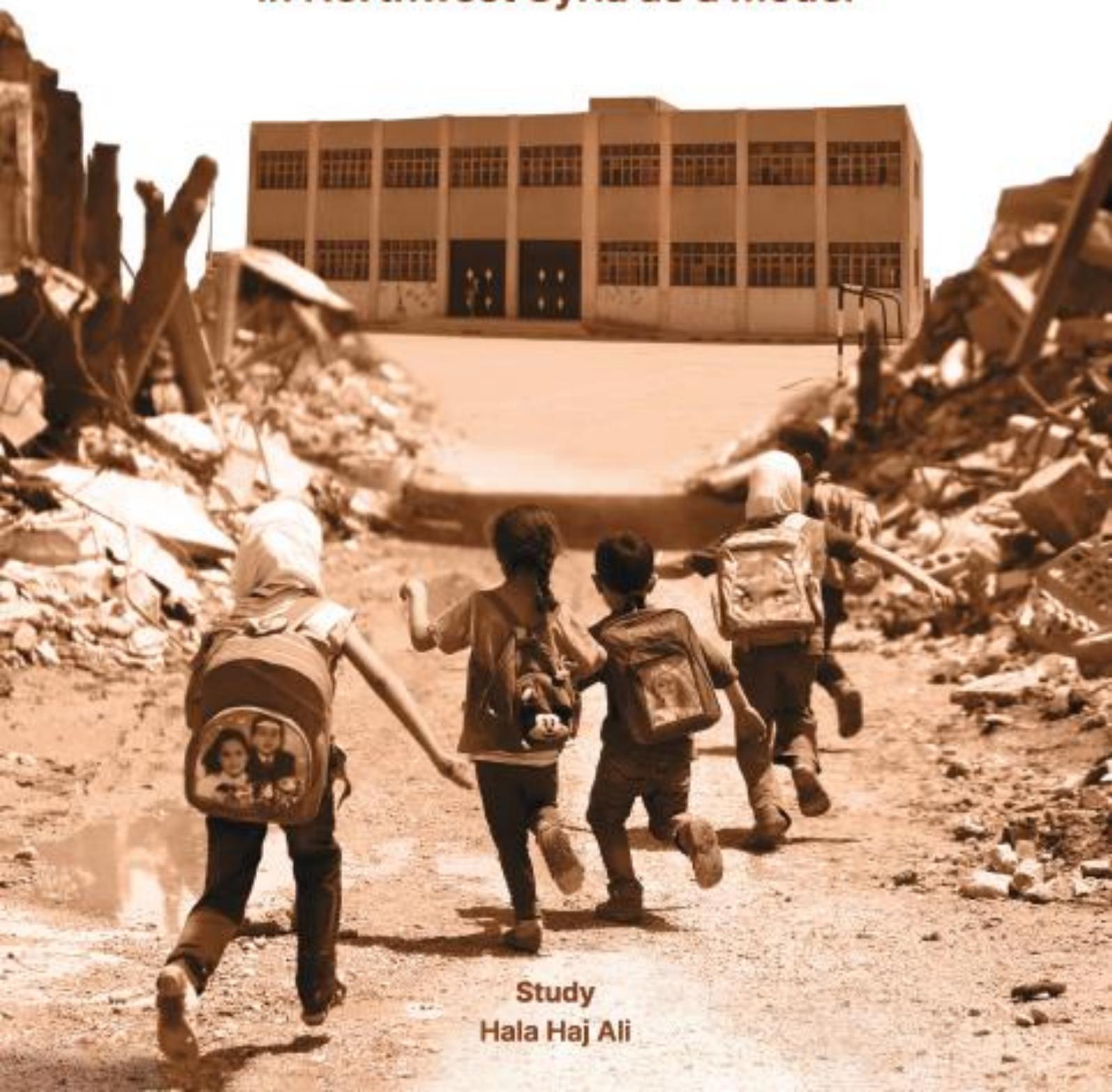


Post-War Generation Needs..

Educational Gaps in Northwest Syria as a Model



Study
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Omran for Strategic Studies

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Executive Summary

- Education, along with its continuity, serves as a cornerstone of "early recovery". It plays a decisive role in maintaining the intellectual and cognitive development of the post-war generation. The significance of education is underscored by its unique role in fostering a high level of psychological, social, and economic stability for both the individual and the wider community.
- Understanding the obstacles and gaps that impede the progress of the educational process in northwestern Syria is essential. It is crucial to determine the depth, causes, and factors contributing to these challenges. Gaining this understanding will provide a concrete foundation for future policies. For effective resolution, we must grasp both the visible and hidden dynamics of the educational process.
- This understanding becomes increasingly vital, especially in the face of declining education quality and the deterioration of its quantitative and qualitative adequacy. This decline is evidenced by increasing dropout rates, school truancy, and student failures. For instance, 18% of school-age children are not enrolled in any form of education, and more than three-quarters of students between the ages of 12 and 17 have left school.
- The diversity of players in the education sector and their differing policies resulted in a lack of clear governance. Instead of a single central authority, numerous centers of differing competencies, executive plans, roles, and authorities emerged. This scenario has led to the existence of a variety of educational certificates, in addition to the absence of a structured decision-making mechanism within the education system; and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities which amplifies ambiguity within the educational process. This lack of transparency has consequently eroded the trust of students, parents, teachers, and administrators.
- The funding provided to support higher levels of education is on the decline, while the aid given to elementary educational stages remains insufficient (The Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria has only received 25% of its required funding). Furthermore, the lack of a single coordinating body to regulate the work among different organizations led to a duplication of efforts, resulting in additional wasted resources and efforts. Often, there's a noticeable absence of coordination among these entities.
- The nature of the relationship between the financial backers and the organizations often resulted in a lack of attention to the involvement of local entities in evaluation and implementation processes. A noteworthy observation in this context is the extensive distribution of protection and psychological support programs. Those far outnumber the programs and activities specifically aimed at supporting education.
- Both areas are suffering from a shortage of qualified educators and a lack of scientific expertise among teachers. Moreover, there is a noticeable decline in the overall number of teachers living in the camps. This shortage is primarily attributed to the permanent relocation of teachers due to displacement; or their extended absence from the majority of school hours as a result of living conditions. Adding to the complexity, the prevailing

security chaos instills fear among teachers towards military entities and influential figures. Additionally, there is a distinct shortage of female teachers in the studied area, further exacerbating the issue.

- The area of study is suffering from low academic performance among students, particularly in fundamental subjects. This situation necessitates the implementation of enrichment programs within the curriculum to bolster student understanding, broaden their perspectives, and facilitate their integration with the modern world. This can be achieved through the incorporation of technology in the education process.
- Furthermore, an emphasis on promoting shared living values in the curriculum is crucial. Despite peace among individuals being largely contingent on political and societal agreements, the lack of curriculum content, or activities addressing communal living and societal interaction could potentially undermine the principles of citizenship. This could be especially detrimental during periods of societal conflict and in their aftermath.
- Indicators associated with infrastructure gaps in schools include factors such as the lack of presence and insufficiency of educational facilities, their geographic distribution, capacity, safety within the school environment, availability of playgrounds and physical activity areas, as well as the availability of necessary healthcare services. When it comes to teachers, indicators include their numerical adequacy, gender balance, financial compensation, educational qualifications, expertise, and the level of security they experience. Curriculum and educational resource-related indicators cover aspects such as curriculum modifications and structural aspects; indicators of educational poverty; investment in education; religious influences on the curriculum; as well as the availability of textbooks and supplementary educational resources. Student-related indicators include the importance of access to education, school dropout rates, financial capabilities of students, privatization of education, the impact of war, psychological pressures, and social factors affecting students.
- The study proposes several recommendations the educational gaps. These include the importance of launching advocacy campaigns to accurately assess needs and advocating for humanitarian aid to be allowed through crossborder mechanisms rather than being restricted to crossline deliveries. It also emphasizes the need to strengthen local involvement in overseeing the educational process and enhance coordination between different stakeholders. The study suggests going beyond relying solely on organizational estimates by establishing an official mechanism for needs assessment. Additionally, it recommends bolstering Syrian funding channels for education and working towards a self-sustaining Syrian financing cycle. Lastly, it highlights the necessity of supporting the creation of a dedicated mechanism to assess school needs, ensure proper technical specifications, and promote equitable distribution.

Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in post-war reconstruction in countries torn apart by conflicts. Syria, in particular, has been deeply affected by the complexities and various dimensions of a conflict, influenced by both internal and external factors. This has led to a complicated network of vested interests, hampering the political process. The war has resulted in multiple societal collapses that have affected the social fabric, as well as depleting both human resources and major social actors essential for rebuilding state institutions, social and civic life, and the political landscape. The education sector has suffered the most severe devastation, with educational facilities being directly targeted and stripped of their human capital through military operations conducted by the regime forces and their allies in the region. As a result, students have lost access to knowledge and learning resources, exacerbating the problems of educational disengagement and dropout rates. Consequently, the existing gaps that hinder the progress of the educational process present a significant research challenge. These gaps are shaped by the consequences and aftermath of the conflict on students, as well as the growing weaknesses in the policies of key actors involved in the educational process. These persistent gaps continue to impede the attainment of a quality education that addresses the evolving challenges and realities of life. Therefore, the central research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the hidden damages of educational gaps within society that drive it towards further violence and unrest?
2. Is the education sector currently in a recovery phase and transitioning out of the emergency response?
3. What challenges do the local community face in overcoming the education crisis?

Understanding these gaps, their depths, causes, and the factors contributing to their widening is of utmost importance; as they form an objective basis for future policies. A proper remedy requires a true reflection on the apparent and underlying aspects of the educational process. This is particularly crucial given the noticeable decline in the quality and adequacy of education, as indicated by high dropout and failure rates. This is corroborated by international reports issued by the United Nations, which provide an overview of the needs in Syria, including the education sector. These reports reveal that approximately 18% of school-aged children in Syria are not enrolled in any form of education; and more than three-quarters of students between the ages of 12 and 17 have dropped out of school.

| In Need of Education | Female | Male | Children 3-17 |
|----------------------|--------|------|---------------|
| 6.6 million people | 47% | 53% | %97 |

Table No. (1): Shows the number of individuals in need of educational support who are of school age⁽¹⁾

Several studies and reports, from both Arabic and international sources, investigated the educational situation in northwest Syria. These reports vary in their focus, with some concentrating on quantifying the needs of the education sector, like the Schools in Syria Report

⁽¹⁾Humanitarian Task Force Report, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2022, an Overview of Humanitarian Needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations, pp. (67-69), the report was reviewed on 19-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7b9j>.

No. (7) ⁽²⁾. In contrast, other studies honed in on measuring the rate of student dropouts in areas under the control of the Syrian opposition, while also keeping track of the total number of students leaving school prematurely.

| Area | Number of Schools Covered | Number of Students Attending | Drop Out Students |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Northern Aleppo Countryside | 540 | 163222 | 223529 |
| Idlib | 916 | 289329 | 423679 |

Table No. (2): Shows the number of dropouts out of the total number of regular students in the areas studied ⁽³⁾

On the other hand, certain studies prioritized a qualitative approach to managing the educational process. For instance, a subset of these studies focused solely on the governance aspect of education in the "Olive Branch" and "Euphrates Shield" regions. ⁽⁴⁾ A different segment documented the state of education in Syria during emergencies, pinpointing the challenges of delivering effective education within the framework of the humanitarian response. ⁽⁵⁾

This particular study aims to identify the gaps within the educational process linked to the actors involved, governance mechanisms, and financial requirements. Furthermore, it explores the shortcomings related to physical infrastructure, such as the distribution of schools, their capacity, the level of safety within the school environment, playgrounds, living services, and energy resources. It also considers the human resources, namely the teaching staff and students.

This study goes further by examining the gaps linked to the current curricula, textbooks, and teaching aids. The comprehension of these gaps will not only aid in assessing public education policies but also encourage those involved in the educational process to seek potential solutions. The study is intended to offer recommendations that could serve as a general framework for enhancing the educational process and propelling it towards improvement.

The study outlines certain procedural concepts pertaining to education in northwest Syria, with a caveat that these may not be applicable to northeast Syria. Prior to 2011⁽⁶⁾, education in northwest Syria was categorized into standard educational stages, similar to what was observed in this study. "Religious education" is a term denoting an informal type of education received at unlicensed religious institutions, which are usually established by ordinary individuals.

The study divides education based on the payment structure into three categories: free, paid, and self-directed. Free or quasi-free education refers to public schools which are financially

⁽²⁾ Assistance Coordination Unit, Thematic Report 2021-2022, report reviewed on 19-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/Ws4u6>

⁽³⁾ Bashir Nasr, Coverage of the Education Sector and Student Dropout Rates in Syrian Opposition Areas, Jusoer Center for Studies, 2022, the report was reviewed on 19-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/pxHW5>.

⁽⁴⁾ (Nemr Hakawati, Education in the Northern Syrian Regions (Afrin, Jarabulus, A'az, Al-Bab), Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2020, report reviewed on 19-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/yTFK8>

⁽⁵⁾ Kinana Qaddour & Salman Husain, Syria's Education Crisis: A Sustainable Approach After 11 Years Of Conflict-The Middle East Institute, 2022 تمت مراجعة التقرير بتاريخ 19-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/q5lnb>

⁽⁶⁾ The first stage is the basic education stage, and it includes the age groups from (6-15 years old), and it consists of: the first cycle, which includes students from the first to the fourth primary grade, and the second cycle includes students from the fifth to the ninth grade. As for the secondary education stage, it includes students from ages (16 to 18) years old, and it includes the tenth to the twelfth grade and is called "baccalaureate." Here, there are specialized divisions, as the secondary stage is divided according to study specializations into: (Scientific Secondary: where students study scientific subjects such as mathematics, physics, and sciences), (Literary Secondary: where students study literary subjects such as Arabic literature and social studies), (Sharia Secondary: follows the same curriculum as the literary secondary with the addition of several religious and Sharia books, and it is called universal and religious sciences), (Vocational Secondary: this stage is currently suspended, but it means studying through subjects related to professions such as agriculture, commerce, arts, and industry.)

supported by the local authority. Here, no tuition fees are charged and textbooks are provided free of cost. However, students are responsible for paying nominal registration fees, as well as costs for stationery, school uniforms, and food. Additionally, religious institutions often provide completely free or symbolically priced education.

Fee-based education comprises: 1) Private schools, owned by individuals or entities, considered a type of investment, and catering to the same educational stages as public schools with a similar curriculum. These schools, however, charge an annual fee, roughly around 400 USD in northwest Syria, with the fee increasing as students advance through grades. 2) Private tutorial institutes, often established by public school teachers, offering supplementary lessons, predominantly focusing on curricula for the ninth grade and 12th grade. 3) Private tutoring, where a teacher visits a student's home, and the tutoring fee per hour is negotiated directly with the teacher, varying based on the subject and the educational level of the student.

Self-directed remote learning refers to any learning a student undertakes independently outside a formal school setting. Students purchase books and summaries and self-study, often aided by online resources to help explain lessons. This approach to education is not widespread in northern Syria. It gained some traction during the COVID-19 pandemic but saw a decline after the health-related lockdown was lifted.

The study also classifies education based on the entity that is implementing it. "Formal education" is the term adopted for education implemented by the responsible governmental entity (Ministry – Education Offices) in the area. This includes support for teacher salaries in the area governed by the "Salvation Government" and support from Turkish entities in the opposition areas.

On the other hand, "informal education" refers to the education implemented by organizations in support of the educational process. No certification is awarded by these organizations for this type of education. It is conducted after school hours or in separate classes during the summer, with the objective of strengthening reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. It does not adhere to the formal curriculum. Instead, it is compensatory education provided by organizations to make up for any educational deficiencies experienced by students. It usually adopts a curriculum called 'Curriculum B', which is often utilized by UNICEF.

This study's research methodology embraced a qualitative, descriptive/exploratory approach. This approach was deemed necessary given the depth of understanding required when examining the local community and its constituents, as well as the subsequent impact of educational challenges on its members. Furthermore, it provided a lens to observe the behaviors and interactions of individuals within the educational system.

The research focused on observing and describing the state of education, employing a multi-faceted analytical approach to define it. It then traced educational issues to understand their context and to illuminate the role of key participants within the educational system. The study remained mindful of the unique characteristics of different study areas and the variances between urban, rural, and camp environments.

The research tools used include focus group discussions and comprehensive individual interviews with government officials, as well as representatives from civil society organizations. The research team attended relevant conferences and workshops, and gathered extensive data, including figures and statistics from both international and domestic sources. These findings were then incorporated into the study during the stages of gap analysis and impact measurement.

The population sample used in the study is composed of Syrian individuals residing within various geographic areas, and differs based on the extent of military control and influence. This variation directly impacts the civil administration managing everyday life within these communities. The areas were divided as follows:

1. The first area: This area encompasses geographical territories under the supervision of the Turkish state (areas of Turkish influence). These territories include cities, rural areas, and villages within Syria. Here, you find the presence of the national army. The area is further divided into the Euphrates Shield area, the Olive Branch operation area, and the Peace Spring operation area, which extend from the east of Aleppo to Afrin, Raqqa, and Tel Abyad.
2. The second area: This area consists of geographical territories under the supervision of the "Salvation Government." Militarily, these areas are under the influence of "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham." This influence carries an extremist religious nature. This area includes cities like Idlib and its surrounding countryside, the western countryside of Aleppo, portions of Latakia, and parts of Hama.

The sampling strategy was designed to reflect the significant population presence in each area to ensure the greatest diversity of information during focus group discussions. Key individuals in certain areas were selected for individual interviews based on accessibility. This approach led to the selection of cities and towns in the first area, such as Al-Bab, Azaz, Jinderis, Akhtarín, and Jarabulus. As for the second area, the cities and towns of Idlib, Kafr Takharim, Darat Izza, and Sarmada were chosen. The study also leveraged various meetings and educational conferences that the Omran Center attended or facilitated.

First Focus Area: Governance Gaps Associated with Educational Process

Several entities play a role in the administration of education, starting from strategic planning to law formulation and enforcement, all the way to supervision and implementation. The diversity of these entities influences the form, content, and sustainability of the educational process. The management of education by each entity affects the overall cohesion and consistency of the different bodies working together.

Given that financing and material backing are fundamental to the educational process, education is considered a substantial economic investment. It requires significant funds and a lengthy wait to reap its economic and developmental returns. This situation has led to differing approaches among the bodies responsible for education. They waver between wanting to

provide partial support to mend certain gaps and hesitating or withdrawing from supporting this sector. As a result, the autonomy of decision-making depends on who holds or distributes the funding resources.

At the local level, the Syrian Interim Government, through the Ministry of Education, served as a civil alternative to state institutions in facilitating the learning process. However, military changes on the ground and subsequent shifts in spheres of influence and alliances reduced its role and limited its control over this process. With the Turkish military's expansion and oversight in Syrian regions, the role of local councils grew. These councils facilitated services, including education, but their role remained naturally linked to Turkish supervision.

In Idlib, its surrounding areas, and the western countryside of Aleppo, following the military control by the "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" and the subsequent establishment of a civil government known as the "Salvation Government"; the Ministry of Education took over the education portfolio, a file in which the local councils previously played a significant role. . It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education, under the Syrian Interim Government, still plays some roles in this area, especially those that the "Salvation Government" is unable to perform.

Firstly: Official Actors in the Education Sector

Below is a detailed explanation defining the official actors, their areas of intervention, their roles and activities, and the governance gaps associated with each actor, depending on the region they operate in, whether it is the first or second area: ⁽⁷⁾

Educational Committees in Local Councils

These are committees attached to the local council in towns and cities. Formally, they follow the Interim Government and practically, the nearby Turkish provinces on the border. The educational process in local councils is represented by the following positions: the Scientific Committee consists of the committee chairman who is a council member, 2-3 council members, the Director of Education, the Assistant Director of Education, the Director of Youth and Sports, and the coordinator. This committee is like a "ministry" in terms of performing administrative tasks. There are several offices, depending on the number of local councils. These offices exist as follows: 1) Afrin - Rajo – Jindires – Sharan – Bulbul – Kafr Janna - Sheikh Hadid, fall under the Education Office in Antakya, 2) Al-Bab - Qabasin - Bza'a – Jarablus – Al-Ghandoura, who follow the Education Office in Gaziantep, 3) Azaz – Souran – Mare' -Akhtarín – Al-Rai -The camps, which fall under the Education Office in Kilis, 4) Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ain which fall under the Education Office in Urfa. **In terms of role and effectiveness; the following can be stated:**

Each office has its own educational policy. Each local council issues its own high school certificate, despite the exam questions being unified from Turkey and set by Syrian committees in Turkish education directorates. However, the suggestions raised by local councils, which understand the students’ situations more than committees in Turkey, are not considered.

⁽⁷⁾ This description was derived as a result of collating the information extracted from focus groups, interviews, conferences, and workshops attended by the center, all of which are detailed in the appendices.

Moreover, there are errors in the questions. They are automated and sometimes, questions outside the curriculum appear.

- The committees oversee the renovation and equipping of schools carried out by organizations. They implement laws that suit their region. Generally, the educational system varies even among offices belonging to the same Turkish state. Each council has autonomy in the administrative area it reports to, and there's no administrative connection between it and other councils.

The scientific committee independently makes several decisions related to administrative matters. These concern internal rules regulating the relationship between teachers, school administration, and students, such as transferring teachers, vacations, sanctions, etc. High-level administrative decisions like opening a school or closing one are made through councils after coordinating with the Turkish side. The committee proposes educational needs to the Turkish side, and coordination generally occurs with coordinators from the Turkish ministry through offices within the council appointed by the ministry.

As a result of the intersection between reality and local perspectives, along with the requirements in the education sector, we can evaluate the governance gaps in the management of the educational process by local councils. A key issue is the lack of a unified educational system; for instance, the education office in Jarablus operates differently from the offices in Al-Bab and Azaz. Moreover, there's an absence of a comprehensive internal system that regulates the educational process, organizes its operations, defines the responsibilities, rights and obligations of its members, and clarifies their authority. The matrix of responsibilities within the educational process is somewhat ambiguous among different educational offices, further complicated by the absence of a quality control mechanism and a system to monitor learning outputs. Other issues include:

1. Decentralized decision-making: There's a high degree of decentralization in educational decision-making within the directorates, accompanied by a lack of teacher involvement in these decisions.
2. Lack of a significant role for teacher unions: Teacher unions lack authority and resources, restricting their role to a minor part of administering teachers' health insurance mechanisms.
3. Inadequate school management: There's a low efficiency index linked to "school management," along with a weak activation of the role of parents' councils.
4. Limited autonomy: Local authorities are obliged to comply with the decisions issued by the Turkish ministry, which sometimes conflict with the specificities of the Syrian situation. For example, determining the age of a student without considering those who have been out of school for an extended period.
5. Unregulated licensing of private schools: Despite there being conditions for the licensing of private schools approved by Turkish states, licenses are sometimes given without sufficient scrutiny. Furthermore, there's a lack of regulation in determining the acceptable limit of tuition fees for these schools.

6. Cancellation of the ninth-grade certificate: The elimination of the ninth-grade certificate led to a decline in academic achievement in the stages following the preparatory stage. This is contrary to the practice of the Interim Government, which doesn't accept progress to secondary school without the ninth-grade certificate. As a result, there's a higher success rate at the Interim Government's Ministry of Education and higher failure rates at local councils.
7. Issues with certificate recognition: Students are often drawn to the certificates from the Interim Government due to problems recognizing the certificates of local councils. This is further complicated by the laxness of examination systems and the issuance of some forged certificates by local councils.

The Turkish Ministry of Education:

The Turkish Ministry of Education oversees all local councils, each of which follows one of the education directorates on the Turkish side. Depending on geographical proximity, the operation of these councils is assigned to the nearest Turkish province. Work procedures vary according to the provincial law and the decisions of the governor. Moreover, a Turkish coordinator liaises with the scientific committee of the local council and the education directorate in the Turkish province to which the local council is affiliated.

The Ministry, through its directorates, fully supervises the educational process in the cities and towns of the first area. It appoints members to the education committees and offices within the local councils, as well as designates a coordinator between the Turkish and Syrian sides. Furthermore, the Ministry oversees the export of the examination system in terms of questions and the exam format. It supervises any changes in the curriculum by adding or removing subjects. It also facilitates the process of equivalency for high school certificates by endorsing them on the Turkish side, making them eligible for registration in Turkish universities or in the universities established by the Turkish side domestically.

The governance gaps associated with the Turkish Ministry of Education's management of the educational process could be titled "weak communication and coordination channels." The coordinator, who is tasked with communicating decisions between the councils and Turkish education, is the only link between the two parties. Additionally, decision-making is tied to the Turkish educational environment (such as the exam system, curriculum modifications) without taking into account the Syrian situation and its transformations. The imposition of a Turkish educational system, based on automation, percentages, and taking tests in more than one subject per day, neglects to account for the needs identified by Syrian organizations operating in the North.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Interim Syrian Government

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Interim Syrian Government is one of the ministries of the Interim Syrian Government. It has several specialized departments and education directorates spread across the provinces of Aleppo and Idlib as of the time this study was conducted. It was established in 2014 and oversees the educational process after its secondary school certificate gained recognition from some countries.

In the first area, the Interim Government continued to oversee the educational process, with the emergence of conflicts with the administrative policies of the local councils, This persisted until 2018. After that, its role diminished as the local councils became completely independent of the Interim Government and its various sectors. The Ministry of Education offices are located in a few cities in the northern countryside of Aleppo, such as Azaz, and are absent and prohibited from intervening in cities east of Azaz (Al-Bab, Al-Rai, Jarablus, etc.) by the local councils. The public relations office of the Interim Government also coordinates with organizations that want to implement a project in the area.

In the second area, its activity began to decline from 2017 onwards. The "Salvation Government" started taking over civil affairs, including education, through the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, limiting the Interim Government's role. It became merely a "public administration," especially concerning communication with supporting and international entities. The education directors in the four provinces are selected by both governments; This process is often marred by poor coordination. The issue of selecting education directors is always problematic between the two ministries; and is usually resolved under public pressure after each ministry nominates individuals.

The ministry has various tasks; in the first area, it is responsible for certifying high school diplomas through its student services office for those who wish to enroll in the Free University of Aleppo, which is affiliated with the Interim Government, or some private universities. The certificates issued by the Ministry of Education in the Interim Government are recognized in Europe and some Turkish universities; but with the condition of the certificate being modified by the Turkish side. It also authenticates data for supporting entities, which is different from the rest of the bodies.

In the second area, donor entities provide support to the education sector through it, after signing memoranda of understanding with it. This includes providing salaries for teachers, textbooks for students, and logistical supplies for the completion of the educational process, from operating costs for schools to renovation operations. It also issues the curriculum and agrees to the existence of other curricula. It creates questions through its educational offices, and its certificates are recognized for university registration in private universities affiliated with the Salvation Government or in the universities of the ministry affiliated with the Interim Government, in addition to printing a portion of the books.

In terms of assessing governance gaps, in the first area, its existence is considered more formalistic, due to the lack of crystallization of the political authority of the Interim Government's role versus the roles of local councils. The certificates it issues suffer from recognition problems by the Turkish side, and they require equivalency. Also, the questions issued by the ministry differ entirely from the questions of the local councils.

Its strictness in standards is noted, which has discouraged some organizations from working through the Ministry of Education in the Interim Government, as its follow-up and evaluation of projects are higher than the local councils.

In the second area, the Salvation Government tries to monopolize the certification file by stamping some documents with the ministry's stamp, which diminishes the value of the

academic certificate. The Salvation Government's attempts to cancel the role of the Interim Government are evident through the appointment of education office directors by it, its constant striving to cancel appointments coming from the Interim Government, and its violation of the Interim Government's decisions regarding issuing certificates (requirements and deletions from the curriculum).

Ministry of Education in the "Salvation Government" in Idlib

After the establishment of the "Salvation Government" in 2017, the local councils created by the interim government were dissolved. The Ministry of Education in the "Salvation Government" took over all education-related tasks in the city of Idlib, its suburbs, Latakia, and western Aleppo countryside. The general structure of the ministry is composed of central directorates (Examinations, Statistics, Planning, Guidance, and Curricula), then subsidiary departments within the directorates of education, and branches carrying the specialties of the ministerial offices themselves. Attached to each education directorate are several educational complexes that oversee schools within the geographical areas. For example, the Curricula office at the ministry communicates with the Curricula department in the directorate to give them executive instructions, then requests reports on work implementation and monitoring.

Support for the Ministry of Education comes through the Ministry of Development, via the Directorate of Organizations and Associations. The ministry performs several roles, such as: assessing the credibility of certificates on which teachers are hired, detecting forgery, nominating names of teachers who have previously succeeded in educational competitions, raising them to organizations interested in implementing projects on the ground, in addition to equipping the infrastructure for building schools, such as water supply, securing road opening, and supervising private schools in terms of adherence to curricula, and administrative matters like appointing teachers who graduated from the educational competitions held by the ministry.

The educational process in the second area relies on full support from organizations, as there is no special budget from the ministry to support salaries or any study requirements such as books and logistics. Several facilities are provided, with the aim of alleviating cost burdens.

In terms of estimating the governance gaps in the administration of the Ministry of Education affiliated with the "Salvation Government", the following can be stated:

1. The internal system suffers from rigidity and bureaucracy. It is not clear to teachers and not officially announced, which makes decisions phased and depends on the executive regulations issued by the ministry, which are timely according to the reality data and who issues these regulations.
2. Teachers are not involved in the decisions of the educational process, and there are no explicit and binding decisions for parents to send their children to education after the abolition of compulsory education law.
3. Its supervisory role is limited to programs "which it thinks are destroying the values of society", as it monitors protection programs and women empowerment projects more than monitoring the implementation of educational activities inside organizations.

4. The directorates have become more effective in imposing their laws and regulations on organizations, and organizations suffer from the ministry's interventions in some educational projects.
5. Most volunteers work in teaching stages above fourth grade education. There is a current staffing reliance on non-specialized education staff who hold university degrees that do not match the subjects they teach.
6. There are no quality control mechanisms or monitoring of learning outcomes. The ineffectiveness of the teacher unions is noted due to the general restriction on the spaces of civil work, as its role is limited to narrow areas of action, such as signing some memorandums of understanding with health unions, pharmacists, and universities as support for teachers.
7. The tendency towards privatization in the face of the severe need for education, and the lack of financial ability for a significant social segment to bear the burdens of the school fee (which has not been determined).
8. The short-sighted treatment of some problems without looking at the long-term impact, for example, increasing the number of volunteers to cover all hours of the school curriculum.
9. The complaints mechanism is ineffective and suffers from a lack of transparency.

Summary

Given the multitude of reference points and differing policies, the educational process is marked by a notable lack of governance indicators. The void left by the absence of a central authority has been filled by various centers, each differing in competence, execution plans, roles, and powers. This situation has led to the issuance of numerous certifications and the absence of a clear decision-making mechanism within the educational system. Additionally, unclear responsibilities in the educational process have only deepened the confusion surrounding educational operations.

This uncertainty has eroded confidence among students, parents, teachers, and administrators alike. As a result, the educational process has lost stability and consistency due to the lack of a centralized hub that would integrate decision-making with the capability for execution and oversight. This issue is particularly prominent concerning secondary examinations, which are hampered by the lack of a central national committee, akin to a single examination department. Such fragmentation has negatively impacted the "effectiveness of support" indicator, leading to hesitation among organizations to invest in educational projects. This reluctance stems from a general lack of trust brought about by the absence of a centralized governing body.

Secondly: Supporters and Funders of the Educational Process

This section explores the dynamics of international financing, mechanisms for distributing support, the primary funders of the educational process, as well as intermediary and executing entities in northwest Syria.

Dynamics of International Financing

The total need is calculated based on all Syrians inside Syria and in neighboring asylum countries (Turkey-Lebanon-Jordan) that rely on international entities' funding to support refugees within their territories. The need for education sector support and funding from external entities has been estimated at 351.43 million dollars. The response plan is based on the international entities' commitment to cover 48.27 million dollars, which is equivalent to 13.7% of the actual need.⁽⁸⁾ However, the actual covered amount is 28.24 million dollars, i.e., 8.0% of the real need.⁽⁹⁾

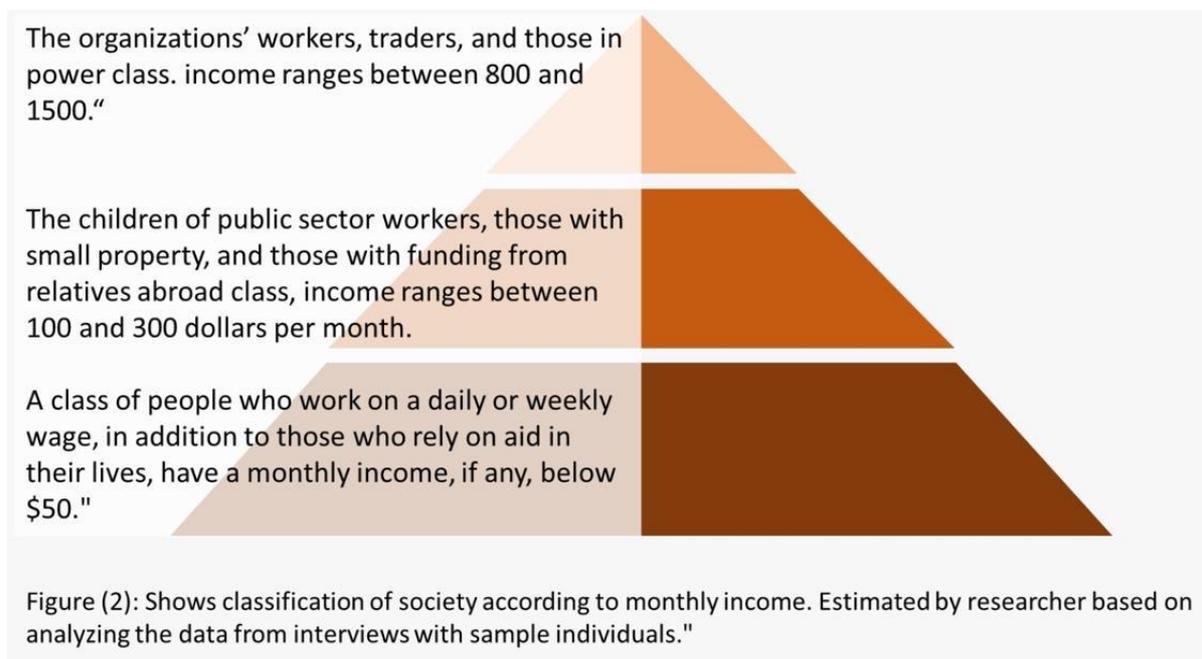
Generally, the financing process, its solicitation, and distribution go through several stages:

1. United Nations organizations request an assessment of "multi-sectoral needs" through information from organizations operating on the ground, or by forming teams to gather, sort, and arrange data. This is done in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
2. The Assessment Analysis Team examines the data and sorts it based on three determinants: time, nature of people (children, women, disabled, displaced, returnees), and sector type (health, education, protection, etc.). Then, a second data analysis process is conducted to indicate the severity of need among sectors and the severity of need within the same sector. After eliminating redundancies and additions, local partners executing in northwest Syria are informed about the extent of need, in which sector, and in which part of it.
3. Organizations raise plans and projects based on this information to coordinators at the United Nations Offices for Humanitarian Affairs. A plan is developed based on the raised projects, and this plan is tied to the time, area, and partners until the last stage is reached.
4. At the donor conference, the United Nations presents its plan and the amount of funds needed. Depending on the lack of resources, donor countries make promises to provide support (most often less than what they actually provide on the ground).
5. Each donor country forms committees to determine mechanisms for distributing support and their locations. This is linked to factors, some political and some economic, that concern the country itself and its ability to fulfill its promises.

⁽⁸⁾See more: Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 – 2023, <https://shortest.link/9lyD>

⁽⁹⁾ Same Reference

As for the channels for sending money to organizations working in Syria, each supporter has a mechanism. Some countries give money to the Humanitarian Support Fund or UNICEF or more than one international organization. There are supporters with offices on the ground who may give money to their offices directly. There are donors who distribute support based on small grants to local organizations directly. These dynamics and distribution methods can be estimated as follows:



Main funders

These are the countries and entities that rely on the emergency response plan to distribute funding and support the poorest and most affected countries by humanitarian crises. In Syria, they are the main source of funding, and their support is concentrated in the northeastern and western regions of Syria, and donations are allocated in the form of a single financial block distributed across targeted sectors. The most important funders are:

| |
|--|
| Main Funding Sources (International funders) |
| Most supportive funding sources |
| Education cannot wait (ECW) |
| Global Partnership for Education (GPE) |
| Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) |
| European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) |
| Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) |
| Insaf |
| HF (Humanitarian found of OCHA) |
| Least supportive funding sources |
| Kuwait |
| Malaysia |
| USA |
| European Union Countries (Sweden, Denmark, France) |
| Islamic Development Organizations (Muslim aid) |

Table No. (3) I illustrates the most and least supportive funding sources.

The process is riddled with several gaps, the most significant being the international community's shift away from an early recovery approach in education, which is tailored to the prolonged nature of conflict in both areas. This approach is hindered by a lack of long-term strategic planning and is marred by an unsustainable short-term funding methodology. As a result, there are considerable gaps in program placement and prioritization.

The goals have now become narrowly focused on eradicating educational illiteracy, leading to minimal financial support and a decline across all sectors. For example, the grant provided by the European Union, previously supplemented by Chemonics, now meets only 65% of the schools' requirements. This shortfall illustrates the systemic issues within the current approach and underscores the need for more robust planning and support.

A significant part of the gap crystallizes in the funder's estimates, as education is not a priority for international bodies, as they deal with the Syrian issue as a temporary relief matter, aiming to respond to urgent humanitarian crises. This is inconsistent with the duration of the Syrian crisis, not to mention its failure to adopt a sustainable plan for education development, in favor of focusing on supporting protection projects first and providing relief, without paying attention to development programs related to a sustainable political solution, which are more costly and require a longer time to evaluate their outcomes.

Several issues also emerge in this gap, such as the absence of a linked chain of information between donors and partners, the absence of clear mechanisms for sharing information and transparency in funding, the decentralization of financial flows from aid, and therefore the inability to monitor, follow-up, and evaluate.

Intermediary Entities (International Organizations)

These are the entities that receive funds from the main donors after coordinating to distribute them in various geographical areas, and meet the need identified by data from international organizations, such as OCHA. These international organizations monitor and evaluate the work of organizations on the ground in education support projects through periodic reports required from them. They focus on non-formal education, which does not comply with the curriculum and has its own unique program. They are also responsible for setting the general plan for supporting education and require local organizations to raise projects that are suitable for the general plan. The most important of these entities are Save the Children, Care, GIZ, Chemonics, Qatar Charity, and Muslim Aid.

These entities distribute funding in both study areas, but the support is less in the first area and increases in the second one in terms of projects and the number of organizations working on the ground. They also implement projects that do not involve financial support for teachers in formal education in the first area, while providing salary support for half of the teachers in the second area, with varying types of support provided - for example, teachers' salaries vary for each international organization.

They also strive to work through local entities and institutions present on the ground in both areas, monitor the implementation process with partners, and provide them with technical support.

Through the work of these entities, several gaps are recorded, including those related to the gap between the support provided and the number of schools, in addition to the clear lack of educational projects for which intermediary entities seek financial support, despite the primary reliance on these projects (approximately 6.1 million Syrian children rely on regular and irregular educational services provided by humanitarian organizations, in all areas of Syria).⁽¹⁰⁾

The lack of concern for the deficiency during the distribution of funding is evident in details of the type of education, such as the presence of a class for learning difficulties, or the decrease in child-friendly centers, due to decreased support. Intermediary entities prefer to support local organizations working in non-formal education in both areas.

Implementers in Northwest Syria

These are the organizations, institutions, and volunteer teams that receive funds from intermediary entities after raising specific educational needs through the submission of educational project proposals. They work on implementing activities and providing direct financial support, or through the local official entities with which they cooperate. Most of these organizations operate in both areas, but they differ in terms of the projects implemented on the ground and methods of providing funding. Support in the first area is limited to training workshops and non-permanent compensation for teachers, while the support provided for the second area includes teacher salaries, operational costs for schools, and training workshops for children and teachers.

These organizations financial assist teachers in school activities, and are applied in areas of Turkish influence. As for Idlib and its countryside, the organizations supported the salaries of teachers in schools. They distribute funding as a single block: opportunity, training, and costs in both areas. The exception is the salary clause, because organizations do not support salaries in the first area.

These organizations support psychosocial support activities in both areas and distribute – partially - stationery and cleaning materials, train teachers to deal with emergency situations, in addition to establishing schools within the camps, and carrying out awareness campaigns in schools about diseases and mines.

⁽¹⁰⁾Kinana Qaddour & Salman Husain, Syria’s Education Crisis: A Sustainable Approach After 11 Years Of Conflict, The Middle East Institute, 2022, صفحة 4 تمت مراجعة التقرير بتاريخ، 12-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/q5lnb>

The table below illustrates the main such organizations:

| Implementing Entities of Support Projects on the Ground | |
|---|--|
| INGOs | Local NGOs |
| Arche Nova | Assistance Coordination Unit |
| Concern Worldwide | Ataa for Relief and Development |
| People in Need | Basmeh & Zeitooneh for Relief and Development |
| Qatar Charity | Beyaz Eller |
| Save the Children | BINAA Organization for Development |
| UNICEF | Bonyan Organization |
| World Vision | Ghiras Al Nahda |
| | Hand in Hand for Aid and Development |
| | Hope Revival Organization |
| | Horan Foundation |
| | Hurras Network |
| | Ihsan for Relief and Development |
| | International Association for Relief And Development |
| | Kudra for Social Development |
| | Molham volunteering team |
| | Muzun For Humanitarian & Development |
| | Nasaem Khair |
| | Olive branch organization |
| | Onder organization for cooperation and development |
| | Orange Capacity Building Organization |
| | Orphan Sponsorship & Relief Association |
| | Sadad Humanitarian Organization |
| | Shafak Organisation |
| | Social Development International SDI |
| | Takaful Al Sham |
| | Violet Organization |
| | WATAN Foundation |
| | YOU ARE LIFE AND PEACE |
| | Bahar Organization |

Table Number (4): shows the entities implementing support projects on the ground.

Summary

The funding provided for supporting higher stages of education is decreasing, and the support provided for the initial educational stages remains low (The Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria has only received 25% of the required funding). The absence of a single reference entity coordinating the work among organizations has led to duplication and redundancy, meaning more wasted effort and money. The lack of coordination among them, in many instances, and the nature of the relationship between the sponsor and the organizations have resulted in the lack of interest in involving local entities in assessment and implementation mechanisms. Perhaps the most notable observation in this context is the disproportionate distribution of protection and psychological support programs, which far exceed programs and activities aimed at supporting education.

Second Aspect: Gaps related to the material and human infrastructure of the educational process

Indications of the deterioration and obstruction of the education sector in Syria are intensifying. Despite the main educational gaps deepening during the conflict and its transformations, some of them extend back to before the revolutionary movement in 2011. The educational process suffered from many systematic weaknesses in education policies and methods, societal inequality, and the emergence of new gaps as a result of the conflict contributed by political, social, and economic factors, both local and external. When monitoring educational gaps, we will try to scrutinize their causes and dynamics, and the role of all official and informal societal actors, in order to anticipate their limits within the societal structure, how they affect the student, and how the student can influence society if the educational situation stabilizes in its current negative manner.

The intertwining and complexity of problems in northern Syria outline the overall picture of the reality of education. Security, political, economic, and cultural dimensions form the context of the problem. They are key players in their field and shape their manifestations in the form of qualitative, numerical, and regional gaps that reflect the disparity from one area to another. They are not of the same intensity and depth in both areas, so the educational gaps will be listed not based on the order of importance, as each gap is linked to one or more others. Education reform is a total cumulative process, and reforming a part is not sufficient to revive this sector and bring it back to life as a source for producing the human cadres that drive the country towards true recovery from the war crisis. Studying all gaps and giving them the same importance is a way towards bridging them, repairing what can be repaired, and rebuilding what requires rebuilding.

Firstly: Gaps in the Physical Infrastructure of the Educational Process

Certain indicators help us understand the scale of these gaps. The indicators related to infrastructure gaps include: the presence, adequacy, and geographical distribution of schools, the capacity of schools, the level of safety within the school environment, play and physical activity spaces, health services needed by schools, and energy resources. The teacher-related indicators are: the numerical sufficiency of teachers, gender dimension, the adequacy of teachers' financial compensation, teaching skills, and experiences, and direct safety indicators among teachers. Numerous indicators reflect the gaps in curricula, books, and supporting educational tools, such as: modifications made to the curricula and its structural features, the poverty of education, investment in education, the religious dimension of curricula, books, and supporting educational tools. Those related to the student include: the need for education, school dropouts, the financial capacity of students, privatization of education, and the psychological and social implications of war reflected on students.

The Presence of Schools and Their Adequacy and Geographical distribution

Both study areas suffer from similar issues regarding achieving the required numerical sufficiency in general, and they differ in terms of the number of operational schools ready for study, and their readiness in terms of buildings and services. Despite many schools being reopened through their rehabilitation and reconstruction by organizations, there are over 162 non-operational schools in northwest Syria, a large number in the two study areas where there are more than 400,000 students out of one million students in northwest Syria⁽¹¹⁾. The number of operational schools in Idlib is lower due to ongoing bombardment, as military instability plays a role in decreasing the rehabilitation process of non-operational schools in Idlib, where organizations usually operate amid a lack of financial resources allocated by the government to build new schools. Several partially destroyed schools are used for study in Idlib, posing a risk to students due to the potential collapse of parts of the building during study, especially with the deterioration of buildings and foundations due to the ongoing bombardment that continues to this day by Russian military force.⁽¹²⁾

The real gap in education is not merely a matter of quantity, but also the geographical distribution of schools. Schools are predominantly concentrated in cities and rural areas, leaving camps to face a severe shortage. This imbalance makes it particularly challenging for children in the camps to access schooling. (Out of 1,396 camps located in the study areas, only 184 contain schools.⁽¹³⁾

Even when a school is available in a camp, it often serves only grades one to four. This limitation results in lost educational opportunities for most displaced and migrant families, especially considering that secondary schools are often located far from the camps and residential areas. The problem is magnified in both areas, particularly in the informal camps, which were constructed without a plan tailored to the state of services at the camp location.

Furthermore, primary schools are more widespread than middle and high schools, with the latter experiencing a decrease in numbers in both areas. This issue appears to be particularly acute in rural Idlib and its camps, where the scarcity of middle and high schools significantly impacts the education of the displaced population.

School Capacity

The reasons for the lack of school concentration proportional to the size of human mass are directly related to the numerical shortage. Therefore, schools in crowded residential areas suffer from reduced capacities. There are a large number of students that the existing buildings cannot accommodate, leading to the existence of two shifts: evening and morning, with overcrowding in classrooms in some areas like Darat Izza where 40 students gather in each class and more, and the number may reach up to 60 students in some Idlib schools, which contain the largest number of internally displaced people.

⁽¹¹⁾ Report on Schools in Syria, Seventh Edition, Assistance Coordination Unit, 2022, pp. (24) and (95), the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/Ws4u6>

⁽¹²⁾ Suleiman al-khalid: At least 9 dead after Russian jets hit Syria's rebel-held Idlib, rescuers say, Reuters ,20 -11-2022:<https://shortest.link/7ia5>

⁽¹³⁾ Report on Schools in the Northern Syrian Camps, Fifth Edition, Assistance Coordination Unit, 2022, p. 1, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/0PevW>

In the camps in the first area, "caravans" are used as classrooms inside the camp, with about 40 students in each. The same applies to the formal camps in the second area, where about 45 students are present in each tent currently.

The decision issued by the Directorate of Education in Idlib to prevent the failure of any student in the early stages of education has affected the overcrowding and increase in the number of students in the classroom. As for the random camps not supported by organizations, the school is a tent that contains less than 20 students, which is an indicator of student leakage in the camp where each tent houses a whole family.

On the other hand, another problem emerges regarding the school's ability to accommodate all students, regardless of their health and social circumstances. Despite the high rate of disabilities due to bombing and military operations, there has been no consideration for the need for facilities for students with special needs inside the school building. (Out of 878 schools evaluated, only 23% of students with special needs are present),⁽¹⁴⁾ which indicates that many students with disabilities are deprived of education, either due to the lack of facilities inside the school, or due to the difficulty of reaching the school in the first place.

Safety Levels within the School Environment

While the majority of schools enjoy a level of safety within cities, this does not reflect the situation of camp schools, where safety is not considered, due to the nature of the camp's construction and lack of consideration when carrying out the engineering plan when it was established, such as the level of window height, and the existence of iron bars to protect the child from falling.⁽¹⁵⁾

A clear difference is also observed between the two study areas in terms of the presence of study seats. The schools recently built by organizations in the first area are characterized by modern seats that are proportionate to the size of the classrooms, while the situation differs in Idlib, where there are schools not supported by organizations. The seats there are of lower quality, and four students may sit in a space that can accommodate a maximum of three students, leading to crowding, which is an important factor in the transmission of infectious diseases and restricts the student's freedom during the lesson.

The situation worsens in the camps, where most random camps lack seats altogether, forcing students to sit on the ground in winter when temperatures drop.

⁽¹⁴⁾Report on Schools in Syria, Assistance Coordination Unit, Seventh Edition, 2022, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7E3x>

⁽¹⁵⁾An in-depth individual interview conducted by Omran Center with a child protection expert at Ihsan Organization, Idlib region, interview date 7-11-2022.



A picture illustrating the way children are seated to receive lessons during winter in Syria ⁽¹⁶⁾

Recreational and Physical Activity Spaces

The two areas vary in the availability of spaces designated for children's play, such as courtyards ⁽¹⁷⁾. In larger cities in the rural north of Aleppo, such as Azaz, Al-Bab, and Afrin, modern schools exist with playgrounds and sometimes games for the early primary stage students. These schools are decorated with murals and vibrant colors on their walls, a result of the efforts by the local community and volunteer initiatives, which often receive financial support from organizations.

However, this is not the case in schools in Idlib that don't receive support from organizations. These schools lack games, colors, and drawings, resulting in an austere appearance. They are devoid of colorful pictures and murals that could provide visual stimulation to students. It's important to note that the traditional construction design of Syrian schools before 2011 closely resembled that of prisons, both in terms of architecture and color scheme. Some of these schools remain as they were, a detail that can elicit feelings of discomfort in students, potentially leading to an aversion to school.

As for the irregular camps and haphazard residential settlements in both areas, educational tent courtyards often merge with the streets. Little to no attention is paid to erecting fences around these schools, leading to multiple incidents of students being run over. In some instances, there

⁽¹⁶⁾Abdullah Al-Bashir, "Northern Syrian Schools Overcome the Bitterness of Ignorance Under Any Pressure," an article in Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, 17-9-2022, the website was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7EuB>

⁽¹⁷⁾The courtyard is the place where children spend their break time. The school day is divided into two breaks, each lasting 15 or 20 minutes, during which the children eat, play, and use the restrooms. The space is an open area adjacent to the school building itself, and its boundaries are defined by the external walls of the school structure.

are no courtyards for rest, compelling children to return to the camp areas, where they play in vacant, unprepared spaces that are not suitable for any activity.

Health Services

Schools across all regions suffer from a lack of sufficient restroom facilities. For instance, in Al-Bab, a school with a capacity of 1000 students has only four bathrooms.⁽¹⁸⁾ This issue gives rise to another problem related to privacy. In more than half of the schools, the bathrooms are unisex, without separate facilities for males and females. As a result, female students use the restrooms less frequently, which can lead to health problems, especially considering that they spend more than five hours inside the school. If we apply this issue to the reality of the camps, the problem becomes even worse. Many educational tents do not have bathrooms within the same spatial range, forcing students to return to the camp to use the restrooms.

With the outbreak of cholera in northern Syria since early September 2022,⁽¹⁹⁾ the study tried to understand the sources of drinking water in schools and the degree of its sterilization. This is particularly important due to the scarcity of water, as a result of climatic factors, fighting between parties over water resources, and the use of water as a pressure tool. Some organizations work on projects to source and purify water, but they do not meet a quarter of the need. For instance, there are 120 water purification stations in Aleppo and its cities out of a total of 301 water stations.⁽²⁰⁾

The water tanks from which students drink are often the same ones that supply water for personal hygiene in the school bathrooms. This problem is exacerbated in the camps, especially the haphazard ones, which rely on buying water in tanks. However, this is not feasible given the rampant poverty, forcing camp residents to fetch water from nearby artesian wells or canals branching from rivers if available. This means using unguarded water susceptible to the spread of epidemics inside the camp schools.⁽²¹⁾

Schools and Energy Resources

The energy crisis plaguing the region has a significant impact on education. There is a desperate need for fuel in winter and electric fans in summer. There's a noticeable difference between the first and the second areas in this regard. Schools in the first area are supplied with enough diesel fuel for heating to cover a quarter of the school hours. In contrast, the unsupported schools in Idlib do not have any heating facilities inside the classrooms. The situation inside the tents is even harsher, with no heating, walls, or doors to provide even the bare minimum protection against climatic factors.

A common issue across all areas is the lack of electricity during school hours, which affects the course of education. This lack of power prevents the use of teaching aids such as projectors,

⁽¹⁸⁾ The opinion of one of the teachers in a focus group in the city of Al-Bab, the interview was conducted on 9-9-2022.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Abdullah Al-Bash, "Cholera Reaches Northern Syria," Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, 22-9-2022, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/R0VRWs>

⁽²⁰⁾ Mansour Hussein, "Searching for Clean Water in Northern Syria," Al-Jumhuriya Newspaper, October 2022, the article was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7Ejp>

⁽²¹⁾ Cholera in Idlib: Fear of Widespread Disease Spread in Camps in Syria, a video report on BBC's YouTube channel, 5-11-2022, the site was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/rshnIR>

and reading and writing in dark rooms is difficult, especially when there are two shifts due to overcrowding in schools.

Secondly: Gaps Related to Teachers

Numerical Sufficiency of Teachers:

The war has significantly affected human resources due to the death or arrest of many teachers at the beginning of the popular uprisings by the regime forces. Additionally, a substantial number of teachers have migrated out of Syria in search of safety. The problem primarily lies in the lack of qualified and experienced teachers. To combat this deficiency, policymakers initially hired teachers during the early years of the war without focusing on their qualifications or certificates.

However, the current situation has seen considerable change due to the establishment of "Teacher Training Institutes". These institutes are spread across various regions including Marea, Azaz, Tel Rifaat, and in the northern and western countryside of Aleppo, such as Atarib and Darat Izza. There are also faculties of education in Gaziantep University in Afrin city, and the Free University of Aleppo in Azaz city.

Despite the presence of these institutes and educational faculties, they are more concentrated in the first area than in the second. This results in a shortage of educationally qualified teachers in the second area.

The recruitment process for teachers depends on competitive examinations conducted by the organizations responsible for education. The Turkish Ministry of Education, for example, appoints professors based on such competitive examinations conducted in both areas.

Gender Perspective and Teachers

The percentage distribution of both genders among the total number of teaching staff is almost equal, hovering around half in both areas. In the first area, women represent 50% of a total of 43,638 teachers. In the second area, women make up 46% of a total of 2,643 teachers. This is primarily due to the high number of female teachers in major cities such as Azaz and Idlib.

However, this does not fully cover the variation in gender distribution among different towns and cities. It is noticeable that the number of female teachers in regular schools and camps in the first area is lower. In the second area, the number of female teachers nearly matches that of male teachers in regular schools, but it drops to about half in the associated camps. ⁽²²⁾⁽²³⁾

⁽²²⁾Report on Schools in Syria, Assistance Coordination Unit, Seventh Edition, 2022, p. 123, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7E3x>

⁽²³⁾ Report on Schools in the Northern Syrian Camps, Assistance Coordination Unit, Fifth Edition, 2022, p. 75, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/0PevW>

| Gender Distribution for Teachers | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Area 2 | | Area 1 | | Gender Distribution by Cities and Towns |
| Camps | Regular Schools | Camps | Regular schools | |
| Sarmada | Idlib | Jarablus/Al-Bab | Northern Aleppo Countryside | Location |
| 240 | 5,134 | 104 | 2,497 | Male |
| 141 | 5,837 | 50 | 1,789 | Female |

Table Number (5): It illustrates the gender distribution of teachers by areas, between regular schools and camps. Source: Data from the Assistance Coordination Unit.

The school staff is composed of both genders in mixed schools. However, in schools that have students of a single gender, the majority of the staff are of the same gender. This imbalance has an impact on students of all age groups in both areas. In secondary schools, female students are prevented from continuing their education if there is no female staff available. In some cultures, co-education is considered prohibited, and societal views prevail concerning the appropriate age for girls to marry, which is between 16-18 years old.

In the middle grades, where puberty and adolescence bring accompanying psychological and physical changes, female teachers are better equipped to deal with female students, given the cultural barriers that impede male teachers' ability to deal with matters that could cause embarrassment to the students.

The lack of female teachers also impacts younger age groups in the primary school phase, where a child needs a temporary substitute for their mother, someone who can emotionally and physically handle them during the period of separation from their family and their going to school. This presents a challenge to male teachers, particularly in the absence of training on how to handle students in a way that aligns with the psychological, physical, and intellectual characteristics of each age group. Although the lack of training applies to female staff as well, female teachers possess a minimum level of these skills, which are acquired due to the gender roles assigned to women in society. These roles include caregiving, protection, and attention, whether as a mother, wife, or sister.

Adequacy of Financial Compensation for Teachers

Several other factors contribute to the numerical and qualitative deficit in teaching staff. Some of these are intrinsic to the teachers themselves, while others are external, such as low salaries in the regions of northwest Syria. In rural northern Aleppo, a teacher's salary ranges between 1,200-1,400 Turkish Lira,⁽²⁴⁾ making the teaching profession insufficient for achieving financial adequacy given the cost of living. This has left teachers with several choices: either to leave teaching and pursue another profession, to work an additional job after school hours (usually a physically demanding job that affects their energy levels for teaching the next day), or to move towards private education and leave public schooling.

These factors are not different in the second area, with the only difference being its reliance on a system of volunteer teachers due to the Ministry of Education's inability, under the "Salvation Government," to secure teachers' salaries. This has prompted organizations to support some teachers' salaries in the primary level and sometimes in the secondary level. The salaries

⁽²⁴⁾ Omar Youssef, "High Costs and Schools Without Teachers and Books," Al Jazeera News Website, 9-2022, the site was reviewed on 7-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/UotZH>

supported by organizations reach approximately \$200 - \$300 USD, but they are intermittent, unstable, do not include school holidays, and depend on unstable factors according to the donors' orientations and their annual budgets. This can lead to a complete cessation of support for a specific geographical area and thus a halt in education.

According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education in the "Salvation Government," the number of schools where teachers' salaries are supported by organizations in both primary and secondary levels is 944 schools; 660 of which are mostly funded in the primary level, and 284 of them operate voluntarily with an estimated 6,156 volunteer teachers. ⁽²⁵⁾ It should be noted that there is no support for ensuring the salaries of teachers in secondary education.

Teacher Competencies and Teaching Expertise

Teachers' professional and academic experiences range from university graduates with degrees unrelated to teaching (33%), to students who have not yet graduated, to unstable teachers with high school certificates or less, who constitute 36% ⁽²⁶⁾ in the regions of northern Syria. This has contributed to a decrease in the quality of education. Because a teacher lacks a university degree related to education and teaching, they also lack the special teaching techniques. This is starkly different when analyzing this point within the educational structure in formal camps, where the percentage of teachers with degrees related to the teaching profession is 86%. ⁽²⁷⁾

This can be attributed to two reasons: the reduction of job opportunities within these camps makes studying education appealing to high school students to ensure a profession that provides income, and the other reason is the existence of support provided by organizations for a significant part of the camps, which acts as an incentive to work in education. However, in informal camps, educational competencies among teachers decrease as many students drop out of continuing their studies and therefore do not achieve the university education that could be utilized in teaching. Furthermore, the lack of organizational support for salaries has led teachers with university degrees to prefer working outside the camp. There is also a significant shortage of teachers in scientific subjects such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics in urban, rural, and camp environments in both areas, with improvements in the number of these expertise in the first area.

Job Satisfaction Among Teachers

The imbalance in the distribution of financial compensations has caused social repercussions, as several local movements by teachers have taken the course of protests and strikes. In areas under Turkish supervision, teachers carried out the "Dignity and Pride Strike" in protest against low salaries. ⁽²⁸⁾ Prior to this, teachers in Idlib city carried out "Dignity for Teachers" strikes, and in areas belonging to the city, several schools participated in the strikes, by ceasing

⁽²⁵⁾ Mohammed Walid Jabs, "Statistics Reveal the Number of Supported Schools," Baladi News, April 2022, the site was reviewed on 7-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/v9kJz>

⁽²⁶⁾ Report on Schools in Syria, Assistance Coordination Unit, Seventh Edition, 2022, p. 126, the report was reviewed on 6-11-2022: <https://shortest.link/7E3x>

⁽²⁷⁾ Report on Schools in the Northern Syrian Camps, Assistance Coordination Unit, Fifth Edition, 2022, p. 75, the report was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/0PevW>

⁽²⁸⁾ Manhal Barish, "Teachers' Strike Continues in Northern Syria," Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 24-9-2022, the site was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/m8CZYA>

teaching until financial compensations were given to volunteer teachers.⁽²⁹⁾ These strikes reflected on the movement of education, and many schools were consequently suspended, with some schools remaining open amid chaos caused by the massive shortage of teachers. These were not the first local teacher protests, which resulted in school suspensions and student dropouts due to the poor living and professional conditions the teachers suffer from, reflecting an indicator of job dissatisfaction. This, in turn, is reflected in the form of aversion to the profession, and contributes to the teacher's lack of desire to develop his/her abilities and enhance his/her job capacities in his field of work, in which he/her only continues in order to maintain a source of income.

In the poorest and most neglected communities, such as camps and informal housing areas, the need to supply education with adequate and qualified staff increases (where 1.4 million children in the camps need educational services).⁽³⁰⁾

Teachers' Direct Security Indicators

Teachers do not feel secure in areas controlled by conflicting factions, where there is no control over weapons, as is the case in the first area. In the other area, despite the strict security control and more effective control over weapons in civilian life, there are other types of security threats that are linked to freedom of opinion and expression and fear of crossing the "red lines" of the "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham". This puts the teacher under psychological pressure created by the security obsession that he is under surveillance and can be arrested at any moment on various charges unrelated to his profession as a teacher. The majority of targeting operations victimize civilians in both areas, but it is higher in the first area.

| Percentage of Civilian Victims | Number of Victims (killed or injured) | Number of Assassinations | Area |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 79% | 166 | 31 | Euphrates Shield |
| 70% | 20 | 6 | Peace Spring |
| 56% | 95 | 14 | Afrin |
| 61% | 41 | 22 | Idlib |

Table No. (6): Shows the monitoring by Omran Center for Strategic Studies of assassinations during the time period extending between the months of (July – December) of the year 2021.

Third: Issues Related to Curricula, Books, and Supportive Educational Means

Modifications Made to Curricula

The Syrian Interim Government modified the curricula set by Bashar al-Assad's regime in 2010. Images representing Bashar al-Assad and his father were removed, and some lessons in Arabic and social subjects were modified. The subject of nationalism was eliminated.

⁽²⁹⁾"We Can No Longer Bear.. The 'Dignity for Teachers' Strike and Calls for 'Protests' in Idlib," Syria Net, 6-2-2022, the site was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/f9nhrS>

⁽³⁰⁾Kinana Qaddour & Salman Husain, Syria's Education Crisis: A Sustainable Approach After 11 Years Of Conflict-The Middle East Institute, 2022, تمت مراجعة التقرير بتاريخ، 8-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/q51nb>

Afterward, the curriculum was modified twice by non-governmental organizations, namely, the Islamic Sham Association and the 'Ilm .⁽³¹⁾ (knowledge) Association.

However, the same kind of changes, which do not change the content inside the curricula, occurred due to the lack of the necessary staff to develop appropriate curricula based on the political and social changes that have occurred in the country, including economic exhaustion. This means that the educational process lacked the necessary tools for change.

This modified curriculum is taught in both areas, but each area deletes or adds a section of the curriculum and some books according to the directions of the decision-makers, such as the addition of the Turkish language in the first area, and the deletion of parts of the textbook due to the inability to provide it in its entirety in the second area. Following these changes, subjects with activities such as music and arts were also removed in both areas.

Computer programs were also removed from schools due to the absence of devices and lack of competencies to provide advanced technical and artistic subjects that help students link these skills to life. This poses a challenge to the aspirations of today's generation, which seeks innovation through venturing into the vast digital space.

Education Poverty Index

School curricula have only been minimally successful in preparing students. Because of educational disruption and students' stagnating and declining cognitive abilities, a student can reach ninth grade without being able to read and write properly in Arabic.

Based on the Education Poverty Index, which tracks the quality of education through the reading comprehension skills of ten-year-old children (fourth-grade students)⁽³²⁾, the study found that a large proportion of fifteen-year-olds in both areas are unable to write a text in correct language and clear expression. The problem reaches its peak in irregular camps, where students struggle to write Arabic letters correctly.

Investment in Education

The established curricula do not take into account the Syrian context, which is living under complex and overlapping economic crises. They do not equip individuals with critical thinking skills that help individuals deal with economic crises using available resources and opportunities. Good education assists in securing sufficient, steady, and sustainable financial income, forming a guarantee for justice and inclusiveness among individuals.

On the other hand, curricula lack comprehensiveness. Vocational education is absent due to the inability to open these schools that require equipment and operational costs. In addition, there is a preference among parents to have their children work in the labor market instead of sending them to vocational education. Even when this type of education is available, it is often inadequate, creating a gap between the needs of the labor market and early recovery projects, and the outcomes that secure academically qualified professionals. However, the neglect of

⁽³¹⁾Nimr Hekawati, Education in Northern Syria (Afrin, Jarabulus, Azaz, Al-Bab), Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2020, p. 11, reviewed on November 19, 2022: <https://2u.pw/yTFK8>

⁽³²⁾ What is Learning Poverty, The World Bank, April, 2021, تمت مراجعة الموقع بتاريخ 7-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/gv30i>

vocational education dates back to before 2011. Its primary function was to absorb students from preparatory stages who had achieved low academic performance.

Structural Features of the Curriculum

The curriculum relies on rote memorization and repetition, making memory transient and not allowing for the consolidation of information. It also fails to foster analytical and creative abilities among students. Therefore, it has been unsuccessful in cultivating mental skills related to memory, attention, perception, and problem simulation, rendering the information valueless. The curriculum and information only serve as a means for students to transition from one grade level to another.

Furthermore, the curriculum's connection to reality and its ability to truly activate information is low. The information included is disconnected from the context of human needs in the Syrian crisis, and it avoids addressing issues related to the Syrian people's demands for freedom, justice, and democracy. The curriculum lacks a subject that contains information on active citizenship, which would help build a national, intellectual, and knowledge identity and emphasize human rights and dignity.

The curricula do not cover the conditions of war, its consequences, events, and the dynamic changes that have occurred. They continue to rely on what was established during times of stability, despite the differing context in all its aspects. They also do not account for the social problems resulting from the displacement phenomenon and changes in students' cultural environments. Furthermore, the curriculum lacks any information relating to training on non-violent communication and acceptance of others, which is necessary for programs for civil peacebuilding, instilling a culture of acceptance of others, and practicing mechanisms of consensus-building among individuals and resolving regional disputes.⁽³³⁾

The Religious Dimension of the Curriculum

There has been a significant increase in curricula that incorporate religious subjects, most notably through religious schools. For instance, in the first area alone, there are numerous religious high schools covering areas such as I'zaz, Qabasin, Turkman Bareh, Mare, Jarabulus, Al-Bab, and Afrin. The expansion of these institutions reflects a growing student interest, driven by the failure of traditional scientific and literary education to deliver tangible outcomes.

In the second area, where "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham" heavily relies on religious ideology, the importance of religious schools has been amplified. A prominent example is "Dar al-Wahy al-Sharif," which is nominally affiliated with the Ministry of Endowments but effectively managed by committees from "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham." These committees direct the curriculum towards extremism, as evidenced by images of jihadist leaders found within the teaching materials.⁽³⁴⁾

Despite the prevalence of these schools in both areas, they are more abundant, organized, and enticing in cities under the control of the "Salvation Government." The ruling force in some

⁽³³⁾ The opinion of a psychologist working in a city, an in-depth interview was conducted with him via Zoom technology on the date of 5-11-2022.

⁽³⁴⁾ Wael Essam, The biography of "Khatib Al-Shishani" is studied in Idlib's schools... and accusations against "Tahrir Al-Sham" of adulterating education, 25-4-2022, the site was reviewed on 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/DJ9lwQ>

cities has strived to marginalize the scientific and objective educational standards, replacing them with a more radical form of education. The aim is to mold the students into a human force that supports the authoritarian structure in terms of stagnation and conservatism. The study also discusses the removal of the philosophy subject in the second area's curriculum due to claims from education officials that it "promotes disbelief among students." ⁽³⁵⁾

Textbooks and Supplementary Educational Materials

The printing of textbooks often lags behind the beginning of the school year by several months. In the first area, textbooks are printed by Turkish governmental entities, while in the second area, a severe shortage of books has been observed. Most students are using textbooks that have been used multiple times before, with over half of the supporting activities in these books having lost their effectiveness. This is because the exercises in these books have already been completed by previous users. Moreover, due to high prices and reduced purchasing power, high school students often rely on summaries instead of buying textbooks.

In camps that do not receive support for book distribution, more than one student shares a single book. Lessons are photocopied and distributed on paper. The minimum delivery method of the curriculum involves the teacher taking a photo of the lesson with a mobile phone and sending the image to parents for follow-up and assignment completion.

On the other hand, lessons require illustrative materials that connect the senses with learning and depend on actual experiments and observations of the curriculum information. Both areas suffer from a lack of basic classical tools such as map models and modern educational tools – labs, computers and their accessories, audio and visual devices. Therefore, information remains theoretical without being linked to practical experience or illustrative tools, which are essential for deepening the understanding of the material in the mind.

Fourth: Student-Related Gaps

Students and the Need for Education

The need for education is growing among individuals in the northwestern regions of Syria, in conjunction with the ongoing "ceasefire" and a decrease in the level of conflict. Society has entered a state of relative stability, as revealed in the 2022 report from the Office for Humanitarian Response. The report highlights the extent of the educational need: (there are 6.6 million people in Syria who require education, 18% of whom have left school. Half of the children not enrolled have never attended before. Non-attendance rates at schools reach 28% in Idlib and 26% in Aleppo. The Office for Humanitarian Response's evaluation of educational needs shows that, of 1,017 camps, there are 196 in the northwest that have school provisions, and less than 2% of children attend informal education services). ⁽³⁶⁾

⁽³⁵⁾ An in-depth individual interview conducted by the researcher with an administrative official working in the Ministry of Education in Idlib city, who refused to disclose his name - The interview was conducted via Zoom technology on 24-8-2022.

⁽³⁶⁾ Humanitarian Needs Report in Syria, Office for Humanitarian Action, 2022, p. 67, the report was reviewed on 24-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/MBHjGK>

School Dropout

The perpetuation of poverty is one of the most significant long-term consequences of school dropouts. This generation of children, absent from school, is projected to forfeit a cumulative lifetime income of 21 trillion dollars at current values. This amounts to 17% of the global GDP in 2022, a sharp rise from the 2021 estimates which projected a loss of 17 trillion dollars. ⁽³⁷⁾

The reasons and repercussions of school dropouts vary according to different factors and variables. They oscillate between those of psychological origin and those rooted in social circumstances. The correlation between these variables is both indispensable and simultaneous. These can be delineated and detailed in the following manner:

- **Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment Due to Age Discrepancies:** The interruptions in students' education, either continuous or intermittent, have created age differences within the same grade. Classes are arranged according to grade level, not by age. Therefore, it's possible to have 12-year-olds studying alongside 9-year-olds, despite the notable differences in physical maturity and cognitive abilities between these two age groups.
- **Decreasing Desire to Complete Secondary Education Due to Uncertain Futures and Limited University Opportunities:** The diminishing prospects of job opportunities associated with higher education and the lack of recognition of certain degrees play a significant role in discouraging students from completing their education. Despite the establishment of several universities like Gaziantep University in Turkey, Başakşehir University, Free University of Aleppo, Free University of Idlib, Sham University, Al-Nahda University, and others, most secondary school students prefer Gaziantep University due to the recognition of its degrees by the Turkish government and the variety of available majors (Economics, Islamic Sciences in Azaz, Education in Afrin, 3 Institutes in Jarablus). However, the university requires the YÖS (Foreign Students Exam) which tests mathematics, intelligence, logic, and engineering, imposing a financial burden on students in the first area.

In the second area, there are private universities with fewer specialties that suffer from issues related to the source of degrees, which limits further studies to within Syrian territories. This drives secondary school students to enter the job market instead of spending years in education without a scientifically robust degree. It should be noted that university degrees in both areas lack international recognition. Although opportunities are broader in the first area due to the variety of specialties, universities, and some countries' recognition of the secondary degree issued by the Syrian Interim Government, the impact of this factor remains weak in encouraging students to complete secondary education.

- **Rising Poverty Rates:** Poverty is becoming increasingly prevalent in Syrian society. According to a UNICEF report in June 2022, there are 2.4 million out-of-school children and 1.7 million at risk of dropping out due to poverty. Nine out of ten people are living in poverty, and 60% of the population in Syria faces the risk of hunger. ⁽³⁸⁾ This issue is particularly prominent among inhabitants of refugee camps. As a result, an increasing number of families are abandoning education for their children to participate in the labor

⁽³⁷⁾World Bank data, October 2022, site reviewed on 6-11-2022: <https://bit.ly/3cHJ1S0>

⁽³⁸⁾Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report.Unicef. 2022 تمت مراجعة الموقع بتاريخ 6، ص 23-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/sAxNg>

market. Students are becoming breadwinners for their families, leading to exploitation by business owners in need of cheap labor. Child labor is prevalent across all regions of northwestern Syria, but it is more concentrated in the camps and informal areas of both study areas than in their cities. The nature of these jobs is physically demanding and can have health repercussions, such as working in charcoal factories and oil burners, and recycling iron from war weaponry remains.⁽³⁹⁾

Dropout labor is more common among males, while females work in less strenuous jobs, such as collecting plastic, rummaging in bins, selling tissues on the streets, and begging. However, the dropout phenomenon impacts females' personal lives more profoundly as female dropouts tend to get married early. Families may encourage this to alleviate financial pressures by transferring the financial responsibility for the daughter to the husband.

Moreover, the cramped living conditions in the camps and displacement sites have led many girls to aspire to move to their husband's home seeking independence. Besides these factors pushing parents to marry off their school-aged daughters, there is also the lack of security and fear of kidnappings and violations that girls might face in areas with security chaos and factional strife.

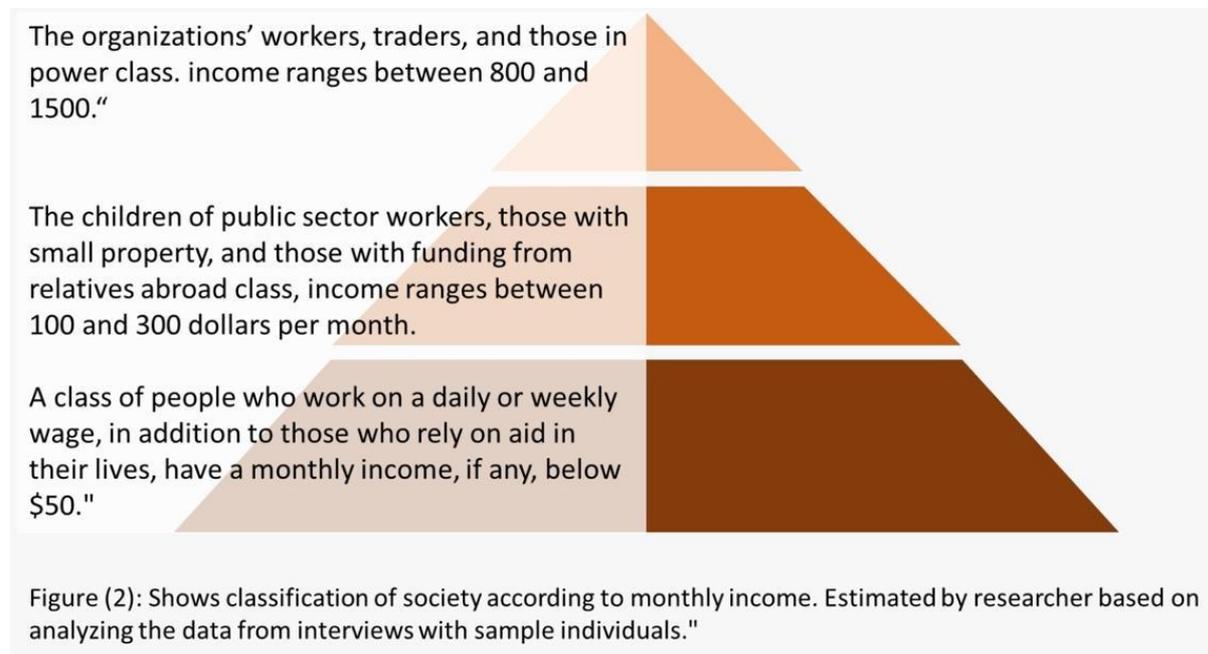
Students' Financial Capacity and Privatization of Education

Private schools are mainly concentrated in the larger urban centers. In Idlib, they are prevalent in Idlib city, Dana, Hazano, and Sarmada, with the latter being the largest hub for these schools, hosting students from various regions. In the northern and Eastern Aleppo countryside, schools are primarily centered in Azaz and Al-Bab. These schools have led to class segregation within society due to unstable education, whether in schools run by the Education Directorate in Idlib or those operated by education offices in local councils. However, the quality of education provided in schools funded by international and local organizations in the second area remains superior to even the private schools.

Class division based on financial status is evident in both study areas, caused by the growth of civil society with its institutions and bodies. This development is a double-edged sword. It provided direct intervention and addressed basic humanitarian conditions in the early stages of the military conflict and the movement of internal displacement. Gradually, the scope of organizations expanded to include women's empowerment, children, and their physical and psychological safety. However, at the same time, it created a societal divide based on the nature of salaries given to organization employees, which significantly exceed what a local professional who does not work within organizations can earn. This situation led to a competition among people to work in local organizations. Regionalism and closeness to influential powers played a significant role in some appointments, resulting in money concentrated in the hands of a class of organization employees. Naturally, these disparities impact the educational situation and the ability to acquire better education, dividing students into those who attend private schools with safe and available transportation, continuous study, and the financial capacity to buy suitable clothing for all seasons. There's also a class of

⁽³⁹⁾Syria's decade-long conflict has fuelled child labour and exploitation. Middle East Eye تمت مراجعة الموقع بتاريخ 20-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/CxRkRk>

children of daily or weekly workers, with the worst situation being for camp residents who mostly lack a stable income and mostly rely on aid. Then there's the sub-middle class - children of those working in departments related to the governing authority. Each class has different income patterns, but generally, the monthly income of community members is divided as follows:



The diagram above illustrates discrepancies in the societal structure, exemplified by the dwindling middle class that is increasingly overlapping with the persistently growing lower class. This occurrence is primarily due to the economic crisis and job instability. In such economic circumstances, acquiring a quality education becomes an enormous hurdle, particularly for the swelling lower class. They often find themselves unable to bear the cost of private education or even secure necessary resources for public schooling. Thus, the economic divide and the privatization of education become significant factors exacerbating the issue of school dropouts.

The Impact of the Psychological and Social War on Students

The traumas associated with war have a detrimental effect on children's cognitive abilities, including their intelligence, comprehension, memory, and focus. It's incumbent upon schools to create an environment conducive to providing mental health services, along with psychological and social support, ensuring that the majority of children can feel safe within their peer groups.

However, schools have not fully succeeded in this mission to promote mental health and socio-psychological well-being. Psychosocial support programs haven't been effectively integrated into the education system and remain separate entities. These programs are sporadically implemented via activities carried out by different organizations. The fear of going to school continues to persist in both areas, fueled by the repeated and ongoing attacks on educational

establishments. From 2011 to 2021, around 1593 schools were targeted, with the regime and its allies being responsible for approximately 88.95% of these attacks.⁽⁴⁰⁾

In relation, the constant displacement and forced migration from one location to another has contributed to a surge in bullying among students, often predicated on their regional backgrounds. The ensuing cultural and social overlaps brought about by these displacements haven't been adequately addressed through community initiatives designed to foster communication, resolve differences, and create harmonious social dynamics. This displacement of many students from their original homes towards the northern Syrian cities and towns has led to new issues. For instance, students hailing from southern cities like Damascus experience bullying based on their dialects by students from places like Idlib. The severity of this issue varies even within the displaced communities. Those who relocated from Aleppo to Idlib or vice versa do not encounter this problem. Yet those who were displaced from the outskirts of Damascus, Daraa, or eastern cities are frequently subjected to bullying based on their dialect, and differences in certain customs and traditions.

Building on what was previously mentioned, a sense of instability is palpable among students due to the frequency of displacement, a phenomenon especially noticeable among those living in refugee camps, with some having been displaced upwards of five times. Such repeated relocations amplify a sense of detachment and rootlessness among these students. As a student begins to adjust to a new community, their family often finds itself forced to relocate yet again, either in pursuit of a safer environment or improved job prospects. This scenario holds true across both studied areas, with minor variations between them. However, the issue is markedly more prominent in makeshift camps, where individuals are incessantly seeking better living conditions.⁽⁴¹⁾

Notably, there's a troubling rise in suicide rates among school-aged individuals in both areas. Since the outset of 2022⁽⁴²⁾, 33 suicides have been reported in Idlib and the suburbs of Aleppo. The factors leading to these tragic outcomes are multifarious. Psychological distress, such as depression and an inability to acclimate to new surroundings, converge with poor living conditions and early marriages to create a high-risk environment. The methods used in these suicide attempts vary, including ingesting insecticides, hanging, and leaping from elevated places.

Third Aspect: Addressing Educational Gaps

Regarding the official actors involved in the educational process, despite administrative differences between the two areas, the commonality of gaps lies within governance and its financial requirements, as well as the multiplicity of administrative references. Consequently, the following policy directions should be pursued:

⁽⁴⁰⁾The Tenth Annual Report on Violations Against Children in Syria, 11-2021, p. 16, the report was reviewed on 7-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/bsNxw>

⁽⁴¹⁾An in-depth interview conducted by the researcher with an official in the Ministry of Education in the Syrian Interim Government, 25-8-2022

⁽⁴²⁾Including children, 33 cases of suicide in northwest Syria since the beginning of the year, Syria Net website, 5-6-2022, site reviewed on 21-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/2546sw>

1. Advocacy campaigns aimed at assessing needs should be conducted, highlighting the major gaps in the educational process. This can be accomplished by striving to involve key players in international and regional conferences concerned with the education sector and its development. On one hand, this approach encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing. On the other hand, advocacy efforts should aim to maintain international mechanisms for humanitarian assistance, which ideally should enter across borders rather than along certain lines. This minimum level of intervention is vital to address the overwhelming need.
2. Amplifying the role of local entities in overseeing the educational process. This ensures that administrative decisions are custom-tailored to match the unique circumstances of Syria and to develop policies that accurately represent the full scale of need, a concern that extends beyond the technical intricacies inherent to the educational process itself.
3. Establishing a diverse array of coordination channels between the various stakeholders is critical. The current coordination system, which primarily involves interactions with Turkish counterparts, would greatly benefit from the incorporation of parallel channels. This measure is an essential governance step because it precludes the development of coordination "bottlenecks" and expedites both decision-making and emergency responses. Moreover, this approach helps to take into account the distinctive Syrian context, which involves notable disparities among regions, cities, towns, and refugee camps. By enhancing the adaptability and flexibility of governance mechanisms, we can more effectively respond to the scale and nuances of ongoing crises.
4. In this context, the Ministry of Education in the Interim Government, along with the local education offices, should assume key roles in the coordination and supervision process. This move will help to alleviate the issues associated with multiple points of reference, or at the very least, prevent structural and functional conflicts among them.
5. Supporting the establishment of advisory bodies for the educational process. These bodies can propose a range of plans and strategies based on an accurate estimation of the needs required by the educational sector in all its tracks. Such bodies could include education experts, psychologists, and experienced professionals involved in managing the educational process. Additionally, these committees can propose policies to address any unexpected changes that may occur in the educational process. These bodies could also benefit from the experiences of international organizations focused on education in conflict-affected countries.
6. A formal framework for assessing educational needs should be established, extending beyond just the estimates provided by various organizations. This dynamic process can identify overlooked areas needing attention and areas where efforts might be duplicated. In this context, it's important to ensure the Ministry of Education within the interim government has a pivotal role. The Ministry should strategize more comprehensively for identifying educational needs and filling existing gaps. This formal approach could also enhance its standing with international bodies, bolstering political representation, and fostering better cooperation with donor countries.

7. The issue of certification authentication should be solely addressed by the interim government. They should work towards enhancing discussions with Turkish counterparts and international entities, aiming to gain international recognition for students' certificates.
8. Essential steps can be taken by all official entities to coordinate efforts. These include:
 - Promote the idea of education as a continuous and ongoing process. This can be achieved through the organization of an annual conference prior to the academic year to devise new plans for the upcoming year and find solutions to ongoing problems, such as improving the examination process.
 - Initiate a media campaign to support the educational process, empower teachers, and provide them with the tools necessary to perform their role within the community effectively.
 - Establish a local educational support fund. Research institutions should collaborate with educational establishments to explore the mechanisms for creating this fund and its usage. This can be accomplished through a meeting led by the research institutions to draft a proposal on this fund, which can then be presented to active local entities.

As for those who fund and support the learning process, in addition to the problem of scarcity and continuity of funding resources, the differing administrative visions of local actors have contributed to creating a governance gap in all regions. A significant portion of the educational process in Northern Syria depends on international funding sources under the guise of humanitarian needs for the region. To bridge this gap, the following is suggested:

1. Strengthen Syrian funding pathways for the education process and work towards creating a Syrian-Syrian funding cycle that targets the needs of the education process. This could be at the level of strategic planning, the estimation of needs, or policies related to student and teacher support, providing them with stability and continuity.
2. Develop other funding channels. The private sector should be involved in the financing process. These entities have the ability to borrow from international banks and reach international trade markets, but this requires a well-regulated legal and financial environment, along with security guarantees.
3. Integrate education into the emergency response plan when implementing any project. Current recovery dynamics often overlook educational activities in emergencies. Because projects are sometimes redundant and absent in other areas, a phased plan should be developed based on small local regions. Relying on small-scale initiatives will ensure aid reaches all areas without expending effort in unnecessary places.

In relation to the infrastructure of the educational process, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Support the establishment of a mechanism for assessing the need for schools, their technical requirements, and their fair distribution: The number of schools falls short of the number of students in camps in both regions. In the cities, the second region suffers more in terms of the organizations' ability to build new schools due to considerations related to power

dynamics, and donors or contributors fearing their financial support could be misused for non-civil activities. There is a clear difference in attention given to education between cities, where educational institutions are more prevalent, and rural areas. There are also imbalances in the distribution of schools across towns and cities in both areas, with most operational and equipped schools concentrated in major cities. This deficiency has led to schools overcrowding with students, with some unable to receive education due to the lack of schools in their areas, especially in irregular camps which also lack basic services, such as play areas and health services linked to the school. This necessitates directing a significant portion of support towards the educational infrastructure in the camps. This mechanism should consider:

- The clear lack of schools designated for special needs students, in addition to the lack of facilities in schools to accommodate students with disabilities in both areas. This necessitates raising the importance of recommendations for projects related to increasing educational services for these groups.
 - The problem of energy shortages, such as electricity and heating materials, in all areas, due to the lack of electricity and diesel in Syria.
2. The need to ensure continuity: Schools in the first area manage to maintain continuity at all educational stages, unlike the second area which lacks secondary education. Therefore, it could be beneficial to merge some classes in the primary stage to save costs and ensure continuity of education until the end of this stage.
 3. The quality of education: Schools in the first area supported by organizations, generally achieve a better quality of education than schools in the second area.

When considering the gaps related to the inputs of the educational process, the logical equation for the process of education is based on three pillars. The first one is the individual responsible for the inputs of information and scientific experiences, that is, the teacher. The second one is the nature of the inputs, their accessibility, their acquisition, and their activation. These include the curricula, books, and instructional materials. The last pillar is the target of these inputs and how they are translated into tangible outcomes, namely the student.

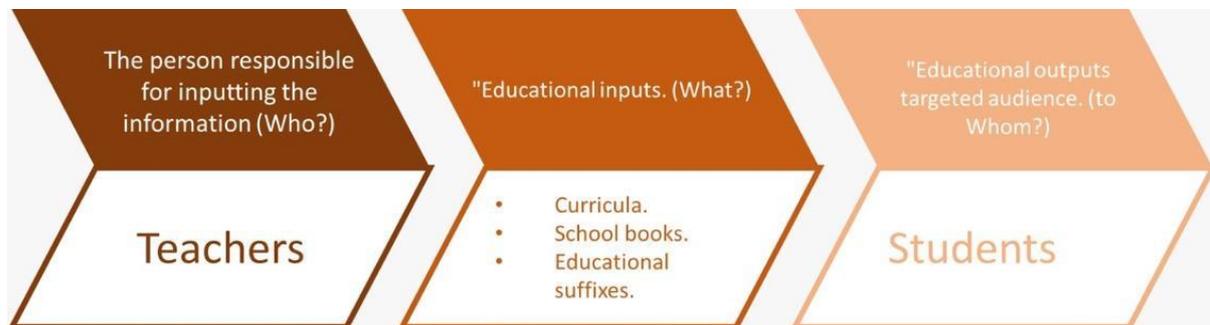


Figure (3) clarifies the mechanism of processing the educational information.

With regard to the gaps associated with teachers, both areas suffer from a lack of educational qualifications among teachers and a shortage of some scientific specializations. Additionally,

the number of teachers is generally decreasing in the camps. Teachers are continuously moving due to displacement or being absent for a large part of the school day due to living conditions. This is in addition to the security chaos and the fear it causes among teachers of military factions and power brokers. A shortage of female teaching staff is also a problem in both areas. Therefore, it is necessary to work on:

- Prioritizing the provision of salaries by allocating a portion of border crossing revenues to increase teacher income.
- Implementing an internal system in cooperation with all local councils, working to generalize it in the first area and reevaluating the centrality of the internal system in the second area.
- Ensuring active representation in teacher unions. The absence of an institutional body to which teachers belong, such as teacher unions, leads to feelings of threat due to the lack of an entity that represents and defends them. This requires the activation of civil institutions that are not affiliated with political or military bodies.

Concerning the gaps tied to the curriculum, books, and supplemental educational resources, the following solutions could be contemplated:

- **Mitigating Educational Poverty:** Both areas grapple with low academic proficiencies in core subjects amongst students. This necessitates the integration of enrichment programs into the curriculum. These programs would help students expand their understanding and connect with the modern world by incorporating technology into the learning process.
- **Promoting Coexistence:** While peace amongst individuals relies on political and societal harmony, the lack of any curriculum content or activities promoting shared community living can potentially undermine citizenship values. Such an absence necessitates efforts during and post-conflict to sustain these values.
- **Cultivating Pluralism and Democracy:** Given the diverse political backgrounds in Northern Syria's society, fostering the principles of pluralism and democracy becomes imperative. Students often harbor beliefs based on regional or factional loyalties. The challenge, therefore, is unifying them under the banner of accepting diversity, particularly when curricula are detached from the realities of the Syrian crisis and its ensuing social issues.
- **Striking a Balance:** It's essential to strike a balance between pure scientific subjects such as abstract and empirical sciences, languages, social sciences, and subjects that tackle religious and societal values.
- **Advocacy and Policy Change:** Advocacy initiatives should target the system's monopoly over education. There is a need to create international momentum supporting a national entity to oversee the unification of the curriculum, ensuring its relevance to the Syrian context and its educational rigor.

Concerning students, the gap highlights the fluid dynamics across generations, particularly affecting the youth. For instance, someone who was six years old at the start of the Syrian unrest is now 18, typically concluding secondary education and entering higher education. As

the same problems persist and new ones emerge, this impact extends to the younger population (ages 4-15) who were born into a plethora of economic, political, and military issues exacerbating the education problem.

To combat these issues, the following could be considered:

- Initiating programs to reduce dropout rates: Creating incentives to encourage children towards education, like scholarships, multi-faceted support for food, clothing, and healthcare, etc., can help. Simultaneously, it's necessary to enforce compulsory education up to at least the preparatory stage, as dropout rates remain high for both genders, increasing at the secondary level and even more for females in camps due to reasons like work, begging, and underage marriages.
- Addressing the psychological and social effects of war: The conflict has left profound impacts on the students' psychological and physical health in both areas. Hence, the role of a permanent social counselor within the school must be activated. Such a role is critical for tracking cases that require long-term programs and implementing these scientifically and systematically. This could be achieved by obligating supporting organizations to have a permanent social service worker as part of any aid provided to a school in the second area. Activating the role of a social counselor through non-formal education, which can be provided by organizations in the second area, could also be beneficial.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the reality of education in its current form by analyzing this reality and dissecting the complex and composite educational problems. This was in order to identify the most significant gaps that students in northwest Syria suffer from, and their depth and pervasiveness within education-related issues. The need to study this phenomenon arises from the fact that education is a right among the rights of the child, as international treaties stipulate the human right to education. It is the duty of the state in which the child resides to secure all that facilitates their access to education, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "Education is a fundamental human right that transcends place and time and is not subject to change or fragmentation."⁽⁴³⁾

The study was divided into two main aspects: the first relates to the mechanisms, methods, and directions in which the educational process is managed. It turned out that there are several factors contributing to shaping the current picture, including local, regional, and international factors. Their tools on the ground vary depending on the angle from which they work, some of which are formal, and others are informal. Diversity and multiplicity did not lead to richness and saturation but complicated the coordination of efforts due to conflicting interests and the dominance of parties based on the influence of de facto authorities on civil life.

This governance gap resulted in other gaps related to the material and human basis related to education, in terms of the existence and quality of infrastructure, the availability of teachers and their competencies, the reflection of the economic and social situation on students, and the

⁽⁴³⁾ Articles (28-29) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, human rights, date of site review 19-11-2022: <https://bit.ly/3oLSoTu>

effectiveness of education. It was revealed that there is a qualitative and quantitative flaw in terms of the existence and distribution of schools, which varies depending on the region studied. The poor economic situation reflected on teachers' salaries and burdened parents and students with additional expenses not related to the basics of life, making education a secondary priority that does not affect survival.

To verify the real effectiveness of education in students' lives, the study identified issues related to the quality of curricula and their availability, in addition to the availability of books and aids for learning. It was found that the current curricula only achieve the minimum temporary benefit, are completely separate from political variables, and the outcomes of education do not align with the requirements of the job market.

The decline in the quality of education results in a delay in the recovery of society, and the outputs of the educational process in its current state cannot be utilized in a way that reflects on moving the economic wheel. In the short term, it does not appear that education is the solution to escape the circle of poverty due to its inability to build a generation capable of initiating early recovery projects and paving the way for reconstruction.

In conclusion: Education and its continuity is a fundamental pillar of "early recovery", and a decisive factor in maintaining the intellectual and cognitive level of the post-war generation. Given its qualitative role in achieving a high level of psychological, social, and economic stability for both the individual and society, it has been included by United Nations organizations as the fourth goal of sustainable development. This goal is represented by ensuring good, fair, and inclusive education for all, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. ⁽⁴⁴⁾Achieving this goal is a requirement for achieving many other goals. On the one hand, it reduces poverty levels, and on the other hand, it is the driving force for moving the dynamics of economic growth and making it sustainable. Thirdly, it narrows the gap of inequality between societies, and leads to better mental health and, consequently, higher societal effectiveness.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Office, site review date 5-11-2022: <https://2u.pw/g9TSA>

Appendix: Study Tools

First: Focus Groups

Seven focus groups were conducted distributed over the two study areas, involving both parents and teachers. Given that the studied geographic areas include camps, and due to the different living conditions for students within these population clusters, groups were formed specific to those areas. The members of the focus groups were chosen from the local residents, with the following considerations taken into account: for the parents, they must have children of school age, and for the teachers, they should have a teaching experience of more than 3 months.

| Area 2 | | | | Area 1 | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Date of the Session Holding | Number of Focus Sessions | Targeted Group | Targeted Area | Date of the Session Holding | Number of Focus Sessions | Targeted Group | Targeted Area |
| 13/9/2022 | 1 | Parents of Students In the City | Dar Izza | 9/9/2022 | 1 | Teachers In the City | Al-Bab |
| 6/9/2022 | 1 | Teachers in the City | Dar Izza | 28/8/2022 | 1 | Parents of Students in Camps | Azzaz |
| 8/9/2022 | 1 | Parents of Students in Camps | Idlib Rural - Kafr Tkhareem | 29/8/2022 | 1 | Teachers in Camps | Azzaz |
| 12/9/2022 | 1 | Teachers in Camp | Idlib Rural -Kafr Tkhareem | | | | |
| | 4 | Total | | | 3 | Total | |

Table number (7): shows the distribution of groups among parents and students in the two study areas.

Second: In-depth Individual Interviews

Eighteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted in both areas, distributed on the stakeholder map as follows: individuals with a civilian status, affiliated with government entities, or actors within civil society, not affiliated with government entities, and directly related to education, whether they are administrators, technicians, activists, or workers in organizations providing educational services in the region. In addition to some providers of social and psychological counseling services to students at different educational stages. Please note that no military or security entity was engaged in any of the study areas.

| Name of Organization | Type of Organization | Job Title | Date of Interview |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ataa | Local NGO | Director of Education Department | 27-5-2022 |
| Ataa | Local NGO | Education Project Manager | 27-5-2022 |
| Takaful Al SHam | Local NGO | Director of Education Department | 9-6-2022 |
| Syria relief | International | Director of Education Department | 9-6-2022 |
| Bunian | Local NGO | Director of Education Department | 14-6-2022 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Shafaq | Local NGO | Project Manager | 15-6-2022 |
| Save the children | International | Project Manager | 16-6-2022 |
| Ihsan | Local NGO | Education Coordinator | 9-9-2022 |
| UNOCHA | International | Coordination with Partners | 20-11-2022 |

Table number (8): shows individual interviews with actors in international and local organizations.

| Area 2 | | | Area 1 | | |
|-------------------|----------------|---|-------------------|----------------|---|
| Date of Interview | Targetted Area | The person's work in education | Date of Interview | Targetted Area | The person's work in education |
| 23-8-2022 | Idlib | Administrator in the Free Teachers' Union | 31-8-2022 | Qabasin | Local Council |
| 24-8-2022 | Idlib | Directorate office in the Ministry of Education | 30-8-2022 | Al Bab | Local Council |
| | | | 25-8-2022 | Azzaz | Administrator / Ministry of Education in the Interim Government |

Table number (9): shows the in-depth individual interviews with official authorities in the field of education distributed over the two study areas.

| Area 2 | | | Area 1 | | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Date of Interview | Targetted Area | The person's work in education | Date of Interview | Targetted Area | The person's work in education |
| 7-11-2022 | Idlib | Child protection expert | 18-10-2022 | Jarablus | Psychological support for students |
| 8-11-2022 | Sarmada | Psychological specialist | 11-10-2022 | Al-Bab | Psychological counseling |

Table number (10): shows the in-depth individual interviews with psychological and social experts and specialists distributed over the two study areas.

Third: Educational Conferences and Workshops

During the research period, the Omran Center participated in several conferences related to education with partners inside Syria. At the end of the study, the Omran Center held a workshop, with the participation of activists and advocates for the cause of education, educational university professors, and developers of education programs, to share the preliminary results of the study and make observations on them.

| Type of Event | Event Title | The entity executing the activity | Event Location | Date |
|------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Educational Conference | Insights into the reality of education and its challenges in northern Syria 1 | Omran Center Partners ACU | Gaziantep | 13-9-2022 |
| Educational Conference | Insights into the reality of education and its challenges in northern Syria 2 | Omran Center Partners ACU | Gaziantep | 20-9-2022 |
| Educational Conference | The First National Conference on Pre- | Free Teacher's Union | Al-Bab | 22-9-2022 |

| | University Education in the Liberated Areas | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|-----------|------------------|
| Workshop | Monitoring educational gaps in the northwest regions of Syria | Omran Center | Gaziantep | 20-9-2022 |

table no (11):Shows The activities carried out by The Omran center related to the study



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