



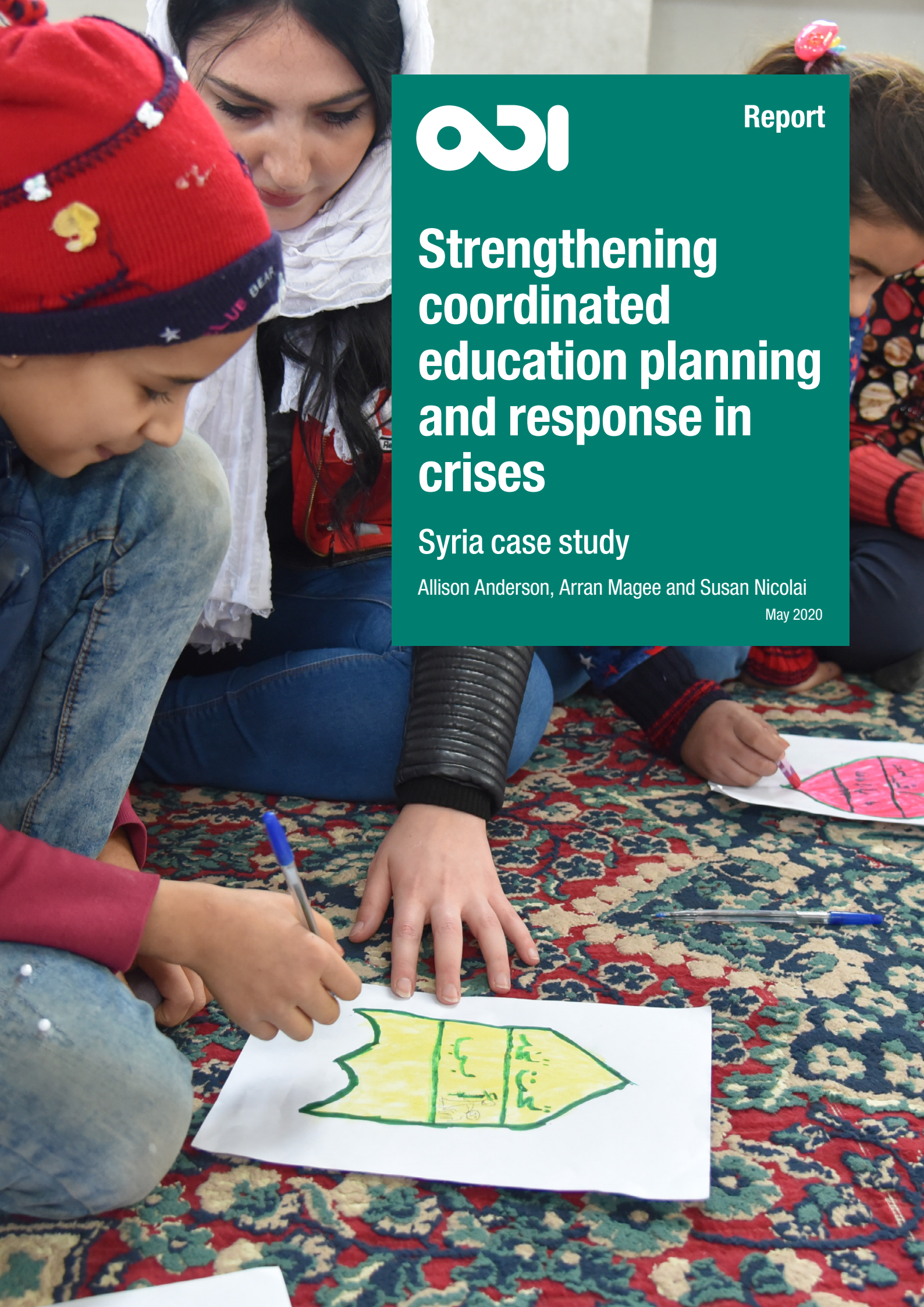
Report

# Strengthening coordinated education planning and response in crises

## Syria case study

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May 2020



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Cover photo: Children attend school in Bajan, Aleppo, Syria. Credit: UNICEF.

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# Acronyms

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>3RP</b>     | Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan              |
| <b>CBO</b>     | community-based organisation                      |
| <b>CBPF</b>    | country-based pooled funds                        |
| <b>DAC</b>     | Development Assistance Committee                  |
| <b>DFID</b>    | UK Department for International Development       |
| <b>DPG</b>     | Development Partners Group                        |
| <b>ECW</b>     | Education Cannot Wait                             |
| <b>EDF</b>     | Education Dialogue Forum                          |
| <b>EiE</b>     | education in emergencies                          |
| <b>EMIS</b>    | Educational Management Information System         |
| <b>ESC</b>     | Education Sector Coordinator                      |
| <b>ESCWA</b>   |   |
| <b>ESWG</b>    | Education Sector Working Group                    |
| <b>EU</b>      | European Union                                    |
| <b>FTS</b>     | Financial Tracking System                         |
| <b>GEC</b>     | Global Education Cluster                          |
| <b>GoS</b>     | Government of Syria                               |
| <b>GPE</b>     | Global Partnership for Education                  |
| <b>HNO</b>     | <i>Humanitarian needs overview</i>                |
| <b>HPF</b>     | Humanitarian Pooled Fund                          |
| <b>HRP</b>     | Humanitarian Response Plan                        |
| <b>IASC</b>    | Inter-Agency Standing Committee                   |
| <b>IDP</b>     | internally displaced person                       |
| <b>IHL</b>     | International Humanitarian Law                    |
| <b>IM</b>      | information management                            |
| <b>INEE</b>    | Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies |
| <b>INGO</b>    | international non-governmental organisation       |
| <b>ISC</b>     | Inter-Sector Coordinator                          |
| <b>ISIL</b>    | Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant              |
| <b>JHF</b>     | Jordan Humanitarian Fund                          |
| <b>KI</b>      | key informant                                     |
| <b>KII</b>     | key informant interview                           |
| <b>MoE</b>     | Ministry of Education                             |
| <b>MoHE</b>    | Ministry of Higher Education                      |
| <b>MoU</b>     | memorandum of understanding                       |
| <b>NES ESG</b> | North-east Syria Education Sector Working Group   |

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|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>NES EWG</b>  | North East Syria Education Working Group               |
| <b>NGO</b>      | non-governmental organisation                          |
| <b>NLG</b>      | No Lost Generation                                     |
| <b>NNGO</b>     | national non-governmental organisation                 |
| <b>OCHA</b>     | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| <b>OECD</b>     | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| <b>RRT</b>      | Rapid Response Team                                    |
| <b>SAG</b>      | Strategic Advisory Group                               |
| <b>SCI</b>      | Save the Children International                        |
| <b>SDF</b>      | Syrian Democratic Forces                               |
| <b>SHARP</b>    | Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan           |
| <b>SHF</b>      | Syrian Humanitarian Fund                               |
| <b>SLP</b>      | Self Learning Programme                                |
| <b>SOHS</b>     | State of the Humanitarian System                       |
| <b>THF</b>      | Turkey Humanitarian Fund                               |
| <b>ToR</b>      | terms of reference                                     |
| <b>UN</b>       | United Nations   |
| <b>UNESCO</b>   | UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation   |
| <b>UN ESCWA</b> | UN Economic and Social Commission for Central Asia     |
| <b>UNHCR</b>    | UN Refugee Agency                                      |
| <b>UNICEF</b>   | UN Children's Fund                                     |
| <b>UNRWA</b>    | UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees      |
| <b>WASH</b>     | water, sanitation and hygiene                          |
| <b>WES</b>      | World Education Services                               |
| <b>WFP</b>      | World Food Programme                                   |
| <b>WoS</b>      | whole of Syria   |



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# Executive summary

This case study examines how, in Syria, humanitarian and development actors can more effectively coordinate planning and response to strengthen education outcomes for children and young people affected by crisis. The research looks at the ‘who’, the ‘how’ and the ‘so what’ of coordination of education in emergencies and protracted crises for communities affected by crisis in Syria in 2018, leading to recommendations for action that can be taken by different types of stakeholders involved in the Syria response.

The Syrian civil war began in March 2011 and has become one of the largest humanitarian crises ever recorded. In 2018, there were 5.8 million children and young people from preschool to secondary school age in need of education assistance inside Syria (OCHA, 2017a). Direct attacks on schools and education personnel have resulted in more than one in three schools being damaged, destroyed or used as shelter and have driven approximately 180,000 education personnel out of education systems (OCHA, 2017a; 2018c). Insecurity and conflict have impeded humanitarian access and services, including coordinated education planning and response. Ground control at times rapidly changes hands between fighting forces, each supported by different international groups and governments, adding yet more complexity to the political situation on the ground. Within this context, the fragmentation of education authority across lines of control between the Government of Syria and various fighting forces has created confusion and impediments to coordination and delivery of education (UNICEF, 2018b). On top of this, education is highly politicised by all sides of the conflict.

## Who coordinates education in emergencies and protracted crises?

The ongoing conflict and shifting lines of control have created the need for coordination

mechanisms within as well as across conflict lines. At the time of writing in 2018, there were distinct coordination mechanisms within Syrian government-controlled areas (the national education system, National Education Sector Working Group for Syria), opposition-controlled areas in north-west Syria (the education cluster operating out of Gaziantep, Turkey) and Syrian Democratic Force (SDF)-controlled areas in north-east Syria (the North East Syria Education Working Group). While coordination mechanisms within each area have their own unique cultures and education authorities, they are committed to working together under a ‘Whole of Syria’ (WoS) approach, coordinated through a WoS Education Sector led by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children in Amman, Jordan. In addition to the WoS cross-Syria education coordination mechanism, this report also examines the cross-Syria Education Dialogue Forum (EDF) and the regional No Lost Generation initiative.

## How can coordination of education planning and response be made more effective?

This study looked carefully at coordination mechanisms within and/or across Syria as well as distinct coordination mechanisms within Syrian government-controlled areas, opposition-controlled areas and SDF-controlled areas. The challenge of effective and transparent information management in Syria is common across and between these mechanisms, due to security and confidentiality concerns of sector members. This lack of information and data, and the lack of transparency around it, remains an impediment to the ability of education partners to coordinate effectively.

It is notable that across key informant interviews there was limited discussion about the impact of tools and processes for coordinated

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education planning and response across the humanitarian programme cycle. It appears that the political, privacy and security concerns of those operating within Syria have led to face-to-face, email, Skype or WhatsApp coordination being the preferred processes. In such cases, it is critical to invest in people, their skills and capacities for facilitating these processes of coordination as well as to innovate with flexible and adaptable communication mechanisms.

This is particularly true for building the capacity of national actors in Syria. It is also critical to allow national actors to adapt coordination and communication processes and tools to fit and grow within their local environment, rather than impose an international education system and processes on them that are not context specific. More could also be done to investigate and replicate or adapt local systems in place prior to the crisis that are familiar to local staff, and which can be repurposed for new coordination needs, thus enabling staff to develop skill sets well-suited to post-crisis reconstruction. Establishing these tools together with national education partners in Syria will not only build ownership and sustainability, but will also increase the relevance and use of such tools.

### **So what does coordinated education planning and response contribute?**

This research, as well as anecdotal and other existing evidence, shows that while coordination requires significant investment, the returns in Syria have been high. Continuing to invest in coordination mechanisms and forums where education actors can engage in dialogue should be a priority of education stakeholders. Through analysis linking the framework of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for defining effective coordination along with the collective education outcomes (equity and gender equality, access, continuity,

protection and quality) of Education Cannot Wait (ECW), this study has found that:

- First, coordination has made a positive contribution to *equity* for displaced children. At one point, implementing partners were hearing that children in non-government-controlled areas wanted to sit exams and were unable to outside Syrian government-controlled areas. These concerns were raised with the coordination hub in Amman. The hub then reached out to the Ministry of Education to broker an arrangement and worked with ECW to mobilise funding to establish a transportation service that would safely ferry students across lines to sit exams.
- Second, in terms of *access*, coordination efforts have enabled a joint effort at fuel provision that has allowed schooling to continue in particular areas, such as Aleppo.
- Third, it seems that coordination has contributed to greater *continuity* of education in Syria, supporting ongoing education provision after areas changed control. Moreover, in the Gaziantep hub of the Whole of Syria (WoS) coordination structure, coordination made a difference on teacher retention by facilitating unification of a pay scale that could apply across the sector to avoid unequal pay and help retain teachers.
- Fourth, a strengthened focus on *protection* outcomes has been made possible through coordination efforts. Coordination structures in Syria provided an avenue for the dissemination of humanitarian principles, including safeguarding principles and information on protecting children with disabilities. This included both setting up training and sharing materials.
- Finally, it is likely that *education quality* has improved due to the work of coordination groups and their role in supporting certification and adopting WoS standard curricular frameworks.

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## Recommendations

To strengthen education outcomes for children and young people in Syria affected by crisis, humanitarian and development actors should more effectively coordinate planning and response. This study recommends that education stakeholders commit to:

1. Continue support for the EDF to facilitate dialogue and coordination across the nexus.
2. Expand the use of information-sharing protocols to increase transparency.
3. Collaboratively define ‘stabilisation actor’.
4. Prioritise formal and informal networking.
5. Avoid double hatting in coordination roles to reduce conflicts of interest.
6. Strengthen investment in capacity building for national actors and coordinators.
7. Increase transparency of how the WoS system works.
8. Ensure a strong role for the UN and WoS system in advocating for and safeguarding the humanitarian response.
9. Strengthen coordination around refugee preparedness.
10. Advocate continued international investment.

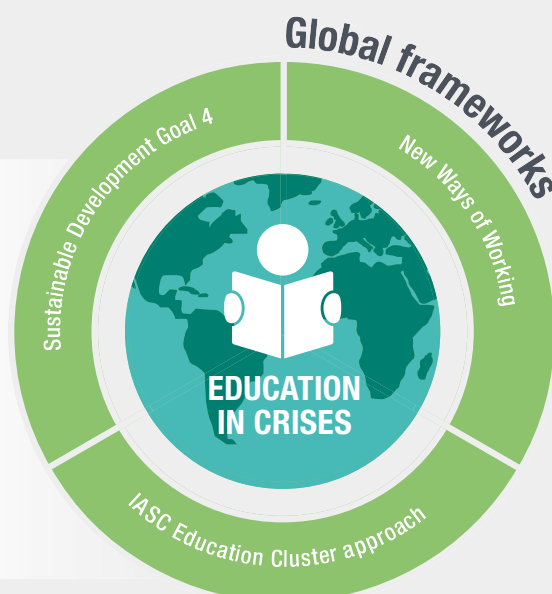
## Conceptual framework: Syria

Key features that shape education coordination outcomes

### Country context



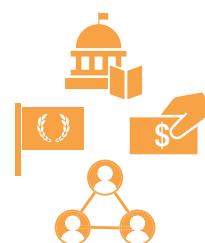
Civil war since 2011, resulting in one of the largest humanitarian crises ever recorded. Conflict and the fragmentation of education authority across lines of control between the Government of Syria and other groups has complicated the coordination and delivery of education. There were 5.8 million children and youth people from preschool to secondary-age in need of education assistance inside Syria in 2018 (UN OCHA, 2017a).



### Who: Coordination approaches

The main actors providing leadership for education planning and response, their responsibilities, as well as the type of group(s) present.

- 'Whole of Syria' (WoS) approach: System to enable information sharing and consistency across different coordination hubs, managed through a WoS Education Sector co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children in Amman, Jordan.
- Within Syrian government-controlled areas: The national education system, led by the Ministry of Education, and the National Education Sector Working Group for Syria, led by UNICEF and co-chaired by the Ministry of Education – Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation in Damascus.
- Within areas not under government control in north-west Syria: The Education Cluster operating out of Gaziantep, Turkey, coordinated by UNICEF and Save the Children.
- Within Syrian Democratic Force-controlled areas in north-east Syria: The North East Syria Education Working Group, coordinated by Save the Children.
- A cross-Syria Education Dialogue Forum is co-led by the Syrian Development Partners Group and WoS Education Coordinators, and a regional No Lost Generation cross-sectoral initiative is co-led by UNICEF, Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision.

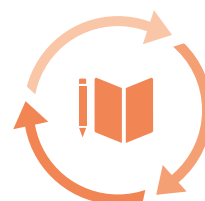


### How: Ways of working

The critical processes and tools that shape the experience of education planning and response throughout programme/project cycles.

**The 'Faerman factors'** analysis on predisposition, incentives, leadership, and equity reveals:

- Across Syria and/or at a regional level: WoS leadership has significantly improved coordination between hubs, although on-going conflict and geo-politics constrain WoS coordination in Syria.
- For coordination mechanisms operating in Syrian government-controlled areas: There is consistent dialogue and investment in leadership, time and resources; subnational education coordinators require consistent capacity-building opportunities.
- In areas not under government control in north-west Syria: Dedicated leadership has incentivised coordination and enhanced equity within the coordination mechanism through the participation of local NGOs; the coordination of the Syria Humanitarian Fund mechanism through the Gaziantep hub incentivised coordination within the education cluster.
- In SDF controlled areas in north-east Syria: The skilled leadership and full-time coordination post of the NES Forum Inter-Sector Coordinator has aided collaboration and coordination across sectors; local NGOs have been incentivised to participate through the NES EWG.



### So what: Evidence of impact

The collective education outcomes of coordinated education planning and response as linked to coordination quality measures.

- **Equity:** children displaced outside of Syrian Government territory were allowed to cross lines of control to sit for exams.
- **Access:** fuel provision has allowed schooling to continue in particular areas, such as Aleppo.
- **Continuity:** education continued after areas changed control and greater teacher retention supported by standardisation of pay scales.
- **Protection:** NGOs have benefited from shared protection materials.
- **Quality:** standardised form of certification of learning available due to adopting common curricular frameworks.



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# 1 Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian crisis in 2011, civilians have endured the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering and destruction. In 2018, an estimated 13.1 million people in Syria required humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2017a). Over half the population have been forced from their homes, and many people have been displaced multiple times. Children and young people, millions of whom have known nothing but conflict, comprise more than half of the displaced, as well as half of those in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2017a).

In 2018, there were 5.8 million children and young people from preschool to secondary age in need of education assistance inside Syria (OCHA, 2017a). Direct attacks on schools and education personnel have resulted in more than one in three schools being damaged, destroyed or used as shelter and have driven approximately 180,000 education personnel including teachers out of education systems (OCHA, 2017a; 2018c).

Coordinating education planning and response for the affected populations has been severely hindered by the ongoing conflict. Ground changes hands between various forces, each supported by different international groups and governments, adding yet more complexity to the political situation on the ground. This has created the need for coordination systems within as well as across conflict lines. As such, there are regional and/or cross-Syria education coordination mechanisms (whole of Syria (WoS), Education Dialogue Forum (EDF), the No Lost Generation (NLG) initiative) as well as distinct coordination mechanisms within Syrian government-controlled areas (the national education system, National Education Sector Working Group for Syria), opposition-controlled areas in north-west Syria (the education

cluster operating out of Gaziantep, Turkey) and SDF-controlled areas in north-east Syria (the North East Syria Education Working Group (NES EWG)).

Coordinated education planning and response in Syria is uniquely complex and challenging. It is also, therefore, an opportunity to draw lessons that will inform current and future education responses in complex emergencies.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Chapter 2 gives the broader background to the research and sets out the case study methodology and framework.
- Chapter 3 sets out key information on the Syrian context and the current state of the education response at the time of writing in 2018.
- Chapter 4 deals with the ‘who’ of coordination, providing an overview of the four coordination systems reviewed in this case study and the roles of different coordination bodies and key actors.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the ‘how’ of coordination, exploring the means and mechanisms for coordination under each of the four systems.
- Chapter 6 explores the ‘so what’ of coordination to help understand some of the implications and impacts of coordination arrangements.
- Chapter 7 sets out the conclusions of the analysis.
- Chapter 8 provides a set of key recommendations on how to improve coordination, planning and response for education in emergencies (EiE) in Syria to strengthen education outcomes for children and young people affected by crises.

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# 2 Research framework and case study methodology

This section sets out the overall framework for the research, including its main questions and aims, and explains how the Syria case study relates to the broader research project. It then sets out the case study methodology in detail.

## 2.1 Framing the research

Recognising the need for strengthened planning, response and coordination for education in crisis-affected contexts, the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Fund is supporting the Global Partners Project (GPP), which aims to undertake a comprehensive review of joint coordination, planning and response structures for EiE. The project will document existing practices and challenges in coordination at the country level and identify lessons across a range of contexts to support improved programming.

As part of the partnership, the Overseas Development Institute is delivering research to examine how humanitarian and development actors can more effectively coordinate planning and responses to strengthen education outcomes for children and young people affected by crises. The Syria case study is one of six case studies that are part of this research, and is intended to contribute to the process of creating country-level evidence bases, which can then be synthesised to develop a stronger global evidence base on what works across and within particular contexts.

The central research question of the study is: ‘How can humanitarian and development actors more effectively coordinate planning and responses to strengthen education outcomes for children and young people affected by crises?’

The sub-research questions are:

- Q1: *Who* are the main stakeholders contributing to country-level education coordination in emergencies and protracted crises, and how can their roles be optimised?
- Q2: *How* can coordination of education planning and response be made more effective?
- Q3: *So what* does coordinated education planning and response contribute to better education and other collective outcomes for children and young people affected by crises?

## 2.2 Case study methodology

The case study approach is based on four main steps:

1. An initial literature review and stakeholder mapping.
2. Remote interviews with key informants working within Syria crisis coordination mechanisms.
3. Analysis of collected data.
4. Validation of findings with key stakeholders.

For the Syria case study, literature was collected from a search of published online sources, later followed by requests to key informants (KIs) for grey literature. Initial KIs were identified via the literature review and recommendations from the Global Partners group. Concurrently, remote interviews took place over a two-week period between 20 November and 7 December 2018 and included 19 KIs from international organisations, donor agencies, international



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non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs).<sup>1</sup> The analysis stage drew together the information collected during the in-country research, triangulated this across multiple interviews and data sources, and conducted additional document reviews to close gaps in the information.

This process has drawn out key themes in terms of this research questions on the ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘so what’ of coordination in the Syrian context. Analysis of ‘who’ is addressed by mapping the formal role of different actors in the literature and sector planning documents, and was heavily augmented with information derived from the key information interviews. The analysis process for the ‘how’ of coordination – looking at enabling factors and constraints – draws on a framework derived from organisational science called the ‘Faerman factors’, which include predisposition, incentives, leadership and equity (Faerman et al., 2001). Analysis of the ‘so what’ of coordinated education planning and response was structured according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) outcomes outlined in the 2018 *State of the Humanitarian System* (SOHS)

report and provides examples of instances where coordination impacted the efficacy of the humanitarian response or directly contributed to collective education outcomes (Knox Clarke, 2018).

The validation stage involved sharing the case study report with country experts for their review and comments, as well as a Global Reference Group of experts on humanitarian and education coordination issues. The study was then revised and finalised based on these inputs.

The Syria case study may be better described as several case studies combined, which adds to its complexity and leads to two significant limitations. First, the Syrian response is spread across a number of regions controlled by different factions, each with its own governing structure and coordination mechanisms. Moreover, the conflict and control lines have shifted since the writing of this report in autumn 2018; thus the findings in this report should be viewed as a snapshot of the coordinated education planning and response in 2018. Second, conflict and insecurity impact on the sharing of information and result in a lack of reliable secondary data that this case study could draw upon, both in mapping current systems and understanding the historic evolutions of response structures.

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1 Researchers approached the Ministry of Education in Syria, through the assistance of the Education Sector Coordinator in Damascus, to request an interview with the Deputy Minister of Education for the Syrian Arab Republic. At the time of writing, this interview had not yet taken place.

## Conceptual framework

Key features that shape education coordination outcomes

### Country contexts



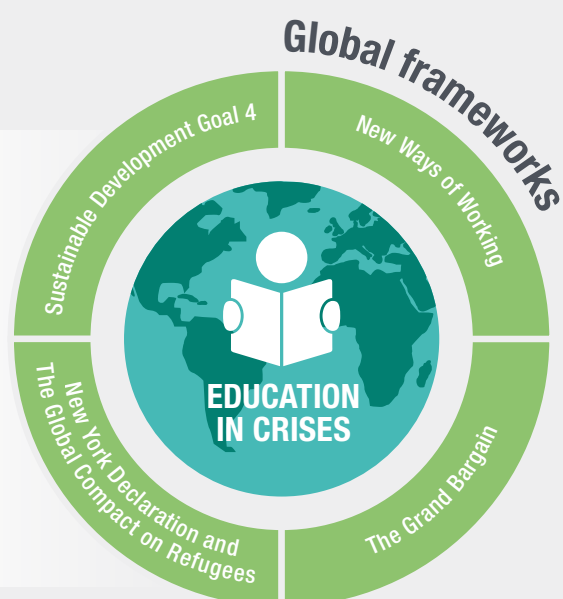
**Country situation:** the geographic, political, legal, social and economic context of the country, as well as existing capacity of national and/or regional authorities to respond to the crisis



**Type of crisis:** violence and conflict, environmental, health, complex emergencies, and whether displacement produces either internal displacement or refugee situations, and the scale of displacement, disasters or mixed situations



**Phase of crisis:** Sudden onset emergency and/or protracted situation



### Who: Coordination approaches

The main actors providing leadership for education planning and response, their responsibilities, as well as the type of group(s) present.

- **Ministry of Education**, and/or other national ministries
- Regional or local **government bodies** overseeing education and/or emergency response
- **IASC Humanitarian cluster coordination approach**, with the Global Education Cluster co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, and country level cluster leadership varied
- **Refugee Coordination Model** led by UNHCR
- **Development coordination**, guided by UNESCO and supported by the Global Partnership for Education
- **Donor-facilitated coordination**, which works through the existing coordination architecture to encourage a more collaborative approach among actors on the ground and mobilise additional funding
- Mixed, regional and other **hybrid approaches**



### How: Ways of working

The critical processes and tools that shape the experience of education planning and response throughout programme/project cycles.

- **Coordination across the humanitarian programme cycle (HCP) and refugee response planning cycle:** needs assessment and analysis, strategic response planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and monitoring, operational review and evaluation
- **INEE Minimum Standards:** a global tool that articulates the minimum level of educational quality and access in emergencies through to recovery
- **The Faerman Factors:** predisposition, incentives, leadership and equity highlighting the softer side of coordination



### So what: Evidence of impact

The collective education outcomes of coordinated education planning and response as linked to coordination quality measures.

- **Collective education outcomes set out in Education Cannot Wait strategy:** access, equity and gender equality, protection, quality and continuity
- **Coordination quality measured by OECD DAC criteria:** coverage, relevance/appropriateness, coherence, accountability and participation, effectiveness, complementarity, sufficiency, efficiency, connectedness and impact



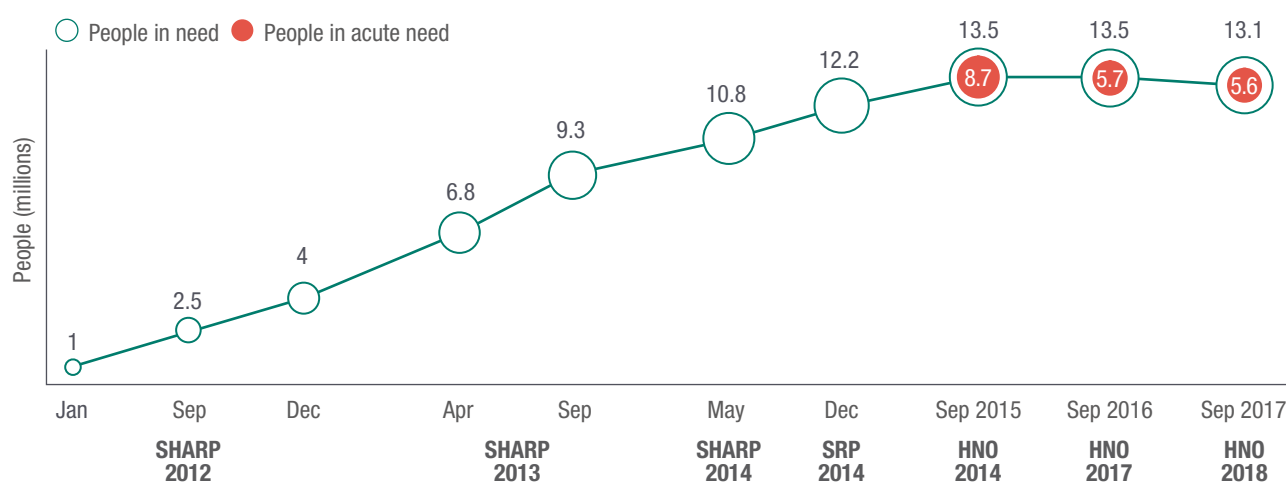
# 3 The Syria context and education response

## 3.1 Overview

The scale, severity and complexity of needs across the Syrian Arab Republic are overwhelming. In 2018, 13.1 million people required humanitarian assistance (Figure 1, including 6.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and an estimated 750,000 people living in ‘last resort sites’<sup>2</sup> (OCHA, 2017a; 2018c). Response in this context is complicated by continual population movement due to shifting conflict lines; in 2017, for instance, 721,000 spontaneous/self-organised IDP and refugee returns also took place, including approximately 66,000 refugees (OCHA, 2018c).

Of the estimated 8.35 million children living in the Syrian Arab Republic, 5.3 million require humanitarian assistance, approximately 127,000 live within areas declared as besieged communities by the United Nations (UN),<sup>3</sup> and 750,000 live in hard-to-reach areas (UNICEF, 2018a; OCHA, 2017a). Serious child rights violations continue, with countless children killed and injured by the persistent use of explosive weapons in civilian areas and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, as well as torture, detention, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access (UNICEF, 2018a).

**Figure 1 People in need by year (2012–2018)**



Source: OCHA (2018c)

- 2 Last resort sites/camps, informal settlements, transit centres and collective centres refer to those sites used only as a measure of last resort, after IDPs have exhausted all other financial and social assets (OCHA, 2018c).
- 3 UN-declared besieged area: an area surrounded by armed actors with the sustained effect that humanitarian assistance cannot regularly enter, and civilians, the sick and wounded cannot regularly exit (OCHA, 2018c).

Prior to the crisis, 100% of male and 98% of female primary school-age children were attending school regularly, as were 67% of both male and female secondary school students (UNICEF, 2015). Upon entering the seventh year of the crisis, 5.8 million school-age children and young people from preschool to secondary age – including more than 100,000 Palestinian refugee children – along with over 300,000 education personnel, were in need of education assistance inside Syria. An estimated 1.75 million children, or almost one-third of school-age children (5–17 years old) from the 2015/16 school-year were out of school and a further 1.35 million were at risk of dropping out. Rates are higher among the 2 million school-age children displaced as a result of the conflict (OCHA, 2017a).

Girls are disproportionately affected, with reports of girls staying at home for fear of being kidnapped or suffering sexual assault (OCHA, 2017a). Child marriage has also been reported as a protective coping strategy across the majority of governorates, leading to early dropout, mostly for adolescent girls, although sometimes involving 10- or 11-year-old girls (OCHA, 2017a).

Approximately 180,000 education personnel, including teachers, have left the education system (OCHA, 2017a). Since the beginning of the crisis, more than one in three schools has been damaged, destroyed, rendered inaccessible or occupied for shelter. What remains of the education system is overburdened, overstretched and increasingly fragmented. The number of students who have been out of school for more than five years is on the rise, with 40% of communities indicating that child labour plays a primary role in keeping children out of school (OCHA, 2018c), highlighting the importance of enhanced collaboration between education, social protection and livelihoods actors.

In addition, education in IDP camps continues to be underserved. For example, a recent assessment of 171 camps found that 74% of

camps and settlements have no education services at all (OCHA, 2017a).

### 3.2 Education within the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria

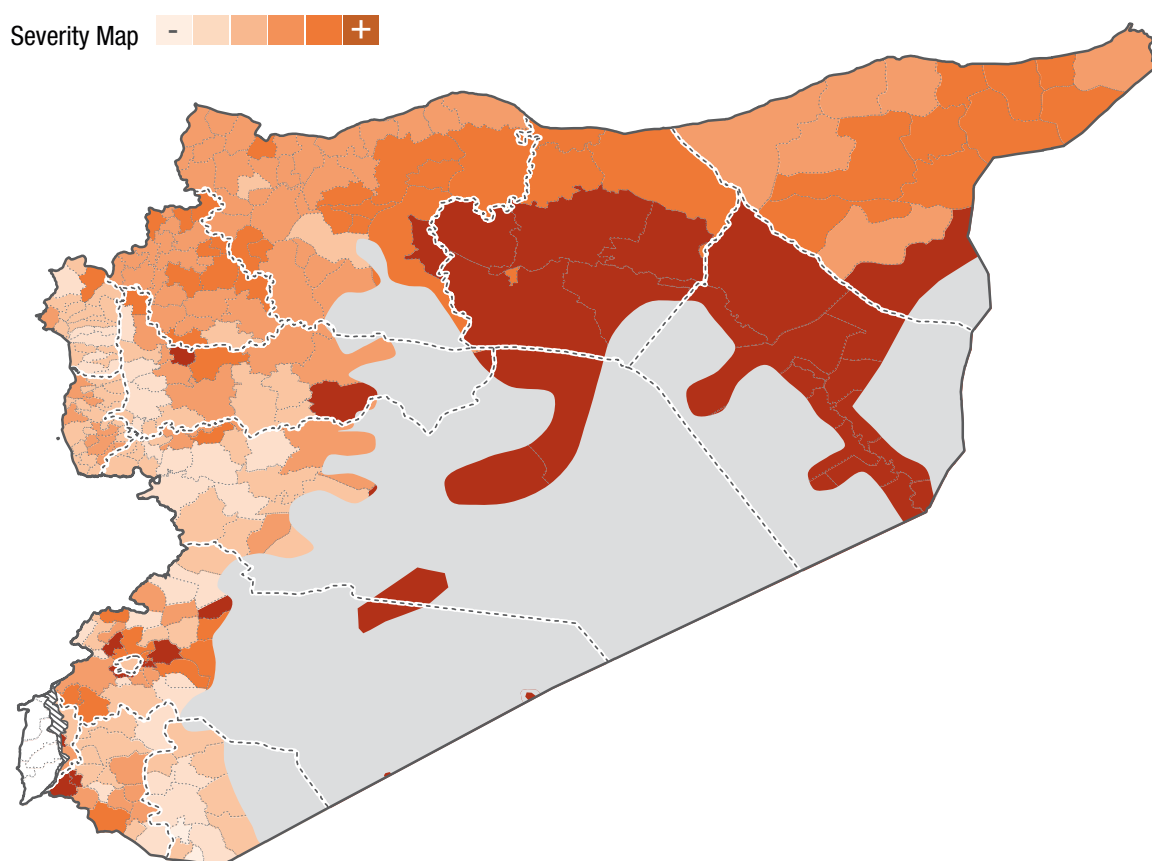
Anchored in the NLG initiative and in line with the ECW investment for Syria, the education sector focuses on achieving three specific goals within the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria:

1. Increase safe and equitable access to formal and non-formal education for crisis-affected children and youth (5–17 years old).
2. Improve the quality of formal and non-formal education for children and youth (5–17 years old) within a protective environment.
3. Strengthen the capacity of the education system and communities to deliver a timely, coordinated and evidence-based education response.

Current response strategies aim to bring children back to formal education pathways through a variety of interventions, prioritising vulnerable children including adolescents, youths, girls and children living with disabilities, especially in formerly UN-declared besieged and hard-to-reach areas<sup>4</sup> (OCHA, 2018c). However, humanitarian actors have faced limitations in reaching areas with the most acute needs (Figures 2 and 3). The 2018 HRP calls for flexible operational approaches and enhanced coordination among humanitarian actors in order to help mitigate these challenges (OCHA, 2018c). Local actors, such as community organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are instrumental to the continuation of humanitarian efforts and ensuring the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability of schooling, as they are in place during – but also before and after – crises, and are usually the first to respond following an emergency (OCHA, 2018c).

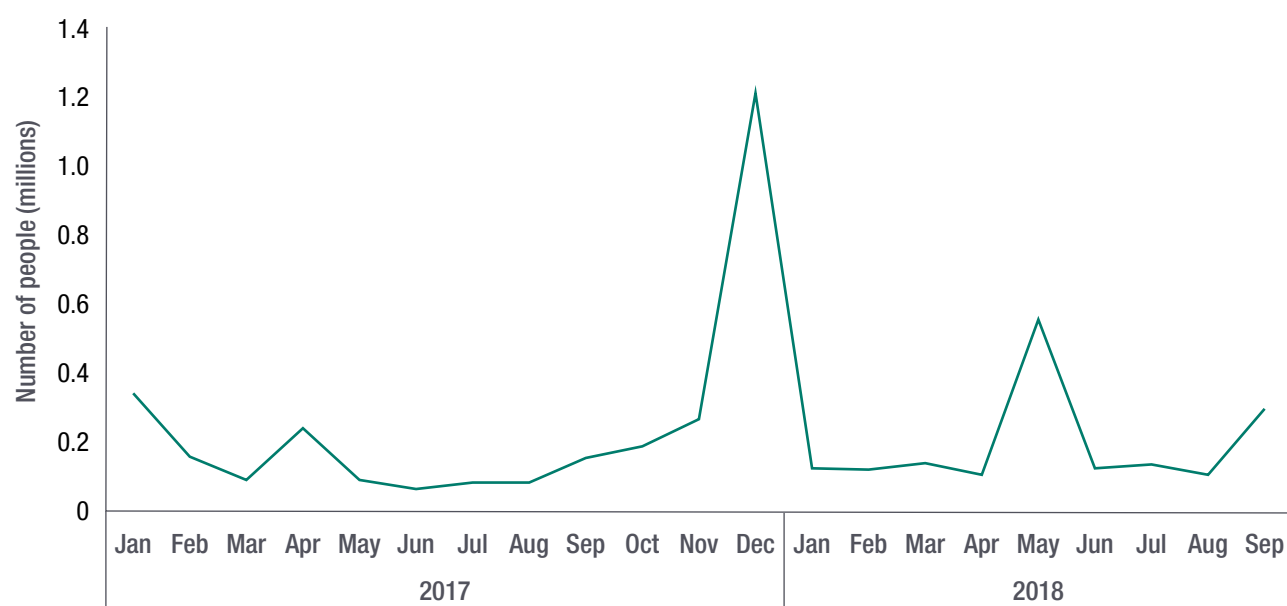
4 Hard-to-reach areas: an area not regularly accessible to humanitarian actors for the purpose of sustained humanitarian programming due to the denial of access, the continual need to secure access, or due to restrictions such as active conflict, multiple security checkpoints or failure of the authorities to provide timely approval. Some areas within the hard-to-reach category are subject to specific access constraints because they are militarily encircled. These areas are physically surrounded by single or multiple armed actors, with the effect of constraining access for both supplies and people to and from the area, such that sustained humanitarian programming is not possible (OCHA, 2017a).

**Figure 2 Severity of education needs 2017**



Source: OCHA (2018c)

**Figure 3 People reached by Education Sector Response (2017–2018)**



Source: OCHA (2018a)

Access strategies include small-scale rehabilitation of damaged schools and establishment of other safe temporary/alternative learning spaces (OCHA, 2018c). The Self Learning Programme (SLP) – the WoS Education’s initiative to address equity gaps in access to quality learning opportunities – will also be scaled to assist those who miss out on schooling due to the crisis, especially in formerly UN-declared besieged and hard-to-reach areas (OCHA, 2018c). The SLP was designed for those children who cannot regularly access school to learn at home or in their communities and facilitates the learning of basic skills and core subject concepts in Arabic, mathematics, English and science (NLG, 2016; UNRWA, n.d.).

In terms of coordination, the *2018 Humanitarian needs overview* (HNO) (OCHA, 2017a) outlines three key objectives:

1. Provide effective coordination support at hub and WoS levels, and reinforced response capacity of national humanitarian actors
2. Maintain coordination and operational capacity for programmes targeting Palestine refugees led by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

3. Enhance security risk management measures to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel and continuity of humanitarian programme delivery

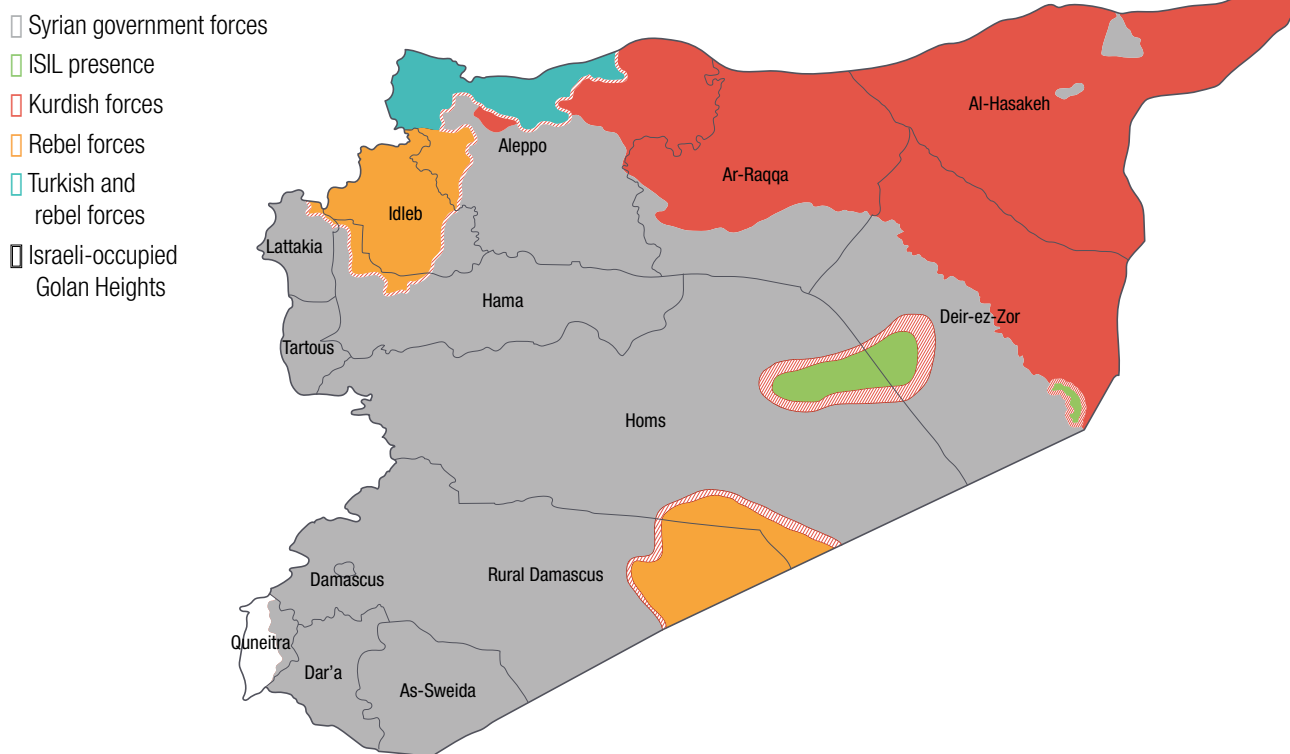
Facilitation of joint and intersectoral assessments, contributing to IDP tracking efforts and data analysis, along with information management on behalf of the whole humanitarian community, were highlighted as key objectives in 2017 and 2018 (OCHA, 2018c).

### 3.3 Education by region

At the time of writing in 2018, the conflict had essentially divided Syria into four regions controlled by different parties (Figure 4):

1. the Syrian Government forces
2. the Syrian armed non-state opposition largely in the north/west;
3. Syrian Democratic Forces, dominated by the People’s Protection Units – a Syrian–Kurdish militia largely in the north-east and
4. the UN-proscribed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

**Figure 4 Controlling forces in areas of Syria, 2018**



Source: OCHA (2018a)



### 3.3.1 Education in Syrian government-controlled areas

*Government-controlled regions* are predominantly more stable than regions under control of armed non-state groups. However, the relative stability attracted large numbers of students, leading to overcrowding, despite the majority of schools having started running double shifts to accommodate increasing numbers (Al Hessian, 2016). Moreover, around 150,000 education personnel from all governorates, including teachers, left the education system, which has negatively affected the quality of education the government has been able to provide (OCHA, 2018c).

Since UNRWA started its field operations in 1950 it has been the main provider of humanitarian assistance to over 560,000 Palestine refugees in Syria (Al Hessian, 2016; UNRWA, 2018a). Prior to the conflict, UNRWA provided basic education through 118 schools located in refugee camps and gatherings, all of which were running on double shifts to provide around 67,300 students with primary and secondary education, following the Syrian curriculum (Al Hessian, 2016). Palestinian refugees feature among the communities most affected by the continued crisis in Syria. UNRWA continues to provide education to over 47,000 Palestinian refugee students across the country (UNRWA, 2018b). Wherever possible, UNRWA students take the national exams conducted by the Syrian government to ensure that their qualifications are recognised by the host country (Al Hessian, 2016).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) are primarily responsible for the administration and management of the educational system, although the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Religious Endowment also play a role. While the system is highly centralised, Syria has introduced some decentralisation policies and some authority has been delegated to Directorates of Education in different Syrian governorates, who are able to apply compulsory education plans, provide health care through the schools, implement training activities, and license the opening of private primary and intermediate schools, early childhood education centres and evening classes (Al Hessian, 2016).

Syria follows a 12-year system of basic and secondary education in Arabic, consisting of nine years of basic education and three years of secondary education. Early childhood education (pre-primary) is available for children aged three to five, but is not compulsory and is provided on a fee-paying basis (WES, 2016). Basic education (grades 1–9) is free and compulsory and is divided into two cycles. The first cycle is six years; the second is three. The Syrian MoE supervises basic and secondary education, including private schools, and is directly responsible for policy, curriculum and learning materials. Students take a national exam at the end of the second basic education cycle. Those who pass are awarded the Basic Education Certificate and permitted to proceed to secondary schooling (WES, 2016). The MoE is also the primary governing body for secondary schools. Secondary education lasts three years, from grades 10–12 (ages 16–18 years), and is offered at general academic secondary schools and technical/vocational school (WES, 2016). Secondary schooling concludes with a central national exam leading to the General Secondary Certificate. In principle, those who complete the cycle successfully are admitted to universities and other tertiary education institutions (Al Hessian, 2018).

Higher education is governed by the MoHE, which is also responsible for developing, deciding, implementing and evaluating higher education policy, laws and regulations. A four-year bachelor's degree, which addresses pedagogy, subject specialisation and practical training, was required for those wishing to teach in Syria (WES, 2016). Alternatively, individuals who held a bachelor's degree in another field could complete a one-year programme leading to a *Qualifying Diploma in Education* certificate (WES, 2016).

### 3.3.2 Education in armed opposition-controlled areas

*Opposition-controlled regions*: in contrast to the centralised education system of the Syrian MoE, the situation has varied across opposition-held areas in north-west Syria, leading to the decentralisation of many education governance functions to the provincial level Education Directorates. Some of the education governance

structures that have been established mirror the pre-conflict education governance system while others have adapted these structures or created new structures entirely (UNICEF, 2018b). The Education Directorates in armed opposition-controlled areas have taken responsibility for formal education, while largely leaving non-formal education activities to NGOs (key informant interview (KII), 2018).

Education services often used the official Syrian curriculum, but with certain subjects removed, such as national education and history, deemed to reflect the views of the present government (Al Hessian, 2016). Some local organisations and NGOs tried to improve the educational situation by opening institutes and organising courses and centres for children. National exams in Syria are conducted exclusively in government-controlled areas. Students from the opposition areas often have to undertake long and dangerous journeys across contested lines to sit their exams, which prevents many from continuing their education.

### 3.3.3 Education in Syrian Democratic Force-controlled areas

*SDF regions* (three Governorates: Ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Al-Hasakah and the Menbij sub-district in the Aleppo Governorate, including Manbij IDP camp) remained relatively safe in comparison to opposition held areas (Al Hessian, 2016). The Kurdish Self-Administration fundamentally does not see its future as integrated within Syrian governance, but rather aspires to autonomy or self-rule in the northern Kurdish area. That said, to some extent the Syrian government has been able to ensure centralised procedures and systems remain intact in areas controlled by the Kurdish self-administration (UNICEF, 2018b).

In north-east Syria and in some SDF-controlled areas, the Government of Syria (GoS) is still providing salaries to teachers and administrators in government-managed public schools as well as a number of Kurdish curricula schools. From GoS-accessible sides, international organisations

provide minor school rehabilitation, equipment, supplies and support to teacher training. A curriculum was developed by the Kurds and taught in the Kurdish language, as well as Arabic and Syriac (Aramaic).

### 3.3.4 ISIL-controlled areas

*ISIL-held areas* are believed to have operated various educational activities focusing on spreading their radical Islamist ideology (OCHA, 2017a), but no reliable information was found as to its nature. Consequently, this will not be covered in this report.

## 3.4 International financing for education in Syria

Only 33% of the education needs outlined in the Syria 2018 HRP had been met at the time of writing in 2018 (81.1 million of 240.3 million) (FTS, n.d.). According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Financial Tracking Service (accessed in 2018), however, an additional 21% of these declared needs are provided bilaterally and are not directly aligned with the HRP.<sup>5</sup> This pattern does not appear to be unique to Syria, although it does potentially impact the ability to coordinate responses effectively.

Funding is generally provided under three categories: humanitarian funding, development funding and stabilisation funding. While the first two are relatively common practice during crises, the stabilisation funding reflects the political nature of the crisis. Stabilisation funding, for which there appeared to be no widely accepted definition among KIs in Syria, is broadly understood as funding channelled to a non-recognised government structure occupying contested land and subsequently at risk of being tied to a political agenda. In terms of education, stabilisation funding has been used for activities such as establishing and/or supporting education systems in opposition-held areas. KIs informed researchers that much of the stabilisation funding, due to the perception of its

5 The Financial Tracking Service (FTS) dataset is fed by voluntary reports on funding flows and pledges provided by donors and recipient organisations. If donors do not report financial information the FTS will underestimate the funding received. In some contexts, the FTS does not capture multi-year funding.

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political nature, has been excluded from formal UN-led coordination structures, as it is deemed by many to be in conflict with the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Donors however, may fund stabilisation projects and humanitarian or development projects simultaneously, engaging with the formal coordination structures for the latter, but not for the stabilisation-related work.

Country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) play a significant role in the funding of education projects in Syria, and in the coordination mechanisms. The main CBPFs for education in Syria are the Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF), the Turkey Humanitarian Fund (THF), the Jordan Humanitarian Fund (JHF) and a fund made available as part of the ECW Initial Investment. The UN Central Emergency Response Fund had a role in funding responses in Syria up until 2013, when it was superseded by the SHF (OCHA, 2013a). The SHF is a multi-donor CBPF, funded with contributions from UN Member States but can also receive contributions from individuals and other private or public sources. Between its inception in 2014 and 2017, the fund received more than \$118 million in contributions (OCHA, 2017d). It is managed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to facilitate the timely allocation and disbursement of donor resources to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs. The Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria oversees the fund and decides on the funding allocations. In 2017, three education sector projects were allocated \$1.3 million through the SHF. While these projects supported the construction or rehabilitation of 109 learning spaces, provided training sessions

to around 119 teachers and got learning supplies to at least 14,454 children, this was far from the 23,748 beneficiaries planned (OCHA, 2017d).

In 2017, ECW granted Syria \$15 million as part of its initial investment window. Its aim was to fund education projects across seven districts and achieve system-level improvement in Syria,<sup>6</sup> strengthening at national, governorate and school levels, with a particular focus on timely data collection, analysis and dissemination (ECW, 2018). Allocation decisions are made through the EDF, established as part of the ECW initial-funding mechanism. In June 2018, ECW announced an allocation of an additional \$3 million to support the delivery of education services to newly displaced children in the ongoing Syria crisis. This allocation was to support aid organisations in meeting urgent growing education needs resulting from new population displacements in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates in the north-west of the country and in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah and Raqqah Governorates in the north-east. It will also build on the coordination and implementation architecture established under the ongoing WoS ECW \$15 million initial investment, in line with the Syria Education HRP.

The THF and JHF are critical tools to fund cross-border operations into Syria, and particularly into besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The scale in terms of education-related activities is significantly smaller, however. The THF funded 35 education projects, including 11 approved during 2017 for a total amount of \$3.1 million (7% of total allocations) (OCHA, 2017e). The JHF funded one education project with \$204,522 in 2017 to rehabilitate an educational facility in the besieged Ghouta region (OCHA, 2017b).

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6 Aleppo: Jebel Saman; Al-Hasakah: Al-Hasakah, Ras Al Ain; Hama: As-Suqaylabiyah, Hama and Muhradah; Homs: Homs and Tall Kalakh; Idleb: Al Mar'a, Ariha, Harim, Idleb; Latakia: Al-Haffa; Rural Damascus: Duma, Rural Damascus

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# 4 The ‘who’ of coordination in Syria

Q1: *Who* are the main stakeholder contributing to country-level education coordination in emergencies and protracted crises, and how can their roles be optimised?

At the time of writing in 2018, education authority had been fragmented across lines of control and had given rise to a number of different authorities assuming roles in the delivery of education in Syria, as highlighted in Chapter 3. In addition, numerous international and national NGOs, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, and UN agencies provided assistance across Syria using regular, cross-line and cross-border modalities. Humanitarian actors were providing coordinated education planning and response assistance within the regions controlled by different parties, across three operational hubs in Damascus (Syria), Gaziantep (Turkey) and north-east Syria. While each hub has its own unique culture and education authority, these hubs are committed to working together under a WoS approach.<sup>7</sup> A variety of NGO and inter-agency coordination networks and donor forums work in each hub and/or at the WoS level to support these coordination efforts.

This chapter provides a general overview of the following coordination structures and mechanisms as they functioned at the time of writing, as well as the role of the key actors within them:

- **Regional and/or cross-Syria coordination mechanisms:** WoS, EDF, the NLG initiative
- **Syrian government-controlled areas:** the national education system – National Education Sector Working Group for Syria (also known as Damascus hub, WoS) and Hubs
- **Opposition-controlled areas:** Education Cluster, also known as the Gaziantep hub, WoS
- **SDF-controlled areas:** NES EWG,
- These are summarised in Table 1 and their relationship presented in Figure 5.

## 4.1 Regional and/or cross-Syria coordination mechanisms

### 4.1.1 The Whole of Syria coordination mechanism

In 2012 the first Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) was released, promoting the establishment and expansion of hubs aimed at increasing local partnerships and enhancing field presence to ensure predictability and regularity of humanitarian access across a wider geographical reach (OCHA, 2013b). In February 2015, a WoS approach was formalised with the implementation of the 2015 Syria Strategic Response Plan, now known as the Syrian Arab Republic HRP. The aim of the WoS coordination approach is to bring humanitarian actors working in Syria and in cross-border operations together to increase the overall effectiveness of the response through ‘one comprehensive framework, a common response plan and a supporting coordination structure’

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<sup>7</sup> One of the barriers identified by the EDF to achieving improved education response is knowledge and understanding of the role and functions of the various education authorities who will lead, manage or contribute to the delivery of education across Syria. Therefore ECW UNICEF has commissioned research to provide a comprehensive and detailed analytical mapping covering the main education authorities across Syria, including those under the GoS, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, SIG and Government of Turkey (UNICEF, 2018b). While this research is ongoing, it will be very useful for improving coordinated education planning and response and should be read along with this report.

**Table 1 Mechanisms for coordinated education planning and response in Syria (2018)**

| Region   | Mechanism  | Coordination lead(s)  | Members/partners   |
|--|--|---|--|
| Regional and/or cross-Syria                    | Whole of Syria (WoS)   | Coordinated by United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children   | Education coordination mechanisms led/co-led by UNICEF and/or Save the Children staff operating at a formal 'hub' level in Gaziantep, Turkey; Damascus, Syria; and through a semi-formalised hub in the north-east.  |
| Regional and/or cross-Syria                    | Education Dialogue Forum (EDF)   | Co-led by the Syrian Education Development Partners Group (DPG) and WoS Education Coordinators  | SDG members, WoS Education Coordinators and hub co-coordinators from Damascus, Gaziantep and Amman; regional representatives from UNESCO, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNICEF, UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The Global Partnership for Education and the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Secretariat are observers. |
| Regional and/or cross-Syria                    | No Lost Generation Working Group   | Co-led by UNICEF, Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision   | A coalition of around 30 active partners working at regional working group level, including WoS Education Coordinator, UN agencies, INGOs and NNGOs.   |
| Syrian government-controlled areas             | National Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) for Syria. Also known as Damascus hub within the WoS coordination mechanism | Led by UNICEF and co-chaired by the Ministry of Education (MoE) Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation in Damascus and an Education Sector | 69 organisations, including 3 line ministries, including the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs; 9 UN agencies; 43 NNGOs and 13 INGOs.   |
| Opposition-controlled areas                    | Education Cluster. Also known as the Gaziantep hub within the WoS coordination mechanism                                   | Coordinated by UNICEF and Save the Children   | 125 members, with 70 active members, mostly Syrian, Turkish and INGOs, also UN agencies implementing education activities in opposition areas.   |
| Syrian Democratic Force (SDF)-controlled areas | North East Syria Education Working Group (NES EWG)   | Coordinated by Save the Children  | Approximately 50 organisational partners, including INGOs, NNGOs, diaspora NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) (ethnic/religious/political and/or geographical area).   |

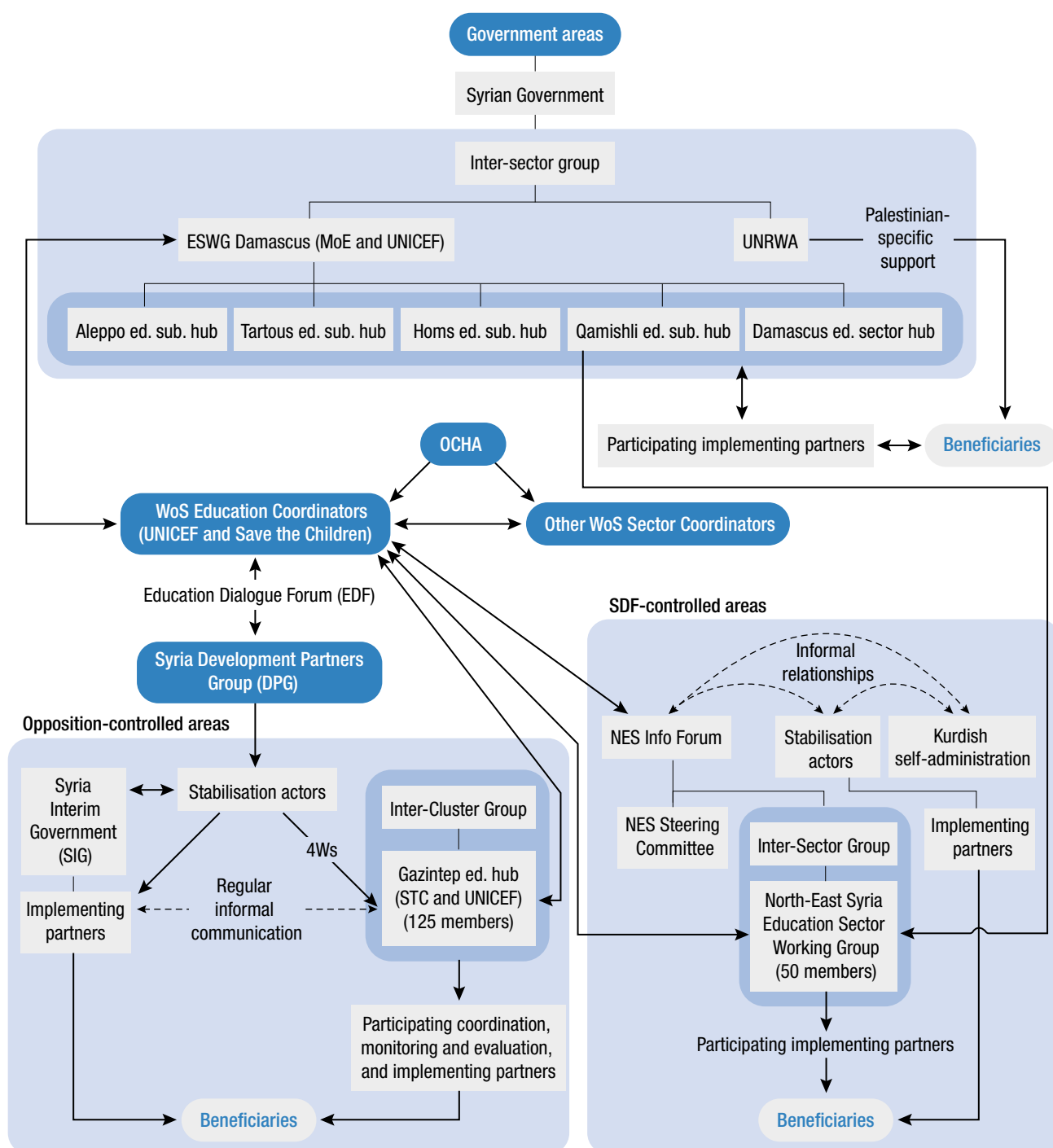
(WoS, 2015: 1). At the time of writing, the WoS coordination architecture consisted of three separate hubs – Damascus (Syria), Gaziantep (Turkey) and north-east Syria – coordinated by a WoS inter-sector coordinator and supported by OCHA, working within the framework of the annual HRP (Figure 6).

The WoS Education Sector is co-coordinated by UNICEF and Save the Children and supported by an information management (IM) specialist working with the WoS Education Sector team. The role of the WoS Education Co-Coordinators and IM specialist is to provide flexible, responsive support to the hubs by facilitating WoS analysis,

planning and reporting, and facilitating coherence and consistency of humanitarian education across the hub level. While WoS Education Coordinators initially double hatted, the roles became full-time in 2017 due to increased work related to the ECW Programme (KIIs, 2018). However, at the time of writing, double hatting continued, as a WoS coordinator was also holding a coordination role in Gaziantep.

The specific facilitation and coordination roles of the WoS Education Sector are numerous; coordinators serve as technical advisors, facilitating exchange of knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt among different hubs to

**Figure 5 Key coordinators of education in Syria (2018)**



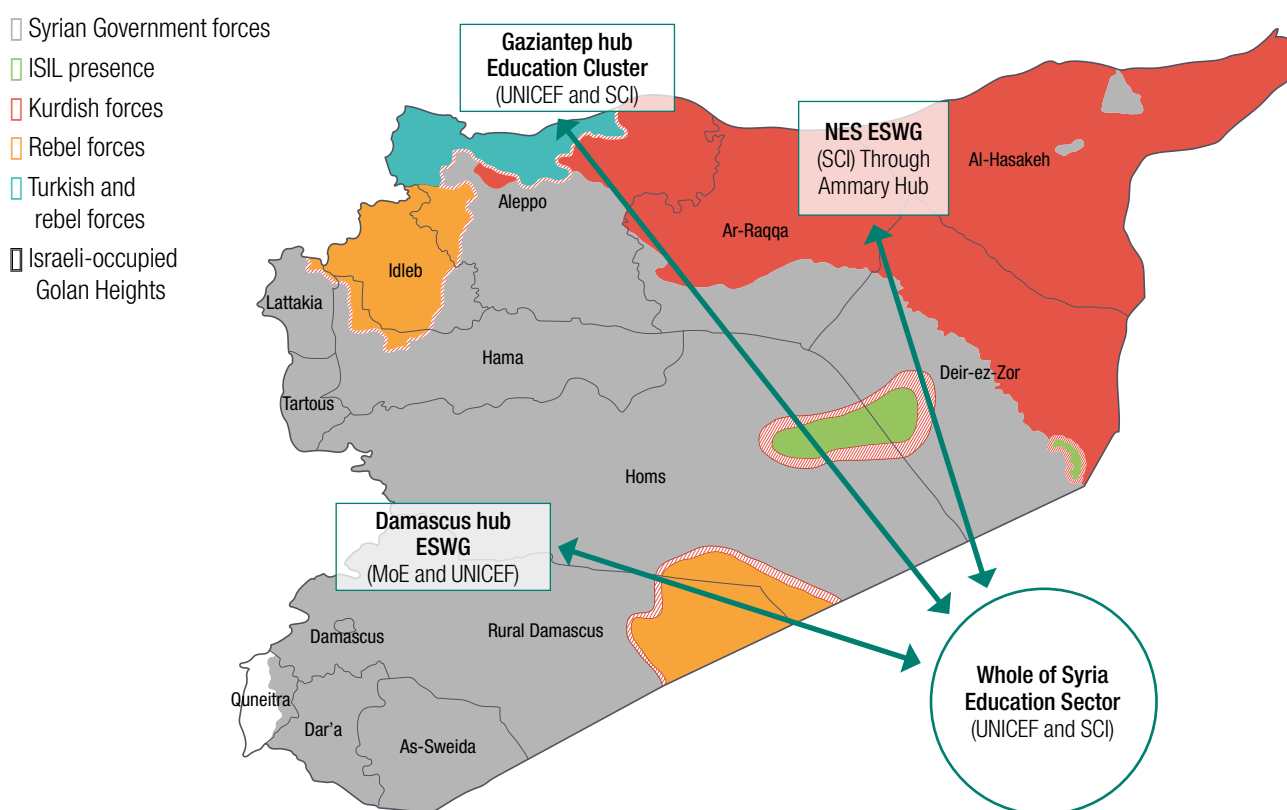
Source: authors (2018)

help the operations' smooth functioning within the hub coordination mechanisms. They also play a critical information management role, as the IM specialist gathers and analyses data from the hubs to ensure sufficient coverage and avoid duplication. Before sharing data with OCHA or other hubs, WoS Education Coordinators anonymise data according to

the information management protocols. In addition, WoS Education Coordinators are involved in relationship maintenance with donors, organisations and parties working across Syria; oversight and management of research and projects; resources mobilisation; and representation of the WoS Education Sector at regional and global forums (KIIs, 2018).



**Figure 6 Whole of Syria Education Sector coordination structure**



Source: WoS Education Coordinators, adapted by authors, 2018

#### 4.1.2 Syria Education Dialogue Forum

Given the strong opposing views between humanitarian and development partners on where and how investment in education planning and response should be made, the EDF was established under the framework of the ECW investment for Syria to ensure a unified and cooperative approach to addressing strategic and technical education issues (KIIs, 2018). Supported by a 2017 ECW grant to WoS, the Syria EDF is co-led by WoS-level Education Coordinators and the Syria education Development Partners Group (DPG, see Box 1)

and supported by an ECW Programme Manager who manages ECW Programme implementation and follow-up of the Syria EDF meetings (EDF, n.d.).

The EDF is convened on a biannual basis to not only promote effective ECW grant implementation, but also to ensure unified approaches to systemic technical education challenges. Initially participation in the EDF was limited to the Syria Education DPG, donors or development partners who contribute funding to ECW or support education inside Syria, WoS co-leads from UNICEF and Save the

#### Box 1 Syria education Development Partners Group

The DPG is an informal donor coordination mechanism made up of approximately 15 like-minded development donors who, at the time of writing in 2018, funded education partners in SDF- and opposition-controlled areas (KIIs, 2018). Chaired by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and co-chaired by the European Union, a small but active group within the DPG discuss humanitarian-development coherence within the education sector in this mechanism.

Children International (SCI) and cluster/hub co-coordinators from Damascus, Gaziantep and Amman. At the second Syria EDF meeting, the Syria EDF membership was enlarged to include the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), UN Economic and Social Commission for Central Asia (ESCWA), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and World Food Programme (WFP) regional representatives. The EDF is tasked with reaching out to other donors and facilitating financing opportunities for the education sector inside Syria. As such, donors outside the DPG like Japan and Qatar have been invited to join meetings (KIIs, 2018). The Global Partnership for Education and the ECW Secretariat participate at the Syria EDF meetings as observers (EDF, n.d.). INGOs and NNGOs are still not involved directly with the EDF.

#### **4.1.3 No Lost Generation Working Group**

The NLG initiative was launched in 2013 as a component of the HRP and Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) processes to focus on the underserved areas of child and adolescent protection, well-being and education, in the Syria response, and supports joint programming at country level and fundraising and advocacy at regional and global levels for those inside Syria as well as refugees hosted in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt (KIIs, 2018). Co-led by UNICEF, Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision, NLG has 'a de facto coordination role' through an NLG Working Group at the regional level in the Middle East and North Africa, made up of operational partners, including the WoS Education Coordinator as well as UN agencies and INGOs and NNGOs (KIIs, 2018; NLG, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).

The NLG Working Group serves as a mechanism for coordination and collaboration, facilitating partnerships and cross-sector programming, advocacy, knowledge management and information sharing within the NLG Working Group (NLG, 2018c). However, the NLG Working Group does not deal with programmatic interventions; instead, the relevant sectoral coordination mechanisms – including the WoS Coordinator for Education – lead

on the design, monitoring and reporting of programming, which is embedded in the HRP for Syria (NLG, 2018c). In 2018, efforts under the education pillar continued to strengthen the delivery of formal and non-formal education through existing systems. There is a dual focus on increasing access to learning opportunities for children currently out of school through accelerated learning, improvements in accreditation, scaled-up provision of education services and self-learning, alongside enhancing the quality of education to improve learning outcomes.

## **4.2 The coordination system in Syrian government-controlled areas**

A key feature of the national education system in Syria that impacts coordinated planning and response is the centralised leadership of the MoE in Damascus. The MoE sets all educational policy and planning for the state and works through Education Directorates at the provincial level.

A national Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) in Damascus coordinates education planning and response in Syrian government-controlled areas. Established in 2012, the ESWG supports the identification of responses, gaps and emergency education needs through the provision of formal and informal educational services in accordance with the plans and priorities set by the MoE (MoE, 2018b). Among key activities, the ESWG supports measures to build institutional capacity in planning, management and monitoring of emergency education and works closely with working groups in other sectors to coordinate strategies and activities, such as child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition, and gender (MoE, 2018b).

Referred to as the Damascus hub by the WoS coordination structure, the ESWG is led by UNICEF and the MoE Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation in Damascus. The Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation chairs the sector meetings, which are co-chaired by a dedicated ESC from UNICEF. The ESC is supported by an IM specialist in Damascus, who also supports the activities of the Child Protection sub-Working Group. In addition to the

role as co-chair of the ESWG, the full-time ESC provides technical support to hub coordinators, who double hat along with UNICEF programme responsibilities, in Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, Qamishli and Tartous (KII, 2018).

The membership of the Damascus ESWG has increased from 44 organisations in 2014 to 69 organisations in December 2016, which according to KII was still the case at the time of writing in 2018. Members include three line ministries, including the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs; nine UN agencies; 43 NNGOs and 13 INGOs (MoE, 2018b). Active partners include the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNRWA, the United Nations Development Programme, INGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and NNGOs (KII, 2018). UNRWA is a member of and participates in the national ESWG meetings as well as intersectoral meetings (OCHA, 2018c).

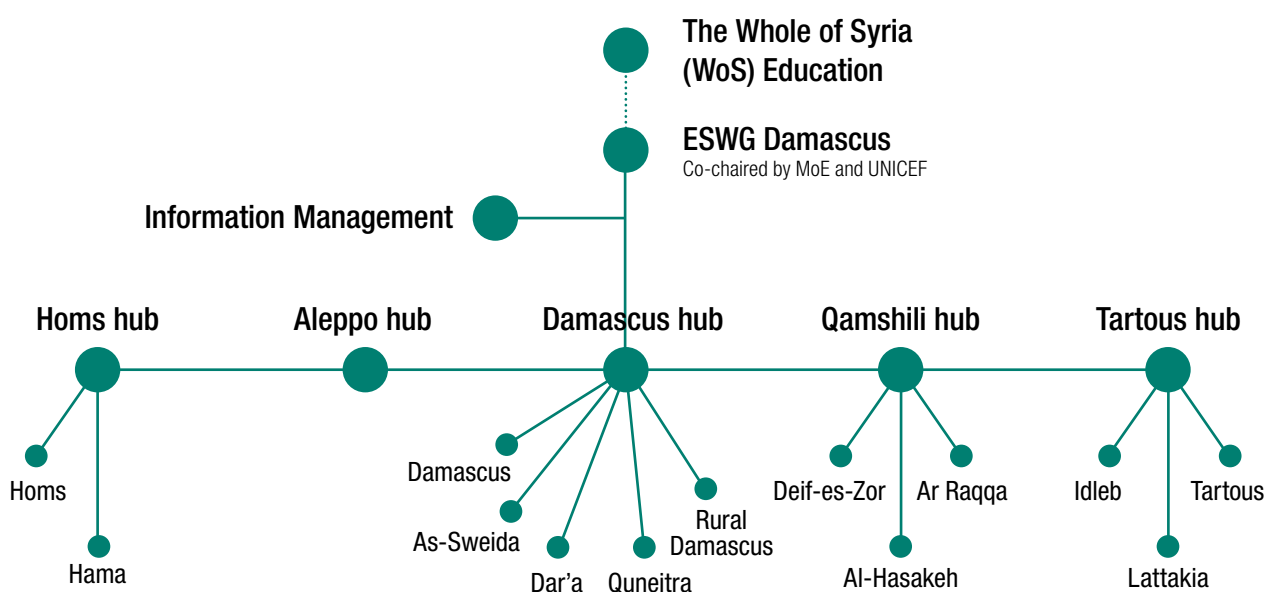
Subnational education coordination exists in five hubs in Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, Qamishli and Tartous (Figure 7). Each hub is chaired by the Directorate of Education and co-chaired by UNICEF. Each of these hubs aims to address

the formal and non-formal education needs of affected populations, including access to safe learning opportunities, preparedness and life skills and the capacity of teachers, in line with the plans and priorities of the MoE, and to strengthen education systems in the governorates within each hub (MoE, 2018a). The majority of hubs (Qamishli, Homs, Aleppo and Damascus) have working groups made up of government, UN agencies and local partners that coordinate technical support and information management at governorate level (KII, 2018). In coordination with the ESWG, these hub working groups work to ‘ensure coherent and effective education response through the mobilisation of government agencies and other education stakeholders ... to respond in a strategic manner across key areas of activity with the HRP and the INEE [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies] Minimum Standards’ (MoE, 2018a).

As described in the Whole of Syria section above, the Damascus hub also coordinates directly with the WoS Education team.

In addition, the ESWG participates in an intersectoral coordination group.

**Figure 7 Education coordination in Syrian government-controlled areas**



Source: Syria Education Sector Working Group, 2017

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### 4.3 The coordination system in opposition-controlled areas

The coordination system for Turkey-based humanitarian agencies providing cross-border humanitarian assistance within northwest Syria consists of a Humanitarian Liaison Group (akin to a Humanitarian Country Team), an Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, clusters and other coordination forums. The Southern Turkey education cluster, referred to as the Gaziantep hub by the WoS coordination structure, was officially activated as a cluster in February 2015 following the UN Security Council resolution authorising cross-border humanitarian assistance from Turkey into Syria, but it has been active as sector working group since early 2013. The education cluster is co-led by Save the Children and UNICEF, coordinating education planning and response from the border of Syria (WoS, 2015). As of December 2018, there were 125 cluster members, the majority being Syrian or Turkish NGOs and 14 INGOs, with 70 active members (KIIs, 2018). Most NGOs were operating in opposition-controlled areas.

The members of this education cluster have changed over time alongside changes in the political and security context. For instance, in 2015 there were 26 organisations active in cross-border operations and implementation, six of which were international organisations and 20 national (WoS, 2015). Syrian NGOs grew to be the largest contingent within the cluster, multiplying as they gained experience within the humanitarian field. However, Turkey's recent involvement in the conflict in 2017 and 2018 has given way to changes in official policy that present a challenging operating environment for INGOs and Syrian NGOs. This has marked not only a decline in Syrian and INGO operations in these areas, but also an increase in Turkish NGO activity, including within the education cluster (KIIs, 2018).

According to KIIs, the cluster is cautious of having too many direct links with stabilisation actors or those perceived to be guided in their education work by a political agenda that may contradict the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Thus education stakeholders such as the Education Directorate of the Syrian Interim

Government, as well as donors and implementing partners, do not participate in coordination meetings (KIIs, 2018).

It is notable that local NGOs established a parallel North-West Syria Coordination Group in Idlib towards the end of 2018 (KIIs, 2018). It was described as a local coordination mechanism across sectors to respond to humanitarian needs, capacity building of NGOs and local councils; little was known about it at the time of writing (KIIs, 2018).

#### 4.3.1 The coordination system in Syrian Democratic Force-controlled areas

The North East Syria (NES) INGO Forum is the coordination body for INGOs that were originally working cross-border from Iraq and in 2018 were working cross-line in SDF-controlled areas, including parts of Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and Al-Hasakah Governorates in Syria. Due to the unique coordination arrangements for north-east Syria and the limited UN cross-border operations authorised by the UN Security Council, the NES INGO Forum leads an INGO-hosted sector coordination system to ensure a coherent, multi-sectoral humanitarian response in Northeast Syria. The NES INGO Forum functions in many ways as OCHA in north-east Syria and in close collaboration with OCHA regionally (Kleivan, 2018). It is part of the WoS coordination architecture, and the NES INGO Forum Director represents members in key coordination bodies, such as WoS, and shares their concerns and suggestions to the wider humanitarian leadership (NES INGO Forum, n.d.).

The NES EWG is the coordination mechanism for education planning and response within the NES INGO Forum. At the time of writing in 2018, there were approximately 50 organisations in the NES EWG, covering a wide variety of organisations from INGOs and NNGOs to diaspora NGOs and CBOs centred around ethnic, religious, political and geographical areas (KIIs, 2018). Many of these NES EWG partners were not implementing education programmes in 2018, but were hoping to get funds to do so (KIIs, 2018).

When the NES EWG was established in July 2017, SCI took the lead and an existing education programme coordinator from SCI

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in north-east Syria took on the role as NES EWG Coordinator (KII, 2018). At the time of writing in 2018, the NES EWG was using an IM specialist in WoS, rather than having a dedicated IM specialist of its own, and a Rapid Response Team (RRT) member was supporting the professionalisation of the NES EWG during a 12-week assignment. While the NES EWG shares information across WoS and associated hubs, in some ways it had stronger coordination with the NES INGO Forum in 2017–2018, given that it did not start as an official WoS hub and that UNICEF is not part of the coordination structure of the NES INGO Forum (KIIs, 2018).

There are also stabilisation actors involved in education in north-east Syria, but they are not members of the NES EWG. While a KI involved in NES EWG coordination noted that there is

a ‘mutual wish to coordinate’, especially given the coordination role that stabilisation actors are playing in territory once controlled by ISIL, the NES EWG and stabilisation actors are still working to find the right *modus operandi* given the sensitivities of both groups’ working under different mandates.

It should be noted that there is also a North-east Syria Education Sector Working Group (NES ESWG) in part of Qamishli city, a divided city in Al-Hasakah Governorate in north-east Syria that is controlled by the government. The NES ESWG is led by the Directorate of Education and coordinated by a UNICEF Technical Advisor for Education who double hat as a sector education focal point. This coordination mechanism is detailed in the section above on Syrian government-controlled areas.

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# 5 The ‘how’ of coordination in Syria

Q2: *How* can coordination of education planning and response be made more effective?

This section examines the ‘how’ of coordination, providing a summary of ways of working and key coordination tools and processes for each coordination mechanism. Factors that enable or constrain effective coordination are then highlighted, drawing heavily on key informant interviews and using a framework of four factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of interorganisational coordination efforts (Nolte et al., 2012; Faerman et al., 2001):

1. **Predisposition** refers to the initial tendencies and dispositions that entities have towards potential partners that facilitate or inhibit working collaboratively. These predispositions can be both institutional and personal: structures channel behaviour in particular ways; thus the system may tend to encourage or inhibit cooperation, with these tendencies in turn shaping personal interactions.
2. **Incentives** relate to the ongoing ‘structuring’ of collaborative relationships over time, and the costs of and benefits obtained from coordinating with partners.
3. **Leadership** and leaders at all levels of an organisation can influence how people think about incentives and even alter initial dispositions as well as equity and power dynamics within coordination mechanisms.

4. **Equity** ensures consideration not just of the number of ‘equal’ actors, but also the recognition of the difference between and comparative advantages of actors and the consideration of the power dynamics present in any inter-organisational process.

At the outset of this section, it is worth highlighting three coordination tools and processes that are used across education coordination mechanisms in Syria to enhance coordinated planning and response, and which are referenced throughout this section: the Syria HRP, the Syria HNO and the 4Ws (Who, What, Where and When). Within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle,<sup>8</sup> the HRP is the primary planning and response management tool for country-based decision-makers, across the international humanitarian community and national partners. The HRP follows a needs-based approach to programming through a yearly identification of populations in need within the framework of the HNO and relying on the Education Severity Scale<sup>9</sup> to ensure outreach to the most disadvantaged population groups. The HNO and HRP processes for education are coordinated by OCHA, the WoS Education Sector and hubs in Syria, with national and international partners operating within the hubs feeding into the strategic objectives. Ultimately, the HRP is a tool to align coordinated planning and response, as education sector

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8 The Humanitarian Programme Cycle provides the framework for identifying humanitarian needs, planning an appropriate response, funding and implementing the response, monitoring its progress and evaluating its impact.

9 The Education Severity Scale ensures outreach to the most disadvantaged population groups. Sector severity analyses indicate the severity of needs across the country according to sector-specific indicators, which then highlight where sector-specific interventions are required.



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objectives, outputs, targets and indicators within the WoS Education monitoring framework are based on the HRP strategic objectives and related inter-sector outcomes (KIIs, 2018).

Information regarding which organisations (Who) are carrying out what activities (What) in which locations (Where) in which period (When) – the 4Ws – is collected from the hubs and analysed by each sector and across sectors at WoS level on a monthly basis (WoS, n.d.). Each hub generates a lot of data, which due to sensitivities around the locations and actions of responders in country, cannot all be shared broadly. Data is shared under an ‘information-sharing protocol’, agreed and signed by the WoS coordinator, each hub coordinator and all the participating members in each hub. This information is essential for sector coordination, with the aim of reaching WoS Education monitoring framework targets in a timely manner and minimising gaps and duplication (WoS, 2017). In theory, the sector analyses of this data are made publicly available on a monthly basis and feed into sector operational coordination, analysis and information products. However, in order to address security- and confidentiality-related concerns of sector members participating in data sharing within education sector coordination mechanisms, the 4Ws are anonymised when shared back with education partners. The impact of this anonymisation of the 4Ws on education coordination will be explored in the sections below.

## 5.1 The ‘how’: regional/cross-Syria coordination mechanisms

### 5.1.1 The WoS coordination mechanism

While the WoS approach aims to unite response across hubs, its role is to facilitate and inform the actions deemed necessary by partners, rather than specify strategic directions. A WoS coordinator explained that responses are largely guided by a formal or informal Strategic Advisory Board in each education hub that dictates real-time changes in direction and response. WoS coordinators do not engage directly with

governing structures; instead, hub coordinators maintain the relationships. WoS provides a support mechanism, rather than a leadership mechanism. As such, WoS coordinators lead face-to-face meetings with the sector coordinators and information managers of the three hubs one-day prior to the biannual EDF meetings and monthly via Skype to share up-to-date information about the crisis and education responses as well as discuss issues of implementation. The agenda of Skype calls is responsive to issues requested by hub coordinators as well as what is happening on the ground. In addition, the WoS Education Sector has created a WhatsApp Group to get real-time information on education security issues and monitor changes among ECW grant recipients. It was described as particularly useful in getting real-time information on attacks against schools (KIIs, 2018).

At the WoS level, OCHA chairs a monthly inter-sector Skype call, which becomes more frequent if circumstances require. A Skype group with all active WoS coordinators and OCHA chairs provides regular communication between inter-sector coordinators. One ex-WoS coordinator described the group as ‘very active’, with a ‘wealth of information being shared that we couldn’t otherwise get to quickly’, although some actors were found to be more active than others.

### Factors that enable or constrain coordination

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that enable or constrain coordinated education planning and response at the WoS level. These are set out below using the Faerman factors (predisposition, leadership, incentives, equity).

#### *Predisposition*

Politics appears to be the single biggest constraint to WoS coordination in Syria. Coordinators suggested ‘red lines’<sup>10</sup> established by each donor or organisation prevented resources being distributed according to prioritised needs. A key example comes from the shifting control of ground. A WoS coordinator noted that in December 2018 63% of Syria was under

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Red line’ was a term used regularly by KIs to describe a point where their or others’ purview ended. It does not refer to any formally established guidelines, but the lines tacitly established by each actor.

government control, and rising, yet funding is not being shifted across lines where a growing number of children are left in need due to various bilateral donors' foreign policies preventing them from providing support to the GoS (KII, 2018). A WoS coordinator expressed their frustration: 'I am just here to address the needs of affected children. Children don't understand politics.'

Politics also hinders the establishment or evolution of support mechanisms. A WoS coordinator describes the challenges in the first six months of the ECW initial investment implementation:

We put in a proposal and a concept note in, maybe it was August [2016]. But it didn't start until April 2017. It took that much time to negotiate how to do it. Syria was one of the test cases, we had agreed the investment had to go through a coordination mechanism, so it was going to be WoS who managed it. We structured three outcomes in the ECW funding proposal, one was that it must bridge humanitarian and development. The DPG came back and said they wanted to make sure the fund could be channelled to opposition areas and were concerned about the government areas. WoS said they worked in both areas, so it shouldn't have been a problem. There was differing views, how do you [WoS] work, how will it work. Lots of back and forth. Then there was fear from stabilisation actors, because we were working in government-held areas and what would that mean [for donors supporting opposition held areas]. Lots of meetings, lots of time working through this. The request questioned the whole WoS approach.

In the case of ECW, its ambitious mandate and attempts to bridge deeply entrenched divides in both humanitarian and development communities required concerted behind-the-scenes efforts, time and resources; something which ECW prepares for across contexts. Only by doing so did it manage to tackle predispositions and achieve the successes outlined in this case study.

### *Leadership*

Within the education sector, leadership almost always involves more than one organisation or entity and while there are clear leadership roles and responsibilities in some contexts, in many of the most challenging situations, leadership roles are far from clear. In Syria, WoS coordinators' leadership role consisted of utilising strong interpersonal skills to engage in a continual process of advocacy, negotiation and compromise to break down barriers and promote trust in each other. While the default position for many was scepticism, sustained engagement allowed this scepticism to begin to change. A WoS Coordinator highlights the importance of the individual: 'I think coordination; I have learnt it is all about personality. I know how to talk to people. It is about trust. I think the most important thing in coordination is the human side. If we have attitude, goodbye. What we need is a human touch. We are not perfect. I keep learning. All from each other.'

While challenges remain, the WoS approach was described as much more broadly accepted in 2018 than during its initial implementation, in part due to its continuing evolution as the context changed (KIIs, 2018). This did not appear to be solely the result of inherent efficiencies in the new structure, but the work of individuals engaging with partners in order to break down barriers. These individuals were assisted throughout by the mechanisms that brought these individuals together, in this instance the EDF. It does not mean the WoS was accepted by all; politics still prevailed. It does, however, highlight the importance of individuals with the right skills in terms of disrupting predispositions.

A KI described the hubs, before the establishment of the WoS structure in 2015, as 'operating in silos'. In contrast, a sector coordinator described how WoS leadership significantly improved coordination between hubs: 'there is more regular and consistent interactions and exchange which didn't happen a year ago'. One particular process that has helped on this front is the face-to-face meetings of hub coordinators that occur a day before biannual EDF meetings. 'The leadership of

the WoS coordinators in this instance, in establishing new mechanisms for communication across hubs, with support from the ECW EDF resources, resulted in a chance to find more common ground on humanitarian principles and accountability to children' (KII, 2018).

WoS leadership also met with challenges. A WoS coordinator notes: 'Each hub has its own unique culture, its own unique way of doing things. In the Amman hub, it had big NGOs and a few Syrian NGOs. That one operated much smoother, everyone knew how the system worked. The Gaziantep hub was working in opposition held areas and most NGOs were Syrian nationals. From very large to very small. In Gaziantep there was a feeling voices weren't being heard.' These challenges highlight the level of adaptability required to operate the WoS system and tackle predispositions. While in theory its practice of coordination seems simple, and leadership on data collection and strategic guidance clear, in reality a large amount of time is spent navigating the contexts and adapting leadership styles to shifting predispositions. WoS coordinators double hatting as hub coordinators – on occasion due to limited resources or issues recruiting – was highlighted as a factor inhibiting effective coordination, as each competed for already limited time.

Concerns over double hatting were not only raised by WoS coordinators, however. Some of the local agencies and INGOs highlighted how double hatting in a coordination role and an agency role can create conflicts of interest that may impact their ability to make leadership decisions impartially. There were instances where WoS coordinators held roles as coordinators or co-coordinators of a hub. In one instance, for example, a WoS coordinator was acting as a contact for the Damascus hub coordinator under government leadership, while simultaneously coordinating the opposition-held areas at a national level. These issues are complicated further, when considering the WoS coordinator's role in reviewing proposals for funding across all hubs, and simultaneously holding the role of point person in their national hub. A donor described how the 'line between the different roles becomes blurry', providing an example of a conflict of interest in the EDF:

If an organisation that is coordinating the response is a government partner, this is a problem in terms of the completeness and objectivity of information. For example, new policies on out-of-school children are being defined by GoS with help from UNICEF. UNICEF and partners of the government then present these as the GoS. Then through the EDF, different perspectives are discussed, including a critique of these processes. [For example], the GoS has taken responsibility but its capacity is too weak, or discriminatory in terms of children without certificates. But all of this is not pointed out by UNICEF because of their multiple roles and hats.

These conflicts of interest – or even just perception of their existence – risk damaging the reputation, and subsequently the efficacy, of the coordination system. These risks were most evident in 2016, when a public letter released and signed by more than 70 aid agencies in the Gaziantep hub said they were withdrawing from the WoS coordination information-sharing programme due to concerns the Syrian government had gained 'significant and substantial' influence over relief efforts in the country. The letter alleged a 'deliberate manipulation of humanitarian and medical aid' (McNeill, 2016).

So, WoS leadership is immersed in the political. As KIs acknowledged, extricating oneself entirely from the political conflicts of interest was impossible in Syria. Ensuring potential conflicts of interest are avoided and addressing the issues of double hatting, however, could play a significant role not only in strengthening WoS coordinators' ability to strengthen leadership, but also to alter negative predispositions.

It is also important to note that despite some of the successes highlighted here in terms of leadership in information dissemination and coordination, there were strong feelings among INGOs, NNGOs and donors at the time of writing that WoS could do more to establish joint assessments and provide a greater understanding of who is doing what, and where.

### *Incentives*

ECW funding channelled through the WoS system was identified as an effective incentive. A WoS coordinator suggested it incentivised better coordination between NNGOs as it provides a flexible fund available for those who participate and for the areas they need to participate in: 'They now see an opportunity to intervene, they now respond [to requests from the sector] with the 4Ws. They see the value of sharing. They can do the analysis of gaps, and the gaps are filled.'

The coordinator also highlighted how the ECW funding provides a huge push for education to be prioritised and incentivising more focus on education projects: 'through other funds you had to really compete, I had to yell to get education prioritised. I had to bark to get education up as a priority. If you stay silent, education will not happen. Now there is new opportunity for the pooled fund. GPE [Global Partnership for Education] also. ECW is more assertive, they are providing funds in a predictable way to address needs.'

CBPFs were also highlighted as key incentives to coordination. By channelling more money through the WoS structure, more people were getting involved in coordination and seeing its benefits. A coordinator described how reporting to WoS has prevented 'NGOs hiding away with bilateral work that shifts coordination to the donor'. Pooled funding was also described as allowing 'marginalised' NGOs, which were not equipped to seek bilateral funding due to capacity constraints, to access funds (KII, 2018).

### *Equity*

A number of KIs highlighted how finding local staff able to gain the relevant visas and with the skill sets necessary to participate in large humanitarian responses, such as proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, proved challenging. The large majority of coordinators suggested that capacity-building projects for these staff are significantly under-resourced, preventing the ability of WoS to receive accurate data required to effectively coordinate education planning and response. While some capacity-building activities were ongoing and widely applauded by KIs, there was a belief that there is room for improvement (KIIs, 2018). Its impact

will not only be on the long-term ability for NNGOs to support education initiatives, but on the effectiveness of the coordination systems.

### **5.1.2 Syria Education Dialogue Forum**

EDF members meet biannually for three-day meetings to not only promote effective ECW grant implementation, but also to ensure unified approaches to systemic technical education challenges, including around stipend/incentive scales, pathways to accreditation, and data collection, analysis and dissemination, among others (EDF, n.d.). Each meeting has a half-day focused on management issues related to the ECW fund and attended only by the WoS and the DPG (EDF, n.d.). The rest of the days are attended by the enlarged Syria EDF membership and dedicated to technical and dialogue sessions related to the ECW grant outcome of strengthened capacity of the education system to deliver a timely, coordinated and evidence-based education response. There have been five meetings of the EDF, with the first in March 2017. WoS coordinators report to the EDF on progress between face-to-face meetings through monthly calls, which KIs described as 'very useful'.

### **Factors that enable or constrain coordination**

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that inhibit and enable coordinated education planning and response in the context of the EDF. These are set out below using the Faerman factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of inter-organisational coordination efforts (predisposition, leadership, incentives, equity).

#### *Predisposition*

An overarching challenge for coordination in Syria is that different organisations bring different mandates to coordinated education planning and response across the nexus. On the one hand there are education cluster organisations with a strong humanitarian mandate. On the other, development-focused organisations and donors have a mandate for long-term sustainable development. Some dual mandate organisations are engaged in both. According to a KI participating in the EDF, given the different organisational mandates

and the accompanying technical and political challenges, the act of bringing key stakeholders with different mandates together in one room to talk about technical issues and present learning and research across actors, some of whom are not meeting in the WoS hubs, is useful. As another KI pointed out, in the context of Syria where education stakeholders can and do have opposing perspectives, 'it is significant that this mechanism is named a dialogue forum, rather than a coordination forum'. As such, a KI noted that the dialogue forum operates as a space for humanitarian and development partners to 'discuss technical challenges and find common alignment, an opportunity for joint work or simply to agree to disagree'. In effect, the EDF helps to bridge the mandate gap and constructively manage differences between actors, creating a predisposition for coordination.

Moreover, as a key informant involved in the EDF noted, it has 'enabled a change of perceptions' to allow for more effective coordinated planning and response. Organisational theory notes that lived experiences shape predispositions to collaborate (Faerman et al., 2001: 376), and these experiences of finding common ground within the EDF among partners that often have opposing viewpoints in Syria have been important in creating a predisposition for coordination. Another key informant described the EDF as 'something I am proud of ... The ECW fund [and EDF] really transformed the trust between the actors. I really value the ECW project. When they first started it, there was a lot of mistrust. By the end, it was all about the children. What other forum exists to discuss education across politics?' Tied into the factor of incentives, a KI noted that coordination within the EDF represents an opportunity to direct funding in a more effective way.

#### *Leadership*

An enabling factor cited by several KIs was the leadership of DFID, which was described as 'instrumental' in establishing the EDF by one KI. Both the leadership of the institution and the person were seen as important by partners within the EDF. As one KI explained, the DFID representative 'went the extra mile to bring people together within EDF. Through this dedication and effort, coordination came to be. There is nothing

like this coordination body, bringing together WoS and donors to manage a grant. This is very unique and effective coordination.' Along with the change in predisposition of actors, cited above, towards dialogue and potential collaboration through the establishment of the EDF, the leadership of DFID also altered the mistrust that had grown between humanitarian, development and stabilisation actors. As a result, a KI noted that the EDF enabled dialogue and coordination in a way that was 'incredibly helpful in terms of ensuring progress on ECW grant and in the broader sector'.

It is also worth emphasising KIs' experience of the process, which suggests the EDF did not fall into place quickly. It took a huge amount of perseverance and negotiation. Its success depended on repeated meetings, leading to results that could not have been achieved through a single conference or coordination meeting. It also drew on the parallel phone calls, emails and Skype calls within the DPG and the other informal mechanisms that the EDF helped form, and later contributed to shifting predispositions.

#### *Incentives*

WoS and hub coordinators and DPG donors reported meeting separately within their respective coordination mechanisms before EDF meetings took place to develop a more coherent response among themselves. For WoS and hub coordinators, these face-to-face meetings were supported by the ECW investment. KI who are members of both groups noted that through these preparatory meetings, the EDF provided an opportunity for and incentivised coordination to align WoS and hub agendas on the one hand, and donor agendas on the other, in order to agree on gaps in needs to prepare for EDF meetings.

#### *Equity*

While this research revealed overwhelmingly positive feedback about the EDF as an enabler of coordinated education planning and response, several KIs – both members and non-members of the EDF – cited room for improvement in terms of the inclusivity of the mechanism and the exclusion of NGOs in particular. Related to the discourse around localisation and accountability in aid, the EDF lacked local and national NGO voices from the ground. Core EDF members were already



attempting to overcome this constraint in 2018, although there is a challenge in increasing select NGO involvement without creating competition among NGOs. Currently, the EDF strategy is to invite NGOs on an ad hoc basis to present on research in order to give them better representation. Several KIs noted that WoS coordinators and hub coordinators need to better reflect NGOs' voices within their respective coordination roles within the EDF, rather than representing UNICEF and SCI. The experiences and voices of smaller NGOs and development actors who are implementing on the ground would help to strengthen communication and coordination across the nexus in order to make sustainable links to both systems-strengthening and capacity-building efforts. In addition, at the time of writing in 2018, the lack of representation of actors from north-east Syria and donors outside the DPG – exacerbated by visa and travel restrictions – represented a constraining factor to coordinated education planning and response in Syria.

A lack of transparency in the EDF was raised by several non-members as a factor that could impede effective coordination. This impacts not only power differences between members and non-members but also, potentially, access to resources and opportunities within coordination discussions and processes. As one KI explained: 'I know it exists, but I've never seen minutes or decisions or anything that comes out of it. Meetings have been happening for at least two years but don't necessarily benefit NGOs.' About the lack of systematised information-sharing, one EDF member noted: 'It is up to those attending the EDF to update implementing partners and share information. The current result is that outputs of the forum are less concrete and perhaps not integrated into projects in the field, so while EDF dialogue informs strategic design it may not go forward into the field.'

## 5.2 No Lost Generation Working Group

Within the NLG Working Group, operational partners 'agree and implement joint actions in support of NLG goals' within a regional level work plan, which indicates the agreed roles for and contributions from partners (KII; NLG, 2018c). The regional Working Group meets

every two months and technical focal points for education within the NLG Working Group – the WoS Coordinator for Education, the UNICEF Regional Advisor for Education and the UNHCR Regional Advisor for Education – represent the education sector rather than their organisation within the Working Group (NLG, 2018a; 2018c). They are responsible for ensuring that NLG activities and messaging are consistent with standards and good practices, updating NLG members on progress and challenges, and ensuring that NLG messages reach coordination mechanisms for the education sector (KII, 2018). Technical focal points for the other NLG pillars of Child Protection and Adolescents and Youth do the same, ensuring strong cross-organisational and cross-sectoral information sharing and fertilisation of ideas, projects and programming that occurs at NLG Working Group meetings (KII, 2018).

### Factors that enable or constrain coordination

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that inhibit and enable coordinated education planning and response in the context of the NLG initiative. These are set out below using the Faerman factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of inter-organisational coordination efforts (predisposition, equity).

#### *Predisposition*

Multiple KIs reported that the cross-sectoral mandate of NLG has been instrumental in establishing an overarching regional framework for coordinated humanitarian planning and response that links education, protection and youth. This cross-sectoral mandate has enabled coordination to strategically advocate and respond across the three NLG pillars. The predisposition for coordination across these sectors enabled by the NLG is reinforced by the leadership of NLG Working Group coordinators, technical focal points and NLG Working Group members, whose lines of responsibility are clear within the NLG terms of reference (ToR) (KII, 2018; NLG, 2018c).

#### *Equity*

KIs cited the establishment of the cross-sectoral NLG framework as an enabling factor in bringing in new partners beyond the

humanitarian sector. These new partners, such as private sector companies, bring comparative advantages that not only contribute to NLG goals but also ultimately to more effective coordinated education planning and response. An advantage of NLG's coordination mechanism, cited by NGOs in particular, is its inclusive and wide-reaching communication mechanisms, whereby communication between the NLG Working Group at the regional level and partners working in NLG countries, including Syria, under the three pillars is shared wide and far. This was contrasted by KIs to the constraint on information sharing within WoS and the education hubs/clusters. One KI noted that this inclusive information sharing has enabled country-level practitioners to more easily align good practice across the three sectors.

### 5.3 How could coordination be improved?

There are a number of areas where coordinated education planning and response within the regional and/or cross-Syria coordination system could be improved. Key areas include:

- Removing double-hatting requirements to free time for more leadership in reshaping negative predispositions that inhibit the effectiveness of the WoS system. It will also help to remove conflicts of interest between the multiple roles held by WoS coordinators and the perceptions of conflicts of interest that appear to be insufficiently addressed by current measures.
- Capacity building for partners has potential for a ripple effect, improving the information shared with WoS, the engagement with the system, and subsequently WoS ability to strengthen coordination. More should also be done to utilise existing shared capacities and to explore local systems in place prior to the crisis that are familiar to local staff, which can be repurposed for new coordination needs, and can leave staff with skill sets suited to post-conflict reconstruction.
- Providing greater clarity to how the WoS system operates through a consolidated document will increase transparency, demystify

the intentions and objectives of the sector, help build understanding among partners, provide vital guidance to new responders and greatly facilitate future research. Jordan's Inter-Agency Coordination Briefing Kit provides a useful example (UNHCR, 2017).

- EDF has provided a platform for overcoming predispositions once perceived to be too deeply entrenched to change. It required strong leadership, perseverance, patience and leadership. Ensuring this system continues and reproducing this model in other sectors could achieve similar effects.

### 5.4 The 'how': coordination in the Syrian government-controlled areas

The national Syria ESWG holds meetings every two months or more as needed. The ESC who co-chairs the Working Group meets with the MoE Head of Planning and International Cooperation in advance to agree on details for the meeting. At the meetings, the MoE gives and hears updates from sector stakeholders and the IM specialist. Education partners discuss issues and gaps, and the ESC and IM specialist collect data about capacities and resources for 4Ws. The ESC collates this information and shares it with the MoE to confirm plans, and ultimately sends meeting summary points and related documents to partners and follows up on action points between meetings. If the MoE is not able to attend a meeting, the ESC keeps the ministry informed and facilitates documentation and key action items for the MoE, which gives oversight to and approval of all documents. If there is an emergency between meetings, ad hoc meetings are held; when warranted, approval for response is facilitated by the MoE (KII, 2018).

In addition to sectoral coordination, the ESC participates in an intersectoral coordination meeting organised by OCHA every two weeks to exchange information.

The ESWG works through thematic sub-working groups set up with specific tasks in mind. For instance, KIs highlighted an important coordination process recently begun through a sub-working group to develop a Transitional Education Sector Plan. In this process, led by the MoE and co-chaired by UNESCO Damascus,



ESWG members are working to ensure that the transitional sector plan will reflect humanitarian needs through alignment with the HRP and link to longer-term development (KII, 2018). Another important process underway within a thematic sub-working group of the ESWG is the development of a Syria Policy for Non-Formal Education, for which members are developing a definition and framework that will be used to bring coherence to policy, planning and response on the issue (KII, 2018).

In terms of tools and processes that support coordinated education planning and response, while the MoE accepts the INEE Minimum Standards as a framework for coordinated planning and response, including through training staff and coordinators, it does not permit joint needs assessments by or accept data from the UN or other actors, using instead its own Educational Management Information System (EMIS) system. As such, the governments' EMIS data is the main source of information for the HRP. However, some KIs contested the quality of outputs from the MoE EMIS. As noted by KIs, the 4Ws are anonymised and not shared for security reasons. Instead, the IM specialist in Damascus provides hub coordinators with an interactive dashboard so they can see what is being done where, but not when and by whom.

The Education hubs in Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, Qamishli and Tartous coordinate strategies and activities with guidance from the national ESWG, sharing information on a regular basis to update education response, existing gaps and needs (MoE, 2018b). Regular education coordination meetings are conducted in the five hubs and co-chaired by the MoE/Directorate of Education and the hub coordinator (MoE, 2018a). In theory the ESC has a monthly Skype meeting with all hub coordinators. However, these are not dedicated full-time coordinator staff; they are UNICEF staff with programme priorities as well as education sector coordination responsibilities. As consistent calls proved difficult, there was a great deal of bilateral communication between hub coordinators and the ESC.

In addition to the formal ESWGs operating in Syria under the leadership of the MoE, bilateral coordination with the government also occurs. All UN agencies, INGOs and NNGOs operating

in Syria operate under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Government of Syria and are under the supervision of Damascus. Therefore, UN agencies and NGOs registered with the government have direct bilateral discussions with the MoE based on needs, such as where schools are most damaged. Permission to implement a programme in a specific location must be granted by the MoE centrally in Damascus.

#### **5.4.1 Factors that enable or constrain coordination**

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that inhibit or enable coordinated education planning and response in Syria. These are set out below using the Faerman factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of inter-organisational coordination efforts (predisposition, leadership, incentives, equity).

##### **Predisposition**

An enabling factor of coordinated education planning and response within Syria is the clear mandate and leadership of the MoE. One KI noted that 'the Ministry of Education is responsible for the education system and has a strong sense of ownership'. Another KI noted that the 'Syrian MoE is very engaged' both within and outside its currently held territory, including continued direct support for human and financial resources for education in opposition and Kurdish self-administered areas. While a KI noted that this leadership can sometimes be an obstacle, creating delays and preventing agility, the KI noted that it has also allowed for more centralised oversight that is likely to prove beneficial as humanitarian response coordination begins to shift more to national actors.

However, the predisposition for coordination enabled by the government's mandate and leadership is countered by politics, confidentiality and lack of transparency. As noted in the WoS section on predisposition, politics and, as several KIs termed it, the 'politicisation of education', can inhibit effective coordinated education planning and response. One KI said: 'all children have the right to education, regardless of the government. We are here to help Syrian children; whether that child is a refugee or in government-controlled territory shouldn't matter.'

In addition, the ability of the ESWG to coordinate education planning and response effectively was constrained by a culture of confidentiality that obstructed transparency and coordination in the education sector. Citing the context of the active conflict, and the Syrian government's role in that conflict, the security and confidentiality related concerns of sector members and the strong control of the government over permissions for work in the education sector, a KI noted a hesitation to share information and data openly in ESWG meetings, which has inhibited effective coordination and, at times, created a level of mistrust among education partners. The fact that the 4Ws data is anonymised was also cited by a KI as a factor that inhibits effective coordinated education planning and response.

On the issue of coordinated planning to prepare the education sector for refugee returns, a KI noted that, because the government leads preparedness and contingency planning processes, these were not fully discussed within coordination forums such as ESWG. This lack of discussion and planning constrains effective coordination in the ESWG; as a KI noted, it impedes the ability of partners to 'understand what others have prepositioned, what the gaps are and how to most effectively fill the gaps, resulting in under-resourced education response'. While there is a Working Group on refugee returns, led by the Government of Syria and supported by UNHCR, a KI noted that refugee education issues should be integrated into the existing ESWG and led by the government there, rather than setting up something new, especially given the existing partners, knowledge and trust already established through the ESWG. On the enabling side, at managerial level, UNHCR and UNICEF were discussing an MoU on refugee returnee education, which would help to clarify responsibilities for who does what where (KII, 2018).

### **Leadership**

The leadership of the ESWG, with clear roles and responsibilities articulated in the ESWG ToR, and the leadership of the ESC in co-chairing the ESWG, were cited by KIs as factors that enable coordinated education planning and response. In particular, the personality and skill of the ESC, working one-on-one with the

MoE in a 'considerate and respectful manner' and laying the groundwork for coordination within the ESWG, were cited as enabling factors (KIIs, 2018).

At the same time, the resourcing of leadership at the hub level in terms of the double hatting of coordinators who also have UNICEF programme responsibilities was once again raised by a KI as a factor that constrains effective coordination.

### **Equity**

Sub-sector coordinators, in their double-hatting roles, were limited in terms of both time and exposure to other coordination staff and trainings that could further their skill sets and capacities. While there had been ongoing conversations around providing regular face-to-face coordination training and technical support to hub coordinators at hub level, this required permission from the MoE and had been limited (KII, 2018).

## **5.5 How could coordination be improved?**

There are a number of areas where coordinated education planning and response within the government-controlled system could be improved. Key areas include:

- Continuing to invest leadership, time and resources into forums where education actors have the opportunity to engage in dialogue. Coordination in government-controlled areas is largely about relationships and people understanding each other. This has to be built over time through consistent dialogue.
- Raising the profile of education for refugee returnees and taking steps to engage more effectively in preparedness and contingency planning and related resource mobilisation within the ESWG. Refugee returnee contingency planning needs a particular focus on coordination around placement tests and recognition of refugee qualifications to ensure continuity of education. This may require the creation of a returnee education strategy within the transitional or national education planning process that clearly outlines the government's approach to the reintegration of refugees back into the national education system.

- Strengthening the capacity of the hub coordinators by providing sufficient training followed by continual professional development equal to that of their peers and focused on coordination and separating programme interventions from coordination work.
- Providing the ESC with more opportunities and time to travel to hubs for face-to-face coordination meetings with education hub coordinators and partners. Such opportunities would allow the ESC to engage in site visits and technical support meetings, which could yield valuable opportunities for relationship-building and coordination.

## 5.6 The ‘how’ of coordination in opposition-controlled areas

The education cluster in Gaziantep organises and facilitates information sharing through bimonthly education cluster meetings, to which all cluster members are invited. In addition to leading and facilitating these meetings, cluster coordinators carry out advocacy and fundraising activities on behalf of the cluster, including participating in a vetting committee for ECW funds and managing a Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF). A Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) within the education cluster is made up of five national organisations, voted in by cluster members, that make decisions on issues such as new members and proposals for the HPF.

In terms of coordination tools and processes, the Gaziantep hub IM specialist collects the 4Ws for monthly analysis, but security considerations require that the data shared back with cluster members be anonymised. Members of the cluster work in task forces on technical issues to complete time-limited tasks. For instance, task forces were working to develop short, user-friendly cluster guidelines on key issues deemed a priority by cluster members, such as salary scale for teachers; WASH and education coordination; the integration of psychosocial support and child protection into education; accountability to beneficiaries; and learning outcome guidelines, among others. Once finalised, these guidelines will be shared both with cluster members and other hubs and donors in Syria.

In addition to education sector coordination, cluster coordinators met monthly in Inter-Cluster Coordination Group meetings, led by OCHA, to discuss updates in the field and preparedness plans across sectors. As described in the WoS section above, the Gaziantep hub coordinates directly with the WoS Education team and with the NES EWG.

### 5.6.1 Factors that enable or constrain coordination

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that inhibit and enable coordinated education planning and response in north-west Syria. These are set out below using the Faerman factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of inter-organisational coordination efforts (predisposition, leadership, incentives, equity).

#### Predisposition

The lack of transparency within the cluster due to security concerns inhibits coordination, which in turn shapes personal interactions in a way that can create mistrust. For example, the anonymisation of the ‘who’ within the 4Ws was described by an implementing partner operating in opposition areas as inhibiting coordination. As KI who is a member of the cluster noted: ‘when you are preparing for an emergency response and have a contribution to make, it is hard to figure out how and with whom to communicate and coordinate if you do not know the 4Ws, and are not able to understand the gaps and collectively determine how to fill them’.

The operating environment in opposition areas was also a challenge to effective coordinated education planning and response, given that actors needed permissions or MoUs across multiple-lines of authority of EDs in Turkey and Syria as well as local councils (KIIs, 2018). INGO registration was proving particularly difficult in Turkey. One KI noted that participating in a training in Turkey was something that INGO actors had become less inclined to do, as ‘there may be a police raid and some education actors don’t have [or have lost] their permits’. An implementing partner within the Gaziantep education cluster shared that they recently lost their NGO registration in Turkey and thus had to move their office from Gaziantep to Amman.

As a result, they could only join a Gaziantep education cluster coordination call over Skype, which raised concerns over who might be on the other end of the line without their knowledge. The KI noted that the impact that this mistrust had on coordination is ‘significant’.

Multiple KIs working across hubs, including in Gaziantep, spoke of the challenges of coordinating between humanitarian and stabilisation actors working in the field of education, given different mandates and principles, and lack of clarity about the definition of stabilisation. A KI noted a case where an implementing partner who claimed to be operating under humanitarian principles was deemed a stabilisation actor by the cluster, resulting in their exclusion from cluster meetings and information sharing. This KI suggested that this exclusion hindered education coordination in the field and resulted in duplication of responses, gaps in coverage and missed opportunities to find efficiencies across education actors. This predisposition against stabilisation actors risks inhibiting the ability of the cluster to constructively manage differences between and leverage comparative advantage and resources across these groups.

### Leadership

Several KIs spoke about an earlier ‘leadership crisis’ within the education cluster in Gaziantep, particularly between 2015–2016, due to constant turnover of the coordinators, which reportedly happened every three to six months. This was partly a political problem due to visa issues for international staff; as a result, SCI nationalised the position to overcome the visa issue. However, turnover was also said to be due to staff burn-out (KII, 2018). Related to resourcing, and an echo of a constraint cited in the Damascus hub, KIs noted that remote coordination is a challenge for effective leadership within coordination mechanisms. While coordinators physically meet with cluster members in Gaziantep, coordinators could not go inside Syria to see programme implementation: ‘we hear different things, and it is challenging to know the whole picture necessary for coordination’.

Multiple KIs spoke about the importance of consistent, trusted and dedicated leadership as an enabling factor that incentivises coordination

and can enhance equity within the coordination mechanism. One KI shared:

In education sector coordination meetings in 2015, only 5–6 people showed up, including cluster coordinators. No one understood how to coordinate. English language was a barrier. When the new cluster coordinator came in, she noticed that many people did not understand her, so she had someone translate meetings. The act of listening – and being perceived by partners to listen – made a positive impact on coordination. With more effective coordination through listening and information sharing, by the end of 2017, there were 75 people at meetings, with 100 organisations active in the cluster. When I asked partners: why are you active in the cluster now? They said: because of the opportunity to receive and share information and receive funds.

According to a KI who is also a cluster member, leadership helped to create incentives for NNGOs to participate in coordination, which in turn created a predisposition towards engagement in coordinated education planning and response in 2016–2017. ‘At the beginning, local NGOs were not receiving information and didn’t see the education cluster as a group that would consult with them, nor a reason to share information with the cluster. Once the new cluster coordinator arrived, people began receiving information, were able to consult with others and engaged more in the cluster. They reasoned: “If I want to implement an education programme, I need to tell the cluster so there isn’t duplication”.’ Through effective and skilled leadership, the cluster coordinator incentivised the participation of NNGOs, which in turn led to greater coverage across geographic areas within opposition-controlled territory in Syria (KII, 2018).

### Incentives

As in the example above, the benefits obtained through coordination, combined with leadership, predisposed actors in a way that enabled coordination. A KI said:

After two coordinators were in place, people started to trust the system. If there was intensified shelling, the coordination team would call a special meeting with people from the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism regional office or Turkey office to have a session to receive information. This showed people that the cluster cares about the humanitarian situation inside Syria. Syrian partners felt that their voices were being heard and amplified as they saw their issues and messages being taken up in advocacy messages that the education cluster shared with protection and other clusters. From this experience, Syrian organisations started to believe in the cluster and share information.

As a result, according to the KI, organisations started to submit 4Ws. At the beginning, they did not because they did not trust those processing this information. Later they knew this was important and they trusted that it would be used as an advocacy tool.

In addition, the fact that the SHF mechanism was coordinated through the Gaziantep hub incentivised coordination within the education cluster. Equity was also a factor here, as a KI noted that the SHF mechanism incentivised ‘a lot of NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and young people trying to respond. It was unique in the Syria crisis. It didn’t exist before the crisis, as these groups hadn’t been exposed to the humanitarian system.’ The SHF mechanism, coordinated through the Gaziantep hub, became a platform for learning about and participating in coordinated education planning and response, building local capacity while also giving people a mechanism to support their communities (KII, 2018).

In addition, the process of developing guidelines based on members’ needs and actively involving them their active involvement in the contextualisation of international standards has incentivised cluster participation and helped to build capacity and create ownership of these tools among partners (KII, 2018). Further incentivising coordination in terms of utilising these good practice tools, the HPF Secretariat

has revised criteria for applicant organisations to include a question on how applicants integrate relevant guidelines into their work (KII, 2018).

### Equity

The SAG within the education cluster was cited by a KI as an example of enabling coordination through leveraging comparative advantages of members and engaging stakeholders from all levels. Moreover, given that members have a strong understanding of the local context, actors and location, it has helped to make the cluster ‘more inclusive’, bringing local knowledge into decision-making (KIIs, 2018). A KI from an implementing organisation noted that in 2016 SAG members reviewed SHF proposals and helped the education cluster select ‘the right projects in the right locations’, given limited and short-term funding as well as SAG members’ knowledge of the local context and actors. At the same time, KIs felt that more of a focus on local capacity building was needed, as local capacity continues to be a constraining factor in coordinated education planning and response.

## 5.7 How could coordination be improved?

There are a number of areas where coordinated education planning and response within the opposition-controlled system could be improved. Key areas include:

- Ensuring resourced support for consistent, full-time education cluster coordinators with the appropriate skills, expertise and personality to build relationships and trust among all partners, including NNGOs, and to build their capacity.
- Supporting opportunities for the cluster coordinator to build leadership and knowledge through field visits for face-to-face coordination meetings with implementing partners.
- Providing greater clarity on coordination with stabilisation actors, including having a transparent and participatory discussion with education stakeholders on definitions and processes for coordination to support predictability of approach and clarity of roles.



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## 5.8 The ‘how’: the coordination system in Syrian Democratic Force-controlled areas

The NES EWG communicates through a variety of platforms, including face-to-face meetings, a Google Group and bilateral and group email and Skype with INGOs and NNGOs, and WhatsApp groups with NNGOs. The information is usually available in both Arabic and English for accessibility purposes (KII, 2018). In terms of coordination tools and processes, the 4Ws are used mainly by INGOs but also by some NNGOs. NNGOs are being continually sensitised by the EWG Coordinator as to the importance of the 4Ws and NNGO input. Capacity development is a core component of the strategic work of the NES EWG and the EWG uses a variety of training materials, including the INEE Minimum Standards training materials, the Country Cluster Core Coordination Training, and training materials on Humanitarian Principles and Conflict Sensitive Education (KII, 2018).

In addition to sector-specific coordination, sector coordinators participate in an Inter-Sector Working Group within the NES INGO Forum, which includes monthly meetings facilitated by the NES INGO Forum Inter-Sector Coordinator across all sectors. This working group has ‘a strong and well-functioning communication platform, with members who are responsive and available’, resulting in a high level of consistent information sharing and openness to support and collaborate across sectors (KII, 2018).

In 2018, there was direct cross-line operational coordination between the NES EWG and the Qamishli ESWG in government-controlled territory for support to education in IDP camps in north-east Syria. Coordination occurred weekly between the two, if not daily, and was described by a KI as ‘very collaborative and fruitful’. However, cross-line and cross-hub education coordination is complicated by the security and political issues between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Government of Syria. In addition, as described in the WoS section above, the NES EWG Coordinator coordinates directly with the WoS Education team through formal cross-hub monthly calls and communication via Skype and emails as needed (KII, 2018).

### 5.8.1 Factors that enable or constrain coordination

Interviews highlighted a range of factors that inhibit or enable coordinated education planning and response in north-east Syria. These are set out below using the Faerman factors that have been found to contribute to the success or failure of inter-organisational coordination efforts (leadership, predisposition, incentives, equity).

#### Leadership

The ‘extremely talented’ and skilled leadership of the NES INGO Forum Inter-Sector Coordinator (ISC) was described by a KI as a factor that led to a predisposition to collaborate across sectors. The ISC spots opportunities for cross-sector collaboration and proactively updates and reaches across sectors to drive intersectoral processes forward, which has ‘made it easier for the EWG to reach out and coordinate with other sectors’ (KII, 2018). In addition to skilled leadership, the ISC’s technical expertise – ‘her ability to understand the “mechanisms, strengths and weaknesses” of the different sectors’ – and high-energy personality, combined with the full-time nature of this post, are perceived as critical enablers of effective coordinated planning and response (KII, 2018).

In addition, the strategic deployment of a Senior Coordinator from the Global Education RRT with expertise and experience to strengthen the NES EWG in terms of developing systems and processes for coordination and to support the capacity of the EWG Coordinator is also an enabling factor. Critical in this process are handover notes that the Senior Coordinator was developing to ensure the work done and work-in-progress were documented and that recommendations for the NES EWG, EWG Coordination lead agency, WoS Education and the Global Education Cluster (GEC) are clear.

#### Predisposition

As highlighted above, the leadership of the NES ISC has created a predisposition to collaborate across sectors. Concretely, this led to collaboration between the EWG and Child Protection Working Group in 2018, including training for teachers on mine risk awareness. It has also led the Education, Protection and Shelter

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Working Groups to collaborate on a Guidance Note on Collective Shelters, including guidance on schools being used as shelter by IDPs. Finally, there is ongoing collaboration between the EWG and the WASH Working Group to contextualise the Sphere Minimum Standards on WASH for schools and learning centres. In 2018, the deployed Senior Coordinator for NES EWG from the GEC RRT was working to fortify this predisposition by recommending that the EWG formalise intersectoral coordination through an MoU or ToR to ensure such coordination continues, regardless of turnover of staff.

Similar to challenges faced within the Gaziantep hub, the different mandates of humanitarian and stabilisation actors were a challenge to coordinated education planning and response in north-east Syria. The different underlying principles that guide the two groups of actors have led to a predisposition that inhibits coordination. This predisposition against certain actors could also impact upon the factor of equity in terms of inhibiting the ability of the coordination mechanism to constructively manage differences between, and leverage comparative advantage and resources across, these groups. This is a challenge, as stabilisation actors in north-east Syria have ‘substantive work and a coordination agenda’ in the education sector and education actors ‘need to understand what they do, where and how they coordinate’ to reduce duplication and ensure broad coverage (KII, 2018).

### **Incentives**

The fact that the NES EWG Coordinator is a national staff member who understands the balance of coordination demands and benefits for local NGOs has been an enabling factor in facilitating coordination and communication with local NGOs, including an ability to explain why it is important that local NGOs share information with the NES EWG (KII, 2018). This communication with NNGOs, combined with the opportunities for training, has incentivised local NGOs to participate in and coordinate through the EWG. As a KI explained, the strong involvement of local NGOs in the EWG is a

‘success story’ for the NES INGO Forum and can be largely attributed to the knowledge of the EWG Coordinator as to how to incentivise their participation.

### **Equity**

The active participation of NNGOs in the NES EWG is important for successful and sustainable coordinated education planning and response. This was attributed to the fact that the EWG Coordinator knows the language and the local environment, and is someone with whom local NGOs were comfortable communicating. Linked to the incentivisation point above, the work that the EWG was doing to build the understanding of the 4Ws, coordination and humanitarian principles and capacity and skills of NNGOs through training (a Country Cluster Core Coordination Training and training on the INEE Minimum Standards, Humanitarian Principles and Conflict Sensitive Education) were an incentive for local participation within education coordination mechanism and building equity and capacity within a population in which there was not a strong culture of local NGO engagement before the war (KII, 2018).

Another factor that enables coordination processes in the NES EWG is the wide variety and flexibility of formal and informal communication tools available for different EWG members operating at different levels. WhatsApp and Skype are used to share quick updates, questions or requests from any participants to the rest of the group, whereas the Google Groups mailing list is used by the EWG to share more formal information. It is a moderated listserv that helps avoid an oversaturation of emails. For instance, the EWG Coordinator shares calls for meetings and meeting minutes, information about trainings and workshops and disseminates standards and guidance notes over the Google Group. While WhatsApp is the most used means of communication in north-east Syria, and effective to quickly disseminate information among local partners and to get their feedback, the Senior Coordinator noted that ‘if we imposed one type of communication only, we would lose touch’.



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## 5.9 How could coordination be improved?

There are a number of areas where coordinated education planning and response within the SDF-controlled system could be improved.

Key areas include:

- Continuing to invest in and build the capacity and leadership of the national NES EWG Coordinator and EWG for sustainable coordinated education planning and response.
- Continuing to engage the active participation of NNGOs in the NES EWG, using a variety of flexible communication tools that facilitate formal and informal communication for EWG members operating at different levels.
- Supporting the development and implementation of a ToR/MoU to build upon and regularise NES EWG and child protection working group intersectoral coordination through joint practical actions.
- Continuing outreach and dialogue to stabilisation actors using the draft ‘Guidance on humanitarian engagement with stabilization actors in Syria’ (November 2018) to support predictability of approach and clarity of roles within discussions to agree on how to ensure coordination.
- Ensuring the north-east Syria coordination system is maintained. Owing to the skilled leadership, expertise, personality and full-time coordination post of the NES INGO Forum ISC, there is a predisposition for collaboration and coordination across sectors. Ensuring this system continues in north-east Syria and reproducing this model in other contexts could achieve similar effects.

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# 6 The ‘so what’ of coordination in Syria

Q3: *So what* does coordinated education planning and response contribute to better education and other collective outcomes for children and young people affected by crises?

Coordinated planning and response is not an end in itself. Coordination activities aim to provide a series of improvements to humanitarian responses that enhance their ability to achieve collective education outcomes. As identified in the Global Analysis Framework accompanying this case study, there are many methodological challenges to measuring whether coordinated education planning and response provide an overall improvement to a response. What can be identified, however, is anecdotal evidence that speaks to the pros (or cons) of coordinated planning and response which can enrich understanding of how coordination relates to the objectives of education partners. This section examines the ‘so what’ of coordination in Syria, reflecting on some of the outcomes and impacts of the coordination mechanisms shared by the KIs.

The information provided in this section was largely gathered by directly asking KIs to provide anecdotes of effective coordinated education planning and response. Many of the KIs were surprised to hear that the research included investigating impact and this was widely met with appreciation. One donor noted, ‘this [area] is neglected and we should be working on it more’.

KIs were encouraged to share anecdotes on any topic, and no explicit attempt was made to guide them towards any of the categories outlined in the framework. However, on several occasions the researchers did, where significant coordination challenges were expressed, prompt

KIs as to whether they had any anecdotes about the negative impacts of coordination in an attempt to present its many potential manifestations. None of these KIs identified any coordination mechanism they would prefer to remove, instead suggesting that any issues are for the most part outweighed by the benefits, or the potential benefits, of coordination.

The Global Analysis Framework (ODI, 2020) accompanying this case study notes two specific frameworks for analysing the effectiveness and impact of coordination: the SOHS adapted OECD DAC framework (Knox Clarke, 2018) and the ECW outcomes. The OECD DAC criteria represent a widely used metric to measure humanitarian responses across sectors and have been adapted as part of the recent SOHS report to reflect more recent trends in humanitarian responses to education (Knox Clarke, 2018). The ECW outcomes are focused on concrete educational outcomes – specifically equity, and gender equality, access, continuity, protection and quality. Most anecdotal evidence speaks of broad improvements to the humanitarian response and assumes subsequent broad and long-term benefits to the education response, while a smaller body of evidence provides examples of a direct impact on education. This section sees the value of both in informing understanding of coordinated planning and response and therefore captures both. It organises the results by the SOHS DAC criteria and includes a description of each criterion at the opening of each section. At the end of the section, Figure 8 disaggregates the findings by both SOHS DAC criteria and educational outcome.

## 6.1 Coverage

*SOHS DAC definition: Action by the international humanitarian system reaches all people in need* (Knox Clarke, 2018).

Providing cross-line assistance is a politically sensitive issue in Syria, yet vital to ensuring all children are reached with quality education. A WoS coordinator described how the coordination structures allowed for advocacy in Damascus, in order to promote ‘all Syrian children as our children’. It was important, the KI suggests, to try and overcome some of the resistance experienced from the GoS when talking about cross-line assistance: ‘by bringing together the responses across borders under a coordinated WoS approach, we were able to advocate for actions that would assist those in other areas’.

The coordinator provides an example of one of the major challenges faced by students in opposition held areas: gaining recognised qualifications. Different curriculums were being used by different parties across Syria. Through continued advocacy from a number of stakeholders, the MoE approved the adaption of its curriculum for use in opposition-held areas with the government logos and politicised content removed. A KI describes this as a ‘huge step’ towards reaching learners with recognised education.

NGOs continue using this adaption of the Syrian curriculum today, including in centres to assist students in self-learning in opposition areas: ‘they are meeting three times a week, or they hire facilitators, lots of NGOs did a campaign like this’.

The WoS coordinator describes how these steps could not have been achieved without coordination across lines and without NNGOs and INGOs to subsequently implement the programming. These actions not only increased the coverage of the education response and improved access to education, but impacted the potential continuity of education for those in areas that have changed hands, or for IDPs who have crossed borders.

A WoS coordinator also provides an example of logistical coordination across the border with Jordan. In the Amman hub, convoys passed

from Azraq refugee camp into Syria, providing cross-border supplies for the south-west region. When the Amman hub lost access to the area due to security reasons, they were able to coordinate with the Damascus hub which channelled resources to ensure programming continued. This instance demonstrates how coordination can both increase coverage to provide education access and sustain coverage when the operational environment shifts.

In Aleppo, an NNGO provides an example of the education sector coordinating to reduce dropout over winter periods when heating generators began to run out of fuel:

During the time Aleppo was besieged, winter was coming, and students began to drop out. Our organisation reported this to the education cluster. The education cluster then communicated with Mercy Corps USA to find out if they had fuel or funding to cover this. The education cluster helped obtain funding for small organisations with low funding opportunities, but which could help with education heating needs on the ground. This emergency mechanism to support small organisations within Syria to rehabilitate schools also helped to decrease tension between IDPs and locals.

This provides an interesting example of where coordination not only improved coverage, but also helped sustain coverage. It also points to the many potential externalities of coordination, in this instance the decreasing tension. Most importantly, however, it allowed learners to continue accessing education.

## 6.2 Relevance and appropriateness

*SOHS DAC definition: Assistance and protection that the international humanitarian system provides addresses the most important needs of recipients (as judged both by humanitarian professionals and by crisis-affected people themselves)* (Knox Clarke, 2018).

Information sharing in order to identify needs stood out as one of the greatest impacts resulting from coordination. Even the most fervent of coordination critics applauded its ability to improve information sharing. In opposition-held areas in particular, information is scarce, as donors and many of the INGOs cannot move around freely to perform assessments in order to target their projects. An INGO in opposition-held areas highlighted how the coordination structures helped them understand what others were doing and ‘more effectively identify where we could make a difference and for who’. An implementing partner for a government donor echoed these views, suggesting information sharing ‘serves a better purpose when it comes to resources and information-sharing impact than it does to enhancing [education] outcomes’. These impacts were not only the result of the 4W and other mechanisms, but what one KI describes as ‘human networking’, the connections that are made by being brought together over the duration of the crisis.

The establishment of the WoS approach also helped bridge information on IDP movements. By having coordinators in different hubs and a WoS approach, ‘we could track children and know where the supplies were required and how to get them across borders’. Without this mechanism for data collection, many of these gains could not have been achieved.

A fund manager for ECW highlighted how implementing partners were hearing that children in non-government-controlled areas wanted to sit exams and were unable to outside GoS-controlled areas. These concerns were raised with the coordination hub in Amman, who drew on the WoS network to coordinate with the hub in the GoS-held areas. The hub coordinator then reached out to the MoE and instigated discussions on allowing those in opposition-held areas to cross and sit exams. Funding from the ECW fund was then mobilised to establish a transportation service that would safely ferry students across areas to sit exams. Through the coordination mechanism, the NNGO was able to utilise the WoS coordination systems’ comparative advantage. The fund manager notes: ‘this could only have happened when ... a good

relationship with the government works, but with a humanitarian agility and mindset.’

## 6.3 Coherence

*SOHS DAC definition: Actors in the international humanitarian system act in compliance with humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law [IHL], and the degree to which they are able to influence states and non-state armed groups to respect humanitarian principles and conform to IHL (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

Coordination structures in Syria provided an avenue for the dissemination of humanitarian principles, including safeguarding principles and information on protecting children with disabilities. A donor KI highlights an EDF session on inclusion, where DFID brought in an expert to talk about protection and inclusion, share some expertise and materials and contribute to raising priority issues for donors:

They had a session on inclusion in one of the education dialogue forums with people sharing their experience, sharing materials, on people with disabilities, that was disseminated to the partners. In terms of knowledge sharing, on a topic so complicated, I think there was some good sharing on expertise, and contributed to keeping the issue high on the agenda.

In the Gaziantep hub, coordination structures facilitated ‘project review committees’, where nominated actors review projects for funding and ensure a code of conduct agreed by all cluster participants is in their proposals. Topics such as sexual exploitation and abuse were addressed.

While a high proportion of the findings shared so far have drawn on the impacts of formalised coordination structures, there were instances where informal coordination played a significant role. One instance is shared from an INGO that was directly approached by an NNGO to improve safeguarding in schools by understanding their methodologies: ‘We used training mechanisms online, followed by coaching, and we worked together supporting others to do the same.’

## 6.4 Accountability and participation

*SOHS DAC definition: Actors within the international humanitarian system can be held to account by crisis-affected people, and the degree to which crisis-affected people are able to influence decisions related to assistance and protection (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

Examples of strengthened coordination leading to improved accountability were largely lacking from the KI interviews. This is perhaps somewhat related to the political issues that hang over the education response and have led to a level of secrecy and anonymity in order to protect beneficiaries, as well as the inability to include members of the affected community in the research that may have been able to shed light on this important area.

One example, however, comes from the Gaziantep hub, where a coordinator suggests that the bringing together of different actors helps ensure the veracity of the data being returned: ‘people go door to door, and often over some of the same areas, which helps us check what they learnt was accurate’. In this case, the duplication of services proved to provide some benefit to ensuring data accuracy, affirming (as outlined in the Global Analysis Framework) that the principles used here to measure an effective humanitarian response may intersect with and, on occasion, contradict each other.

## 6.5 Effectiveness

*SOHS DAC definition: Humanitarian operations meet their stated objectives, in a timely manner and at an acceptable level of quality (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

Lessons learnt were highlighted as a key yet underutilised benefit of coordination. An INGO participating in the Gaziantep hub notes that there were ‘regular presentations about activities and lessons learnt from the other programmes’. These activities were used to shape responses that learn from local knowledge to overcome unforeseen challenges and meet stated objectives.

These lessons benefited both education responses and INGOs navigating the local

structures. Staff at a Syrian national organisation undertaking coordination activities in-country demonstrate how local actors provide valuable information to inform responses through the SAG to target important needs and navigate the complex structures:

When the SAG was active, it was very helpful. Before that, it was up to the cluster coordinator who might not understand the context in terms of where and who to work with. Or who not to work with. Cluster coordinators were not able to understand the mechanism between organisations and the Education Directorate within Syria and some of the problems it could create. The SAG helped to contextualise the response to Syria, so it was very helpful.

Finally, an implementing partner working in opposition-held areas provided an example of how coordination mechanisms help build partnerships with other organisations and clusters that can channel educational resources through existing mechanisms. By coordination with the health sector, health checks could be organised in schools operating in the area, hence increasing coverage of the health provision and creating more holistic education responses.

## 6.6 Complementarity

*SOHS DAC definition: The international humanitarian system recognises and supports the capacities of national and local actors, in particular governments and civil society organisations (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

An INGO also highlighted how the sector coordination working group meetings provide opportunities for capacity building and professional development, benefiting the INGO and other stakeholders. They also highlighted how these successes play a huge role in validating the benefits of coordination and creating more active participation on the ground.

An example was also given where the coordination structures contributed to unifying

decentralised structures. In the Gaziantep hub a coordinator spoke of how the biweekly coordination meetings facilitated the unification of teachers pay. Teachers were ‘getting paid \$100 and some in the same school funded by another NGO were getting paid \$300’. The lower-paid teachers were leaving or trying to move to other schools, creating high turnover. Coordination in the Gaziantep region allowed the discussion of a pay scale that could apply across the sector to avoid unequal pay and help retain teachers.

## 6.7 Sufficiency

*SOHS DAC definition: Resources available to the international humanitarian system are sufficient to cover humanitarian needs (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

Coordination in Syria opened doors for advocacy to increase resources for education responses. Through the Syria EDF, ECW were able to bring together sector coordinators and donors to discuss needs and gaps. A sector coordinator describes how these forums gave the opportunity to discuss increasing resources to south-west Syria after it was retaken by the GoS:

At that time, given the way the negotiation happened, the government quickly took control of the area and the people did not move out. Donors told me, we will not give resources for that. But we were able to convince the ECW Secretariat to get resources for the children, which are still there now despite the change of control.

A sector coordinator describes how the resources for these areas may not have been available without the EDF coordination mechanism that created a direct channel between donor and sector coordinator and helped move away from a political position and towards humanitarian needs irrespective of areas of control.

## 6.8 Efficiency

*SOHS DAC definition: Humanitarian outputs are produced for the lowest possible amount of inputs (Knox Clarke, 2018).*

A number of KIs highlighted the benefits of coordination in reducing duplication. An organisation providing education services in opposition held areas highlighted how NGOs often collected data on out-of-school children from their programmes and from their communities. By sharing this data, the organisation avoided having to duplicate surveys and instead channelled the resources to under-researched areas:

Most NGOs rely on HNO figures and when they go to actual communities, they find we are already there or planning to support schools. So we communicate with NGOs to make sure there isn't duplication.

An NNGO informs us that during the early phases of the crisis in opposition-held areas, local NGOs were not receiving information on what was going on where. This shifted dramatically when a new coordinator was assigned to strengthen coordination mechanisms in the area: ‘Once [the ESC] from UNICEF moved in, people began engaging a lot more, receiving information and able to consult more. If I wanted to implement an education programme I tell the cluster to ensure there isn't duplication, it was a big change.’

A stabilisation actor also demonstrates the impact of bilateral coordination. By cooperating with a local NGO, they were able to ensure there was no overlap in a library project initiative in opposition held areas. According to the KI, what was key in this coordination was cost: ‘the saving from our end is now being put into different activities, like training of librarians and more books’.

During an EDF meeting, an INGO shared that it was developing what it called a ‘light touch assessment learning and Social Emotional Learning tool’. A partner in the meeting offered to put them in contact with another organisation, which resulted in a partnership to fund and implement the project. The example indicates the ability for coordination to both reduce costs and share resources.



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## 6.9 Connectedness

*SOHS DAC definition: International humanitarian system articulates with development, resilience, risk reduction and peacebuilding* (Knox Clarke, 2018).

As noted throughout this case study, supporting national and local actors in Syria is complicated by the political agendas that may steer education projects. These same complications impacted the ability for coordination to articulate with development objectives.

One example, however, comes from a WoS coordinator. The coordinator highlighted how the hub structure facilitated coordination with the GoS to enable the curriculum to be used across lines. In turn, ‘when opposition-held areas became government-held, these students were better prepared for integration’. The KI repeatedly emphasised how important this change was. They highlighted how common IDP movements are, and that without coordination to unite a curriculum, there would be less chance of continuity of learners’ education, or the ability for responses to align with long-term development objectives of restoring a coherent education system.

Coordinators also highlighted the role of the EDF in bridging the gap between humanitarian responders and development-focused donors. Coordinators and WoS coordinators attend the EDF, allowing them to raise priority issues and input into harmonising the response with long-term objectives and allowing development partners to highlight areas where humanitarian responders are missing opportunities to contribute to sustainable projects.

## 6.10 Impact

*SOHS DAC definition: The degree to which humanitarian action produces (intentionally or unintentionally) positive longer-term outcomes for the people and societies receiving support* (Knox Clarke, 2018).

Examples were given of both positive and negative impacts of coordination in Syria. In

the Damascus hub a coordinator explains how the sector coordination allowed all education initiatives in government-held areas to be channelled through the GoS for authorisation. These structures filled gaps in the GoS ability to coordinate the diverse array of actors in country. Coordinating with the GoS was described as a time-consuming task, but one which provided ownership to the government and enabled it to coordinate education responses around long-term objectives. It also helped put in place and normalise the structures, processes and principles that can remain long after humanitarian action ceases.

Conversely, in opposition-held areas, coordination allowed for a systemic exclusion of certain actors deemed to be misaligned with humanitarian principles from formal channels of collaboration. Stabilisation actors spoke of how this negatively impacted their ability to share information and their education response. A number of INGOs raised concerns about the impact of this approach on the long-term structure of the education systems in the regions. One KI noted:

Some NGOs are only working at the local levels, and at the school level [outside of coordination mechanisms]. It is creating a school imbalance, where the councils now have a lot of power. It is usually the head teacher from the village that now has the power. They are responsible for community affairs. They didn’t have any direct authority over what schools did before, and then NGOs started giving them more funding and created a power imbalance.

These power imbalances were raised as concerns for the long-term impacts on the education system in these regions.

Discussing the political decision-making around these actions or the advantages and disadvantages of decentralised schooling is beyond the scope of this case study. The issues raised, however, highlight the many potential faces of coordination.

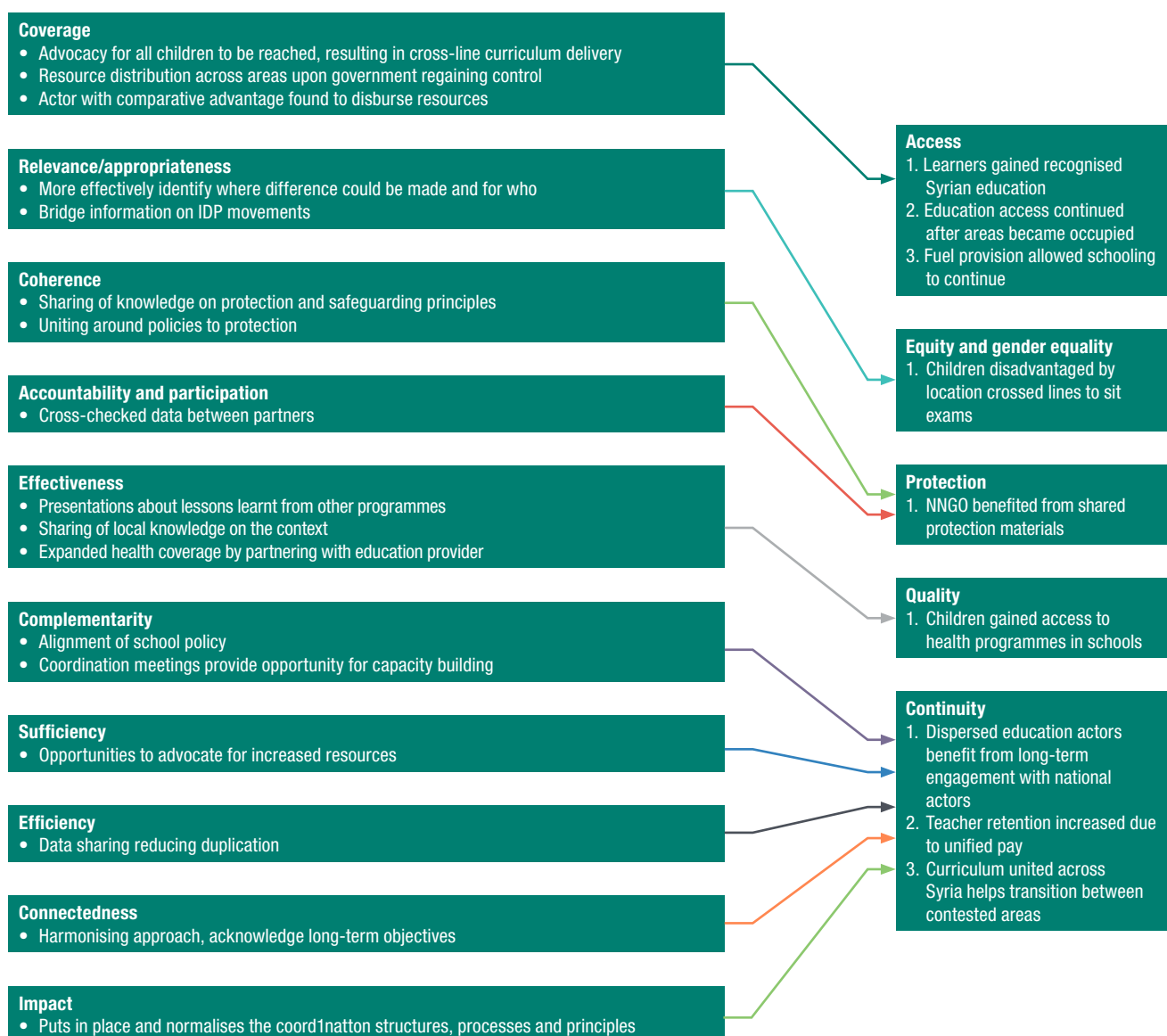


## 6.11 Linking coordination to education outcomes

The OECD DAC criteria were used as it was expected that a large amount of the anecdotal evidence gathered in this research would speak to broad improvements to the humanitarian and development response that cannot be directly evidenced as impacting education responses, but contributes to conditions conducive to improved education outcomes. That said, there was also

hope that some of this evidence would speak to education outcomes directly. Recognising the importance of both, the Global Analysis Framework (ODI, 2020) proposed a framework that combined the SOHS OECD DAC criteria and the ECW collective education outcomes. This framework is now populated with the data found during the Syria case study and shown in Figure 8. This data will be combined at the end of the research project with that from other case studies and used in an overall analysis.

**Figure 8 Linking education coordination to education outcomes in Syria**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

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# 7 Conclusion

Coordinated education planning and response in Syria is complex because of the rapidly changing lines of conflict and control across different factions and territory. The subsequent fragmentation of education authority in this context, and the absence of a countrywide structure for national education leadership around which international and national support to coordination can align, has been a major challenge to effective coordination in Syria. However, embedding the Syria HRP education objectives across education coordination mechanisms – the WoS mechanism and education hub coordination mechanisms, the EDF and the NLG Working Group – has helped to create strategic alignment across the humanitarian and development nexus.

Despite this alignment on education objectives, the education coordination mechanisms as they existed in 2018 in Syria did not encompass all education actors needed to meet these objectives. In particular, stabilisation actors were largely left out of education coordination mechanisms. Given that there is considerable overlap between humanitarian and stabilisation activities within the education sector in SDF- and opposition-controlled territory, there is a strategic and operational imperative to ensure some level of consistent communication and information sharing to avoid duplication and enable effective coordination takes place, while negotiating the delicate balance with preserving humanitarian principles. This is particularly important as the humanitarian sector looks to bridge the humanitarian–development nexus. At the time of writing, however, there was no consistent approach to information sharing with stabilisation actors across WoS and education hub coordination mechanisms, which caused confusion and constrained effective coordination.

Another absence in the education coordination architecture in Syria at the time of writing was a

local education group, which in other contexts brings together government and development partners – including financing partners, bilateral and multilateral agencies, teacher unions, education implementation partners, religious organisations, the private sector and civil society organisations – to coordinate countrywide planning and response across the nexus. Establishing such a group has been problematic in Syria as the political red lines drawn by each actor prevent cross-line coordination. Instead, education coordination groups working in different areas across Syria were working in disparate ways to facilitate coordination between local authorities and partners. The EDF has been a welcome innovation in this context, as it enabled some of these actors, notably humanitarian actors and development donors, to come together. However, this was still a significant gap that constrained effective coordinated education planning and response across the nexus.

In terms of *how* education coordination functioned in Syria, one issue that was raised across key informant interviews was the challenge of effective and transparent information management and sharing in Syria. The information contained in the 4Ws is essential for sector coordination. In theory, the sector analyses of data are made publicly available on a monthly basis and feed into sector operational coordination, analysis and information products. In practice in Syria, security and confidentiality concerns of sector members have meant that the 4Ws were anonymised when shared back with education partners. This lack of information and data, and the lack of transparency around them, remained an impediment to the ability of education partners to coordinate effectively.

Linked to this point, it is notable that across key informant interviews there was limited discussion about the impact of tools and processes, apart

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from the HRP, the HNO and the 4Ws, for coordinated education planning and response across the humanitarian programme cycle. It appears that the political, privacy and security concerns of those operating within Syria have led to face-to-face, email, Skype or WhatsApp coordination to be the most impactful processes. In such cases, it is critical to invest in people, their skills and capacities for facilitating these processes of coordination as well as to innovate with flexible and adaptable communication mechanisms.

This is particularly true for building the capacity of national actors in Syria. It is also critical to allow national actors to adapt coordination and communication processes and tools to fit and grow within their local environment, rather than impose an international education system and processes on them that are not context specific. An example of this is the prolific use of WhatsApp, Skype and Google email groups, which highlight where capacities for coordination overlap, and which could be scaled up with ease and at low cost. More could also be done to investigate and replicate or adapt local systems in place prior to the crisis that are familiar to local staff, and which can be repurposed for new coordination needs, thus enabling staff to develop skill sets well-suited to post-crisis reconstruction. Establishing

these tools together with national education partners in Syria will not only build ownership and sustainability, but it will also increase the relevance and use of such tools.

Little has been said about national education planning, apart from the ongoing work led by the Syrian MoE and UNESCO within the ESWG in Damascus to develop a Transitional Education Sector Plan. At the time of writing, researchers had reached out to but had not yet had an opportunity to speak to a representative of the Syrian MoE about the plan and other government priorities.

It is worth noting that, while there has been a great deal of coordinated education planning and response focused on IDP populations within Syria, this was less visible around planning and response for returning refugees within the education sector. This was in part due to the control and ownership of education preparedness processes by the MoE, thus there is little inter-agency coordination beyond the government-led ESWG.

Finally, the ‘So what’ section of this case study illustrates that, while coordination requires significant investment, the returns it provides in Syria are high. Continuing to invest in coordination mechanisms and forums where education actors have the opportunity to engage in dialogue should be a priority of education stakeholders.

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# 8 Recommendations

To strengthen education outcomes for children and young people in Syria affected by crises, humanitarian and development actors should more effectively coordinate education planning and response. This study recommends that the education stakeholders commit to the following general recommendations. There is also a set of specific recommendations for defined areas (Box 2).

## **Continue support for the EDF to facilitate dialogue and coordination across the nexus**

The establishment of the EDF was applauded by all KIs. It has enabled development and humanitarian stakeholders to come together around a table to discuss technical issues and, in some instances, find common ground on contested issues. It has also opened avenues for WoS and hub coordinators to convey priorities to donors.

Numerous KIs highlighted that greater efforts needed to be made to incorporate more voices of NNGOs and donors outside the DPG and the NES EWG. While throwing open the doors to a much larger group may prove counterproductive, WoS coordinators and hub coordinators could identify means of capturing and conveying more direct inputs from these partners that are at risk of being overshadowed by WoS priorities. Steps should also be taken to allow other actors to benefit from the same positive corollaries of the group, such as information sharing and capacity building by supporting new and existing groups with similar opportunities.

## **Expand the use of information-sharing protocols to increase transparency**

Information sharing is a sensitive issue in Syria, and information-sharing protocols have not

been without issue or concern. However, when all parties have been included in a transparent process of developing information protocols, they have proved effective in allowing partners concerned with releasing sensitive information to share more openly. Similar strategies could be applied to contact lists, meeting minutes, MoUs, ToRs and other forms of documents and data to increase knowledge and transparency of the response, particularly around the EDF.

## **Collaboratively define ‘stabilisation actor’**

There appeared to be ambiguity around the definition of a stabilisation actor. While most KIs within the WoS system seemed clear on who was doing stabilisation work, the research found that donors and some implementing partners felt that much of the work being done was incorrectly labelled, thereby excluding their activities from formal coordination mechanisms, and in one instance, creating parallel coordination systems between stabilisation actors and NGOs. The finding raises two questions: (1) is excluding groups from coordination mechanisms in the best interests of affected populations? (2) if so, how is ‘stabilisation actor’ defined to ensure that only those concretely under such a category are affected?

Answering the first of these questions is necessary but beyond the scope of this project. The second is of vital importance to effective education coordination planning and response. Attempts to define these actors had already been made in the north-east Syria hub in 2018 (Kleivan, 2018). These should be developed collaboratively with partners in other hubs and used to establish clear and transparent practice for the WoS system.

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## Prioritise formal and informal networking

This research has highlighted that coordination in Syria is time intensive and people centric. Attempts should therefore be made to:

- Ensure staff with coordination duties are experienced leaders with appropriate skills, expertise and dispositions to build relationships and trust among partners.
- Provide as much time as possible for these individuals to use their initiative to develop bonds. A coordinator's day consists of more than reporting tools, information management and other measurable outputs. It consists of time-consuming networking and relationship building that can create some of the unparalleled benefits highlighted in this research. Ensuring that time for these activities is built into the work plan of staff with coordination duties will be the only way to reap all the positive corollaries of coordination.

## Avoid double hatting in coordination roles to reduce conflicts of interest

KIs highlighted conflicts of interest that can occur when double hatting takes place. For example, the role some staff have held as both WoS and Hub Coordinator raises questions about the neutrality of the WoS system. Double hatting is also in direct contradiction of the above recommendation, and it is recommended that the practice be avoided in Syria whenever possible.

## Strengthen investment in capacity building for national actors and coordinators

A number of KIs noted how Syria, prior to the crisis, did not have a significant NGO sector, and subsequently finding experienced staff proved difficult. Providing appropriate training to staff that have now filled roles in the response can strengthen coordination and produce a ripple effect, improving the information shared with WoS, the engagement with the system, and subsequently WoS's ability to strengthen

coordination more broadly. More should also be done to utilise existing shared capacities and to investigate local systems in place prior to the crisis that are familiar to local staff, can be repurposed for new coordination needs, and can leave staff with skill sets suited to post-conflict recovery and resilience.

UN and SCI Coordinators in country should benefit from these activities. In particular, subnational coordinators, who were more isolated and less trained than their counterparts in other regions, missed the opportunity to learn about and share coordination lessons, techniques and tools. The deployment of the GEC RRT coordinator to the north-east Syria hub appeared to be a particularly fruitful means of sharing experiences and supporting capacity-building activities.

## Increase transparency of how the WoS system works

Providing greater clarity to how the WoS system operates through a consolidated document would increase transparency, demystify the intentions and objectives of the sector, help build understanding among partners, provide vital guidance to new responders and greatly facilitate future research. Jordan's Inter-Agency Coordination Briefing Kit provides a useful example (UNHCR, 2017).

## Ensure a strong role for the UN and WoS system in advocating for and safeguarding the humanitarian response

A greater emphasis on the role of the UN and WoS system in advocating for and safeguarding the humanitarian response for EiE and protracted crisis is vital to uphold and protect humanitarian principles. This is all the more important at a time when 'donor red lines' are preventing investment in improving learning and access to education of children and young people in some areas, especially those controlled by the GoS, and where education remains disrupted and inaccessible for millions of people.

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## **Strengthen coordination around refugee preparedness**

Steps should be taken to further raise the profile of education for refugee returnees and engage more effectively in preparedness and contingency planning and related resource mobilisation within the ESWGs. The MoU under discussion between UNICEF and UNHCR in 2018 on refugee returns, clarifying responsibilities between the two agencies, should be an urgent priority.

## **Advocate continued for continued international investment**

Efforts should be made to prioritise and strengthen advocacy to continue international investment in education as well as in child and youth development inside Syria considering the scale of the financial gap and the needs of IDPs as well as potential returnees.

## Box 2 Recommendations by region

### Regional

1. **Removing double-hatting requirements** will free time for more leadership in reshaping negative predispositions that inhibit the effectiveness of the WoS system. It will also help remove conflicts of interest between the multiple roles WoS coordinators hold and the perceptions of conflicts of interest that appear to be insufficiently addressed by current measures.
2. **Capacity building for partners has potential for a ripple effect**, improving the information shared with WoS, the engagement with the system, and subsequently WoS ability to strengthen coordination. More should also be done to utilise existing shared capacities and to investigate local systems in place prior to the crisis that are familiar to local staff, which can be repurposed for new coordination needs, and can leave staff with skill sets suited to post-conflict reconstruction.
3. **Providing greater clarity to how the WoS system operates through a consolidated document** will increase transparency, demystify the intentions and objectives of the sector, help build understanding among partners, provide vital guidance to new responders and greatly facilitate future research. Jordan's Inter-Agency Coordination Briefing Kit provides a useful example (UNHCR, 2017).
4. **Continuing support for EDF provides a platform for overcoming predispositions once perceived to be too deeply entrenched to change.** It relied on forums designed to bring actors together over prolonged and repeated periods. It required perseverance, strong leadership and patience. Ensuring this system continues, and reproducing this model in other sectors, could achieve similar effects. The relative commonalities and experiences in the sector that the actors shared are worth noting, however, and created a strong basis for the progress which was made and may influence its efficacy with other actors.

### Syrian government-controlled areas

1. **Continuing to invest leadership, time and resources into forums where education actors have the opportunity for dialogue.** Coordination in government-controlled areas is largely about relationships and people understanding each other. This has to be built up over time through consistent dialogue.
2. **Raising the profile of education for refugee returnees** and taking steps to engage more effectively in preparedness and contingency planning and related resource mobilisation within the ESWG. Refugee returnee contingency planning needs a particular focus on coordination around placement tests and recognition of refugee qualifications to ensure continuity of education. This may require the creation of a returnee education strategy within the transitional education planning process that clearly outlines the government's approach to the reintegration of refugees back into the national education system.

3. **Strengthening the leadership capacity of the Damascus sub-hub coordinators by providing** consistent capacity-building opportunities focused on coordinating the subsector and separating programme interventions from coordination work. One possibility is the deployment of a GEC RRT member to support this capacity-building work.
4. **Providing the Education Sector Coordinator with more opportunities and time to travel to hubs for face-to-face coordination meetings** with education hub coordinators and partners. Such opportunities would allow the ESC to engage in site visits and technical support meetings, which could yield valuable opportunities for relationship-building and coordination.

### Opposition-controlled areas

1. **Ensuring support for full-time education cluster coordinators** with the appropriate skills, expertise and personality to build relationships and trust among and capacity of all partners, including NGOs.
2. **Supporting opportunities for the cluster coordinator to build leadership and knowledge through field visits** for face-to-face coordination meetings with implementing partners.
3. **Providing greater clarity on definition of and coordination with stabilisation actors**, including having a transparent and participatory discussion with education stakeholders on definitions and processes for coordination to support predictability of approach and clarity of roles.

### SDF-controlled areas

1. **Continuing to invest in and build the capacity and leadership of the national NES EWG Coordinator and EWG** for sustainable coordinated education planning and response.
2. **Continuing to engage the active participation of NGOs in the NES EWG**, using a variety of flexible communication tools that facilitate formal and informal communication for EWG members operating at different levels.
3. **Supporting the development and implementation of a ToR/MoU to build upon and regularise NES ESW and child protection working group intersectoral coordination** through joint practical actions.
4. **Continuing outreach and dialogue to stabilisation actors using the draft 'Guidance on Humanitarian Engagement with Stabilization Actors in Syria' (November 2018)** to support predictability of approach and clarity of roles within discussions to agree on how to ensure coordination.
5. **Ensure the north-east Syria coordination system is maintained.** Owing to the skilled leadership, expertise, personality and full-time coordination post of the NES INGO Forum ISC, there is a predisposition for collaboration and coordination across sectors. Ensuring this system continues in north-east Syria and reproducing this model in other contexts could achieve similar effects.



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# Annex 1      Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with 19 interviewees from the following organisations and coordination mechanisms:

Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) Syria  
UK Department for International Development (DFID)  
Education Cannot Wait  
Education Sector Working Group, UNICEF Syria  
ECHO  
Equitas Education  
Gaziantep Education Cluster, Save the Children  
Gaziantep Education Cluster, UNICEF  
Global Education Cluster Rapid Response Team  
North East Syria Education Working Group, Save the Children  
No Lost Generation  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
People in Need  
Save the Children, MENA  
Syria Relief Network's Coordination Platform for Education  
Whole of Syria Education, Save the Children  
Whole of Syria Education, UNICEF

Researchers approached the MoE in Syria, through the assistance of the ESC in Damascus, to request an interview with the Deputy Minister of Education for the Syrian Arab Republic. At the time of writing, this interview had not yet taken place.











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