girl "barely answered my questions," according to the researcher. The researcher reported a similar experience at MSN where the two children appeared "extremely shy" and quite "sad and afraid".

In Jordan, we went to great lengths to identify and interview professionals working in NGOs like Save the Children (the ECCE program) and UNICEF (Better Parenting program) and the other organizations listed in the provided table of organizations in Lebanon and Jordan. However, and unfortunately, many of the individuals could either not be reached or meet for the interview.

**Lebanon**

We visited seven formal schools and seven non-formal schools run by NGOs. The sample of formal schools comprised four schools supported by Caritas Austria: the Lycee National Lebanese School (LNL) and St George Assyrian School (SGA) in Beirut and Don Bosco (DnB) and St Joseph School, Ajaltoun (StJ) in Mount Lebanon. At LNL, we interviewed the principal (35 minutes), two teachers (25 minutes, 15 minutes), the psychologist (35 minutes), a mother (20 minutes) and a few children in the playground. When we visited the SGA, we interviewed the director, a social worker, a father and two children. At DnB, we interviewed the director (1 hour), the social worker (1 hour), a teacher (30 minutes) and one of the preschool children (5 minutes). We visited other formal schools that had invested in building their preschool years. The Tyre Community School (TCS) is located in South Lebanon and is a private school that first opened in 2012. TCS does not have Syrian refugee children, but we wanted to see if there were some approaches that other preschools with more vulnerable children could draw from. The field researcher interviewed two KG teachers (20 minutes each), mother (20 minutes) and the director of the KG (20 minutes) and spoke to some of the children inside the classroom and on the playground. For our visit



to StJ, we spoke to two teachers (40 minutes each). StJ is a private school that has received funding to register a certain number of Syrian refugee children to attend the day, mainstream shift. The Bishopric Catholic School (BCS) is a private school in Bar Elias (Bekaa) and we interviewed the director, a teacher, a mother and her child. Also in the Bekaa, we visited Fares Awdeh (FAD), a Palestinian school in the Bekaa Valley and funded by Fateh and the Women's Union. At FAD, we interviewed the director, her assistant, a mother and two children.

The sample of non-formal schools and educational programs comprised a school in Tyre (South Lebanon) run by the Beit Atfal Assumoud (BAA), the Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP) in Beirut and Shouf, Jusoor School run by Jusoor (JSR) in the Bekaa, Salam Lebanese Association for Development and Communication (SLM) in the Bekaa, the Cedar Shelter by Caritas Lebanon (CDR), and a camp school in the Bekaa run by Cives Mundi (CVM). At BAA, we interviewed the principal, a teacher and the psychologist. The BAA school in Tyre hosts at least 120 students, all of whom come from homes of low-income to poverty. At ULYP, we visited two of their centers, one in Beirut (Hamra) and the other in the Shouf mountains (Debbieh). In Beirut, we interviewed the director and three teachers (30 minutes each); in Debbieh, we met with parents and children. We visited the Jusoor School in the Bekaa valley, near Kefraya, and interviewed the director (40 minutes) and a teacher (25 minutes) and observed the final hours of the school day. At Civis Mundi (CVM), we interviewed the director, two teachers, three mothers and three children.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PHYSICAL SETTINGS

During the field visits, we observed classrooms, the school grounds and neighbourhood and inquired about what the program offers to children and their parents or guardians. We begin with a brief description of the schools and programs in Jordan and then a similar overview of the formal and non-formal education centers in Lebanon.

### The schools in Jordan

The KG program in the four Melkite schools for the Syrian refugee children runs in the afternoon, after regular school hours, for three hours a day, five days a week. During holidays, the school opens for the Syrian children as regular school hours in the morning. When term time resumes, the schedule changes so that the Syrian children attend after the local host community children leave.

The Melkite schools are located in neighborhoods of, apparently, low to middle-income families. The schools generally appear clean and safe. All classrooms have carpets and gas heaters for the winter and child-size wooden round tables and small chairs for the children. Their walls and doors are decorated with numbers, letters, and children's paintings and crafts. At MSA, MSN and MSM, we observed a smartboard in one of the classrooms used to show videos and cartoons. The MSA is located near a narrow street surrounded by tall stone walls. Entering the school, you can see a large yard and a small play area surrounded with a fence. MSH is surrounded by many houses in a crowded and low-income neighbourhood. You enter the school through the small white door, and then walk down steps to find the KG building. On the right, there is a large yard, and a wide play area that is surrounded with a fence and shade to protect the children from the sun. The building has four

classrooms, a principal's office, and restrooms. Outside the classrooms, there is a cooler for drinking water, and an appropriate sink where children can wash their hands with liquid soaps.

MSN has a large parking lot inside the school premise where guests can park their cars. Distinct from the other Melkite schools visited, this school had a very large painting of the saints Peter and Paul with a big cross in the middle on the building exterior. There is a church beside the KG building. In another yard, there was a small fenced-in play area. Inside the building, there are four classrooms and the principal's office at the end of the hall. MSM is located on a crowded street which has many shops and markets. There are two buildings, one for the KG classes and the other for the principal's office. They are separated by a wide yard. The doors of each classroom have the names of the children on it, with the name of the class such as "The Roses Class". The walls are also decorated with posters and a "rewards board". There are also drawers that have many teaching tools and toys.

### Formal and non-formal programs in Lebanon

The four formal schools, LNL, SGA, DnB, and StJ run preschool programs as part of the RHEP project by Caritas Austria. LNL is located in a densely populated area of Beirut of mostly low to middle income families. The building has three floors. The classrooms are furnished with roundtables, chairs, chalkboards, games, posters (numbers, animals, alphabet, seasons, days of the week) and two tables for their bags and bottles of water. For meals, children bring their own breakfast or buy sandwiches from the school shop. The school prepares sandwich meals like hamburgers and fried potato sandwiches and, sometimes, snacks like boiled beans and popcorn. Despite claims of serving "healthy food" and "keep them away" from unhealthy food, some of the meals seem to lack essential nutrients that the children may not be getting at home. The children do not have a naptime. The teachers foster behaviors that show respect, like asking permission to use the bathroom and saying "good morning" when entering the class, "please" when wanting something and "thank you" when receiving it. The principal is selective with accepting children with special needs; they have only two or three who have autistic spectrum disorder or a learning disability because they are concerned about interrupting other children's learning experiences. Although the tuition fees are extremely low compared to other private preschools, many parents cannot afford the fees; according to the principal, they still try to find a way to admit the children.

DnB is an elementary school established in 1945. It is located in Qartaba, a large village in the mountains of the Mount Lebanon governorate and hosts 260 students. Three classrooms are allocated for the KG students and decorated by handmade crafts and furnished with a tv in each room, child-size tables and chairs. The school also has a spacious playground and bathrooms especially designated for children. The principal has an assistant and both work closely with the social worker, psychologist, speech therapist, three KG teachers of ten schoolteachers, two school support staff and four bus monitors. The psychologist and speech therapist visit once per week; the social worker believes that they should visit more often. The pre-schoolers at DnB learn Arabic, French and Math and participate in activities like music, dancing, singing, painting and handmade crafts and outings (e.g. going to the supermarket to buy ingredients and prepare food at school). They have two breaks where they eat the food they bring from home and play together: one from 09:30-10:00 and the other from 11:30-12:00. DnB also organizes awareness sessions on positive parenting three times a year with parents. They also coordinate with other NGOs. Ana Aqra', for example, helps provide professional development activities. Another NGO visits the children and facilitates non-formal learning activities like the circus program for children in grades one to six, once a week for six months, where children participate in circus-related activities to build capacities for socialisation and emotion management. DnB organizes meetings with parents three times a year. For parents and youth, the staff at DnB organize vocational training sessions on sewing, hairstyling, makeup, English and computers.



The TCS is a relatively new school that aims at a balance between young children’s academic achievement and social development, mostly to feel as an active member of the community. The ground floor is dedicated to the KG students. The classrooms are furnished with a digital projector, child-friendly tables, chairs, whiteboard and posters around the class walls displaying a behaviour chart, numbers, alphabets, calendars, colors, shapes, weather and the students’ birthdays. The class is named “Rainbow” and has four groups, each with its own name. Children bring their own meals to school. A canteen is available and sells snacks and sandwiches, except soda drinks, chocolate or chips. The school does not have a designated psychologist, but the principal said he is in direct contact with a doctor whom he consults on issues related to the children.

BAA was initially established for orphans. It now runs a “Family happiness” program or “Saad el Osra” that provides financial aid and educational and psychosocial support activities to the most vulnerable of Palestinian refugees across the camps in Lebanon. Four social workers regularly visit families and organize their activities. Their cultural arts program includes dance, arts and crafts and a music program of almost 130 musicians across the country that perform to and teach children. The program for family support addresses reproductive health for teenagers and psychosocial therapy for children from Syria who experienced violence from the war. To young adults who dropped out of school, they provide vocational training on electricity, sewage treatment, aluminium and painting. Their scouts program for people from 6 to 20 focuses on personality development and managing problems within the camps. They have also built a recording studio for their music and a photography studio. They run a pre-school of four classes and a team of seven teachers open to Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian children to prepare them for school. The hours are from 07h30 to 13h00 with a 15-minute break and 20-minute lunch. They have a small playground, so the classes have different times to go outside. Their dental clinic also works closely with the nursery. The classroom had tables, chairs, a TV, laptop, a cupboard for each child’s toothbrush and toothpaste, colourful boxes for their games, cups for their stationaries and written name labels under each item (see figure 1). The walls are filled with posters of the numbers, letters, days of the week and the weather. For meals, they avoid canned foods by asking children to bring 500 LL or 1000 LL every day to class and, with additional funds from the school, the school prepares hot meals and provides snacks like seasonal fruits. After this pre-school, the children move on to the UNRWA school where they receive ongoing support by the pre-school for the first three days to help with the transition.

ULYP is an NGO that was established in 2010 to empower vulnerable groups, mainly women and children (ages 5 to 18, refugees from Syria and Palestine) living in Lebanon. ULYP runs a ten-day ECE program called “HAPPY” for the five-year-olds, which aims to encourage the child to think, discover, ask questions and communicate (ULYP Director), teach them English and build their confidence (ULYP Teachers). The program is based on the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE, which has a similar philosophy of ECE/ECD as Montessori and Waldorf. Children register at the center for the ten-day program but continue their preschool outside the center. According to the director, ULYP also keeps in contact and coordination with preschools to provide support. The director describes their activities as different from the traditional preschool systems in Lebanon because they encourage children to sing, dance, plant and other similar activities. The center in Debbieh appeared very clean and child-friendly. The room was equipped with child-size tables and chairs, access to crayons and papers, a television, a small library of children’s books, cupboards for the children’s work, posters, toys and a carpet to sit on when they watch a movie. Outside is a playground that has a see-saw and slide. They used to ask parents to pack healthy foods for the children, but parents did not. So, they stopped asking parents to pack food and ULYP started preparing healthy foods at the centers, which was often difficult because the children were not used to eating fruits, vegetables, hot meals, and even milk.



Figure 1. Images of a preschool classroom at BAA. The image on the left is of cupholders with children’s toothbrushes and toothpastes. The image on the right shows how all items are labelled, demonstrating a print-rich environment.

JSR is run by Jusoor, an NGO established in the USA and targets Syrian refugee children and families. The school is surrounded by a number of Syrian refugee camps in the Bekaa valley. It is probably the only opportunity for children in many areas in Lebanon to access some form of schooling. However, the physical structure of the building seems quite worn. The school does not have a playground and the classrooms appear to be quite small for the number of students registered and built from poor quality wood. The furniture, like tables and chairs, do not seem comfortable, although the classrooms are very clean. JSR teaches the Lebanese curriculum in order to prepare the children for public schools. The morning shift is from 08:00 to 11:45 and the afternoon shift is from 11:45 to 15:00. Each shift is four class periods with a 20-minute break to eat the food they bring with them from home. They also have a program that encourages young Syrian children to remember their country and preserve their sense of belonging and identity to Syria. During the summer, JSR provides a play program where the children come only to play. This year, they launched a new program, SALAM, for children who are struggling with mental health issues or exhibiting aggressive behaviours.

Salam LADC is an NGO established in 2006 to help Lebanese displaced from the Israeli war. Recently, in August 2017, it opened a community center in the Bekaa where volunteers and teachers organize extracurricular activities for the children. The center used to be a house; it has three classrooms, an office and a kitchen. They have an outdoor space. The children from two to five years use the big room, which is decorated by crafts made by the children and photographs of the activities at the center. The center has two managers, a team of international volunteers, four teachers and two cleaning workers. The two volunteers interviewed are from Denmark and Germany. The community center provides computer classes, choir, homework support, Arabic, English, cinema, yoga and reading stories. One of the volunteers focused on the children’s motor skills and coordination.

## TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS, EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter, teachers give a unique insight into their approaches with the children and their caregivers at home. We learn about their qualifications and responsibilities. Their testimonies illustrate how they understand the needs of the children and their parents and best ways to support. We also report on experiences from psychologists and social workers who routinely visit the children at the schools or education centers. Teachers, too, explain how they provide psychosocial support when working with parents on managing children's behaviors that appear disruptive, aggressive or concerning to teachers. At the end of this chapter, teachers narrate experiences and observations when trying to work with parents in supporting the wellbeing of their children.

### ECE students and human resources

#### *In Jordan*

At the MSA, the KG has 50 Syrian children who are selected only based on their age. The principal was hospitable to the researcher and is apparently a favorite among the children. She has been a KG principal for 20 years. There are four teachers in the KG and all have a degree in ECE. One has six years of KG experience and the other has ten; they teach Arabic (literacy), Math (numeracy), Science (five senses, human body parts, animals, etc.) and activities. There is also a teacher just for English (literacy and numeracy). At MSH, the 80 Syrian refugee children in the KG are divided across four classes. Some appear more active and engaged than others who seemed quiet and less interactive. The MSH school has a principal, eight teachers, a psychologist, a cleaner, restroom facilitator for the children, bus drivers and four bus monitors. All eight teachers are females and have a degree in either early childhood education or child development; they also have prior KG experience ranging from 2 to 10 years. It is the MSH principal's first year as a school administrator and appears to be close to the children; some children were seen saying to her, "Miss, I love you!". MSN hosts around 100 Syrian refugee children, distributed across four classes.

The KG at MSN has eight teachers, all of whom have degrees in ECE. While some are early career teachers, others have over ten years of ECE experience with one teacher up to 16 years and the principal with 21 years. Each class has two teachers: a senior teacher supported by an early career teacher. There is one English teacher who teaches English to the four KG classes. The psychologist, who is full-time for the KG, works closely with children who have difficulties, gives children classes on different subjects and gives advice to teachers. The two teachers at MSN recalled workshops facilitated by Caritas Lebanon on how to support children, deal with difficult cases and use different approaches to support and teaching. At MSM, the 100 children in the KG (all Syrian) are distributed across 4 classrooms of 25 each with 2 teachers per class. In addition to the principal and eight teachers, the staff at MSM includes a psychologist, bus monitors, bus drivers, cleaner and restroom facilitator for the children. The principal has been a KG director for 20 years. While some of the teachers have bachelor degrees in early childhood education, the principal provides regular training opportunities for those teachers from other disciplines. The principal and teachers recalled training by Caritas tailored for different ECE services. Bus monitors received training in first aid, maintaining order and safety in the bus and ensuring that parents receive their children. For teachers, the workshops focused on methods of teaching the curriculum and explaining information

to children. Psychologists received training on how to support children with aggressive behaviors, who exhibit anxieties when separated from their parents and who witnessed extreme violence.

Although the children were selected based on their age, one principal explained that some parents gave a different date of birth for their children, even for the UNHCR documents, so s/he would be accepted in the KG. Parents understood that this service provided by Caritas is only offered in selected KGs. Parents want their children to benefit from the equipment, transportation, meals and special activities organized for the children. Parents believe that public primary schools do not provide these, or at least at the same level of quality. Consequently, some older children are in the same class as younger ones and, as the principal observed, the older group of children find the age differences a little distressing and sometimes express it through aggressive behavior.

#### *In Lebanon*

Lebanon offers very few opportunities for formal qualifications in ECE/ECD. Moreover, there is virtually no regulation that mandates the hiring of preschool teachers with a formal ECE/ECD qualification. Hence, most of the ECE teachers we interacted with do not have a written qualification from a higher education institution on ECE/ECD. When recruiting ECE teachers, directors rely mostly on some experience with young children, demonstrate a sense of care towards young children and hold a university degree. The director at ULYP also seeks teachers who are open to professional development. At LNL, the principal selects teachers based on their degrees and, mostly, through summer internships, which provide an opportunity to observe and evaluate performance at the school and with the children. Still, the LNL principal has faced difficulties with teachers who demonstrated high levels of competencies as interns but started to show poor quality of work when employed. Even a teacher at LNL was frank in explaining that she has faced great difficulties trying to support a child with special needs because of the lack of training she has had. At TCS, the teachers attended teacher training courses and workshops at the Middle East University in Beirut. NGOs like ULYP also recruit teachers without qualifications in teaching or early childhood but provide them with periodic workshops and training programs.

Principals and teachers in Lebanon expressed great concern over the children's relationships with their parents, but only some showed confidence in their potential for healthy growth. The LNL principal found that a great deal of children witnessed their mothers suffering or crying at home and subject to direct violence from their husbands. Consequently, these children learn to express themselves aggressively with others or stop going to school; this "breaks my heart" because the children from Syria have "high levels of intelligence and energy". Other health, developmental and behavioural issues faced by children include speech impediments, "hallucinations" of parents being "very rich" and using offensive language. Some seemed to hold more conservative views towards the children. For example, two preschool-age children were seen kissing on the lips and, so, the teacher was concerned and called in the parents. Another staff member argued that giving too much attention or care (more than necessary) will bore the child and even introduce a degree of stress.

At DnB, the director and teachers like to consider themselves open to registering students from any background and requiring any special need. More than half the 93 preschool children are Syrian, a few from Iraq and the others are Lebanese. Each of the three KG classrooms has 30-33 students. The director has been at the school for almost 14 years. She strongly values the children's social life and how they learn more about their culture. She also likes to pop into classes without prior warning to see how the classes are truly running. The entire elementary school has ten teachers. Despite lacking formal written qualifications in ECE/ECD, a teacher at DnB underscored key skills that every teacher should have when working with such vulnerable children. First is to love the children and second is to keep all personal problems or issues behind at home and focus solely on the children. She also appreciated the trainings provided by Ana Aqra' and would like to continue to learn more about how to provide psychological support for children and engage them in drawing and arts and crafts activities.



At ULYP, each classroom has two teachers and there is a psychologist who visits the centers. There is also a security guard, a cleaner and a bus driver. The teachers at ULYP are also joined by two other teachers from the local preschool where the children attend. The psychologist provides support to mothers and how they manage their relationships towards their children when addressing issues at home. They try to reach out to the most underprivileged children, who are mostly refugees from Syria and Palestine and Lebanese living in poverty.

JSR hosts a total of 280 students: 110 in the morning shift and 170 in the afternoon shift. There is one Palestinian and one Iraqi. The school has 10 teachers, a director and bus driver. For the early childhood classes, two teachers are always present at the same time. The director recruits teachers based on experience, arguing that their previous work with children is more valuable than a written qualification. This perception may be true in the context of Lebanon where professionals have almost no opportunity to study for a written qualification in ECE/ECD. The teachers are also Syrian and, according to the director, they are able to be more empathetic with the children because they live in similar conditions. The teacher we interviewed was responsible for teaching English, Math and Science. She recalled training workshops that she found most beneficial; themes included the right to play, learning difficulties, progressive education and working with children with different abilities. JSR also has a psychologist who visits them weekly and has worked on individual cases, including young girls who suffer from fear and anxiety. His role is critical because, according to the director, the teachers are unable to provide the intensive psychological support to children who have experienced war-related trauma and continue to experience verbal and physical violence at home.

The community center we visited at SLM has a total of 35 Syrian children between the ages of 2 and 5. They are selected according to need; so, those who have no access to any toys or programs can register. The two Danish volunteers at SLM had some experience in the field of ECE/ECD. One used to work in a day care and decided to focus more on coordination and motor skills after seeing how poor the children are in, for example, balancing themselves. She advocated that psychomotor skills are fundamental for learning to write, ride a bicycle and express yourself through body language. To learn more about the children, she spent time visiting the families in the camps. She learned that the tents are almost empty with virtually no need to stimulate their bodies (e.g. no doors to open). The second volunteer has a BA in psychology and they developed a program to help develop gross motor skills like jumping, rolling, running fast, changing direction and fine motor skills like using scissors and drawing. One of the volunteers noticed how families have so many children and, thus, children must receive very little (if any) individual attention from the parents. Although the team is quite modest, the volunteers have found it difficult to get full cooperation from the translator who visits occasionally but spends much of her time on the phone and have the colleagues respect the classroom by not walking in and out. Finally, the two volunteers reflected on differences between their work with the Syrian refugee children and the children in Denmark and Germany. The approaches used in their respective countries were almost impossible to facilitate here because the children lacked the experiences necessary to participate.

## Developmental support from psychologists

MSA has a full-time psychologist who gives lessons on health, cleanliness and activities and provide support to children who have difficulties or special needs. She registers all cases and makes referrals through Caritas to any case that requires a specialist. At MSH, the researcher learned from the full-time psychologist that she has three degrees from higher education (BA in music education, MA in curriculum and teaching and PhD in leadership and wellbeing). When describing her work activities, she explained how she closely observes the children and their behaviors and follow up daily with children who experience physical or psychological health

issues. She also helps children overcome fears or difficulties at school. On the first day of school, for example, “Some children were afraid and shy. It’s a new place and new people; but through encouragement and love, they gradually began to feel comfortable and safe”. She also reported on three children who have more serious health issues. One child struggled with speech but is reportedly doing better; another has problems with her vision and will be referred to Caritas. The third child often faints. The mother believes she has epilepsy, but the psychologist is not so sure and, thus, will refer her to Caritas for a medical examination. The psychologist also reported on a child in KG1 who refused to leave his brother in KG2 “because he has fears”; which the psychologist attributed to “problems between their parents” where the mother faces violent abuse from the father (MSH psychologist). The psychologist reportedly contacted the mother who was “comfortable to tell us about the problems with her husband and welcomed our offer to help”; the father, however, did not respond to phone calls. The MSH psychologist also gives children lessons about moral behaviors like honesty and sincerity and benefits of healthy food, good sleep and exercise. Trying to change habits, however, is difficult as the MSH counsellor explained; she has been struggling to encourage a child to change their eating habits after a mother expressed concerns about her child who refuses to eat well.

The psychologist at the BAA described her work in two parts: (a) responsible for public awareness campaigns on issues related to mental health and children’s rights and (b) individual and ethical counselling. She also underlined her commitment to the program’s provisions and early interventions of play, art, music and healthy eating for children. She explained that different children may have unique dietary requirements. For example, some children have thalassemia and, therefore, they focus mostly on an iron-rich diet in order to avoid or minimize anemia. The BAA psychologist expressed concern over family planning and early marriage as most of the mothers are very young, live in poverty and have many children. Nevertheless, the involvement of parents in any intervention for the children was crucial in her work. While she is able to dedicate one session per week or two weeks for each child she supports, she meets parents after every three or four sessions to follow up on tasks they have been assigned, normally changes at home they have agreed to carry out. Some of the most challenging cases have been around the cultural norm of corporal punishment of children at home. Parents often justify hitting their children as methods to grow up and “be a man” and learn to listen when spoken to. This is why she believes the most urgent need for these children is “affection”. She observed that parents have a difficult time showing affection; one mother reported that she kisses her child mostly while he is asleep. The children in the school are also in dire need of opportunities to play more and acquire toys. Other critical cases include the shock, denial and anger parents experience when they learn that their children have special needs (e.g. hearing impairment, autism, etc).

At LNL, the psychologist described her interventions to support their social, emotional and psychological development. At the social level, she believed it was important to help Syrian children integrate “in our society”. In supporting the children’s emotional growth, she had one case where a child in KG3 suffered from anxiety when separated from his mother and could neither adapt to the school nor pronounce letters correctly. After time with a speech therapist, the child has improved while in grade one. With the children who experience difficulties in cognitive development, she brings the children together in a small group and they work on activities to improve attention, concentration and memory. She even sees children from grade 3 who still have not been able to learn the letters of the alphabet. She also noticed great pressure from parents on their children to do well in preschool and primary years because they believe that education may “take them out of the situation they are in”. Parents in more rural areas may prioritize vocational experience over an education degree. Some parents in this city-school also seemed to give little attention to hygiene while other parents made sure their children came to school showered, with clean clothes and all materials in their bags. The psychologist expressed great empathy towards the parent refugees who are not able to meet basic needs, living in one room apartments with other families and still living with the shock and traumas of the war and forced migration. The psychologist has some materials for testing intelligence and sensory development but is still missing many assessment tools.



The psychologist at ULYP works mostly and directly with mothers whom she believes are critical to ensuring a healthy and safe environment for the children. She starts with open-ended questions to learn about their concerns and close-ended questions like what they see right or wrong in an image. She relies on elements of drama therapy by having the mothers role-play scenarios and then discuss the conflicts and approaches. Some recurring themes include new ways of mothers managing conflict at home (with their husbands and towards their children) and approaching children if they had stolen something from school or watched pornography online. Despite the professional development she gives teacher trainers and teachers, many of these professionals continue to overlook conflicts in the classroom or at school that could be opportunities to develop the important skills for managing conflicts. The psychologist believes that mothers need more time to appreciate, love and have more confidence in themselves. She also found that her conversations with grandmothers have resulted in valuable insight that mothers can benefit from.

## Learning and teaching in the classroom

The KG in the MSA, MSH, MSN and MSM schools teach letters and numbers (in Arabic and English); at least hour a week, they teach science (five senses, human body parts, animals' voices, four seasons, etc). A staff member at MSM explained that they are awaiting a curriculum from Caritas. Other activities are described as either teaching tools or extracurricular and are "just for fun" (MSA teacher). These include dancing, sports, games, singing, drawing, crafts, watching cartoons on the smartboard and playing outside. More specific forms of teaching tools include toys, worksheets, smartboard, the whiteboard, play-dough and puzzles. A principal showed teaching games and toys stored in drawers in each classroom and CDs to play cartoons, teaching videos and songs on the smartboard. The children also have notebooks for homework to write several times the letters of the alphabet or numbers they have learned that day.

The teachers in the schools in Jordan described how they attempt to integrate different activities or tools like storytelling, games and drawing in order to learn numbers and letters. For example, when they teach the letter "c", they give the word "cat" as an example and start to talk about how they look like and what sounds they make. Teachers said they use stories, games, and songs to teach these subjects. They also have teaching tools like playdough, crafts, coloring pencils and worksheets that they also use. For example, when the lesson is about number "3", they ask children to write "3" using playdough or to draw three things with colors. When the children start to learn vowels in Arabic ( ا، و، ي ), and how to connect them with other letters, the teachers create a small game for them. For the letter "ا" / "A" when connected with "ب" / "B", the children jump and say "Baaa, Baaa". For the letter "و" / "O", they turn around to look at each other and say "Booo, Booo". For the letter "ي" / "E", they bend toward the ground and say "Beee, Beee". Similarly, at MSN, the principal described their approaches as "teach through playing" by using songs, stories and materials like toys, colored cards, worksheets, the smartboard and playdough when teaching. During a visit to one of the classrooms, the teacher drew the Arabic letter for "ب" / "B" and gave the children playdough to make a shape of that letter. The children appeared to enjoy playing with the dough while shaping it like the letter on the board. The principal at MSM also gave examples of incorporating the learning of colors, letters and foods "in a fun way" through drawing and coloring. When teaching the letter for "orange" in English and Arabic, "the teacher tells the children to draw an orange, and notice the letter "O" in the word "Orange"; "باء برتقالة" in Arabic and color it with the orange color "باء برتقالي.. بارتقالي"; so by this, the children learn the letter, a word that has the letter, and the color 'orange' that also has a letter".

Teachers and principals in Lebanon described a similar emphasis of learning a set literacy and numeracy curriculum. The LNL principal referred to this material that needs to be learned when explaining that the KG1 and KG2 children can catch up if they are too sick to come to school because "the material isn't hard". Also, the principal did not want

to give a child struggling with a speech impediment a grade on reading; this raises questions on whether routine grades are necessary or even appropriate. Vulnerable children learning to hold a pencil in KG2 and counting from 0 to 10 are also common indicators of progress among teachers. Like the KG teachers in Jordan, the teachers in Lebanon describe the learning activities as forms of play or creative arts.

A teacher at BAA explained that at 3 years old, they begin with identifying shapes and colors; at 4 years old, they start to identify letters and their sounds with some writing; at 5, they focus on practicing writing words in class and at home in order to prepare for school. She once organized an activity on what the children want to be when they grow up and recalled how excited and engaged they were. When visiting the classroom, the children were divided into four groups: reading, mathematics, playing, Arabic. Each group has a name: stars, moon, clouds and sun. Before splitting into groups, the teacher showed them how mixing two colors can create a new color. With a blow of the whistle, the groups of children began their group activities. In the reading group, they were given letters and asked to arrange them in order to form an assigned word. In the mathematics group, children were counting the dots on pictures of cubes and then writing the numbers in English and Arabic. The children in the Arabic group were writing and coloring the letter "M". In the playing group, the children were outside the classroom in the corridor sitting on pillows and drawing. For story time, the teacher asked the children to take out their imaginary keys and lock their mouths so she could read the story about a ginger cookie. Although the children appeared to be helping each other during the group activities, the interactions were mostly at a level of cooperation (sharing coloring pencils, helping each other get the right word) rather than collaboration (producing new words together, drawing an image based on different contributions). A teacher at LNL had also organized the children in groups. Each table has a different color and animal (lion, rooster, tiger) for the children to also learn about. The children were also learning about shapes, plants and the stationary they use in their class. On a board, the teacher has written names of children who are responsible for putting the tables and chairs in place. Despite the apparent emphasis on learning to count and write numbers; this same teacher found that she had to make an extra effort with the children when learning to count and write numbers because many of them who start KG1 or 2 at LNL have never held a pencil before.

Many of the learning activities appeared to be directed towards the transmission of content knowledge, even when learning about the five senses as an opportunity for children to explore and discover. At the MSH, the researcher observed a class where the children were exploring the five senses. One of the two teachers was facilitating the class while the other helped in preparing the materials. The teacher chose five children and each held a card with an image and word of each sense (e.g. a nose with the word "smell"). For "taste", she took out a lemon and some salt and sugar and asked the children to taste them. The researcher described the teacher, however, as "patiently repeating the information several times for the children". The children appeared to interact with her though not really engaging with the new knowledge, namely the terms and descriptions of the senses. The teachers at TCS maintained that play is an essential pedagogy inside the classroom. We observed children experimenting with sponges cut out into shapes, coloring images of farm animals and playing with clay. Some cognitive games, however, appeared to resemble memorisations exercises; for example, writing sentences on the board, asking students to close their eyes, erasing a word and then asking them open their eyes and recall the word that was erased.

Routine was described as essential in some of the schools. At DnB, establishing routine was a core function to providing children with a sense of security and confidence at the school. They first open with a prayer. Then, for the first four months, they focus on teaching children how to sit, stand in line, talk in class and go to the bathroom by themselves. The teachers at JSR open every day with circle time for 15 minutes. The children are encouraged to share a story, whether happy or sad, of something that has happened to them in the last day or two. Sometimes the topic is open and other times the teacher chooses a topic. During a classroom visit, the children were divided into small groups and working together.



At ULYP, the teachers described a routine of opening the day with a circle session and have songs to sing to start the day. Then, children are assigned different roles (e.g. to serve food), they have a moment to unwind and have time to play in the classroom with each other. There is a time allocated for learning English where they learn how to divide the words into syllables and, if they do this well, start to form sentences with the words. For numeracy, we observed an activity in the classroom where they children counted letters from the names of some students (e.g. Mohammad: 8 letters). One of the teachers then read to them a story in English about a spider and performed some movements with her hands. She then showed them the story on the tv and asked them questions about what had happened. Afterwards, the children had some time to draw a spider with its web. They then had fruits for snack. The children seemed very happy; they spoke frequently with each other, they were able to approach the teachers with confidence and, during the conversations with the children, they seemed very expressive and initiated some of the discussions.

The two volunteers at SLM have a room dedicated for three hours a day for the motor activities with the children. They have two groups, each comes in for a total of six hours per week. They start every morning with free play. During the first two months, they used Lego blocks to train fine motor skills, coordination and social skills that are needed to build things with peers and share the Lego pieces. The children have become so accustomed to this and motivated by it that, if the volunteers are late, the children start preparing the room to begin. Afterwards, they sing songs in English. The children then teach the volunteers songs in Arabic. The teachers address each child by name. During snack time, they provide bananas and milk. They have the children sit in a circle and pass the bananas around. They observed, just like in Denmark, how difficult it is for young children to receive something and then pass it on to someone else and especially in this case where the children are deprived of many basic provisions. The next activities depend on the children's energy levels. If they see the children quiet, they sing. If they see them quite energetic, they let them draw, play with the little tent to go in and out, do yoga exercises and do jumps. The volunteers noted some changes or personal improvements they observed in the children, such as being able to use blocks to build a structure and showing confidence when walking into the classroom.

## Psychosocial support and behavior management

Observations and interviews with principals and teachers showed various forms of support to children's socio-emotional development. Many teachers reported that, in the classroom, they explain the importance of children being polite with their parents, not hitting other children, respecting others and standing in a line when waiting to ride the bus. We observed how teachers and the principal in Jordan line up the children and make sure they walk to the buses safely without showing aggressive behaviour towards the children. Learning to listen to children also emerged as a fundamental value that enables teachers and caregivers to address difficult behaviours and model to children how to communicate. We had not spent enough time in the schools, however, to observe how teachers and school leaders listen and talk to children in various circumstances. One of the MSA teachers also explained that teachers need to be like mothers to the children; she was seen helping them wear their coats, packing their bags and giving hugs to the children as they were leaving to go home. At MSH, the principal believes that effective teachers need to "be a human in the first place" and "very patient in dealing with children" before any written qualification in ECE or ECD or having previous experience. The MSM principal recalled a time when she was addressing disruptive behaviour in the class and explained to the children that they are like their parents.

The teachers in Lebanon and Jordan shared a commitment to being sensitive to children's feelings and needs for affection. A teacher at BAA believed that children first and foremost needed tenderness and security and someone to listen to them when they talk. At LNL, a teacher called for exercising empathy "because their situations are

bad enough" and the way to get the children to love and trust you is to demonstrate calmness with them. Another teacher at LNL also believed that speaking to children gently is essential for learning about non-violent ways of communicating. She also remembered times when children did not want to follow instructions (e.g. to eat, play, sit) and found that the most effective response was to give the child his/her space and they would eventually pull through. A similar philosophy was heard among teachers at DnB. A teacher there believed to "love the children" and respect what they say; the director added to let the children know that they are being listened to and loved. In one of her classes, she was talking about circles and one of the children asked for a square, so she gave him both. She also stressed on the importance of making even a greater effort to being sensitive to the children because now we have a new level of diversity with Syrian refugee children in the classroom. For example, Lebanese children will most likely have their own room and own toys while Syrian refugee children will live with 15 others in the same room; despite coming from the same region and Arab culture, parents have different approaches to parenting and war-related traumas. Another approach to connecting with the children is spending time observing them play. The director at DnB believes that she has learned a great deal about the children in the school at individual and social levels when she observed them in spaces of freedom, such as playtime. She also maintained the importance of communicating issues or concerns one-on-one rather than in front of peers, which demonstrates respect to the child and builds on the connection created.

We observed structured and ad hoc approaches to managing children's behaviour that can be disruptive or concerning. At RR, an afternoon camp school in North Lebanon, the teachers had created a vertical behaviour chart of seven levels, from "Amiable" (Super) to "Rentre à la maison" (Return home) (see Figure 2). The children's names were written on clothes pins and clipped to a colored message. I observed a child who, apparently out of excitement, pushed another during a dance activity. One of the teachers walked the child out of the class and they stood in front of the chart. The teacher asked the child open-ended questions about why they had pushed and informed them about the



Figure 2. Behaviour modification colour chart at RR.

consequences. The child appeared very apologetic and accepted the change of status. The teacher made a great effort to remain composed (e.g. talking quietly, asking open-ended questions, waiting for the child to complete their sentences, avoiding aggressive physical contact). In addition, the chart was print-rich in French and Arabic text. The TCS had a more traditional behaviour chart with stars awarded to children with good behaviour and additional stickers for children with the most stars.

In Jordan, we observed an example of an ad hoc intervention to managing concerning behaviour of a child who repeatedly used offensive, “sexual words” in the class. The principal said they had already informed his mother who reacted in shock. The principal learned that the child watches many videos on YouTube unsupervised and they suspect he learned this language from there. So, as a form of punishment, they withheld the child’s backpack and stationary when the teachers were distributing them to the students. The principal recalled the child crying and promising not to repeat that language. She and the child agreed that he will receive his bag if the bus monitor reports back that no offensive language was spoken on the ride home that day. Naming and addressing the use of offensive language is critical to learning how to socialize in socially diverse environments. However, forms of punishment that appear as surprises may cause unnecessary levels of stress and encourage children to spontaneously react to peers who offend or threaten them.

In a similar case, but at DnB, a teacher had a four-year-old girl who continuously insulted and threatened her. The girl would tell the teacher “you are an animal” (inti hayaweneh) or “I want to hit you” (baddeh ‘odorbik). The girl would also sometimes hit her head on the wall. So, the teacher decided to communicate directly with her mother and they spent a great deal of time thinking about solutions and how the mother can make changes at home (e.g. language used, showing more affection). The teacher reported that, with time, she observed changes in the girl’s behaviour and believes these changes resulted from increased attention and affection from her mother. With other children at DnB, however, she continues to struggle to help. For example, she has three Lebanese children at the school who are always alone and do not talk to any of the other children; she does not understand why.

Some teachers recalled extreme cases that required referral to mental health professionals. A child in the preschool in Lebanon was raped and, subsequently, started to display aggressive behaviour towards his classmates. The teacher directed a referral to the psychologist. Teachers are also unprepared for managing children’s feelings and difficult circumstances. At BAA, a mother abandoned her children and the husband travelled. One of the children, a five-year-old girl, was in the preschool at the time and, during Mother’s Day, started to cry with they played the song, “Sit el habayeb” (a song tribute to mothers). The teacher was surprised.

## Relationships towards refugee caregivers

### Jordan

Teachers and principals at MSA and MSH described the refugee parents as extremely poor and explained that most did not complete their secondary (grade 12) and, many, their basic (grade 9) education in Syria. Parents’ level of education was important to a few; one teacher (MSN) explained that parents with formal schooling have an important role in their children’s education. At MSH, the principal praised a literacy program afforded by Caritas for parents who are apparently finding it useful and effective. In this program, parents learn English, Arabic and Math, which, in turn, could allow them to continue what their children are learning at school. Their children may also be more encouraged to learn when they see their parents learning.

The teachers and directors believe that almost all parents care about their children; “those who don’t care are very few, around 2% only” (MSA Principal). This principal described parents who do not appear to care as ones who neither ask about their children nor respond when the principal calls or invites them to attend classes with their children. Parents of children at MSA and MSH are regularly invited to attend classes with their children and spend the day at the KG because many parents have no idea what their children do at KG. Other parents perceived as neglectful are not home when their child arrives from preschool; parents reportedly rely on their neighbors or other family members in the household to be present while they are visiting friends or running errands. The principal has informed them already that if either parent is not there to receive their child, the bus will return him/her back to the preschool and the parents will then have to take a taxi to pick up their child. Parents also seem to give limited attention to their children when they share their homes or rooms with other families. The principal at MSN noticed that children from such households seem to have greater needs for attention, care and affection than other children.

They also described how parents have been a source of conflict, stress or neglect for the children. For example, fathers may seem disconnected from their children’s school affairs because they are more concerned with securing an income. Work permits are extremely difficult to attain, so many fathers take on jobs illegally. Work insecurity is also a stress factor that many refer to when explaining reasons behind domestic violence. Fathers, therefore, become threats that mothers use by saying, “I will have your father beat you!” (MSA Principal).

### Lebanon

The BAA nursery at the Palestinian refugee camp in Tyre invests heavily in building close relationships with the parents of the children. Parents are experiencing great difficulties in finding work on the fruit farms. BAA builds on existing relationships between the parents in the camp who have known each other for a long period of time. These relationships make it easier for social workers to visit the families to follow up on their difficulties and talk about their children, especially if they are experiencing disruptive behaviour in school or have suddenly dropped out. The principal reported that many mothers, even after their children had moved on to the UNRWA schools, volunteer during the Sunday activities by cooking, celebrating and helping the workers. Their continuous commitment to pre-school activities was seen as a form of caring and contributing to the community and, thus, a success indicator. The BAA principal also recalled a father who turned to alcohol addiction after feeling that he was unable to support his wife and children with health problems; he currently is undergoing therapy. Other families reportedly struggle with children who have special needs (e.g. autism), unbalanced marriage relationship and domestic violence; all family members are encouraged to attend family therapy sessions, which take place at least once a week “and this is not enough”. The sessions emphasize the importance of (1) parents making connections with their children, (2) parents managing individual struggles (e.g. fathers feeling like they cannot provide for the family, mothers feeling resentment towards their children) and (3) parents managing the relationship with each other as partners (e.g. respect, violence, abuse, etc.).

During the child’s first days at preschool, the teachers at BAA expect that parents also attend. Many of the parents, whom virtually all are mothers, have close relationships with the teachers. They visit regularly, donate food despite their level of poverty and volunteer even after their children graduate to grade school. Some parents, unfortunately, are disengaged. The teacher, for example, did not appreciate one of the parents using an invitation letter addressed to parents as a sandwich wrapper. Other parents believe they are trying to help but teachers see that some have done their child’s homework, which undermines the purpose of the assignment. She also noticed that the mothers’ level of education did not seem to determine their level of enthusiasm to learn and volunteer at the school.



At LNL, the principal organizes one parent-teacher meeting per semester; however, a teacher reported that they have not yet organized a formal parent-teacher day. Nevertheless, both teachers found the daily interactions with parents very important. The psychologist at the school had organized some awareness and guidance sessions for the parents, even though most of her work with the parents is one-to-one. A teacher recalled how some parents have shared with the teacher some struggles they have at home with their children, like how to manage “the stubborn child”. In one case, a mother shared with a teacher her frustrations in how much time it takes the child to get ready in the morning. The teacher asked the mother to give the child a few more responsibilities in the morning: dressing up, packing the bag, etc. The same teacher reported that the mother started to see differences.

The principal is also open to meeting with parents at any time as long as they make a request through the child’s homework diary although there was no suggestion of actively inviting or encourage parents to take the initiative. There is one mother who is very involved and constantly inquires about her child’s behaviour, eating habits and learning the alphabet at school (LNL Teacher). Other parents do not seem to be involved at all. A teacher at LNL reported that “they don’t check their [child’s] diary” and these children really struggle in the classroom. The teachers felt, however, it was important to recognize the parents’ traumatic experiences of escaping the war, losing all wealth and living in poverty. Still, they showed concern over parents of two children who have rarely visited the school or communicated with the teachers; the grandfather drops them off and picks them up. The principal also made a distinction between parents who neglect and those who do not have the means. For example, most parents of children in LNL do not have the means and, so, when the child comes to school without a sandwich or uniform, it is mostly because the parents could not afford to have them prepared.

The LNL psychologist expressed great concern for the majority of parents who came to Lebanon when the war was very intense where they saw the missiles destroy towns and corpses lying on the road and lived in fear of various military groups, including the government and the so-called Islamic State army. For the parents, the psychologist does not have a support campaign or intervention; most of the interventions are designed for children’s academic achievement. When the psychologist does provide guidance on parenting, she does experience some differences in cultural values; for example, according to some parents, their eight-year-old is expected to cook and clean. The psychologist did mention that some parents have followed through on the guidance provided and have noticed changes in their children’s behaviours inside the class. There is also a concern for young parents, those who marry at 14 or 15 and then try to raise children (LNL Principal), and parents who hit their children as a form of punishment (LNL Teacher).

At DnB, the social worker found almost all parents from Qartaba and only one or two from Syria have at least completed secondary school. She also believes that almost all the parents are concerned about their children’s education and future and describes them as engaged because they care a great deal for their children’s marks and try to study their children’s books in order to help them. She believes that the disengaged parents are consumed by family problems, financial difficulties and war-related traumas; hence, they do not attend teacher-parent meetings and find achievement in merely registering their children in school. The social worker found that, among the Syrian refugee children, mostly mothers are engaged and attributed the involvement of the female parent in the child’s education to being Muslim, understanding Islam as a religion where the father is the provider and mother manages the children’s affairs. When explaining the impact of the awareness sessions designed for parents, she highlighted the children’s improvement of marks as an indicator of success in supporting parents helping their children. The social worker reported another success story where two children had exhibited chronic stress and social isolation under a life of extreme protection at home because of the mother’s fears of her children’s safety. However, after some time at school, the mother may have gradually felt more secure because of the safe and caring environment at DnB. She still struggles to emphasize to parents the importance of how they communicate with their children. A teacher at DnB, however, believed that most parents are disengaged as they rarely participate in activities for parents or, at least, show that they are following up with what their children are doing at school (e.g. by reading the child’s agenda).

At the private-run TCS, teachers or the director addresses most of the concerns directly with parents or, more specifically, the mother. A commonly observed issue among children at TCS are feelings of fear (TCS Director). The TCS director believes it is important that the director or teacher and parents come up with and agree on interventions to support the child who is experiencing difficulty in school. The teachers at TCS also recognized that many parents are not so involved because of their work commitments. Those who are involved “call the school to ask about their children” or, when a child is absent, visit the school to see what the child needs to take at home to catch up. One issue that parents do not seem to address very carefully is the birth of siblings, which should be planned and carried out through conversations between parents and their children. Parents also appear to rely on heavily processed and sugared foods as snacks for their children when packing their lunchboxes, despite the requests made from the school to pack healthy foods. A teacher also described some parents as overly concerned about either performing well or not performing at all. The former, a parent punished a KG3 child for mistakes in a dictation exercise by arriving to the school without a car and having the child walk home. Another parent, who is a teacher in the school, wants her son and daughter in KG “to be the best in class”. For the latter, a mother objected to have her child write four lines for a writing exercise, even though the teacher explained that they are preparing them for the grade one. In a rare case where a father was involved as an active caregiver, a child who found it difficult to adjust to school and spent most of the time crying had then asked her father to drop her off and pick her up every day; the child has reportedly adjusted well.

The parents of the children at ULYP are living mostly in poverty and have not completed their secondary education. At ULYP, there is a concern over the number of children that Syrian families have. In one case, the director recalled a mother of nine holding a baby when visiting the center. After openly asking why she continues to have children when living under difficult circumstances, the mother explained that her husband threatened to leave her if she does not keep giving him children. The psychologist described two parents who were very engaged. One mother had been subject to extreme oppression at home where she was not permitted to leave the house or express her thoughts. However, one day, she overheard her husband “selling” their daughter for marriage. She came out of her room and asserted her husband and the visitors that the child will not be married and that this form of oppressive living will not continue. The psychologist reported that the mother described this moment as empowering.

The location of JSR means that the parents will most likely be living in the poorest of conditions compared to other Syrian refugees across the country. One of the teachers at JSR gave an account of negotiating with parents to send their daughter to school. The teacher met the girl selling tissues on the street and took the initiative to talk to her parents. They ignored and resisted the teacher because, according to them, an education would not improve their status and living conditions. The teacher, however, was persistent. The parents eventually registered their daughter at the school. She shared another success story that transpired out of working closely with parents. A young girl at the school was suffering from fears and low self-confidence. Some of the teachers worked closely with the psychologist and met frequently with the parents and the girl. The teacher has noticed great progress in her behaviours at school. The director, too, reflected on the challenges and rewards of working with parents. Many parents rejected awareness sessions organized for parents claiming that the activity was patronizing. Over time and dialogues, some parents have begun to participate in the activities organized for parents. Still, many parents resist or deny the notion that they need psychological support. In another case, a parent refused to send his daughter to school, afraid over her safety and arguing that her place is in the house. The director persisted and, after many discussions about the importance of girls and boys having an education, the parents allowed their daughter to attend school. Finally, it is mostly mothers who visit the school and one of the teachers believes that fathers and mothers should show an equal interest and commitment.

The volunteers at SLM rely heavily on the parents to help the children (two to five years) settle in by spending 30 minutes every day during the first week. They also depend on the conversations held with parents to learn more



about their children's environments and behaviours at home in order to (1) develop programs that best address their needs and (2) evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. The volunteers also work with the parents in getting the children ready in the morning; they visit the camps to pick up the children and end of up waking many of the children up and, in half an hour, the children are ready. While some parents show how engaged they are, others have shown no interest despite numerous attempts to explain the importance of having their children participate. The volunteers have seen some of the parents participate in some of the activities, like computer classes while their children attend the community center. As professionals new to this context, they believe that parents who are disengaged are not necessarily negligent towards their children; they are merely too traumatized and depressed to care for themselves, let alone their children. Other forms of engagement from parents that the volunteers described were picking up their children, appreciating their work by thanking them, asking how their children were and inviting them for tea. Some of the parents have also shown some dependency on the volunteers by inviting them over to lunch as an outlet to talk about their difficulties and struggles. Observing mothers cry over lost husbands and children has also been quite emotionally demanding on the volunteers.

## Concerns and wish lists

The conversations at MSM revealed an explicit concern about sexual violence, especially from the principal. In Lebanon, the BAA principal expressed grave concerns over the growing abuse of drugs, which are becoming more affordable. At the social level, the social worker at DnB found that many of the KG children have a difficult time socializing with peers; the violence at home may have caused them to become "too sensitive" and self-destructive (e.g. when one boy feels sad, he starts to hit his head on the wall). A volunteer at SLM is very worried about a girl who avoids eye contact but has been aggressive with a knife and biting. Also, teachers and directors (e.g. JSR) were also concerned about provisions of basic needs. Many of the children do not have shoes and some left school because they could not afford transportation, despite nationwide efforts to ensure all Syrian refugee children have transportation to school. At JSR, for example, the children wore dirty clothes, some without shoes, and played well together outside.

Less life-threatening concerns include the transition to formal grade school and this concern is shared equally by parents and teachers. The BAA teacher expressed worry about the large-size classrooms and teachers who "shout at the children." Teachers and directors from nearly all other schools and NGOs in Lebanon (except TCS) who have designed educational programs for refugee and vulnerable host community children share the same worry. They believe that children will receive less attention and have fewer opportunities to express themselves and discover when they move to public schools. Some parents have even lied about their child's date of birth in order to register them in preschools run or supported by NGOs.

Many of the teachers and directors used the interviews as opportunities to voice needs. Some of the directors expressed concerns about the lifespan of their ECE program because they rely quite heavily on external funds and, thus, called for additional funding. Others asked for more specific resources and learning opportunities. One of the psychologists thinks a laptop would allow her to keep better records of the cases she has. At the moment, she records the details of the children's cases in her notebook and leaves it at school when she goes home. A laptop with password-protected files would ensure greater privacy. The psychologist is also waiting for forms needed to inform Caritas about cases who need attention and medical or psychological referral or financial aid. Each form requires the name of the child, birthdate, UNHCR document number and explanation of the case. Another psychologist asked for special clay or playdough and balls for psychomotor activities for children who display degrees of weakness in their fingers and hand muscles.

Some teachers requested further training and tools. One teacher at MSN asked for a specialized workshop on how to deal with aggressive children. She and a colleague also mentioned that they are still waiting for a request made for materials like teaching cards and cardboard. Some teachers in Jordan asked for a smartboard in every classroom to show videos and cartoons, although the one available was reportedly used around 30 minutes each week. The principal in LNL also asked for a digital projector to play entertainment videos for the children. Digital technology in the classroom may actually be underused. There is also a concern of how much time children spend using smartphones and digital technologies at their age. There is also an occasional call for more toys that allow children to play in creative ways (e.g. open-ended play). The LNL principal asked for workshops on how to approach aggressive behaviour among children. The BAA principal said that instead of organizations constantly running workshops, it would be more beneficial for the people at the camps if that money is invested as capital to start running small businesses (e.g. soap, jams, etc). Also, instead of hosting a conference at a hotel, he encouraged using the camps as public spaces for debate and knowledge sharing. A teacher at TCS expressed concern over the apparent lack of communication between children and parents due to time spent on tablets and smartphones. She wishes for workshops on how to motivate children and have them follow instructions better. Finally, the principal at MSA believes that the teachers could use more recognition of their work. A "Best Teacher Award" or "Best KG Award", for example, could inspire and motivate the teachers to do better (MSA Principal).

## YOUNG CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The young children we observed and spoke gave us only some insight into their expectations of caregivers, challenges faced with caregivers and ideas on benefiting more from their relationships with caregivers. The brief encounters with the children yielded very little information. Learning about the needs and expectations from pre-school age children own voices demands a methodology that provides an open space where the researcher, parents and children first engage in casual interactions like play, sharing favourite photos or having a snack together.

### Conversations with children

All the children we spoke to said they were happy at the school and that they liked their teachers. At MSH, a KG2 child told the researcher that she loves her teacher (the one who was teaching the five senses) and the principal (who also teaches). Although most of her talk was in short, often yes/no phrases, she still spoke about her mother who is studying and will graduate soon. She complained that she is "not happy at home because my younger brother hits me" and that her father is sick. When asked what her parents teach her at home, she said, "They tell me to hit whoever hits you." The child we spoke to MSN, however, seemed very shy and somehow unhappy and afraid. She said she had no friends and the friend she did have did not want to play with her anymore. The young girl may have been acclimatising to the new year as it was her second week of KG. In Lebanon, we had similar conversations with the children; many had named their friends and most were concerned about sharing their toys. What stood out, however, was that children in BAA appeared to talk with greater degrees of enthusiasm and also introduce new ideas into the conversation. Most likely this happened because of individual differences in personality traits of the children; however, it does warrant further investigation into children's behaviors in various forms of preschool educational programs.



Children appear to behave and be expected to behave as adults. Talking with a five-year-old girl, she explained the chores she does at home, like peeling potatoes and helping clean up the kitchen. When visiting SLM, the volunteers recalled a visit to one of the tents where a five-year-old boy prepared coffee for them. When speaking to the boy, he expressed his excitement in taking care of and playing with his sister, helping his mother at home and preparing coffee and tea. He loves choir class at the community center and dreams of becoming a singer. Although this chapter of the report only presents what the children shared directly to the researchers, a principal in Jordan noticed that many children talk about migration to Europe and the USA. She also found that they express very little sense of settlement or hope to return to Syria and, instead, show enthusiasm over interviews to migrate. This clearly reflects their parents' conversations at home.

## Observing relationships and interactions

In a classroom visit (MSA), all seemed to be enjoying their time while the teacher was drawing on their faces. The FR also noticed that the children feel especially close to their teachers and principal and very friendly towards each other; they were laughing with each other and did not appear to annoy or internationally harm their peers. One boy was crying because a girl had hit him; she explained it was "by accident". The teacher asked her to apologize and she did, but the boy stayed upset, covering his face most of the time. The teacher reported that this boy, in particular, is more sensitive than the others. At MSN, a young girl was eating her apple and did not seem interested in participating in the singing and playdough activities with her friends. What appeared odd to the researcher was the apparent absence of intervention to encourage the child to participate; however, the teachers may have been exercising a respect for individual differences. At DnB, the children seemed very much engaged inside and outside the classroom. We saw children sitting next to each other and eating their breakfast, two boys sharing their toys, a group of children playing with the teachers and a group of girls holding hands and singing were positive signs of them feeling safe and happy.

Inside the camp, during a series of home visits, we observed a range of dynamics among siblings and parents. In one family, a grandmother sat on the bed while her daughter, son and granddaughter (of the daughter) sat on the floor mat. They offered juice and, despite declining the kind gesture, they served a glass of orange fizzy soda. After I explained that I do not eat sugar, they explained that it was made of fresh juice. I accepted the drink but with some new questions of their knowledge of food and physical health. The three-year-old girl was bouncing around the tent with her mother's phone in her hand, swiping through videos. She seemed loved, cared for and happy. The amount of time she spent with the phone on her ear and her mother's apparent innocence over the risks associated with mobile phones also raised some concerns. In another tent, three brothers sat quietly next to each other while the fourth brother, two years old, sat next to his mom. While she was talking, he played with a large truck making engine noises. In frustration, she struck his face and threw the truck outside the tent. In an astonishing display of resilience, he stood up quietly, walked outside and continued to play with his truck. The three brothers were very generous in offering the candies and chocolates they received from the Eid holiday one week prior. Another young boy (10 years old) walked me around the camp and, in conversation about school, recalled an incident when he asked to go to the bathroom and the teacher repeatedly struck his hands with a ruler. In another camp school, children playfully pushed each other around when the activities allowed for open expression. Many were barefoot and, surprisingly, walked home using the small village roads without shoes. The friendly encounters with the children during the camp visit yielded three interesting observations that corroborate with the interviews with adults. These children (1) were quick to respond to smiles and questions, (2) displayed a degree of resilience that suggests a degree of habituation to a violent environment and (3) exhibited very little self-control when given the space to play with friends or express themselves through physical activities.

## CAREGIVERS' PERSPECTIVES

Interviews with parents took place mostly at school. In Lebanon, we carried out three home visits at a camp in North Lebanon and a shelter (CDR) for women who managed to escape physical abuse at home. Conversations with mothers, fathers and relatives living at home with the children revealed a distressing backdrop of war-related traumas and everyday struggles that appear to determine how caregivers at home understand and prioritize their children's needs.

### Relationships with their children

Parents of children were born in Jordan and Lebanon were grateful that their children did not experience the war. These parents have already witnessed other children who were born in Syria and living in fear and trying to hide from the noise of exploding bombshells.

Many of parents were separated or just living without their partner. Mothers separated from their husbands (e.g. divorce) reported that their children do not really mention their father. One mother thinks that it is because they never had a good relationship with their father. In this case, the father was verbally and physically violent with her and his children and left a degree of trauma on his daughter who was extremely insecure and, sometimes, aggressive. The mother believes that the daughter never knew right from wrong because he used to beat her for no reason. The two mothers at CDR left their husbands were abusive to them and their children. One of the mothers had a hearing impairment; although we observed how she was able to communicate effectively with her five-year-old-daughter, the social worker at the shelter explained how they needed to make additional efforts to use verbal language to communicate with the daughter so that she learns how to speak with others. The second mother confessed feelings of resentment or hatred towards one of her children whom she bore from being raped.

Mothers shared their experiences and beliefs in raising their children. The children were often described as "good" when they behave and listen to their parent's instructions. A mother of four boys in one of the camps pleaded for advice on how to manage their children; the eldest (nine years old) does not interact much at home or at school and appears to be overcome by the television. Many of the parents believe that mothers must have the greater responsibility because the father works and the mother stays at home most. Mothers described many fathers, if not most, as parents who do not sit with the children to play because they feel so much stress and pressure to provide for the family. Mostly mothers appear to play with their children than the fathers. When parents describe time spent with their children they refer to helping them prepare for school, asking them how school was, giving them the phone to play with and opening up applications that play videos. One mother (Jordan) wished that her child would spend no more than half an hour a day. Most parents advocated for capital punishment at home but one mother (Jordan) believed that hitting children only breeds violence.

Parents, mostly mothers by virtue of the sample set, expressed concerns over their children's mental and physical health. According to one mother, her child is constantly afraid and regularly says, "Mom, there's a monster!" in many places he goes. Regarding food, one mother experienced a degree of stress when she saw her child not taking her milk. Another was very concerned about securing regular access to food and her child's nutrition. Mothers also found themselves alone when helping their children recover from a trauma, even when it was not directly related to the war. For example, one mother's child in Syria had a trauma after a great fall when he was a year and a half. She said he cried for many weeks and would even wake up in the middle of the night crying. She used to read the Qur'an to him to soothe him; she believes this helped.



Parents also expressed desires for their children. One mother wants her preschool-age child to learn languages, first Arabic and then English. Another mother wants to make sure that the preschool her child goes to shows a great deal of care. Many mothers want their children to have toys to play with, dance classes for daughter who loves to pretend to dance ballet at home and resources for drawing, building robots and other interests that the children have expressed. A mother who also teaches at LNL broke down into tears when she recalled the time spent begging schools to register her child, which she described as more painful and difficult than begging for money.

## Attitudes towards provisions of KG

All parents interviewed who had children in a preschool were very appreciative to have their children at the school's KG. They explained that their children are in a place that was safe, caring and stimulating and that safety was the most important thing for them. However, they were unable to clearly express what they expected from the preschool or what an ideal preschool should look like. When they did, they hoped that schooling will open opportunities for them while others look at the more immediate benefits of learning to read and write, especially from parents who did not go to school. While most parents did not seem to reflect much on their children's preschool experiences, they were more concerned about the transition to public school. A parent reported that her children are vulnerable to anti-Syrian verbal abuse at school. Other parents are under the impression that mainstream schooling puts a great deal of pressure on learning information and studying and, so, the children have very little time to play or for themselves. During the visit to JSR, we observed parents revisiting the school to see if they could bring back their children from public schools to register again in JSR.

## Daily conflicts and struggles

Refugee parents in Jordan and Lebanon experienced destructive expressions of conflict, instability and struggles in almost every aspect of daily life. Moreover, these experiences violate virtually all human rights. When starting conversations with parents, they normally begin expressing their anxieties of being unemployed or avoiding persecution, whether by returning to Syria or being stopped without residency permits (Lebanon). Even when they have a Masters-level degree, they are unable to work (Jordan). Mothers and fathers were clearly far more concerned about their safety, work and living conditions than their children's provisions of preschool. Many parents live with the memories of violence from the war in Syria. Parents told stories of escaping the war, seeing so many dead bodies, and being subject to beatings by military and police (mostly fathers). One father in Jordan recalled a time when he and his cousin walked out of the house after curfew to get cooking gas. They were detained for three days by the government regime and tortured in brutal ways. He also recalled surviving a protest where government military forces openly shot at protesters with machine guns and picking up body parts afterwards. The researcher apologized to hear such experiences and for putting the father in a position to share such experiences. He said he appreciated the conversation as a chance to share, "Even though I may tear while talking about [these experiences],...I feel a weight off my chest later".

As reported in the previous section, many of the mothers interviewed are single-parenting, with their husband either away or separated. A Syrian mother of three and her husband are separated and he returned to Syria. She appeared very emotional when talking about the pressures of trying to manage the children without him. She currently lives with other family members in the same house, but the conflicts among each other added to the stress and feelings of sadness and loneliness that she believes negatively affect her ability to take care of

her children. Indeed, many of the mothers are traumatized from the violence inflicted onto the fathers and the insecurity of not having any money or home after having lost them from the war. Many feel lonely.

During the camp visit, many families reported about the financial burdens they face but restrictions and curfews to mobilize and find work. Besides food, their most pressing expenses include rent of 35 USD for a small family-size tent and electricity bills for the meters hanging outside the tents. An NGO supplies them with water. One family claimed that some receive monetary aid from UNHCR while other families with children do not. They are unaware of aid policies, their rights and certain provisions that they describe as exclusive. In Lebanon, they have curfews and restrictions of movement, especially that many do not have valid residency permits. So, refugees, especially living in rural areas, cannot find work opportunities. During one of the camp visits in North Lebanon, two fathers asked me if I had any work for them.

## Opportunities for better living (wellbeing)

Mothers and fathers expressed ambitions for a better quality of life. Fathers mostly spoke about finding work to cover basic living expenses. Many parents claim they are waiting for chances to migrate so their children have better opportunities to learn, play and eat well. Some parents, like the father who shared personal experiences of torture under detainment, wished for some kind of social support groups to talk about painful memories. The father wished for a group just for males who can tell each other their stories. Sharing such memories and traumas can liberate them from the anxieties and memories that may be hindering their abilities to provide their children with the care needed. As for existing workshops, some parents – mostly mothers – participated in those organized by NGOs (e.g. self-defense, make-up, hairstyling, computer, sewing, zumbaa, etc.). The mothers said that the activities helped them emotionally, found them useful for everyday living (e.g. self-defense) and prepared them for work opportunities (hairstyling and make-up). According to a mother in Jordan, Caritas provides workshops for parents but she claimed that she was never informed. Other parents also said that they were not offered workshops or similar activities.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION ACTIONS

In the final chapter of this report, we first discuss three critical themes that emerged from the findings. We then conclude by drawing on the key findings to respond to the main research questions. The final research question seeks recommendations. In the final section, we outline directions to further research, which include research methodology ethics.

## Discussion

Learnings from the various stakeholders and education programs in Lebanon and Jordan suggest three critical discussion areas in the knowledge field of ECD/ECE of young children directly affected by armed conflict.

### ***Underpinning, dominant developmental theories***

Traditional developmental theories, namely by Piaget (1971, 1975), that aim to universalize stages of growth and cognitive development have dictated education system structures despite their failure to consider individual and cultural differences (Moore 2000, Walsh 2005). Most of the classroom observations in Lebanon and Jordan showed teacher-child interactions trying to reinforce the learning of knowledge that a curriculum has set for a particular age group. Even when many of the learning activities allow children to explore different materials and senses, teachers like in the case of MSH kept repeating information for the children to repeat. In more subtle manifestations, the admission procedures into school also exclude many children who appear to threaten sequential learning processes. For example, some principals reported that they exclude children who could hold back the learning in the classroom because of their special needs (autistic spectrum or learning disabilities). Despite the knowledge of these serious limitations, educationists continue to overlook the cultural contexts that children grow in and grow into (Walsh 2005). Violence like corporal punishment at home is a cultural context that provides children with the script of how to behave (e.g. in fear or perpetrate violence). It appears that only psychologists and social workers have the opportunities to support children in an experience of developmental change by addressing their cultural context. Moreover, the activities in the HAPPY program at ULYP and SALAM program at Jusoor encourage children to draw on their cultural identities and experiences when expressing themselves through psychosocial support and creative activities.

### ***Healthy and harmful relationships***

Children will master languages, establish healthy relationships and construct knowledge in settings that provide quality education when their relationships with caregivers are stable and secure. These healthy attachments are mostly based on reciprocity when talking, listening and playing (Bowlby 1969). Many cultural variables in the context of conflict-affected areas appear to disrupt and prevent reciprocated interactions. Many of the parents demonstrated an expectation of their children having to behave as adults. Hence, the seemingly permanent state of unilateral, top-down dynamics of disciplining children give no room for conversations or interactions when children display curiosity and playfulness. Consequently, parents can only express frustrations and punishment while children experience confusion but develop resiliency. Healthy relationships founded on reciprocated interactions through conversation were demonstrated at RR when teachers and children engage in genuine and friendly conversations about changing color on the behaviour management poster (e.g. why are you here? Children explaining and teacher showing understanding).

### ***Concerning positions and emotional state of caregivers***

Parents' emotional states are crucial in helping children constructively manage their traumatic experiences. Studies in other areas affected by armed conflict (Betancourt et al., 2015; Panter-Brick, 2014; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Psarros et al., 2016) show how parents suffering from loss and violence are risk factors to their children's well-being. The state of most parents' mental health that are ridden with stress and war-related trauma are indeed a detrimental factor that hinders their children's neural development, which further challenges their abilities to form and maintain healthy relationships and learn at school. How children constructively manage their traumas

are determined by their parents' emotional states (Pynoos et al., 1995; Qouta et al., 2007). Conversations with various caregivers suggest that their poor state of mental health are indeed a risk factor to the child's well-being, a finding consistent in conflict-affected areas (Betancourt et al., 2015; Panter-Brick, 2014; Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Psarros et al., 2016). Indeed, many reported how many children have observed their mothers suffering and crying from abuse or violence at home and fathers expressing frustrations in finding work. Although children appeared to have been developing some degree of resilience to parents' short temperaments, the interactions with parents are, in many cases, traumatic experiences themselves. By and large, the adults who may have the most stable emotional states are the children's teachers and social workers. However, some (e.g. MSA Principal) reinforce parents as source of violence by threatening to tell a father to beat their child if they misbehave.

## CONCLUSIONS

### ***RQ2. What are key support needs of vulnerable children in RHEP partner schools in a learning environment?***

Either the children may have been too young to express their support needs or the methodology of inquiry through conversation needs to be extended to a more ethnographic nature of understanding. What the evidence from other sources suggest is that the young children require healthy relationships based on:

- a. Stability and consistency: avoiding turnover of caregivers, ensuring that caregivers do not fluctuate to extremes of emotions (loving one minute and violent another as we see in emotionally hurt parents), and providing routine at home as well as school. Most urgently, the children need a sense of stability and this can be provided through routine so they can gradually shift from "survival mode" to a degree of well-being that enables them to express curiosity and forge healthy relationships.
- b. Providing basic needs: basic nutrition; protection from sexual, drug and physical abuse; and security. These needs will also help the children avoid being part of an income generation based on child labor and begging on the streets.
- c. Cognitive stimulation: From three years and older, children need access to other caregivers who behave as parents and opportunities to play with peers, learn and discover and make new friends. When spoken to, adults must be conscious of using language properly.
- d. Trust: Feel safe with caregivers so that they can explore. Parents must receive support, at least at the socio-emotional level.

### ***RQ3. What are perspectives of caregivers on how to support their children's education?***

Caregivers' perspectives on ECE have been quite vague because they do not really have preschools in Syria and many young children work. So, as refugees, ECE is an opportunity for others to care for their children while parents rest. And, indeed, parents need a break and to socialize. The majority of caregivers see preschool as a place to learn basic literacy and numeracy. Very few seem to expect ECE as an opportunity for children to make friends, spend the day in a safe place and have fun. For some parents, transportation is still an issue. Many parents are either too busy or cannot afford to drop off their children and pick them up on time. They also tend to justify



provisions of education more for males than females. Finally, in order for parents to better support their children's education, they called for more resources like money and health services. We probably should not expect these parents to provide psychosocial support, especially when they need it the most.

**RQ4. What are teachers' perspectives and approaches in working with caregivers to support students' learning and development?**

By and large, teachers and directors from the host community hastily generalize parents as disengaged, uninterested and negligent. The teachers who are also refugees showed much more empathy and understanding towards the children. These teachers are putting emphasis on hygiene, not to hit each other when they get mad and how to take off their shoes. Working with refugee children takes an emotional toll on teachers, especially those who are refugees themselves. There was quite some anxiety from teachers working at NGOs over funds to secure their jobs and provisions for the children. Teachers in schools and some NGOs saw parents more as harmful and negligent caregivers who ignore and hit their children, do not help their children with homework and do not prioritize their children's schooling.

**RQ6. How do civil society organisations (CSOs, including Caritas Jordan and Caritas Lebanon) promote parental involvement in the education of their children?**

Mostly mothers participate in NGO-related activities. NGO activities appear to overlook the family as a whole component by often targeting only parts of the family (e.g. activities only for children, mothers or fathers). Many NGO workers cannot say how they will measure the success of their work. Some will say that the children learned their letters and numbers. Others put value on retention. Student enrollment and retention are rather popular quantitative variables that are valued by donor and government agencies. Few will identify success when children do not steal from the classroom, control their impulses (e.g. getting the ball only when they have permission), raise their hand when they want to answer a question and take responsibility in cleaning the classroom.

**RQ7. Recommendations to enhance Caritas' involvement of caregivers in support of children's academic performance and psychosocial wellbeing.**

Below are four primary recommended action plans. Under each is a table specifying activities that can be taken by different stakeholders, namely school principals, teachers, NGOs and policymakers. These stakeholders also influence educational authorities like school boards, departments at MEHE and CERD and teacher training centers. The specific actions per stakeholders could serve as success indicators in forthcoming interventions.

**Segregation and integration as school design**

Most formal educational provisions for Syrian refugee children have been designed as afternoon shifts. This is convenient for the administration of funds when hiring an entire team of human resources and for procurement of stationary and transportation. However, the sociological dimension to this arrangement prompts questions over the apparent segregation of Syrian children from Lebanese children. Moreover, it potentially reinforces the socio-political tensions and divisions between the Syrian refugee and host communities. Evidence from this report suggests that the integration of Lebanese and Syrian children have helped increase levels of diversity inside the classroom, which is essential when fulfilling the aims of education for citizenship according to the national curriculum. It has also allowed for greater interactions between Lebanese and Syrian communities. We must remain aware, however, of subtle prejudices (e.g. seeing all refugees as helpless and in need and Lebanese as potential threats to security) that influence how members from each community view and interpret the others'

behaviors. Indeed, many of the Lebanese social workers expressed low levels of confidence in Syrian refugee parents being effective caregivers. The tensions that may arise from integration, however, can provide valuable opportunities that allow both communities, especially the host, to develop new approaches and relationships that help transform conflict (e.g. competition for limited resources).

**Recommendation action 1:** Increase diversity of teachers (refugees and host community) to better safeguard condescending attitudes.

**Recommendation action 2:** Document and disseminate children's learning and developmental experiences when their group comprises children from different backgrounds and nationalities.

**Recommendation action 3:** Further public discourse to question the potential harms and even benefits of segregation and integration of refugee and host community children in education settings.

| Target group | Suggested actions   |
|--------------|---|
| Principals   | <p>RA1. When funding does not permit hiring of teachers from different communities to work at the same school, principals can coordinate with each other to organize collaborative professional development activities. Principals can also encourage parents from Lebanese and Syrian families to participate in parent councils.</p> <p>RA2. Encouraging teachers to produce portfolios to document their observations and reflections. Highlighting celebrations of diversity and collaborative work by publishing photos and brief commentaries in a yearbook or newsletters sent home.</p> <p>RA3. Through partnerships (e.g. university, municipality), host dialogues or social events that bring people from Lebanese and Syrian communities together to socialize.</p> |
| Teachers     | <p>RA1. Make conscious efforts to forge friendly and professional relationships with teachers coming from different communities.</p> <p>RA2. Document evidence of how children from different backgrounds learn and grow when doing activities together. Share these testimonies with other teachers in professional development activities or [online] portfolio.</p> <p>RA3. Reflect on concerns and opportunities of children's learning and growth in portfolios and conversations with other stakeholders (e.g. teachers).</p>   |
| NGOs         | <p>RA1. Consider diversity criteria when recruiting teachers to education projects and regular social and professional development activities that engage teachers from different backgrounds together</p> <p>RA2. Overlooking special needs and age as criteria for admission or grouping children. In public report briefs, include evidence and reflections of children from diverse backgrounds learning and growing together.</p> <p>RA3. Publish project summaries sharing observations, experiences and reflections on new directions for the public. Organize with other institutions public seminars that share good practices (e.g. HAPPY and SALAM).</p>   |
| Policymakers | <p>RA1. Provide incentives or recognition for schools that meet a certain ratio of teachers from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>RA2. Encourage inspectorates to report on initiatives where students, teachers and parents engage in activities together. Incorporate in teacher education programs new approaches to facilitate constructive collaborations among students and parents from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>RA3. Host or participate in organized public seminars that critically review the structure of the second-shift in public schools.</p>   |



## A foundation-based curriculum for early childhood growth and development

The preschool education programs attempt to strike a balance between healthy growth and acquiring literacy and numeracy skills. The formal schools we visited, more in the RHEP participating schools, have engaged children in arts, crafts, music, play and other social activities inside the classroom. Some of the education programs have even restructured the classroom into small groups, thematising each group into a distinct activity. The activities, however, appear to maintain a pedagogical culture that aims to support the learning of literacy and numeracy as a primary objective in preparation for first grade. In other words, most teachers talked about ECE mostly in terms of literacy and numeracy while other activities are “just for fun”. Even in Jordan, where teachers have written qualifications in ECE and ECD, the teachers and continuous professional development programs still appear to prioritise the mastery of basic literacy and numeracy for first grade. Lebanon has virtually no opportunities for higher education studies in new approaches to ECE/ECD. Moreover, the pressures of achievement in school are also played out in preschool. A child reportedly started to have a fear of failing after his parent came to visit the school to discuss the mistakes he made on his dictation exercise. Also, some preschools directors appear to select only students who do not have special educational needs, although they give the impression that their school is for all children.

**Recommendation action 1:** Draft ECE curriculum based on an evidence-informed conceptual framework of healthy ECD (e.g. healthy attachments, emotion management, language stimulation, managing stress, structured and unstructured play, fine and gross motor skills, greater independence) with a clear theory of change and success indicators.

**Recommendation action 2:** Review and develop initial teacher education programs in higher education institutions so that teachers can reflect on their practice using concepts from contemporary developmental paradigms and research on learning (e.g. collaboration vs cooperation) and ECD (e.g. cultural contexts, managing emotions).

**Recommendation action 3:** Continue to support teachers in developing a new outlook on children’s experiences (e.g. children cooking their meals, raising a garden and animals, etc) and invest in more time for naptime and structured and unstructured play.

**Recommendation action 4:** Collaborate with academic institutions to organize a conference that allows for sharing of ECE practices and research.

| Target group | Suggested actions   |
|--------------|---|
| Principals   | <p>RA1. Facilitate and/or participate in roundtables with other stakeholders (e.g. academics, policymakers, parents, etc.) to detail and periodically review an ECE/ECD strategy with action points and monitoring and evaluation activities.</p> <p>RA2. Support ECE teachers in participating in education program reviews at university.</p> <p>RA3. Organize school-based ECE curricular reviews (biannual? bimonthly?) where parents and teachers share and critically reflect on activities for preschool children. Dialogues to (a) ensure routine, (b) provide resources/materials like toys, furniture and time that facilitate play, exploration and forming friendships</p> <p>RA4. Encourage ECE teachers to document their experiences and prepare presentations of their approaches to share at public seminars or conferences.</p>   |
| Teachers     | <p>RA1. Participate in professional development activities that encourage reading academic literature on developmental theories of child growth and development. In portfolios, refer to conceptual frameworks when reflecting on observations and experiences.</p> <p>RA2. Provide feedback or actively showcase portfolios to early childhood teacher education program leaders at university or teacher training centers.</p> <p>RA3. Document and share with principal and parents new approaches or activities that illustrate initiatives for children to explore and socialize and testimonies of children’s journeys of individual growth.</p> <p>RA4. Prepare to share portfolios or documented classroom experiences in academic conferences.</p>   |
| NGOs         | <p>RA1. Facilitate stakeholder consultancy workshop with ECE/ECD experts to design an innovative ECE curriculum that parents and teachers can periodically review and monitor.</p> <p>RA2. Coordinate with government agencies (MEHE, CERD) and universities to review ECE teacher education and professional development programs.</p> <p>RA3. Organize regional professional development seminars where ECE teachers regularly share practices and read academic literature to reflect on practice and consider new approaches.</p> <p>RA4. Support ECE teachers in non-formal educational settings to document and present documented classroom experiences</p>  |
| Policymakers | <p>RA1. Engage academics specialized in contemporary developmental theories (as opposed to sequential or linear Piagetian theories) in periodic ECE curriculum reviews</p> <p>RA2. Encourage universities to carry out education program reviews for teaching diplomas; program reviews should consult various stakeholders including teachers, principals and parents. Collaborate with universities in organizing a conference that examines approaches to ECE/ECD (theoretical and empirical).</p> <p>RA3. Organize nationwide professional development seminars on how ECE teachers can access academic literature on contemporary developmental theories to help document, reflect on and develop their practices to share with others.</p> <p>RA4. Partner with NGOs and universities in hosting a conference on new approaches to ECE. Present key policies and policy frameworks that govern ECE.</p> |



## Mothers, fathers and ECD/ECE

Regarding ECD, most refugee parents view their children as young adults by punishing them for child-like behaviours, viewing them as burdens who should be more independent and feeling a sense of failure when they cannot manage their behaviours. Parents also show little affection at best (e.g. absence of comfort, kissing children while they are sleeping rather than awake) and violent reactions at worst (e.g. verbal and physical abuse). They are unaware or misinformed about physical health (e.g. sugary foods, sleep patterns, hours on digital screens) and mental health (e.g. expressing affection, managing emotions, talking, playing) and their significance to brain development during the preschool-age years. Moreover, parents appear to struggle with denial, embarrassment and confusion when they discover their children have special needs, regardless of severity.

Concerning ECE, parents have many anxieties about their children going to primary school, which starts with first grade. Teachers and directors have expressed similar worries. Some parents view education and extracurricular activities as great opportunities for their children, but not all. Virtually none of the parents talked about the preschool as a place to play, socialise and grow; it was mostly to learn how to read and write for better work opportunities in the future. Other parents value preschool education as an opportunity to rest from the children; one parent moved her child because the school ended at noon and chose a place that ended at 14h00. Otherwise, some would rather have their children working.

Most parents are seen as disengaged by teachers and directors. At the same time, Syrian refugee parents – most of whom did not complete basic education in Syria – may find themselves in limited capacity to engage in their children’s schooling when their views of schooling are mostly to learn a new language (English or French) and excel in literacy and numeracy. Moreover, educators and parents may have different understandings of “engagement”. For example, educators are likely to interpret parents not being home to receive children as a form of negligence but not seen as important by parents.

**Recommendation action 1:** Produce series of reader-friendly information guides on learning, healthy growth, brain development and the roles of caregivers

**Recommendation action 2:** Define degrees or forms of parent engagement in preschool and when children begin primary school.

| Target group | Suggested actions   |
|--------------|---|
| Principals   | RA1. Allocate time during school hours for ECE teachers to read and reflect on information guides.<br>RA2. Disseminate MEHE policy regulations on parent council to all parents, legal guardians and teachers. Support parent councils in defining their objectives and developing an annual strategic plan.  |
| Teachers     | RA1. Share documented experiences with NGOs and policymakers so that they illustrate the information guides with testimonies from ECE teachers.<br>RA2. Communicate to parents and legal guardians how they can support their children’s healthy growth and development.  |
| NGOs         | RA1. Commission a number of academics whose expertise range across various contemporary developmental theories to produce a series of documents that provides guidance to caregivers. With academics and policymakers, NGOs can organize stakeholder consultancy workshops to draft trilingual ECE/ECD guidebook for formal and non-formal preschools.<br>RA2. After consulting specialists in ECE/ECD, publish a series of reader-friendly one-page fact sheet / guide on supporting children’s healthy growth and development (e.g. nutrition, relationships, playing, managing disruptive behavior, etc.) in print and e-format and in three languages. Organize with local municipalities regular parent gatherings to share concerns and best practices. |
| Policymakers | RA1. MEHE to coordinate with Ministry of Health, NGOs and academics to write guides and information sheets on core elements of healthy ECD.<br>RA2. MEHE and Ministry of Health to revise existing decrees on parent’s roles and, after consulting with relevant expertise, reissue a policy framework that encourages close coordination between parents and schoolteachers on all affairs of the child.   |



## Reimagining the school as a community center

Parents are suffering from war-related traumas. Some expressed appreciation towards the interviews as spaces to talk. Clearly, they need a great deal of support for therapy and personal development. Parents, whether from refugee or host community, hold traditional understandings of ECE and ECD that threaten or undermine the healthy growth of preschool-age children. Parents also struggle in managing their relationships with each other and their children. Psychologists are playing a fundamental role in creating a holistic educational program. However, many of the psychologists and almost all the teachers do not hold professional qualifications to help support Syrian ECD/ECE. Teachers either rely on instinct to respond to children with disruptive behaviour or find working with cases

**Recommendation action 1:** Schools can also serve as community centers where parents and their children spend time to play or read books. As public centers, they can also provide spaces for parents to meet in group therapy activities (e.g. on parenting, marriage, war-related traumas) and participate or even lead in educational workshops on parenting or vocational skills.

**Recommendation action 2:** Build partnerships and relationships with parents and other family members (e.g. grandparents) as active agents during schooling hours. Encourage parents to volunteer to play and provide support inside and outside the classroom.

**Recommendation action 3:** Develop a caregiver education program and curriculum and [continue to] provide continuous professional development or teacher education at the school for directors, teachers and psychologists.

**Recommendation action 4:** Use school grounds to publicly showcase students' work and celebrate teachers' achievements.

| Target group | Suggested actions  |
|--------------|--|
| Principals   | <p>RA1. Propose a schedule where parents can convene for support groups and play with their children. Its sustainability relies on coordination with the municipality and no costs incurred. Coordinate with parents and an NGO, university or any other organization with expertise in caregiving on developing a one-year plan of activities.</p> <p>RA2. Invite parents and other family members (e.g. grandparents) to volunteer, create database of volunteers and collaborate with NGOs and specialists to provide ECE/ECD workshops to volunteers and teachers.</p> <p>RA3. Encourage teachers, family volunteers and children to document their experiences and reflections of working together. With consent, their portfolios can be used as evidence to inform workshop activities on roles of caregivers in ECE/ECD.</p> <p>RA4. Partner with 2-4 neighboring schools to organize a fair that celebrates students' and teachers' achievements, initiatives and projects. Ensure that teachers, students and parents comprise the organization committee. Invite parents to attend.</p> |
| Teachers     | <p>RA1. Create a group of volunteers who can rotate responsibilities in providing access to school grounds.</p> <p>RA2. Define areas of support needed that parents and family members can voluntarily engage in. Participate in workshops that inform teachers on best practices to constructively collaborate with volunteer family members.</p> <p>RA3. Document observations made with the children for the portfolio. Actively participate in consultation activities that seek out new approaches on how parents, family members and teachers can better support the growth the preschool-age children.</p> <p>RA4. Allocate spaces in the hallways and classrooms to post children's work. Ensure that children's work to be showcased is produced strictly by children with minimal or no aid from caregivers (unless the task is a collaborative one between children and caregivers). Regularly host parent-teacher meetings to share work carried out in class and invite and welcome feedback from parents.</p>  |
| NGOs         | <p>RA1. Either mobilize volunteers or raise funds to support the school in organizing extra-curricular activities for parents and their children at school.</p> <p>RA2. Coordinate with ECE/ECD experts and schools to organize workshops for volunteer family members and teachers. Lead an advocacy campaign for MEHE to support the opportunities for family volunteers to support ECE teachers.</p> <p>RA3. Collaborate with academics and experts to host stakeholder consultancy workshops and draft a workshop curriculum of themes and activities for parents and teachers of early childhood children. Facilitate workshops and professional development (PD) in formal and non-formal education centers. Use experiences and feedback to revise PD program.</p> <p>RA4. Provide teachers and principals with ideas and approaches in organizing spaces and activities that celebrate achievements at school. NGOs to limit the contribution or use of resources for sustainable purposes. NGOs can help facilitate partnerships between schools who can showcase together.</p>           |
| Policymakers | <p>RA1. Explicitly assert support to schools providing time and space for parents and their children to socialize. Define procedures to use school premises for family activities; preferable to avoid centralizing approval at ministry level.</p> <p>RA2. Encourage inspectorates, principals, teachers and parents to share their testimonies of working together in preschools.</p> <p>RA3. Participate in hosting consultancy workshops and endorsing ECE caregivers' education curriculum. Attend selected PD workshops and participate in revision of caregiver education and PD curriculum.</p> <p>RA4. Encourage [2-4] public schools to form a consortium or partnership and organize a fair where they showcase students' projects and teachers' achievements and invite parents to attend and, if appropriate, engage with.</p>  |



## Directions for further research

Continuing the integration of research activities within the RHEP will continue to be instrumental in ensuring the most ethical and informed development of a quality ECE program for the most vulnerable. We highlight three forms of research activities for Caritas Austria to continue prioritizing.

### ***Commitment to highest standards of research ethics***

Methods of inquiry to gather information from vulnerable young people need to be revisited so that more time is scheduled to enter their space (i.e. playground, classroom) and gradually establish more trust through playing or learning together before inquiring into specific topics. Researchers spending time to share personal information and family anecdotes also generates trust. A principal in a refugee camp in Lebanon expressed frustration at having his camp school participate in a great deal of studies but has seen nothing materialise, develop or improve. Researchers must bear in mind that vulnerable people will, in many instances, accept discussions in hope of networking to access better opportunities. Researchers will also be offered refreshments like tea or coffee and snacks; to accept these gestures shows respect and trust but could risk a sense of competition among the participants. In addition, males in conservative families do not shy away from directly asking for work opportunities. Unfortunately, this does put the researcher in an awkward position.

### ***Sampling***

Future research design on ECE of vulnerable children in Lebanon and Jordan can also consider greater representative sampling measures. The purposeful and opportunistic sampling helps in mapping out ECE initiatives that are not recorded in inter-agency databases. This form of sampling also served the purpose of evaluating and advancing the work at the selected RHEP participating schools. By limiting the sample selection to opportunities for site visits, however, we are likely to miss learning about good practices in other education programs. Moreover, the sample that targeted the private sector of formal education clearly does not include the cultural elements that shape caretaker-child relationships in public schools, which may raise greater concerns that those suggested in this report.

### ***Developing approaches through action research methods***

In contexts characterized by degrees of stability, education systems have already been largely defined and shaped by holistic understandings of human development and learning. Provisions of education, however, for young people directly affected by war do not adapt to the changes in peoples' lives. Hence, the significance of the RHEP is the development of these approaches to ensure some form of quality education for forcibly displaced and the most vulnerable of people. Forthcoming design and development of education programs for refugee and vulnerable children can incorporate elements of action research in order to enhance and sustain informed approaches. Elements of action research involve many stakeholders, especially parents, teachers, children and principals, in the continuous cycle of planning, implementation and review of the program. The RHEP can also consider a longitudinal study to track progress of holistic intervention.

### ***Dissemination and outreach***

Future activities should give further attention to sharing findings generated from the RHEP. Researchers can develop theoretical frameworks that inform quality educational programs specific to families and children directly and indirectly affected by war and other forms of armed conflict. Civil society and government agencies can use evidence of good practice to inform policy, advocate for system change and provide frameworks for professional development and program design. The sharing of testimonies from caregivers and children can also inspire other practitioners, parents and guardians to try new or different approaches at home and school. Some key dissemination activities include the sharing of research briefs and public seminars in Arabic that can inject a specific language in ECE/ECD discourse in the Arab region. New findings can advance research and development agendas among donor and government agencies. Finally, the opportunities for vulnerable caregivers and children to share their testimonies empowers them with the confidence, support and knowledge in ensuring a dignified life for children and their parents.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A – Questions and observation schedules

#### Children

##### Questions:

- Do you like school? Are you happy at school?
- If yes - what do you like about school? Is there anything you don't like about school?
- Do you like your teachers/the facilitators?
- Who's your favourite teacher? Why?
- Who is your best friend?
- If you had a new toy, would you share it? If yes, with whom? If no, why not?
- Does your mother or father come to school with you? If yes, when? If no, why not?
- Are you happy at home?
- What do you do at home? What do you do with your mother/father? Do you play, or sing, or read stories together?
- Is your mother happy? Is your father happy?
- What does your mother/father teach you at home?
- Does your mother help you with schoolwork? Does your father? If yes, with what? If no, why?
- Do you like it when your parents help you with schoolwork?
- Who loves you most in the world?

##### Observations:

- Are children social/making friends with each other? Are any of them isolated/refusing to play with others? (Give rough %)
- Are children kind to one another? If one is hurt or alone, are any of the children engaging them?
- Are the children sharing? Fighting? Hitting/screaming at each other?
- What is the children's relationship to their teachers? Are they trusting/friendly/loving? Are they scared of them? Do they listen when the teachers instruct them?

#### Parents

1. Your children
  - Tell me about your children. How many, ages, sex, nationality
  - Where and with whom do they live?
2. The parents
  - Are you married? If divorcing, see if they're willing to talk about it
  - Did you ever go to school? Where did you reach?
3. Your children's health and development
  - What is one thing you are most proud of your children? What else?
  - What is one thing you are most worried about? What else?
  - What do you wish most for your child right now?
  - Does your child go to preschool/school? On a scale of 1-10, how involved are you in your child's learning at school? How? What do you do? What would you like to do but don't/can't?
  - What should they learn at this age?

4. Your role as a parent at home and school
  - On a scale of 1-10, how involved are you in your child's development and learning?
  - Describe your relationship with your child: How do you and your child spend time together?
  - What are you most happy about/proud of regarding your relationship with your child?
  - Could your relationship with your child be better? How so? Where would you like it to go?
  - What have been some of the biggest challenges as a parent? Tell me a story
  - All parents and children have arguments. What do you and your child fight about most?
  - Are there times when you hit your child? When is it ok (maqbool) and when isn't it?
  - Do you think that mothers and fathers should have different roles in a child's development and learning? If yes/ if no, how so?
5. Trauma and stress
  - Has your child experienced any trauma (such as exposure to violence, loss of a family member)? If yes, can you describe for me what happened? What did you do to help him/her to overcome it? What would you have liked to do but couldn't?
  - Have you or your partner experienced any trauma?
  - How has/have the traumatic experience(s) impacted you and/or your partner? Has this affected how you care for your child? If yes, how so?
6. Educational programmes
  - What activities does the school/NGO currently provide for you as parents? Do you participate?
  - Do you think these activities are helpful? If yes, how so? Give an example of something you've learned/ benefited from the programme. If no, why are they not helpful? What should they be doing instead?
  - What kind of support do you need or want in order to better support your child's academic and socioemotional development? What kind of support does your husband need?
  - What do you wish most for your child right now?

### Directors, Teachers and Psychologists

##### Questions:

1. Program
  - Tell me about the activities at your school/NGO
  - What is the mission of the school? What are your goals/objectives for the children at your school? (is socioemotional learning/development/wellbeing a goal?)
  - How many children do you have, where are they from (ethnicity, geography, what socioeconomic level of families), how do you choose them to be in your school/programme?
  - What do children do at your school/NGO? (classes, activities)
  - How many hours do children attend? play?
2. Parents
  - What do you think the role of the parents should be? How do you think they should support the academic and socioemotional development of children?
  - Do you know the children's parents/caregivers? How often do you interact with them, and in what setting?
  - Does your school/NGO provide formal or informal support for caregivers? If so, what? (e.g. parent-teacher meetings; psychosocial support/counseling for the parents, etc.)

- Which parents are you reaching through these activities? Are the parents responsive? Who are the parents who are more involved/less involved? Is there a difference between the mother/father's involvement?
  - Are the parents affected by trauma or stress? If yes, do you think this is affecting the way they are able to support their children emotionally?
3. Staff
- Tell me about the teachers here. How many teachers/facilitators do you have at your school/NGO?
  - [for the Director/Principal] When you hire your ECE teachers, what skills and qualities do you look for? Why?
  - [for the teacher] What skills and qualities do you think are important for kindergarten teachers to have? Why?
  - Do you think the socioemotional development of a child is the responsibility of the school and its educators? If yes, how should the school support their socioemotional development? Do you think your school is doing enough? If not, what would you do differently/additionally?
  - Is there a psychologist/counsellor? If yes, who and how often are they present?
4. Final reflections (successes and challenges)
- What are your biggest concerns/worries for the children in general? How about psychologically/socioemotionally?
  - What lessons have you learned from working with the parents? Would you do anything differently? What (else) would you do to encourage or enhance the capacity of caregivers to support the learning and wellbeing of their children?
  - What are the barriers to successful support to caregivers?
  - Are there any success stories with the caregivers? What would you advise other programmes to do?

**Observations:**

- What is the relationship between the teacher and the children? Friendly, strict, harsh, gentle?
- What is the relationship between the teachers?
- What is the relationship between the teachers and the parents?
- Do the adults talk about the children (and their problems) in front of the child?
- Do the children seem happy here?

## Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet

Dr Bassel Akar  
Director, Center for Applied Research in Education  
Notre Dame University – Louaize  
Zouk Mosbeh  
Lebanon

18 September 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Dr Bassel Akar and I am co-Principal Investigator with Alexandra Chen of a research project entitled, "Caregivers and vulnerable preschool children in Lebanon and Jordan." The study is funded by Caritas Austria and is carried out through the Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the Notre Dame University – Louaize in Lebanon. This comparative study aims to learn about the approaches to and experiences of supporting the developmental needs of vulnerable children and Syrian refugees below the age of 6 as well as their caregivers in Jordan and Lebanon.

We have identified you as an active professional in this area and, thus, can learn a great deal from your experiences, observations and reflections. By interviewing you, we hope to learn more about:

1. The approaches you have adopted to support preschool children and their parents and
2. The relationships you have with parents of preschool children.

The research team comprises Aya Zakaria and Nadia Rdeini in Lebanon and, in Jordan, Dima Hamadmad. Kindly welcome our team of esteemed and highly qualified researchers to meet with you and learn more about your valuable experiences.

We are unconditionally committed to the strictest code of research ethics. Kindly be assured that:

1. You will remain anonymous when we cite your responses
2. All information gathered will be stored securely for a short time before deleting all records
3. You may wish to withdraw your participation at any time.

Shall you have any further queries about this research project, you can contact me at any time through email (bakar@ndu.edu.lb) and phone (+9613389378).

I thank you in advance for your support and time from your schedule.

With best wishes,

Dr Bassel Akar