A future in the balance:
Expanding the positive outcomes for a whole generation of children from Syria and Iraq
Forced displacement

The main causes of forced displacement in Syria and Iraq are extreme violence and impoverishment. Children and their families face indiscriminate attacks, detention, torture, sexual violence and recruitment. Tens of thousands of children have been killed due to conflict. Today, more than two million children inside Syria do not have regular access to aid, thousands live under siege.

Access to education inside Syria and Iraq

Education systems in Syria and Iraq are overburdened. Schools and learning spaces are unsafe, over-crowded and under-resourced. In Syria, 2.1 million children, or 40% of the school-age population, are out-of-school, and a further 1.4 million are at risk of dropping out. One in four schools has been damaged, destroyed, used as shelters for displaced families or are being used for military purposes. Many children have missed out on years of education. In Iraq, almost one third of Iraqi children are out-of-school.

A lack of access to education puts children at increased risk of exploitation, child labour, early marriage and recruitment into the fighting.

Access to education in neighbouring countries

The London Conference of 2016 committed to get all children in school in the 2016/17 school year. However, as schools started, there continue to be over 900,000 out-of-school refugee children from Syria. That is 55% of school aged children. In Turkey alone, despite significant efforts from the Government, there are 607,000 out of school children. Nearly half of Syrian refugee children in Iraq are out of school.

Refugee children face major barriers, including limited space in schools, different language of instruction and curriculum, discrimination and financial constraints. A lack of conducive regulatory frameworks, admission procedures and pathways between formal and non-formal education (NFE) for those children unable to access the formal system, further hinder education opportunities. NFE programmes are important for children unable to access the formal system due to missed years of schooling or other reasons. Access to secondary education opportunities, vocational training or higher education is even lower. In 2015, in Lebanon, only 11% of Syrian youth were in formal school.

Access to livelihoods

Most families are dependent on humanitarian assistance or reliant on work in the informal sector – vulnerable to exploitation, low wages, and at risk of detention or deportation if caught working illegally. In Lebanon, a survey found only 26% of households had generated income the previous month; pushing families towards negative coping strategies such as child labour and child marriage. In Iraq, 77% of refugee children from Syria who were working reported that they were seeking employment to support their families.

Despite significant progress in promoting sustainable livelihoods for Syrian refugees, weak economic growth, slow implementation of policy reforms, protection concerns and lack of freedom of movement, continue to hamper progress. Other factors like linking work permits to employers make refugees more vulnerable to exploitation.
### Poverty and debt

Refugees from Syria are falling into debt and facing poverty, as they struggle to generate income while living costs increase and aid levels fluctuate. Some 70% of refugees in Lebanon are living below the poverty line, compared to 50% in 2014. In Jordan, 90% of registered Syrian refugees in urban areas have fallen below the national poverty line.

### Child marriage

Child marriage is a growing problem not only because of poverty, but also because it is seen as a means to protect girls from sexual violence. Girls are getting married at a younger age. In Jordan, the proportion of registered marriages involving Syrian children increased from 18% to 25% between 2012 and 2013, half involving husbands 10 or more years older than the Syrian girls.

Many marriages are unregistered, reducing the legal protection of those getting married and preventing birth registration. Child marriage often leads to dropping out of school and is associated with gender based violence and serious health issues.

### Child labour

With growing levels of poverty and limited legal options for adult refugees to earn an income, an increasing number of refugee children are working to support their families. Limited access to quality education is another reason. In Jordan, nearly half of refugee households said they relied partly or entirely on income generated by a child. In Lebanon 3 out of 4 children working in the streets were Syrian.

The consequences of harmful work for children can be severe, including exposure to violence, health problems, family separation and lack of education.

### Residency and civil documentation

Lack of legal status is a root cause of refugee families’ growing vulnerability. They are at risk of arrest and detention, which is leading to significant limitations on freedom of movement, and curtailing access to livelihoods and basic services. As many as 70% of refugees from Syria lack a valid residency in Lebanon and up to 130,000 face similar problems in Jordan.

In addition, many refugees from Syria and civilians in areas beyond the control of the governments in Iraq and Syria struggle to obtain birth certificates. Only 30% of Syrian children born in Lebanon had birth certificates in 2014. Parents often lack marriage certificates or legal residency, access to registration services, knowledge of procedures or the means to pay associated fees. Without birth registration, children may face difficulty accessing protection and basic services including education, and risk becoming stateless.

### Opportunities for adolescent and youth engagement

Despite their aspirations, Syrian refugee youth have very limited opportunities to contribute to their communities meaningfully in social, civic and economic terms. Youth lack access to sufficient higher and vocational education opportunities, programmes to prepare them for the school-to-work transition, targeted psychosocial support, or avenues to have a greater voice in decision-making. This leads to disillusionment, the desire to migrate, and can result in negative activities.
Together we can push to create the path for uprooted children to learn and lead productive lives

Nour

Nour is 15. Her father was killed in Syria, and after multiple displacements she has crossed the border with her mother and two sisters.

Nour attends after-school classes to help her catch up and does well.

Nour starts to thrive at school

Nour’s mother is legally able to run a home-based business and receives financial support for its expansion.

Nour does very well in high school. She receives a scholarship to study architecture at a local university and becomes a volunteer mentor and tutor for Syrian adolescent girls in her community.

Radwan

Radwan is 15. He has missed two years of education in Syria before he enrolled in school in the country to where the family fled.

Radwan participates in an accelerated learning programme that allows him to complete the missed years of schooling in nine months. He then enrols back into formal education.

Nour’s mother makes the difficult decision to enter Nour into a marriage to a neighbour from the host community. This will ease the financial burden on the family and she feels Nour will be protected from potential harassment.

Nour is 15. Her father was killed in Syria, and after multiple displacements she has crossed the border with her mother and two sisters.

Nour is abused in her marriage. She is ashamed to turn to anyone for support. She feels trapped and nervous about her future.

Radwan continues to do well in school, graduates and enters vocational training. He wants to become an electrician so he can earn a living and return home when the war ends to rebuild Syria.

Radwan’s family income is reduced as his father – who doesn’t have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Radwan’s family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Nour’s mother receives no financial assistance and her informal home-based business cannot sustain the family. Nour is withdrawn from school.

Nour feels discouraged in the lower grade and receives no additional support at school. Nour’s mother does not see the value in keeping her at school and withdraws her.

Nour’s family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Nour’s mother’s debt increases as does the cost of living. Her informal home-based business is struggling.

Nour is 15. Her father was killed in Syria, and after multiple displacements she has crossed the border with her mother and two sisters.

Nour starts working in the informal sector, re-selling merchandise, to help her mother pay for their rent.

Together we can push to create the path for uprooted children to learn and lead productive lives
Nour does not have her school certificate from Syria. She takes a placement test and is placed in a lower grade in the host country.

Nour attends after-school classes to help her catch up and does well.

Nour’s mother is legally able to run a home-based business and receives financial support for its expansion.

Nour does very well in high school. She receives a scholarship to study architecture at a local university and becomes a volunteer mentor and tutor for Syrian adolescent girls in her community.

Radwan drops out of school and goes to work on a construction site to help support the family.

Nour’s mother receives no financial assistance and her informal home-based business cannot sustain the family. Nour is withdrawn from school.

Nour feels discouraged in the lower grade and receives no additional support at school. Nour’s mother does not see the value in keeping her at school and withdraws her.

Nour begins to thrive at school and her mother makes the difficult decision to enter Nour into a marriage to a neighbour from the host community. This will ease the financial burden on the family and she feels Nour will be protected from potential harassment.

Nour starts working in the informal sector, re-selling merchandise, to help her mother pay for their rent.

Nour’s mother’s debt increases as does the cost of living. Her informal home-based business is struggling.

Nour feels discouraged in the lower grade and receives no additional support at school. Nour’s mother does not see the value in keeping her at school and withdraws her.

Nour is abused in her marriage. She is ashamed to turn to anyone for support. She feels trapped and nervous about her future.

Radwan’s family income is reduced as his father – who doesn’t have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Radwan attends the local school but struggles with the language of instruction and is bullied because he seems different from the others.

Radwan’s parents no longer see the value in keeping him in school and no additional assistance is available to help him improve his language skills or cope with the bullying.

Radwan participates in an accelerated learning programme that allows him to complete the missed years of schooling in nine months. He then enrolls back into formal education.

Radwan enrolls in a supplementary non-formal education programme with language classes. At school a counsellor helps him cope with the bullying, and all the students are taught skills to better manage the stresses in their lives, which lowers the incidence of bullying.

Radwan’s family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Radwan’s family income is reduced as his father – who doesn’t have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Together we can push to create the path for uprooted children to learn and lead productive lives.
Nour does not have her school certificate from Syria. She takes a placement test and is placed in a lower grade in the host country. Nour attends after-school classes to help her catch up and does well.

Nour’s mother is legally able to run a home-based business and receives financial support for its expansion. Nour does very well in high school. She receives a scholarship to study architecture at a local university and becomes a volunteer mentor and tutor for Syrian adolescent girls in her community.

Radwan drops out of school and goes to work on a construction site to help support the family. Nour starts to thrive at school and Radwan starts to thrive at school.

Radwan's family is given the legal right to reside and work. His father finds a job and Radwan stays in school.

Radwan participates in an accelerated learning programme that allows him to complete the missed years of schooling in nine months. He then enrolls back into formal education.

Radwan’s family income is reduced as his father – who doesn’t have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities. Radwan continues to do well in school, graduates and enters vocational training. He wants to become an electrician so he can earn a living and return home when the war ends to rebuild Syria.

Radwan’s family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Given the right opportunities, the green path will lead to learning and opportunities to lead empowered lives. The darker the dot the greyer the prospect for the refugee child, family and the generation to follow.

Together we can push to create the path for uprooted children to learn and lead productive lives.
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Nour's mother is legally able to run a home-based business and receives financial support for its expansion. Nour does very well in high school. She receives a scholarship to study architecture at a local university and becomes a volunteer mentor and tutor for Syrian adolescent girls in her community.

Radwan drops out of school and goes to work on a construction site to help support the family. Radwan's family income is reduced as his father – who doesn't have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Radwan's family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Radwan's family income is reduced as his father – who doesn't have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Nour's mother receives no financial assistance and her informal home-based business cannot sustain the family. Nour is withdrawn from school. Nour starts to thrive at school, Radwan starts to thrive at school.

Radwan participates in an accelerated learning programme that allows him to complete the missed years of schooling in nine months. He then enrols back into formal education.

Radwan's parents no longer see the value in keeping him in school and no additional assistance is available to help him improve his language skills or cope with the bullying. Radwan's family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Radwan attends the local school but struggles with the language of instruction and is bullied because he seems different from the others. Radwan's family no longer has legal residency in their host country. They restrict their movement to avoid encountering local authorities as they risk being detained.

Radwan's family income is reduced as his father – who doesn't have work authorization - stops his activities in the informal sector out of fear that he will be caught and punished by authorities.

Nour's mother receives no financial assistance and her informal home-based business cannot sustain the family. Nour is withdrawn from school.

Nour feels discouraged in the lower grade and receives no additional support at school. Nour's mother does not see the value in keeping her at school and withdraws her.
The conflicts in Syria and Iraq must come to an end. All those with influence must redouble their efforts to achieve a political solution to these conflicts so that refugees and internally displaced people can voluntarily return in safety and dignity. In the meantime, all violations of children’s rights must cease as an urgent priority, in particular all attacks on education, health and water facilities.

For the refugees, policy makers, donors and humanitarians can help prevent a ‘Lost Generation’ and expand the positive choices available to children like Nour and Radwan. To do this they need to deliver on the commitments made at the London Conference in February 2016, and specifically to:

i. **Ensure policy and funding commitments work first and foremost for children.** Children constitute over half of the 13.5 million people in need in Syria, 10 million in Iraq, and 4.8 million Syrian refugees in the region. Any planning framework needs to prioritise protection of children, family unity, children’s right to civil documentation, education for all and access for adults to safe income generating opportunities. Youth must also have access to opportunities to contribute meaningfully and productively in their communities and the economy.

ii. **Focus on effective implementation with clear accountability mechanisms.** Unless that is in place, we risk raising the hopes of families and children, but fail to deliver. Regular review of progress and adjustment will be required to reach that anticipated and positive change, and to avoid a delayed or diluted impact because of hurdles including logistical and bureaucratic issues. Specificity in the pledge, periodic tracking by an agreed body or peer, and transparent public reporting on progress within an agreed schedule, can promote accountability.

iii. **Access to valid legal status and residency to guarantee refugee protection.** Through setting up clear, accessible, and affordable procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration. It is the foundation for guaranteeing access to basic services and essential to the protection and wellbeing of refugees.

iv. **Remove barriers that prevent refugees from Syria earning an income to meet their basic needs.** This will help promote significant shifts to enable refugees to contribute to the society and the economy. This can include initiatives to increase livelihood opportunities for both refugees and host communities; removing the threat of punitive measures which many refugees working in the informal sector face; and increase protection from exploitation.

v. **Work hard to provide all children and youth with access to quality education.** The commitment to provide children and youth with safe, inclusive and quality formal and non-formal education goes hand in hand with the commitment to strengthen the capacities of national education systems, as well as community-based work inside Syria and Iraq. It is essential to improve the quality of education through creating conducive learning environments; promoting life skills education; and training teachers on effective teaching methodologies and classroom management. Intensify work with neighbouring countries hosting refugees for increased work with civil society, remove barriers in accreditation and certification and allowing refugee teachers to work.

vi. **Back commitments with finances.** Policy commitments by host countries have proven to be a powerful call for collaborative investment in medium term measures, which can improve the lives of refugee children, alongside humanitarian efforts. Commitments made in compacts and other mechanisms need to be funded up front through multi-year investments to enable refugee hosting countries to successfully implement the widespread policy and practice changes, and national systems strengthening they have committed to.