

Strengthening Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and Data for Increased Resilience to Crisis

COUNTRY CASE STUDY: SYRIA

The ‘Strengthening Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) and Data for Increased Resilience to Crises’ initiative responds to the need for accurate and relevant education data and evidence in crisis contexts. UNESCO, in partnership with NORCAP and supported by Education Cannot Wait and SIDA, has conducted country case studies in Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, Palestine, South Sudan and Syria to analyse recurring data challenges in crisis situations in the framework of the initiative.

This document was commissioned by UNESCO and is part of the collection of six country case studies carried out. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to UNESCO.

This document can be cited with the following reference: Esma Al-Samarai, 2021, Syria Country Case Study. Document commissioned for the UNESCO Strengthening Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) and Data for Increased Resilience to Crises’ initiative.

© UNESCO and NORCAP 2021. This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo>).

For further information, please contact: eie@unesco.org

ESMA AL-SAMARAI

2021

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acronyms | 3 |
| Background | 5 |
| Methodology | 6 |
| I. Context | 7 |
| A. General country context | 7 |
| <i>THE WHOLE-OF-SYRIA (WoS) APPROACH</i> | 7 |
| B. Crisis and Education-in-Emergencies context | 9 |
| <i>THE COMPLEXITY OF EDUCATION BETWEEN GoS AND WoS</i> | 9 |
| II. Data production and use: Actor mapping | 10 |
| A. Ministry of Education | 10 |
| <i>EMIS AND SIMIS</i> | 10 |
| B. Coordination mechanisms | 16 |
| <i>EDUCATION SECTOR WORKING GROUP IN DAMASCUS</i> | 16 |
| <i>EDUCATION CLUSTER IN WoS: THE SOUTHERN TURKEY HUB</i> | 19 |
| C. National and international organizations | 20 |
| <i>ASSISTANCE COORDINATION UNIT (ACU)</i> | 20 |
| <i>WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)</i> | 23 |
| <i>DFID</i> | 25 |
| <i>SYRIAN SOCIETY FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (SSSD)</i> | 26 |
| III. Conclusion: Findings and recommendations | 29 |
| Bibliography | 31 |

Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| ACU | Assistance Coordination Unit |
| ACR | Annual Country Report |
| ACTED | Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (FR) |
| BTL | Back to Learning |
| DFID | Department for International Development (UK) |
| DoE | Directorate of Education |
| DoP | Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation |
| DoS | Department of Statistics |
| DRHC | Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator |
| ECW | Education Cannot Wait |
| EiE | Education in Emergencies |
| EMIS | Education Management Information System |
| ESWG | Education Sector Working Group (Damascus-based) |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GVC | Gruppo di Volontariato Civile |
| GoS | Government of Syria |
| HC | Humanitarian Coordinator |
| HCT | Humanitarian Country Team |
| HDX | Humanitarian Data Exchange |
| HNO | Humanitarian Needs Overview |
| HPCR | Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research |
| HRP | Humanitarian Response Plan |
| HtR | Hard to Reach |
| HQ | Headquarters |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IECD | Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement |
| IFE | Informal Education |
| IMU | Information Management Unit |

| | |
|--------|--|
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| IT | Information Technology |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MySQL | Structured Query Language |
| NFE | Non-Formal Education |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NORCAP | Norwegian Capacity |
| OCHA | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| OOSC | Out-of-School Children |
| RHC | Regional Humanitarian Coordinator |
| SARC | Syrian Arab Red Crescent |
| SCI | Save the Children International |
| SIMIS | School Integrated Management Information System |
| SNGO | Syrian Non-Governmental Organization |
| SSG | Strategic Steering Group |
| SSP | System Service Processor |
| SSSD | Syrian Society for Social Development |
| ToT | Training of Trainers |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WoS | Whole of Syria |

Background

When a conflict or a natural disaster erupts, education is generally among the first services interrupted, and the last ones resumed. Governments are often overwhelmed by the needs for relief aid and have traditionally focused on access to basic services such as food, water, shelter and protection, with only 2 per cent of humanitarian funding allocated to education (Nicolai et al., 2016).

Through the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4, governments have committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Yet, 262 million children and youth remain out of school globally. Among them, 75 million are in urgent need of educational support in 35 crisis-affected countries (Nicolai et al., 2016).

Insufficient funding is not the only barrier to quality education. The lack of real-time and quality data, poor coordination between humanitarian and development organizations, and inadequate national actors' capacities are among the top five challenges preventing the provision of quality education in crisis (Nicolai et al., 2016).

In light of these challenges, and building on a longstanding partnership, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Norwegian Capacity (NORCAP) are working together to ensure that education systems are resilient to shocks and crises.

UNESCO and NORCAP, with support from with Education, Cannot Wait (ECW), have developed an initiative aimed at a more effective and harmonized approach to education data management and use in crisis situations. In particular, the project focuses on:

- Strengthening national Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS).
- Strengthening capacities of Ministries of Education and humanitarian and development actors to ensure complementarity of and integrated approaches to humanitarian-development responses in education data management and use of existing EMIS.
- Fostering knowledge sharing and building the evidence base on solutions to EMIS and data-related challenges in crisis contexts.

After consultation with international and national partners, UNESCO and NORCAP identified a sample of six countries in which it commissioned case studies on data collection, analysis and management in the context of the education response. Syria was one of the countries selected.

Overall aim of the case study

The case study aims to analyse the current EMIS and recurring challenges related to the use and management of education data and information in times of crisis.

Objective of the case study

To highlight gaps between the information generated through EMIS and data and information used by humanitarian/development actors in Syria. Based on the findings from this analysis, to outline potential remedial actions to address identified gaps.

Methodology

The study was undertaken for two months. Due to the ongoing crisis and the risks involved in having international staff operating across Syria, it was advised that the author should be desk-based and conduct research through numerous publications and available documents, in addition to interviews, phone calls and email correspondence with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other partners operating in Syria. Conducting this case study remotely poses limitations in terms of scope and verification.

A desk review was conducted as a first step. Questionnaire forms¹ were then sent to different stakeholders in the education sector in Syria. These were followed by more in-depth interviews using Skype and WhatsApp phone calls. A number of partners were unable to (fully) disclose information regarding their data collection processes and assessments given sensitivities around data in the Syrian context.

¹ The form had questions regarding the education data collection process, tools used to collect and verify data, human resources and equipment, data analysis, challenges or key issues involved with data collection, and recommendations.

I. Context

A. General country context

Syria is a country in Western Asia, bordering Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, Israel to the south-west, and Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. A country of fertile plains, high mountains and deserts, Syria is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups. The country is a republic consisting of 14 governorates, subdivided into 61 districts that are further divided into subdistricts.

While the crisis in Syria has affected the whole country to varying degrees, some parts of the population and locations have been more severely affected than others (OCHA, 2019a). The most acute needs across several sectors are concentrated in areas with large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Of the estimated 11.7 million people in need of multisectoral humanitarian assistance across Syria, 5 million people are in dire need. This refers to people living in areas where the overall levels of need are considered to be catastrophic, critical or severe (OCHA, 2019a). The locations most affected are governorates in the north-west and north-east. The crisis remains the largest displacement crisis in the world today, with over 5.6 million registered refugees and over 6 million people internally displaced (UNHCR and UNDP, 2019).

The humanitarian response remains an operation delivered from locations within Syria and neighbouring countries (Turkey and Iraq). The large scale of needs, complex displacement patterns, and rapidly changing operational and political environments require dynamic and flexible coordination support and systems to facilitate effective humanitarian response. Numerous Syrian NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and UN agencies provide humanitarian assistance across Syria using all response modalities: Syria-based humanitarian programmes, inter-agency convoys, and cross-border responses.

THE WHOLE-OF-SYRIA (WoS) APPROACH

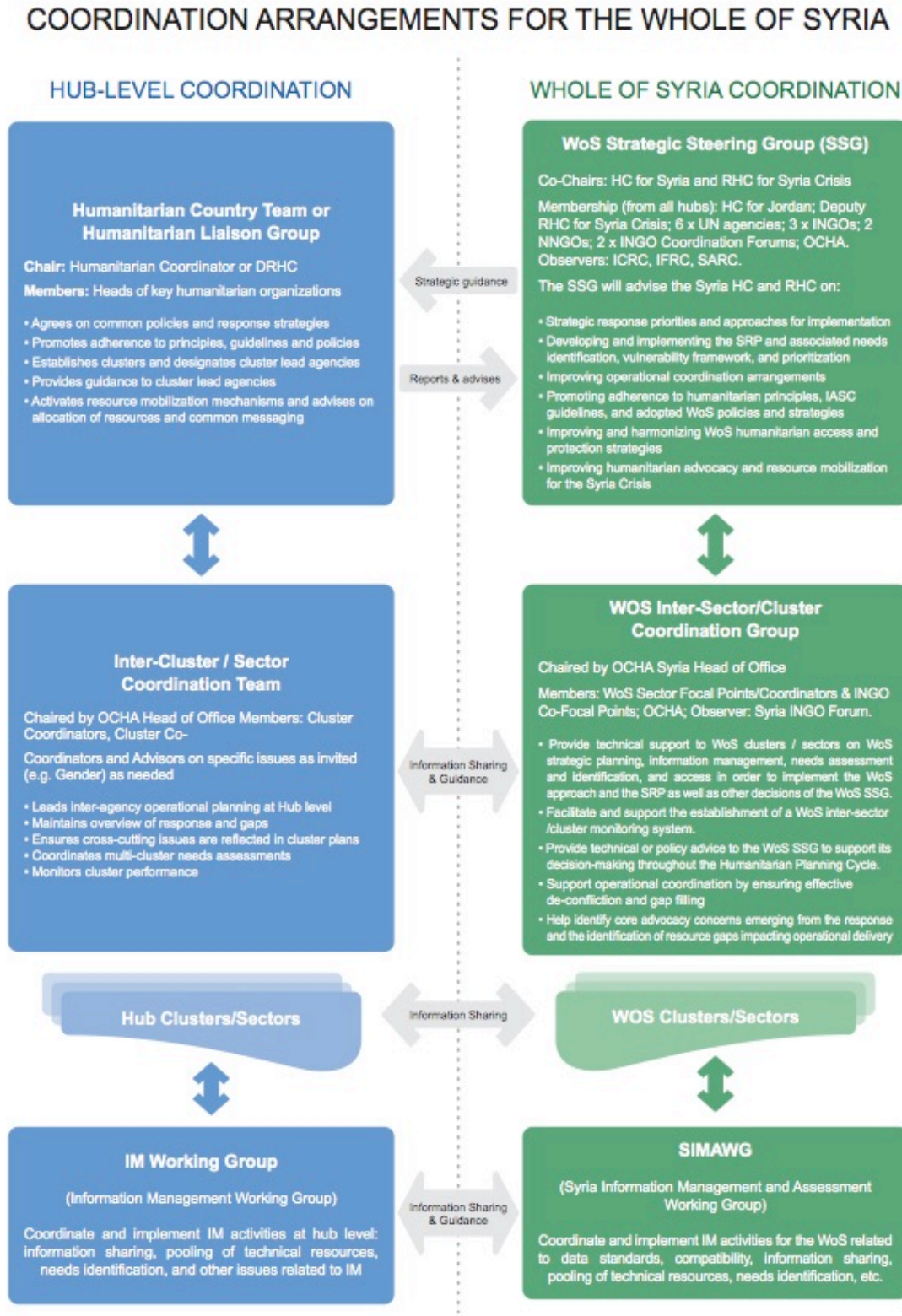
Humanitarian aid has been provided by various local and international actors. In 2014, UN Security Council Resolution 2165 authorized humanitarian aid to be supplied via four crossings. Humanitarian assistance to refugees and their host communities in the countries neighbouring Syria is coordinated by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) who also serves as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the countries, thus seeking coherence in the UN-wide support to both refugee and host communities. Many NGOs have focused on negotiating access across frontlines to provide a lifeline for those in need and face several challenges – particularly in ensuring it is safe for their staff to work (Tinsdall, 2013).

In September 2014, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) operations in Syria, Turkey and Jordan were brought together into a single response framework, and the 2015 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the Syria Strategic Response Plan (SRP) were drafted. A united appeal for Syria was launched, and in February 2015, the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach was formalized with the implementation of the 2015 SRP.

The humanitarian leadership team for Syria includes the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC), based in Amman, the HC for Syria based in Damascus, the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator

(DRHC), based in Gaziantep, Turkey, and the HC for Jordan, based in Amman. The coordination arrangements of the WoS are illustrated in more detail in the following figures:

Figure 1. Coordination Arrangements for the WoS.



Source: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info> (Accessed 7 March 2020.)

B. Crisis and Education-in-Emergencies context

'An estimated 180,000 teachers are no longer in service. Some 40 per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed, and many others have been used to shelter displaced people. All Syrian children have a right to education without discrimination, and this right must be protected, respected and fulfilled.' - Emergency Relief Coordinator Briefing to Security Council delivered by Reena Ghelani (OCHA), 29 November 2018.

The protracted crisis in Syria has provoked widespread humanitarian tragedy. The crisis has forced an estimated 2.1 million children out of school and has put a further 1.3 million at risk of dropping out (OCHA, 2019a). Some 2.63 million children have been displaced within the country. Schools in IDP/returnee-receiving communities have limited absorption capacity for newly arriving students, causing overcrowding; while in most camps, education services are insufficient or non-existent. Hostilities have left more than one in three schools damaged, destroyed, no longer accessible or occupied for shelter and other purposes (WoS Education Sector, 2018). In public schools in locations such as Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Dar'a and Al-Hasakeh, classroom sizes reached 150 students per teacher in September 2018 (MoE, 2018a). A 2018 assessment of 226 camps in Aleppo and Idleb governorates revealed that 73 per cent of camps and settlements had no education services at all, showing no improvement from 2017 (OCHA, 2019a). A shortage of qualified teachers and low remuneration also limit the provision and quality of education. Children who are out of school face increased protection risks, including child marriage and the worst forms of child labour (OCHA, 2019a).

Families fear sending their children to school, as education personnel and infrastructure continue to be attacked.² As populations move into areas contaminated with unexploded ordnance, it has prevented children from going to school and made it dangerous for students and school personnel to do so. Bombardments and displacement have led to increasing hostility-related psychological trauma for children, their families and education personnel. Exposure to violence decreases attendance leads to dropouts and affects learning outcomes by limiting concentration (OCHA, 2019a).

THE COMPLEXITY OF EDUCATION BETWEEN GoS AND WoS

Across the country, learners are following different curriculums which support a different political narrative. Many students have been displaced due to the crisis. Because of this, the MoE has made a concession that students in areas affected by the conflict are allowed to take their examinations at other centres, provided that they get examined on curriculum approved by the Syrian Government. However, this has not always been safe or possible, particularly for students attending schools in non-government-controlled areas. A joint effort between education sector partners and UNICEF, in coordination with the MoE, supported over 15,000 children from Hard to Reach (HtR) areas to take their 9th and 12th-grade examinations in safer areas. Many children risked their safety, crossing active lines of conflict and risking family separation to take their exams and certify their education.³ Thus,

² Eighty-five attacks were reported, of which 56 were verified in the first half of 2018. Compared to 2017, the number of verified attacks on schools for only the first half of 2018 is more than 65 per cent of the total number of the previous year, showing an increased trend (OCHA, 2019a).

³ Support provided includes accommodation, meals, education bursaries, learning materials, extracurricular and medical services as necessary.

there are also concerns among children and parents about education certificate recognition.

Information sharing is highly sensitive in the Syrian context, and a lot of information is not available due to protecting staff and beneficiaries. Reports and studies can be duplicated unknowingly due to the lack of information sharing between humanitarian and development actors. This impacts the capacity to assess the impacts of the crisis and cooperation between different actors.

II. Data production and use: Actor mapping

There is an abundance of information about the humanitarian situation in Syria, including with regard to education. However, the key issue is not how much is available but how it is presented and used in an efficient, effective and coordinated manner to inform and enhance crisis response. Below is a breakdown of how the different actors produce, use and share data and the challenges involved.

A. Ministry of Education

The MoE is responsible for the coordination and management of education data and information for pre-primary, basic and secondary education, and vocational institutes. In addition to this, the Ministry is also responsible for the production and exchange of information and data for policy formulation, planning and management of education service delivery. The information and data gathered and generated are used for decision-making towards timely delivery of education that meets the national vision of inclusive and quality access to education for the Syrian citizens (MoE, 2018b).

The Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation through its Department of Statistics (DoS) is responsible for collecting, processing, and analysing education data for planning and policy formulation. To ensure effective data processing and management, the Directorate of Information Technology of the MoE manages and implements technological support to all education data chain entities. The overall goal of the management information system is to ensure that all responsible bodies at all levels of the education sector can access accurate data and appropriate information, each one according to its permissions, to facilitate the decision-making process, and to ensure that policies and education planning will be built on accurate EMIS data (MoE, 2018b).

EMIS AND SIMIS

Framework/background

Before revamping the EMIS framework in Syria starting in 2016, an annual collection of data had been conducted in November each year through a school census using a 26-page document that primarily focused on inputs such as numbers of students and teachers and the state of school infrastructure. The manual collection and processing of data were from school to governorate to central level using Excel. The verification process occurred only at the central level. The MoE attempted to develop a simple online system to enable capturing of data in 2014/2015, but it did not materialize, and therefore the whole process had to be revamped.

The process of revising the EMIS framework started in July 2016 as a joint collaboration between UNESCO and UNICEF with the MoE and adopted a two-pronged approach: immediate EMIS support and long-term EMIS support. The first was designed to capture essential data at the school level to inform rapid decision-making processes in a changing context; while the second was conceived of as a comprehensive School Integrated Management Information System (SIMIS) to capture information on schools, students, teachers, infrastructure and classroom assessment, among others, accessible at all levels within the MoE from school to district to governorate and MoE headquarters (HQ) levels. Also, the system was designed to subsequently enable the school community including teachers, school management and parents/guardians to monitor and track learner access, attendance, participation and performance through the educational trajectory from pre-primary to the end of secondary education cycle. This system would help to measure and monitor educational progress, and to undertake evidence-informed planning and management of the national education system (UNESCO and MoE, 2020).

The support provided aims to strengthen the capacity of the Syrian MoE to provide real-time, accurate and complete data, and to improve the quality and accuracy of education data. A three-year SIMIS work plan was rolled out in 2018, including new features and resource mobilization. Some of the features are to address new classroom assessment policy, integration of Curriculum B,⁴ intermediate institutes and tracking of out-of-school children using mapping, which may include use of a mobile application.

At the time of writing of this report, the SIMIS is still in its early stages of piloting, with only a few schools in Damascus and Rural Damascus connected to the system, due in part to the issue of the need to reinforce connectivity and to continually enhance the SIMIS software to address operational issues. The future plan, as indicated in the 2018 workplan is to roll out to all schools. In the meantime, the EMIS involves conducting an annual school census to provide the required education statistics and indicators for education policy formulation, planning and management.

In short, in the Syrian context, the EMIS framework constitutes two part-process: short term approach through annual school census and long term approach through the SIMIS.

The short-term approach: annual school census

The process of data collection is both manual and digital. The data are collected at the school level manually, then transmitted to the Directorates of Education at the governorate level, and finally sent in the format of EXCEL to the Department of Statistics in the Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation in Damascus. The data are first verified by the school principal and again later when they are entered into the system by the DoS at the governorate level; they are checked one last time by the central DoS, where data are compared against previous indicators and evidence, as well as the situation in the governorates. As previously mentioned, the data are used to measure and monitor educational progress – such as enrolment, numbers of schools and teachers, and pass rates – and to

⁴ Curriculum B is a certified accelerated learning programme that aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged out-of-school children and adolescents, especially those who missed out on more than one year of schooling due to the crisis in Syria. The goal of Curriculum B is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity, enabling them to catch up and reintegrate into their age appropriate classes (Curriculum A) or in upper level of Curriculum B if learners are not age appropriate.

undertake evidence-informed planning and management of the national education system. This is also to show the progress and the performance of the Ministry (MoE, 2018c, pp. 20-21).

The following is a breakdown of how this information is prepared and collected.

At national level:

- August: The Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation and the DoS start the logistical preparations for the annual school census.
- September: Electronic statistical forms (Excel and Access) are prepared, revised and distributed to the governorates.
- October and November: The dates for the census and the statistical forms are announced.
- December: Verification and correction of the school census database.

At governorate level:

- October: The Department of Planning and Statistics in the respective Directorates of Education (DoE) at governorate level print out the census forms. Meetings with school principals are organized to explain the forms in detail.
- November: The Department of Planning and Statistics in each governorate receives the completed forms and verifies them.
- December: The governorates' Department of Planning and Statistics uses two different programmes (Excel and Access) to enter all schools' data.
- January: The electronic version of the completed school census is submitted to the central DoS in the Directorate of Planning and International Cooperation.

At school level:

- November: All school principals complete the school census forms on the designated day of the census.
- November: All schools submit the completed forms to their respective DoE.
- December: The Departments of Planning and Statistics in the respective DoE receive inquiries and verify information.

Once this process is completed, the data are verified, and quality is controlled at different levels to ensure the accuracy of the information. There are three levels of quality control;

1. School level: The school's secretary fills in the data, and the principal verifies them.
2. DoE at governorate level: The statistics staff verifies the data with the principal. The data are then further verified using an Excel formula where the tables for enrolment should match with the tables for age and nationalities and will equal zero if no discrepancies occur.
3. MoE level: The baseline is tested, and mistakes are corrected in coordination with the DoE. Data are compared with Access and Excel, and mistakes are corrected through communication with the respective DoE.

As stated, these data get collected once a year in November as it is believed that the number of students and staff and their movements have stabilized between areas and schools.⁵ The idea is to get a snapshot of the educational reality and compare it with previous years.⁶

With support from UNESCO and UNICEF, the MoE reviewed the 26-page school census form and developed a 2-page school census form to fast-track the EMIS data collection for 2016, which was later replaced with a 12-page form in 2017 that will continue to be used until the long-term system has been fully put into place. The MoE with the DoS have changed the 2-page forms for the school census to 12-page forms not only to include information on number of learners and number of teachers, etc., but also to report on the state of school buildings, latrines and drinking water, learners with special needs and teachers' training.⁷

The use of technology was challenging since the SPSS software failed and was only used in Damascus. Furthermore, all the data were entered on an Excel template with limited functionality and relevance.

The long-term approach: SIMIS

The long-term support with developing a new software (SIMIS) is still necessary to capture more data. UNESCO supported the MoE in purchasing MySQL software⁸ and a pilot project was started, covering 36 schools (26 in Damascus and 10 in Rural Damascus) with a plan to eventually scale it up to all 13,433 schools countrywide. Guidelines were prepared, and 10 master trainers were trained to then train 30 others (Training of Trainers) from central directorate and governorate level. The SIMIS was launched in September 2018, and since then, more than 170 personnel have been trained on it (UNESCO and MoE, 2020) and the training of staff is a continuous process and is part of the 3-year plan developed in 2018. Starting in 2018, WFP joined the discussion and expressed commitment to supporting the SIMIS through its own programming.

The SIMIS is primarily developed at three levels: school,⁹ governorate-level DoE and HQ-level DoE, **a unique student number ID is used**. In 2019, it was upgraded to a new version with the following additions:

- Modification and design of the Classroom Assessment Module according to new national policy: Oral 10%, Homework 10%, Activities 20%, Tests 20% and Written exam 40%.
- Integration of Curriculum B according to the Curriculum A datasets and MoE requirements in SIMIS, ensuring harmonization across the two curricula.
- Development of interactive and dynamic reporting of education statistics and indicators.
- Training of MoE technical staff.
- On-site technical support to MoE.

⁵ Interview with a ministry official on 26 January 2020.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Indicators such as new students, repeating students, nationalities, age, number of drop-outs, IDPs, learners with special needs and kind of impairment (visual, hearing, mobility, speech and psychological), school staff, qualifications and training (all gender-disaggregated), water quality testing and availability of drinking water, latrine facilities and accessibility for learners with special needs, garbage disposal, names of learners whose parents died in military combat (working for the Syrian Arab Army or Ministry of Interior), number of TVET learners disaggregated by type of education and gender.

⁸ MySQL is a relational database management system. It is a free and open-source software.

⁹ 'Schools' is used here to refer to all education levels (kindergarten, basic and secondary education, including vocational and private education).

For the time being, the SIMIS cannot be used to its full potential yet due to limited resources for procuring equipment and providing high-speed internet to all schools. Therefore, the MoE still relies on the school census.

In line with the 3-year workplan, to expand implementation, UNICEF has recently provided funding for equipment and appliances to connect 2,500 schools¹⁰ to SIMIS and the work to do so has begun. The workplan consists of three parts: infrastructure, system, and capacity development. The MoE together with the Ministry of Communications have been investing in infrastructure, whilst UNESCO have been focusing on developing the system and building the IT and statistical capacity of the MoE and Governorates. UNICEF invested in capacity development at school level.

HR and equipment

There are DoEs in each governorate responsible for EMIS, with smaller education units in charge of data collection. Coordination between them happens during the school census. Due to continuous electricity outages and limited internet network coverage, it has proven impossible to dispense with the manual labour and only use the EMIS computerized system. The data get collected by the education units and then are given to the DoE at the governorate level for data entry if the education units are not able to link with EMIS due to electricity cuts or lack of computers.

The MoE owns the system and gives access and authorization to different levels of education staff from school to MoE level. The data are entered by data entry personnel.

Data usage/analysis

The Director of Planning and International Cooperation is the co-chair of the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) along with the Education Sector Coordinator. This coordination mechanism is used to discuss education-related projects and provide necessary feedback, figures and reports as needed for partners to make informed decisions about responses.

The data gathered are used by the MoE for planning purposes and budgetary forecasts, as well as to measure the performance of the Ministry. However, there is always a need for NGOs and UN agencies to conduct assessments.¹¹ A lot of resources are used to collect these data, and many of them are repetitive. This leads to fatigue among beneficiaries, who are asked repeatedly to answer the same questions, and is also a waste of time and resources that can have a serious impact on the timeliness and reporting intervals needed for some EiE data.

The MoE's annual reports are also distributed to other ministries such as the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Higher Education annually as standard procedure. There are talks about developing a system similar to SIMIS for the Ministry of Higher Education as well; however, the talks are in their early stages. The Ministry still collects data manually and enters them on Excel. The Ministry of Industry gathers data on vocational training and the Ministry of Tourism gathers data on tourism and hotel management students. In addition, the Ministry of Culture collects data on their youth and adult literacy programmes. None of these ministries has access to EMIS or SIMIS at the moment. However, they all feed the Central Office for Statistics with data that can be used if/when needed.

¹⁰ Syria had 22,000 schools in total before the war and now has 13,433.

¹¹ Such as learners in need of psychosocial support and nutritional needs, security and safety of schools, etc.

Humanitarian and development partners must receive government approval to conduct assessments.¹² The MoE seeks to facilitate the work of partners and prioritizes alignment with identified priorities. Some partners have cited that obtaining approvals can be time-consuming and may delay response.

Quality of data

The school census provides data collected on one specific day of the year. The SIMIS, which is meant to replace the excel-based EMIS eventually, is more comprehensive, including data for all levels of education, and will be able to collect and analyse these data on a rolling basis throughout the school year. However, it is not linked to every school and therefore the majority of the data collection is done manually; in some areas, where there is a safety risk, it is not possible to gather data. Thus, the margin for human error is higher and the accuracy of data is uncertain. Numerous verifications are conducted at different levels to mitigate this; however, capacity is still a challenge. More training in Information Technology (IT) proficiency, network management, data management and IT security is needed (MoE, 2018b, p. 4).

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- Due to the crisis, many schools are damaged and/or being used as shelters for IDPs or are situated in unsafe areas, making it difficult to collect data from these schools.
- The schools' connectivity to the MoE data centre is also a major obstacle. Lack of computers, electricity cuts and limited internet coverage are reasons for relying on paper forms.
- The current system is very time-consuming and there is a need for more equipped and trained staff, especially in areas affected by the crisis. Many qualified teachers and educational staff with computer literacy have left their areas, and the MoE will have to build the capacity of those who remain.
- There is a lack of funds to train staff, link schools to SIMIS, and no clear plan for completing the SIMIS. The MoE has mentioned that linking all schools to SIMIS is part of their 2020-2022 plan. However, efforts must be made to secure the required funding.
- The data are collected on a specific day in November and thus, do not measure progress throughout the year, nor do they capture evolving circumstances. Therefore, it is difficult to monitor and mitigate crisis. For example, data on learners who drop out of school during the year or after the school census has been conducted will not be captured until the next year's school census. The World Food Programme (WFP) needs accurate data to plan school feeding programmes (i.e. it needs to know exact numbers of children in schools to be able to plan, procure and deliver meals); therefore, it has to conduct its own data collection and cannot rely on EMIS.
- The EMIS figures should be evaluated with caution as in some areas they showed discrepancies. In the school census, teachers who teach in more than one school get counted only once, in one of the schools – which affects the student-teacher ratio. However, the DoE's justification is that they calculate the ratio based on the governorate level and not per school; therefore it does not affect the overall picture.

¹² Interview conducted on 20 February 2020.

- Particularly in hard-to-reach areas, quality issues and discrepancies may arise due to lack of clarity around who manages schools and lack of training for those collecting data, among other challenges.

Recommendations

- Addressing EMIS challenges, the new SIMIS is a comprehensive system that operates in real time. The teachers are responsible for data entry in their respective schools. The MoE will need continuous support in terms of capacity building, training of qualified staff, and funding to link all schools to SIMIS. Support is also needed to develop a realistic and detailed roadmap for connecting schools to the system over the coming years.
- The school census requires a larger number of well-trained data entry clerks, especially in governorates which have been heavily affected by the crisis such as Raqaa and Idleb. Strengthening the capacity of the existing staff and training new ones should go hand-in-hand with the preparation for the annual school census.
- The current EMIS school census data collection and reporting occur once a year, therefore not capturing the change as it happens – and thus, not helping to respond to, or mitigate, a situation in a timely manner. Follow-up and progress reporting (e.g. reports on drop-out rates and status of school buildings) are needed on a more regular basis so proper response can happen on time.

B. Coordination mechanisms

EDUCATION SECTOR WORKING GROUP IN DAMASCUS

OCHA has been coordinating UN agency, donor and NGO efforts in various sectors across Syria. In the education sector, the ESWG – co-led by MoE and UNICEF – is based in Damascus and coordinates the education sector at the national level. Their work involves all governorates. The ESWG has played a major role in coordinating UN agencies, donor and NGO efforts in various education-related programmes across Syria.

Framework/background

One of the ESWG's main functions is information management. The data are collected on a monthly basis from all actors working on education, in addition to during meetings once every two months or on an ad hoc basis, depending on developments in the country.

Process of data collection

The 4Ws (Who has done What, Where and When) reporting process is the primary methodology of information management and essential to understanding and assessing the work of the ESWG. This report includes the data collected from all 75 organizations working on education in Syria on a monthly basis. The ESWG collects and disseminates all information with the different parties, including the MoE, to provide an up-to-date mapping of the different activities and responses, so that duplication of efforts is minimized. The data collected at Damascus level is fed into the regional WoS information management system based in Amman.

Tools

For the 4Ws reporting, ESWG uses Excel with pivot tables to collect the information.

Figure 2. Two screenshots from a completed 4Ws form

| for WHOM? (لمن) | | | | | | | | | | | | | WHEN? (متى) |
|--|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Reached his month and for the first time with activity المستفيدين الجدد - المستفيدين الذين تم الوصول اليهم لأول مرة | | | | | | | REPEATED beneficiaries reached again this month with activity المستفيدين المكررون - المستفيدين الذين تم الوصول اليهم مسبقاً بالنشاط | | | | | | Select the appropriate status in the table اختر الحالة المناسبة من القائمة |
| NEW CHILDREN (GIRLS <18) (بنات <18) | TOTAL NEW CHILDREN مجموع الأطفال الجدد | NEW ADULTS (Men >18) (رجال >18) | NEW ADULTS (WOMEN >18) (نساء >18) | TOTAL NEW ADULTS مجموع البالغين الجدد | TOTAL NEW INDIVIDUALS مجموع المستفيدين الجدد | NUMBER OF REPEATED (BOYS <18) الأطفال المكررون (بنات <18) | NUMBER OF REPEATED (GIRLS <18) الأطفال المكررون (بنات <18) | TOTAL REPEATED CHILDREN (<18) مجموع الأطفال المكررون | NUMBER OF REPEATED (Men >18) مستفيدين مكررون (رجال >18) | NUMBER OF REPEATED (WOMEN >18) مستفيدين مكررون (نساء >18) | TOTAL REPEATED ADULTS (>18) مجموع البالغين المكررون | TOTAL REPEATED BENEFICIARIES REACHED مجموع المستفيدين المكررين | Status حالة النشاط |
| 0 | 0 | | | 0 | 0 | 8 | 9 | 17 | | | 0 | 17 | Ongoing |
| 0 | 0 | | | 0 | 0 | 8 | 11 | 19 | | | 0 | 19 | Ongoing |
| 2 | 3 | | | 0 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | | | 0 | 7 | Ongoing |
| 4 | 7 | | | 0 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 4 | | | 0 | 4 | Ongoing |
| 7 | 10 | | | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | 0 | 0 | Ongoing |
| | 0 | 2 | 9 | 11 | 11 | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Ongoing |

| Reporting period (الفترة التي يغطيها التقرير) | | WHO? (من) | | | | | WHERE? (أين) | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| Select the appropriate year of reporting اختر السنة المناسبة للتقرير | Select the appropriate reporting month اختر الشهر المناسب للتقرير | Select the name of the organization in the community list اختر اسم المنظمة من القائمة | Select the name of the implementing partner(s) for this activity in this location اختر اسم الشريك المنفذ لهذا النشاط في هذا الموقع | Select the type of implementing partner اختر نوع الشريك المنفذ | Select the name of the Donor for this activity in this location اختر اسم الممول لهذا النشاط في هذا الموقع | Is this activity part of Humanitarian Response هل هذا النشاط جزء من الاستجابة الإنسانية | Please double click on the cell, search for the community. Note: you can directly search in both Arabic and English يرجى النقر المزدوج على الخلية، ابحث عن المجتمع. ملاحظة: يمكنك البحث مباشرة في العربية والإنجليزية | Select the name of school/ learning center for this activity اختر اسم المدرسة أو المركز التعليمي لهذا النشاط | Select the appropriate type of school/ learning center in the dropdown list اختر النوع المناسب للمدرسة أو المركز التعليمي من القائمة المنسدلة | Select the level of the school/ learning center اختر المستوى المناسب للمدرسة أو المركز التعليمي | |
| Year of reporting (سنة التقرير) | Reporting Month الشهر المغطى بالتقرير | Grant Organization المنظمة المانحة للتطوير | Implementing Partner الشريك المنفذ | Type of implementing partner | Donor الممول | HRP (Yes/No) | Community المجتمع المحلي | Name of school / learning center اسم المدرسة أو المركز التعليمي | Type of school/ learning center نوع المدرسة أو المركز التعليمي | Level of school/ learning center مستوى المدرسة أو المركز التعليمي | |
| 2019 | 10: October | Aga Khan Foundation | Aga Khan Foundation | INGO | Other Donor/Non-UN | No | | | Other | Early Child Education | |
| 2019 | 10: October | Aga Khan Foundation | Aga Khan Foundation | INGO | Other Donor/Non-UN | No | | | Other | Early Child Education | |
| 2019 | 10: October | Aga Khan Foundation | Aga Khan Foundation | INGO | Other Donor/Non-UN | No | | | Other | Early Child Education | |

Source: Agha Khan Foundation

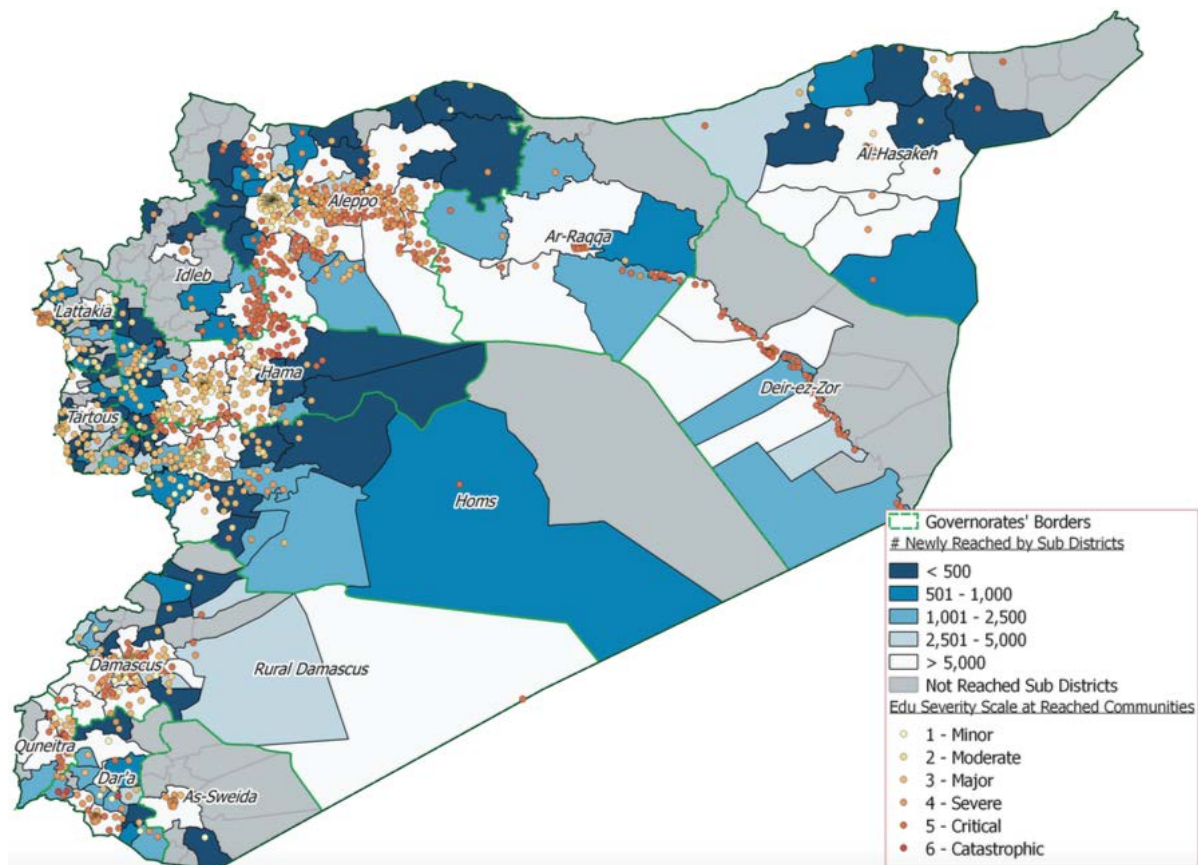
Data usage/analysis

The ESWG maps projects and activities done by the different partners inside Syria. The final report is distributed to all members but without the names of the organizations. Thus, NGOs and UN agencies tend to collect the same information through key community members, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The ESWG uses EMIS data as a baseline to help in verifying information from the 4Ws, and refers mainly to data such as enrolment, number of schools, teachers and learners. However, EMIS data are insufficient, and there is still a need for assessments. EMIS data are also not available to all partners, and the ESWG is not allowed to share them. The 4Ws is a report that measures the response, and individual organizations do not share their assessments and findings with the others.

Quality of data

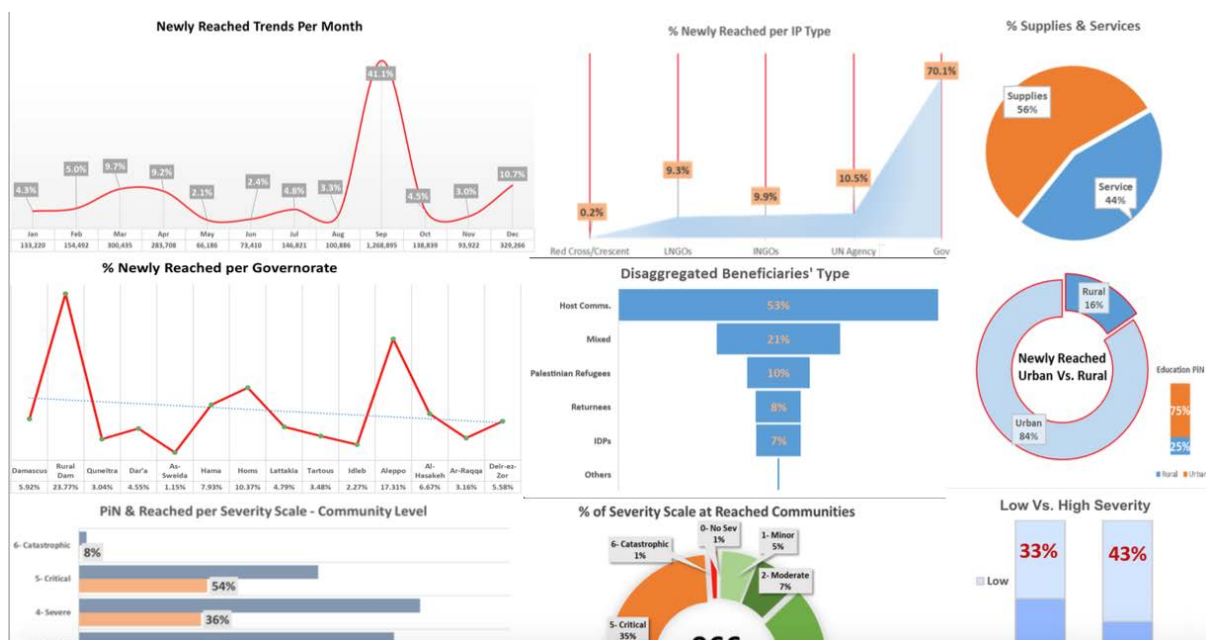
ESWG data are reliant on data produced by EMIS and data received by partners. Although there are some discrepancies in EMIS data, the margin for error is still acceptable. The 4Ws reporting, however, lacks a qualitative dimension. Partners need to share positive and negative lessons learned during implementation to replicate good practice, scale up the most effective practices and reduce inefficiencies.

Figure 3. Screenshot from the Education Sector Fact Sheet showing the responses by members of ESWG



Source : ESWG (December – January 2019)

Figure 4. Screenshot from the Education Sector Fact Sheet showing the responses by members of ESWG



Source : ESWG (December – January 2019)

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- Decisions on planning any humanitarian response should be based on reliable data. This is not easy when access to people affected by the crisis is difficult and when the operating environment is dangerous. Security challenges, bureaucratic impediments and governance issues adversely impact both data collection and use.
- Cooperation and referrals of cases between the different partners are based on individual efforts and not coordinated by the ESWG, nor do they follow an established set of guidelines. For example, a partner working on school rehabilitation seeing the need for psychosocial support might refer these cases to another partner.

Recommendations

- Qualitative reports on assistance to education should be produced more regularly.
- Solutions to improve coordination around data and minimize duplication should be explored while considering security and protection issues.
- Possibilities of scaling up interventions should also be explored at an early stage, in consultation with beneficiaries (UNICEF, 2016, p.8).
- Guidelines should be provided on how to refer cases and encourage actors to do so.

EDUCATION CLUSTER IN WoS: THE SOUTHERN TURKEY HUB

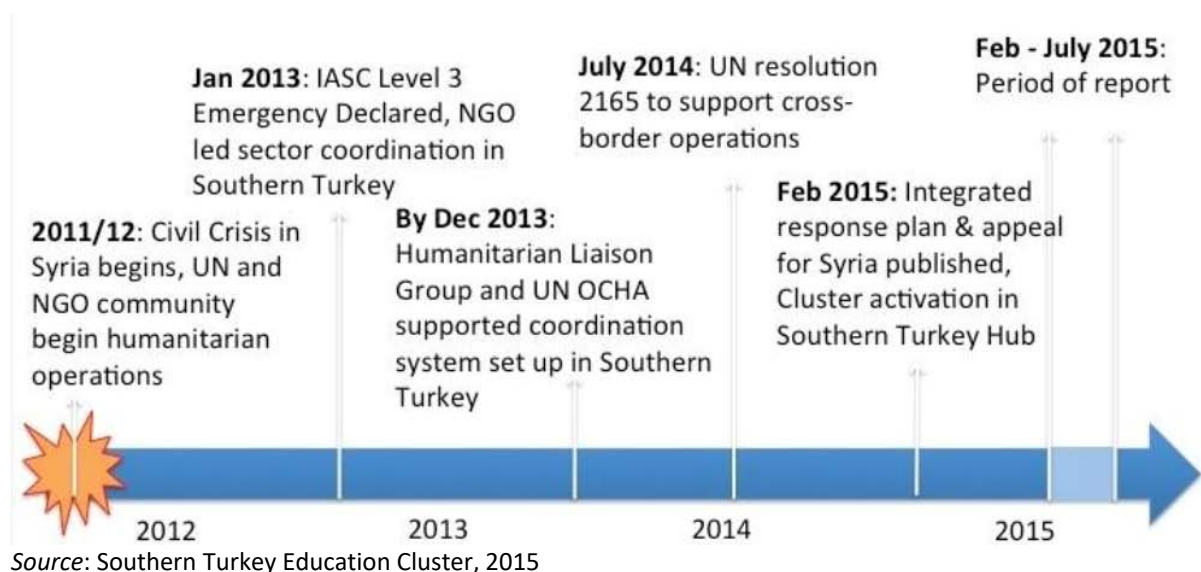
Since the beginning of the crisis, humanitarian operations have been led from several hubs: country operations within Syria and cross-border assistance from Southern Turkey and Jordan. In September 2014, the WoS approach was implemented as a result of UN Security Council Resolution 2165, bringing together these separate operations into a single framework with a common response plan and a supporting coordination structure to increase the overall effectiveness of the response. A Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Strategic Response Plan (SRP) for 2015 were completed under the WoS.

Officially activated in February 2015, but active as a sector working group since early 2013, the Southern Turkey Education Cluster is co-led by Save the Children and UNICEF.

The Education Cluster has a similar job description to the ESWG in Damascus. To protect key informants, the names of the Cluster partner organizations are not revealed. Exact locations of schools are also not included in reports. For example, the Cluster produces a report similar to the 4Ws to look at who is doing what, where and when. The 'who' is mostly limited to the response-hub, as for two out of the three hubs the organization name is anonymized.

Sensitivity and protection around collection and use of data are so vital that the Education Cluster only allows face-to-face meetings with partners; Skype and other forms of communication are not possible for reasons of security and reliability. The security situation limits the sharing of information among partners, which has implications for coordination around data collection and use.

Figure 5. Timeline for the establishment of the Southern Turkey Education Cluster.



C. National and international organizations

ASSISTANCE COORDINATION UNIT (ACU)

The ACU is a Syrian non-governmental, non-profit institution focused on maximizing the impact of assistance delivered to the Syrian people by coordinating the efforts of donors, implementing agencies and community representatives.¹³ Their work is information management, advocacy and monitoring and evaluation. They are based in Gaziantep and work in six to seven governorates,¹⁴ with special emphasis on hard-to-reach areas. Their studies cover around 80 subdistricts in north-west and north-east Syria, in addition to all IDP camps; and in 2019, they conducted a study on out-of-school children (Joint Education Needs Assessment) under the supervision of the Education Cluster (Southern Turkey Hub) and Save the Children International, in cooperation with 13 Syrian NGOs working on education.

Their objectives are:

- Mapping humanitarian needs and ensuring stability in Syria.
- Coordination with all humanitarian and stabilization actors to achieve the response plan with better impact.
- Mobilization and the advocacy of humanitarian issues at local, regional and international levels.
- Increasing resilience and supporting sustainable development.
- Promoting reliance on local resources, providing support in emergency situations and boosting the early recovery of communities.

Their biggest partners and donors have been DFID, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Qatar Red Crescent, Turkish Ministry of Health and Expertise France.

¹³ ACU website, <https://www.acu-sy.org> (Accessed 2 February 2020.)

¹⁴ Idleb, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, Al-Hasakeh, Deir ez-Zor, eastern parts of Rural Damascus and parts of Hama.

Process of data collection/data usage/analysis

The Information Management Unit (IMU) of ACU was established in late 2012. Various types of information products are published – such as Need Assessments, Thematic Reports,¹⁵ Situational Reports¹⁶ and Flash Reports¹⁷ – in short, medium and long formats, in addition to Online Interactive Studies. ACU collects data by conducting key informant interviews. Their enumerators meet key informants face-to-face to conduct surveys.

ACU shares the data with the Education Cluster and the WoS to be used in the HNO, and they upload them on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), Reliefweb and their own website. The data are available for any humanitarian purpose, whether to develop projects or prepare studies for direct response, unless donors request non-disclosure of information.

Tools, HR and equipment

The IMU uses different technologies regarding software such as Kobo, SPSS, Arc GIS, Access and Excel, in addition to hardware and web-based solutions such as Arc GIS Online, Power BI and Survey Monkey.

The unit consists of a central team of ten information management professionals based in Gaziantep, Turkey, as well as an enumerator network across Syria. The IMU enumerator network consists of 95 full-time enumerators dedicated to collecting data across Syria, within 6-7 governorates, in addition to 23 full-time camp enumerators dedicated to collecting data within 180 IDP camps in northern Syria, in Aleppo and Idleb governorates.

Quality of data

ACU depends on direct observation from their enumerators when they work in the field (at school level) and then triangulates the information from various sources such as the Education Cluster. The IMU central team receives the data electronically and converts them into an Excel database; then the data are cleaned and analysed. The last version of 'Schools in Syria' covered 4,016 schools and included 34,000 surveys conducted with students, parents, teachers and principals. Their data are used for the HNO and other donor publications.

In many ways, the IMU's job in education in hard-to-reach areas is equivalent to the MoE's EMIS for government-controlled areas. However, their data are more detailed. Some have raised concerns about the reliability of data collected by the MoE in hard-to-reach areas, owing to issues of capacity and access .¹⁸

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- Coverage difficulty and limited access. Most NGOs are working in the safer areas and therefore no response is getting to other areas in dire need. ACU is one of the few organizations that can conduct assessments in risky and dangerous parts of the governorates.

¹⁵ Such as 'Schools in the Northern Syria Camps 2018', which is produced annually and covers the number of schools in camps, number of students, type of school buildings, school supplies, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools, education level and curriculum.

¹⁶ Such as the quarterly bulletin 'Syrian Crisis in North West'. It covers main events, number of people killed and injured in Idleb, Aleppo and Hama.

¹⁷ Covers data such as facilities targeted/bombed and where, number of civilians killed, number of children and women killed, and the distribution of IDPs among governorates.

¹⁸ Interview conducted on 20 February 2020.

- There is always a need for more field enumerators to cover bigger and more areas. However, funding is usually limited.
- The NGOs working under donor policies usually do not share their data and findings without donor permission. This creates a limitation for triangulating information.
- There are no unified templates available for data collection. Organizations design their tools for data collection and project proposals. However, other organizations are not able to use this information to optimize efforts and save time.
- Different organizations collect data from the same location and receive no funding for a response. This increases the expectations of the beneficiaries. However, when no response is received, a trust gap is created between the community and the organization; and people refuse to answer subsequent questionnaires because they believe doing so will not result in anything.
- The reliability of EMIS data for hard-to-reach areas is perceived as a challenge by some partners, as discussed during the Education Dialogue Forum in October 2018 in Jordan between the MoE and ACU. Debates around reliability reflect in part the political dimensions of data collection and use in the Syrian context.

Recommendations

- Increased coordination and information/data sharing should be pursued to the extent possible given security and protection concerns.
- UN agencies and NGOs should harmonize their data collection and reporting templates, so they can be used by others. This would allow organizations to spend less time on reformatting or collecting different data, especially if they are receiving funding from different sources over time. This will be a long-term endeavour, but a long-term investment.
- Unified definitions and criteria are also needed when conducting needs assessment. For example, there are several definitions of people with special needs and different administrative boundaries that need to be agreed upon prior to conducting any assessment or survey. The same is true for definitions of what a household is or who can be defined as an orphan.
- There is a lack of educational documentation in schools. Efforts should be made to build the capacity of the DoEs and school management for registration of student information.
- More education studies are needed under the Education Cluster umbrella on an annual basis, such as Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA). In addition to annual studies on schools in refugee camps, annual reports and drop-out assessment reports are also needed for schools in Syria.
- Lack of funding for local organizations jeopardizes the ability of such partners to continue producing robust data, particularly for hard-to-reach areas. Additional and sustained support is needed for Syrian organizations operating in the WoS area to be able to continue conducting systematic, organized and thorough assessments.

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

WFP provides emergency food assistance to vulnerable and conflict-affected Syrians through its food distribution programme in all 14 Syrian governorates, subject to access. Under this programme, 4 million people receive assistance from WFP each month with food rations consisting of, among others, rice, bulgur wheat, pasta, dried beans and pulses, providing 1,500 kcal per day for one month.¹⁹

Framework/background

Under Strategic Outcome 01, ‘food insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, IDPs and returnees, in all governorates, have access to life-saving food to meet their basic food needs all year long’. WFP’s school feeding programme – in partnership with the MoE and local partners, and in coordination with UNICEF – targets pre-primary and primary school children in areas with a high concentration of IDPs, as well as poor food security and education indicators. The programme provides fortified snacks to children in school to encourage enrolment and regular attendance, as well as food vouchers to incentivize families to re-enrol out-of-school children in the accelerated ‘Curriculum B’.²⁰ This is in addition to distribution of fresh meals mainly in Aleppo and Rural Damascus (WFP, 2018).

Process of data collection

WFP planning relies on assessments conducted by the education sector and other education partners including the MoE, and on the assessment carried out by WFP’s field offices. WFP has six field offices in Syria (Damascus, Homs, Tartus, Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and Qamishli), and each office has at least three field monitors. The field monitors monitor progress through a set of questionnaires consisting of 2-3 pages by interviewing the headmasters of schools, teachers and school children in addition to interviewing stakeholders outside of the school who are involved in the different school feeding activities. The data get entered into a system at the field office which is linked with the central system in Damascus.

Tools

WFP uses a MySQL system that is accessible online from all field offices. Some offices have also started using tablets instead of the three-page questionnaire, which minimizes data entry afterwards.

HR and equipment

WFP works to build the capacity of its school feeding programme partners and has conducted 12 workshops on programme implementation for MoE staff involved in the implementation of the programme at school level in 2018 and 2019.

WFP has one Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) officer in every field office in addition to the field monitors and third-party monitors. The organization has an adequate number of staff working on data collection and entry; and with the use of tablets and an effective software system, the workload is manageable.

¹⁹ WFP website, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/syrian-arab-republic> (Accessed 31 January 2020.)

²⁰ The value of the voucher aims to compensate the cost of child labour.

Data usage/analysis

Monitoring data are entered electronically using tablets linked to a central database. Dashboards are generated to reflect the monitoring findings. Partnering with other UN agencies remains a priority, and WFP is currently in discussion with UNICEF and UNESCO to coordinate the development and implementation of SIMIS. UNESCO and UNICEF and under the leadership of the MoE participated in the development of a national Transitional Education Plan.

The current WFP school feeding outputs and outcome indicators are used to report on the implementation and impact of the school feeding programme to different stakeholders including donors.

Figure 6. WFP outcome and output indicators

Output Indicators

| Detailed Indicator | Unit | Target Value | Actual Value | % Achieved |
|--|----------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Strategic Result 1: Everyone has access to food | | | | |
| Strategic Outcome 01: Food insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, IDPs and returnees, in all governorates, have access to life-saving food to meet their basic food needs all year long. | | | | |
| Output A: Targeted students receive nutritious school meals or CBT, in order to increase enrolment and attendance. | | | | |
| Act 02. Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities. | | | | |
| Number of schools assisted by WFP | school | 2244.0 | 2034.0 | 90.6 |
| Number of retailers participating in cash-based transfer programmes | retailer | 52.0 | 27.0 | 51.9 |
| Output B: Targeted students receive nutritious school meals or CBT, in order to increase enrolment and attendance. | | | | |
| Act 02. Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities. | | | | |
| Quantity of fortified food provided | Mt | 13900.0 | 13900.0 | 100.0 |

Outcome Indicators

| Target / Location | Modalities | Activities | Gender | Base Value | Latest Follow Up | Year End Target | CSP End Target | Date/Source/Mean of Collection |
|--|--|---------------|---------|------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------|--|
| Strategic Result 1 - Everyone has access to food | | | | | | | | |
| Strategic Outcome 01: Food insecure populations affected by the crisis, including host communities, IDPs and returnees, in all governorates, have access to life-saving food to meet their basic food needs all year long. | | | | | | | | |
| Outcome Indicator: Attendance rate | | | | | | | | |
| Syria | SMP: Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities. | Food | male | 97.65 | 92.85 | ≥80.00 | ≥80.00 | Base Value: 2017.12, WFP programme monitoring, WFP Monitoring Latest Follow-up: 2018.12, WFP programme monitoring, WFP Monitoring Year end Target: 2018.12 CSP end Target: 2018.12 |
| | | | female | 97.39 | 94.64 | ≥80.00 | ≥80.00 | |
| | | | overall | 97.47 | 93.59 | ≥80.00 | ≥80.00 | |
| | | Value Voucher | male | 92.47 | 93.01 | ≥85.00 | ≥85.00 | |
| | | | female | 94.71 | 90.36 | ≥85.00 | ≥85.00 | |
| | | | overall | 93.48 | 90.61 | ≥85.00 | ≥85.00 | |
| Target / Location | Modalities | Activities | Gender | Base Value | Latest Follow Up | Year End Target | CSP End Target | Date/Source/Mean of Collection |
| Syria | SMP: Provision of school meals for pre- and primary school children in regular schools and CBT to out-of-school children enrolled in informal education or alternate learning opportunities. | Food | male | 96.96 | 96.91 | =70.00 | =70.00 | Base Value: 2017.12, WFP programme monitoring, WFP Monitoring Latest Follow-up: 2018.12, WFP programme monitoring, WFP Monitoring Year end Target: 2018.12 CSP end Target: 2018.12 |
| | | | female | 97.32 | 97.68 | =70.00 | =70.00 | |
| | | | overall | 97.16 | 97.33 | =70.00 | =70.00 | |

Source: Syrian Arab Republic Annual Country Report 2018, Country Strategic Plan 2018, ACR Reading Guidance

Quality of data

The WFP M&E Unit is responsible for data collection to be able to track progress and evaluate programmes. EMIS data are useful to WFP in obtaining information on the number of targeted schools and learners' enrolment. However, EMIS data are only gathered at the beginning of the year and do not track changes in the number of learners and dropouts in real-time; this creates a challenge for WFP school feeding implementation, which requires a monthly update of enrolment and attendance figures. To overcome this challenge, WFP has recently collaborated with UNICEF and the MoE to start a pilot of a child-level data collection tool for Curriculum B students. WFP's contribution is providing tablets to schools participating in this pilot in Rural Damascus and Aleppo.²¹

The development of the new SIMIS will be of benefit to WFP. They are currently collaborating with the MoE, UNICEF and UNESCO to include school feeding indicators therein.

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- Insecurity, approval delays and the presence of armed groups prevent WFP from reaching people in need in several parts of the country.

Recommendations

- WFP recommends implementing a school-level information system that will allow for real-time reporting and extraction of data, and will support the design and implementation of effective and efficient programming.

DFID

Framework/background

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has been an active actor in Syria since the early days of the crisis. They have supported many UN agencies in addition to international and local NGOs. Furthermore, they have been funding studies and research papers in numerous sectors such as protection, resettlement and education. They have not solely relied on EMIS data for their education programmes due to its limitations in terms of scope and timeliness.

Process of data collection/tools/usage/analysis

DFID has developed its own data collection and monitoring system that is highly complex and monitors trends and their effects in addition to achievements. For example, it can monitor learners' performance before and after specific training or workshops for teachers. The data are iteratively applied to develop programmes and projects driven by the needs.

Gaps/challenges/key issues

One of the biggest challenges associated with this system is the sharing of data. Due to the dynamic context in Syria, protection of teachers, parents and learners becomes highly important. DFID recognizes that information on teachers, parents and children can be very sensitive. Therefore, it has a strict confidentiality policy and cannot share information with external parties. DFID has shared anonymized data previously when organizations have come with a specific request; and historically, it

²¹ Learners should have attendance rates of at least 80 per cent for their families to be eligible for food rations.

has done this with other government departments, donors, practitioners, academics, and researchers. However, DFID does not disclose identifying details about this new programme or put their staff in danger by inviting open access to their systems.

SYRIAN SOCIETY FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (SSSD)

Framework/background

SSSD is a Syrian NGO that responds to the needs and challenges of Syrian youth, with a special focus on the marginalized, through a pro-social approach aimed at creating connections and cooperation between individuals as stakeholders, institutions as service providers, and government agencies as policy-makers.²² SSSD works in many sectors such as protection, education, health and sanitation, and basic livelihood services.

SSSD works in all governorates which are under GoS control and protection. Their education-related projects include, but are not limited to, the maintenance and rehabilitation of schools, back-to-school campaigns for children who dropped out, stationery distribution to school children, advocacy campaigns against social violence, and psychosocial support. Their work methodology includes:²³

- The usage of Participatory Learning Methodology (PLM), which allows dropouts to develop their learning capabilities and critical thinking in ways that will enable them to go back to learning and, eventually, be mainstreamed into the formal school system.
- An alternative education model which combats the factors hindering the progress of these school-aged children, gets struggling students back on track towards high school graduation, and also creates a positive school culture proven to transform at-risk students and schools.
- Working on reintegrating children and youth who have dropped out into regular classes through the Informal Education Programme (IFE).
- Maintaining effective internal referral pathways, so that specific monitored cases are referred to and from the educational programme so that a maximum number of cases are being addressed.

Today, the IFE model implemented by SSSD is being taken one step further, with the MoE to use it as a model for alternative education – developing legal frameworks, criteria, guidelines and measurement tools. This model will become formally recognized by the MoE throughout the country.²⁴

Process of data collection

SSSD has a computerized system that is used for data collection and analysis. The system can count all beneficiaries and sort them according to activity, school class, number of drop-outs, etc.

Tools

The organization uses their own Information Management (IM) system to gather and store data in addition to receiving information from the Ministry of Labour and Social Services regarding children who need educational services and the MoE. The SSSD system is an Excel-based one in which each centre has access to all governorates where they operate. It is also linked to the central system in Damascus.

²² SSSD website, <https://www.sssd-ngo.org> (Accessed 4 February 2020.)

²³ Interview conducted on 5 February 2020

²⁴ Ibid.

HR and equipment

SSSD conducts their assessment by sending teams of two to three people with a two-page questionnaire. The teams visit schools and meet with school staff to assess the situation of the school; they also go door-to-door visiting residences to meet families. The questionnaire is filled in manually and then entered into the computer system by a data entry clerk at the SSSD community centre in the governorate. Each community centre has at least two data entry clerks working full-time.

Data usage/analysis and quality of data

The data are used to conduct needs assessments and also to monitor the progress of the teams in each governorate, in addition to evaluating projects or activities. They are, however, more used for technical matters than analysis. The data are also used for reporting back to donors on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

The data are verified by comparing the monthly and quarterly reports with the data available on the database and also through monitoring and evaluation.

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- Not all actors in the education sector are sharing information.
- Internet connectivity and electricity issues.

Recommendations

The MoE and SSSD seem to be working closely together and international volunteering.²⁵ In Syria, they work on education, WASH and protection interventions in Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor governorates.

Process of data collection

Seventy-five percent of the data collected by WeWorld-GVC in Syria are education-related. The organization collects data through KIIs with DoE staff, ranging from teachers to principals and school counsellors; pre-authorized door-to-door visits conducted by GVC staff and DoE volunteers; and SARC branches (e.g. FGDs conducted by the psychosocial support department in Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor using tools provided by GVC staff).

The education assistant in the field collects and gathers data, besides implementing and monitoring education activities. The collection of data is tightly implemented with local partners/stakeholders and communication is needed on a daily basis during the data collection process. The data are collected manually, through hard-copy questionnaires during face-to-face discussions or open FGD discussions.

Tools/HR and equipment

The GVC Education Staff in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor collect the data in conjunction with a trained team of DoE volunteers, in addition to the SARC personnel in the two governorates.

The data are verified by cross-checking mechanisms within education activities (e.g. surveys submitted to the beneficiaries during education activities), and by follow-up activities, if applicable (e.g. phone calls to out-of-school children reached through door-to-door visits). The data get collected at different levels:

²⁵ Ibid.

- Sub-district level, by staff from DoE.
- Local level (city/village), by SARC staff in the area.
- School level, by teachers, principals and school counsellors.
- Individual level, to identify possible beneficiaries through door-to-door questionnaires aimed at collecting information on out-of-school children (OOSC). This is conducted by volunteers from DoE and GVC staff.

The data are collected manually, then entered into an Excel programme and stored in Excel files, mainly using pivot tables. Reports are generated on a regular basis depending on donor requirements, and shared with partners upon request.

Data usage/analysis and quality of data

Based on the data collected and verified, GVC develops analysis and evaluates the impact of each intervention, reports the achievements to donors and shares relevant information with the education sector. It additionally uses these data to integrate education activities with different interventions to boost the impact of GVC actions (e.g. planning livelihood activities to support poor families who cannot afford enrolling their children in formal education). GVC also uses the data to develop new project proposals.

To ensure quality, GVC constantly gathers data from relevant sources and consequently updates the database at least three times a year. The majority of the data refer to out-of-school children, for whom information is collected through door-to-door visits within massive Back to Learning (BTL) campaigns in Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor.

Gaps/challenges/key issues

- The process of receiving approvals from the government to conduct assessments can be very lengthy and such approvals are not always granted.
- Proposed questionnaires have to be approved beforehand by the MoE and this takes a long time. Thus, limitations are linked with the impossibilities for INGOs to collect data through direct communication with people in need.
- Difficulty in recruiting skilled personnel for data analysis.

Recommendations

- More coordination is needed between INGOs in terms of assessing needs and sharing data in order to create more synergies.
- Better quality of data might be ensured through direct access of NGOs to people in need, which is not allowed at this time.

III. Conclusion: Findings and recommendations

There is a wealth of information being collected in Syria, both inside and outside the government-controlled areas. However, the education system is deteriorating and the number of dropouts is escalating. In addition to the limited funding available for education projects, political agendas, security and safety play a major role.

The MoE is putting forth considerable efforts to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on learners and provide education within existing resource constraints. UN agencies, NGOs and neighbouring countries are also working to provide children a safe and protected learning environment. There will, however, continue to be many challenges involved as long as the crisis continues. Below are the areas which have to be taken into consideration to better address data and information needs and their use to inform crisis preparedness and response.

Due to the nature of the crisis, the coordination and sharing of information are major obstacles that need to be addressed. There are data at ministerial level, including limited, ad hoc EiE data, in addition to all of the data being gathered by the various different humanitarian and development actors. Political sensitivities and protection issues remain significant challenges, but most partners have recommended greater coordination around the collection of data and sharing of information within existing constraints.

There is also considerable geographic disparity in data collection, in particular in the north-west and north-east of the country due to the crisis and related issues of access and security. This results in fragmented data, in turn, making it difficult to have accurate and comprehensive information and affecting the ability to respond to education needs in certain areas.

Having an operational and fully functioning SIMIS will surely be of benefit to all parties involved – not only the MoE. Having said that, with only 36 schools connected to the system, SIMIS still has a long way to go before all schools are connected. Both the MoE and other education actors are collecting data on education and EiE, and are using it for donor reporting, monitoring progress, measuring achievements and planning, as well as for funding opportunities. However, as mentioned above, the lack of coordination and sharing leads to overlap and duplication of responses. Many studies are repetitive, and schools and informants are providing the same information more than once. Strengthening coordination of methodologies among the different actors by sharing information, assessment analysis and lessons learned within the education sector is vital to reduce inefficiencies and scale up the most effective practices. This can be achieved by the creation of an assessment working group which shares information and comes up with recommendations. The ESWG can perhaps take on that role and add a qualitative assessment section to the 4Ws reporting.

The use of technology is challenging in a country that does not have the funds or the infrastructure to support it, particularly if a system like SIMIS is supposed to not only work on ministerial, directorate and school level but should also allow parental participation. The current lack of infrastructure also limits the effective capturing of data at grassroots level via online systems. The GoS has received equipment to connect 2,500 schools to SIMIS. If this project is rolled out urgently and effectively, it will provide much needed accurate and timely information. However, this will still leave more than 10,000 schools outside of the information chain – schools that are most probably in the more affected areas

of the conflict. The system requires huge investments in human resources and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure at school, governorate and MoE HQ level. Thus, to be able to have a functioning SIMIS, the long-term support of UNESCO and UNICEF is vital, particularly in capacity building and development, and in IT infrastructure support.

Despite the overabundance of data collection tools, not all can be harmonized due to different needs, responses and frequency of collection. Having said that, there is still a possibility to achieve some kind of harmonization between certain tools to avoid duplication and beneficiary fatigue. Several partners have raised the issue of different donors' requirements when it comes to data collection and reporting. Efforts to unify reporting formats and requirements could be a time- and cost-effective exercise.

Moreover, there is a need to agree on common definitions used when collecting data, such as defining criteria for people with special needs, households, orphans, as well as defining the geographic boundaries of communities, cities and villages. Partners have noticed that the boundaries of a community differ from one partner to another and therefore data vary and disagree with each other.

Bibliography

- Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) website, <https://www.acu-sy.org> (Accessed 2 February 2020.)
- Nicolai, S., et al. 2016. *Education Cannot Wait: Proposing a Fund for Education in Emergencies*. London, Overseas Development Institute.
- OCHA. 2019a. *Whole of Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview*. <https://www.hno-syria.org> (Accessed 17 January 2020.)
- OCHA. 2019b. *Syrian Arab Republic: 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan*. <<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info> (Accessed 17 January 2020).
- OCHA. 'Coordination Arrangements for the Whole of Syria'. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info> (Accessed 7 March 2020.)
- Parker, B. 2013. 'Humanitarian Besieged', *HPN Humanitarian Practice Work*. <https://www.odihpn.org> (Accessed 10 March 2020.)
- Slim, H. & Gillard, E. 2013. 'Ethical & Legal Perspectives on Cross-border Humanitarian Operations', *HPN Humanitarian Practice Work*. <https://www.odihpn.org> (Accessed 10 March 2020.)
- Southern Turkey Education Cluster (Turkey Response), 2015. *Schools under Attack in Syria: A monitoring report on the impact of attacks on Syrian schools*. https://www.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL-Education-Under-Attack_STurkey-Briefing-Paper_2015-09-02.pdf (Accessed 10 March 2020.)
- Syrian Arab Republic Ministry of Education (MoE). 2018a. *Education Management Information System Data, 2017-2018 academic year*.
- Syrian Arab Republic MoE. 2018b. *Policy on Information and Data for Education Institutions*.
- Syrian Arab Republic MoE. 2018c. *Statistical Education Booklet, Statistical Report on Education in Syria 2011-2017*. Beirut.
- Syrian Society for Social Development (SSSD) website, <https://www.sssd-ngo.org> (Accessed 4 February 2020.)
- Tinsdall, B. 2013. 'The Challenge of Access in Syria', *HPN Humanitarian Practice Work*, November 2013. <https://www.odihpn.org> (Accessed 9 March 2020.)
- UNESCO & MoE. 2017. 'Systems Strengthening of Republic of Syria Education System: UNESCO EMIS Support', School Integrated Management Information System (SIMIS), *Work Based Standard Operational Procedures*.
- UNESCO & MoE. 2020. *SIMIS Summary Report*.
- UNHCR & UNDP. 2019. 'Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP)', <https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org> (Accessed 20 January 2020.)
- UNICEF MENA Regional Office (Whole of Syria Education Focal Point). 2016. 'Syria Education Sector Analysis, The effects of the crisis on education in Syria, 2010-2015'.

WeWorld-GVC website, <https://www.gvc.italia.org> (Accessed 10 February 2020.)

Whole of Syria. 2017. 'Strategic Steering Group, Protection Strategy 2017-2018'.

Whole of Syria. 2018. 'WoS 2.0 Presentation' [PowerPoint presentation].

Whole of Syria Education Sector. 2018. 'Education Needs Assessment'.

World Food Programme (WFP) website, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/syrian-arab-republic> (Accessed 31 January 2020.)

WFP. 2018 'Syrian Arab Republic Annual Country Report 2018, Country Strategic Plan 2018', *ACR Reading Guidance*.

WFP. 2019. 'WFP Situation Report #11', Reliefweb, <https://www.reliefweb.int> (Accessed 19 January 2020.)

World Vision, 'Syria Refugee Crisis; Facts, FAQs, and how to help'. <https://www.worldvision.org>> (Accessed 28 January 2020.)