

## **Early Childhood Care and Education for refugees and host communities: examples from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey**

December 10, 2020

### ***Summary of Discussions***

This [webinar](#), jointly organized by the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) and the World Bank, was the first of a series of webinars to discuss the main needs and solutions for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Mashreq and Turkey, areas hosting a high number of refugees. It aimed to initiate a conversation among development partners, civil society, private sector actors, and local governments working on this topic and it launched the joint work of CMI and World Bank on ECCE in forced displacement settings.

#### **MAIN TAKEAWAYS**

- **ECCE is an important but underdiscussed topic, especially in forced displacement contexts.** Pre-school, that is education for children under the age of eight, is of utmost importance to make sure children are ready for school, even more in displacement contexts, when children may not speak the host country's language or know specific customs. In the MENA region, four refugee children out of ten do not enroll in school. In addition, pre-school is not compulsory in every country, and often refugee children are not targeted in pre-school or school-readiness public authorities' efforts. As a result, most ECCE activities are carried out by community-based organizations or the private sector, and children from disadvantaged families are left out. However, despite the benefits of ECCE for child development, research on ways to ensure a quality pre-school education that improves children's brain development and emotional and relational skills are still scarce and little known by the parents, who carry all the educational burden while they also face high difficulties themselves.
- **ECCE for refugee children requires to adapt curricula and training of teachers to the special needs.** refugee children live in difficult material and psychological conditions and are highly likely to drop school early. ECCE adapted programs should focus on learning key social and practical skills rather than classical pre-school learning and provide social and emotional support to children and parents (children-teacher quality interaction being key).
- **Especially in displacement contexts, it is important to focus on supporting parents.** Like the children, the parents went through traumatic events while in displacement and shall be supported psychologically and socially. Such programs, often managed by NGOs, can reach out to parents and contribute to raise awareness among them on the importance of ECCE, also via social media.
- **With an already low pre-school enrollment rate for refugee children, the COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating challenges.** As pre-school activities go online, parents become the primary source of learning, and ECCE institutions struggle to keep their online services. Solutions could come from local authorities or local actors such as community-based organizations in the form of support to families and parents.
- **Public authorities have a major role to play to boost ECCE for refugees and vulnerable children,** as they are key to improve the content of ECCE (through quality and adapted curricula), improve training

and qualification of teachers, monitor and evaluate ECCE activities, create better incentives and regulatory conditions for privately led ECCE initiatives.

- **The private sector is an important player for the establishment of a quality ECCE offer and for improving the care economy.** The private sector can be incentivized by public authorities to offer quality ECCE services. Similarly, as the care economy is often women-led, women can be offered entrepreneurship opportunities to develop care service businesses, such as kindergartens.
- **Solutions should be made in partnership with different actors.** Local examples show the importance of international, national and local partnerships: municipalities, NGOs, community-based organizations, the private sector, governmental institutions can collaborate to increase the outreach and spectrum of childcare services, such as providing internet access to families in need, offer dedicated childcare offers to parents working in the public sector and private firms, and allow mothers who leave their children at kindergartens to attend vocational training courses.
- **Next steps for learning activities:** The CMI will work on developing a community practice on ECCE in forced displacement context through follow up thematic discussions, involving a larger spectrum of stakeholders. Thematic focuses could revolve around the following sub-topics: content and quality of ECCE (curricula, training of teachers, evaluation) ; the role of local communities and parents in ECCE ; the issue of ECCE financing and regulations ; refugees and vulnerable children's special needs and targeted ECCE programs.

#### DETAILED SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

*Speakers' presentations are available [at this page](#).*

**Mrs. Blanca Moreno-Dodson**, Manager of the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) opened the meeting by highlighting the number of unprecedented challenges that local governments hosting refugees and the larger international community are facing. ECCE is at risk in forced displacement settings, and even more now with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which forced community centers and schools to close and left all the educational duty to families already living under strained circumstances. In light of these challenges, Mrs. Moreno-Dodson remarked the willingness for CMI to initiate a conversation on solutions for local authorities to face the many challenges arising from forced displacement and exacerbating with the COVID-19 crisis, in addition to the need to complement ongoing projects being implemented in the targeted countries. Mrs. Moreno-Dodson remarked the importance of providing solutions in partnership, especially by allowing the private sector, which is a crucial player, to be part of the solution by offering incentives. As an example, municipalities can partner with the private sector and local actors to enhance training for childcare professionals or to act as focal point for families. Mrs. Moreno-Dodson expressed the wish to explore ways to improve the local ECCE offer formally and informally in order to support the socio-economic integration of refugee and vulnerable children and prioritize ECCE in recovery efforts for the region. Finally, she outlined that this webinar is part of this effort and will initiate a discussion to approach the issue and go into details for finding solutions.

**Mr. Kamel Braham**, Human Development Program Leader at the World Bank continued the opening by outlining the importance of ECCE. He remarked how the World Bank has been dedicated for over 10 years to make children ready for school, looking at the importance of pre-school, as it makes sure that children are healthy, stimulated and ready for the next educational step. The World Bank education strategy aims to invest early in children, before they start school. Mr. Braham indicated how in the MENA region, and

more specifically in the Mashreq sub-region, there is a low level of pre-school enrollment, despite ongoing efforts and a common understanding of its importance. It is even more so in the case for children in refugee families, where four out of ten refugee children are not in school, despite the existence of structure and capacity. He further remarked the absence of enough resources in pre-school investments, and the important role of the private sector in Jordan and Lebanon to complement public efforts. Finally, he concluded by underlining that in this context, the World Bank has been trying to find innovative solutions by focusing on civil society and private sector engagement, however, with the COVID-19 crisis, new complications arise.

### ***Session 1: Overview on country strategies and policies***

*This session outlined the status of Early Childhood Care and Education in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey including the challenges encountered and ongoing projects and research regarding hosting refugees and supporting vulnerable local children.*

**Dr. Garene Kaloustian**, independent expert on early childhood care and education in Lebanon, started the first session stressing that ECCE is an important but underestimated topic. Dr. Kaloustian shared results from a study aiming at institutionalizing tools to assess the quality of early childhood education (ECE)'s learning environments and provide development capacity for continuous monitoring and evaluation of quality standards at public Kindergartens in Lebanon. The study was part of a World Bank project aiming at increasing the enrolment of children aged 3-5 in public kindergartens, provide greater opportunities for kindergarten services to children in disadvantaged areas and improve school readiness in Lebanon. The study used the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R), which allows to assess the overall quality of children's learning environment and visited 68 randomly selected kindergartens to collect qualitative data through observations of children. Dr. Kaloustian remarked that this type of academic research is scarce in the field of ECCE, especially regarding measures for the quality of interactions and the relational aspects. Main results of the study showed that attention is paid to the curriculum rather than the emotional wellbeing for children, teachers are not equipped to deal with challenging social and emotional situations amongst the children, and while schools managed to improve their fixed furniture and hygiene measures, the interactive and relational aspect had just little improvement. Finally, Dr. Kaloustian concluded recommending to make ECE more visible, further develop measurement tools, focus on children's social and emotional development and learning, support ECE workforce competencies and capacity building and support cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration.

[Mrs. Kaloustian's power point presentation is available here.](#)

**Mr. Mohammed Audah**, Education Economist at the World Bank, focused his presentation on the Jordanian context, presenting a World Bank project that seeks to leverage private sector capital to expand access to quality kindergarten services as part of the Jordan Education Reform Support Program. Mr. Audah outlined the issue of access to ECCE services, as groups with a lower socio-economic status do not have the same access as other groups, there is a low level of pre-school enrollment especially in rural and poorer areas. In this context, ECCE services are almost exclusively provided by community-based organizations and the private sector. Mr. Audah explained that the Development Impact Bond (DIB) is a potential solution developed internationally over the last 10 years. The DIB is a mechanism allowing investors to provide up-front capital for the financing of the expansion of the kindergarten sector through service providers, and receive results-based return payment: the outcome funder (in the Jordanian case

the central government) only pays after successful completion of agreed upon deliverables. The system also involve service performance management and oversight. The system does not require governments to pay upfront. Mr. Audah continued explaining that the project has run a review of the market and sector assessing the DIB as suitable instrument for the Jordanian situation, with great opportunity for penetration of private sector in kindergarten services. The next steps will be to continue developing a financial model to be shared with the Jordanian government and to be piloted at the end of 2021 in East Amman. [Mr. Audah's power point presentation is available here.](#)

**Mr. Erkan Acikgoz**, Director of the Program for Integration of Syrian Children in the Turkish Education System (PICTES) at the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE), presented the project, funded under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRITs), which aims to increase school readiness and foster the social adaptation for Syrian and Turkish children. The program is developed in cooperation with the Directorate General of Basic Education and implemented by the teachers. As not enough Syrian children are enrolled in Turkish school, Mr. Acikgoz outlined how PICTES aims to reach 5-6 years old Turkish and foreign children who have not yet benefitted from pre-school education nor any form of schooling, and who are expected to start primary school. The program started in 2019, through a summer program reaching up to 58 376 children in September 2019 (of which about half were non Turkish) in many provinces. Activities included: development of curricula, training of trainers for teachers and administrative staff, the delivery of material and equipment to schools, free transportation and nutrition services provided to participating students. To address the language barrier, PICTES developed partnerships with academia and gave Syrian children the chance to share the classroom with Turkish children to learn Turkish easily with their peers. Evaluation of the program showed that it contributed to increase language skills of children, as well as social, selfcare skills and cognitive development. Finally, Mr. Acikgoz remarked that the success and reach of the program will allow to provide similar services when the situation permits, as well as organize trainings that will support the professional development of pre-school teachers on the education of foreign children and inclusive education. The Program also plans to develop a mobile Kindergarten Application to reach more children. [Mr. Acikgoz's power point presentation is available here.](#)

## **Session 2: Local experiences: including refugees in ECCE offers**

*This session focused on practical local examples to ensure a quality ECCE for vulnerable locals, and refugees, including examples from the private sector, local organizations and NGOs, and municipalities.*

**Mrs. Rania Sobeih**, Director of the Zaha Cultural Center, Jordan, started the session with a presentation of the Center that serves 1 million beneficiaries for free, with activities for children aged three to sixteen. Zaha Center's programs aim to reach children of the less fortunate areas and strengthen their capacity through innovative programs and after school activities, such as sports-related programs, learning languages and recreational crafts. It also provides training to care-providers. Mrs. Sobeih highlighted the importance of support from the international community and of different kinds of partnerships: Zaha Center is expanding with the help from municipalities, the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and 300 partners who contribute to provide services free of charge. Mrs. Sobeih further specified that the Center's services also extend to families, in particular Jordanian and



Syrian women and youth, aiming to raise their capacity and create entrepreneurship opportunities through vocational training and e-marketing courses that meet the needs of labor market. They also target children and families with special needs through their rehabilitation center and a psychological and community support center. Finally, Mrs. Sobeih reported how since the COVID-19 pandemic started, Zaha Center implemented online activities and is aiming to open local centers again soon. She reported that face-to-face classes and sessions is preferable to online interactions, however the Center has been working on providing as many online solutions as possible, including psychosocial support to youths. During COVID-19, Zaha Center targeted 16 kindergarten and 22 centers by offering remote services for continuity of projects, in collaboration with some partners that provide children and their families with internet access. [Mrs. Sobeih's power point presentation is available here.](#)

**Dr. Alexandra Chen**, early childhood specialist at Harvard University, continued the session with examples from Lebanon. She reported that in Lebanon, the average enrollment in pre-school is at 27%, which is below other regions except from sub-Saharan Africa. She reiterated the importance to have discussions on ECCE such as this webinar, to identify areas where policy makers can make a difference, and where the private sector can also support ECCE for refugee children under 5 years old. Dr. Chen highlighted how Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are at risk, in bad living conditions, with constraints to play, sometimes working in the street on top of the stress of displacement, and moreover no mental space to “dream” of a good future. In addition, the Lebanese public school system does not include pre-school for Syrian children as mandatory, but just some basic school-ready skills, where teachers are not equipped, and classrooms are overcrowded. In light of these challenges, pre-school education is even more important: it is a human right, provides a pathway to having more options in life. Dr. Chen showcased good practices and innovative solutions regarding curricula programming, delivered by different actors with focus on adaptability and adapted learning, taking into account Syrian children’s special circumstances -and the fact that many will later on drop out of school so support their families: i) develop a love of learning in a short amount of time ; ii) teaching basic knowledge of language for basic social skills (their name, parent’s name, how to use Lebanese lira); iii) focus on logic and critical thinking; iv) teaching the children to learn in chaotic conditions and mitigate the negative impact of their environment; v) mitigate the risk for trafficking and kidnapping by teaching body ownership and saying no. Similarly, a specific focus shall be given to those children with disability, who can be assisted by specific NGOs and ad-hoc equipped spaces. Finally, Dr. Chen highlighted the importance of supporting displaced parents by offering psychosocial support to mitigate their displacement trauma: teacher-parents relationship being critical. Dr. Chen concluded her presentation by mentioning a few existing challenges calling for solutions: notably, the too strong focus pre-school learning rather than early stimulation and adapted curricula for refugees, the lack of political will to include Syrian children in pre-school services in the same way of Lebanese children, the lack of teachers qualifications, and the limited data available.

**Mrs. Meriem Ait Slimane**, Senior Private Sector Specialist at the World Bank, continued with a presentation on a perspective from the private and financial sector, drawing attention to childcare as an economic sector. Mrs. Slimane highlighted that childcare is a very important sector for women empowerment, economic impact and development, as women are a predominant part of the care economy, which includes elderly care and child care, predominantly employs women, but also frees time for women to work and access the labor market when an offer exists. Mrs. Slimane continued explaining how to include women refugees, especially as in Jordan, the labor market participation of Syrian women



is much lower than that of Jordanian women, for instance because of trauma, lack of network, less access to opportunities. In this regard, she remarked that, ideally, when developing the childcare sector, the ECCE offer should be publicly provided also to refugee families, although this is not always possible due to financial constraints. Mrs. Slimane outlined that, in light of challenges, private sector solutions can help: women can be encouraged to be entrepreneurs by becoming care providers in their home, including hiring other women as well. To make this happen, the regulatory environment must be improved: as an example, in Jordan the licensing process for businesses takes over a year, and many give up during the long waiting time. Mrs. Slimane concluded that the childcare economy can create jobs through entrepreneurship as well as free up time for parents to work, especially for women, representing a win-win situation for the economy.

**Mrs. Kübra Çinkılıç**, Director of Family and Children in Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, Turkey, closed the second session with a perspective from a municipal point of view on supporting the local ECCE quality. Mrs. Çinkılıç reported a series of projects implemented in Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, where children from different ethnic backgrounds as well as mothers are included for personal development. The projects also include Syrian children to help them overcome the language barrier, and for children of municipal employees, only a small fee is required for access. Mrs. Çinkılıç reported that the Municipality is planning to open new nurseries and day care centers in different neighborhoods, including industrial zones, in order to support working mothers and families living in disadvantaged areas. Mrs. Çinkılıç also reported how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ECCE projects, which were forced to close but are now opened at 50 % capacity. Mrs. Çinkılıç gave an overview of new projects to be launched in the future, among which a mother and child campus where mothers can focus on personal development and parental behavior while the children can play in a dedicated children's area, and a school program free of charge for children of disadvantaged families in cooperation with UNICEF, and the Child Report Card to ensure children's inclusion in municipal services. Finally, Mrs. Çinkılıç reported how the Municipality is continuously developing new ideas, such as the establishment of a Child and Adolescent Consulting Board to ensure active participation of children and adolescents to municipal management. [\*Mrs. Çinkılıç's power point presentation is available here.\*](#)