

March 2019

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Jordan: education policy in transition

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As the education sector in Jordan moves from a humanitarian to a development response, a lack of planning for an appropriate transition risks excluding some groups of learners.

In most cases the best way to transition from a humanitarian to a development response is not immediately clear. Although the education sector has produced guidelines that outline the process for drafting transitional plans in “crisis-affected and challenging situations”,¹ in many contexts the capacity and coordination of sector stakeholders (including the government, donors and international and local practitioners) to collectively identify and agree on the needs and the best ways forward remain a challenge, resulting in some key elements of this transition period being overlooked.

In relation to this transition in Jordan, the key approach of the education sector was initially based on a strategic plan with a humanitarian framework but is now based on a clearly development-focused plan. The initial plan (the chapter on education in the Jordan Response Plan, JRP²) was drafted by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with national and international humanitarian partners. The new plan (the Ministry of Education’s national Education Strategic Plan 2018–2022, ESP³) was drafted by the Ministry with limited consultation with other actors. The transition from the first to the second plan has been relatively abrupt, and insufficient attention has been paid to what occurs during the period in between the two plans – where we are now. As such, needs that were highlighted in the first plan persist but the newer plan does not address how to continue to meet these.

In addition, there are differences in how the two documents define certain key terms. For example, the target group of the JRP education chapter is identified largely as ‘children, adolescents and youth’. When humanitarian operations started, the rationale was that all children had the potential to be in the formal education system, whether in formal school, vocational

training or higher education, and thus in effect all children came under the remit of the Ministry of Education. However, as the crisis has become protracted, and national-level education priorities and policies have changed, the rhetoric in the response has narrowed from children to schoolchildren, thus clearly including only those who are already inside the Ministry of Education system, which comprises formal, non-formal, higher and one stream of vocational education; informal and other forms of vocational education fall outside this system.

Vulnerable groups

As a result, it is those children who are outside the system that are the most vulnerable. They fall into two categories. Firstly, some children remain outside the system because of reasons such as family poverty (which may result in child labour or early marriage). This group largely comprises adolescents and includes vulnerable Jordanians. The needs of this group used to be a core concern of the education sector but they no longer receive a similar level of attention; meanwhile, responsibility for this group has not been clearly transferred to the ESP (or to any other sector or line ministry). These adolescents are at risk of falling off the national agenda altogether unless another government ministry directly assumes responsibility for them. This could potentially be the Ministry of Social Development, although its capacity to cover these additional needs is not clear. This leaves these children at risk of having no educational options and limited protection.

The second category at risk is those who are pursuing certified non-formal education programmes. These children currently have two nationally accredited options: one for 9–12-year-olds and one for boys aged 13–18 and girls aged 13–20. These non-formal

options were noted in the JRP but, without Ministry of Education capacity to run either programme, their implementation was outsourced to sector partners. Although the needs of this group appear in the new response plan, the lack of ESP capacity means that they are not prioritised. Furthermore, pupils following these programmes are excluded from following the upper years of study that are required to complete certified higher education. As a result, the efficiency of these programmes and their relevance to children's needs in the current context are in question, as is their effectiveness as a pathway into formal higher education. And in the absence of a focus in the ESP on revising the policy frameworks around vocational training for refugees, there are few if any relevant pathways for out-of-school adolescents. Had there been a designated, better-designed period between the two plans, this could have allowed for sufficient capacity to be built within the Ministry of Education in order to address the educational needs of this group.

Additionally, whereas the main recipient of the service provision in the JRP is the children themselves, the main recipient in the ESP is now the Ministry of Education itself – technically and financially. Through a Joint Financing Agreement (JFA), the major education sector donors have pooled their funds to provide direct budgetary support to the Ministry of Education to implement the ESP. Under the JRP, the Ministry received only a percentage of the refugee response-related funds coming into the country; the JFA, on the other hand, invests directly in government and services. This provides the Ministry of Education with more flexible and predictable funding – clearly more favourable to the Ministry but not necessarily to children's needs. The JFA approach – largely dictated by aid effectiveness agendas – makes perfect sense for certain parts of the protracted response in Jordan, such as sector-wide education planning, teacher training and data management. However, by taking this approach, both the funds and the focus are being drawn away from needs that persist outside the formal school system. A more structured approach is

needed for the overlap of the ESP and the JRP to ensure that all needs are being funded and addressed along concurrent timelines.

Why do transitional frameworks matter?

Displacement crises are lasting longer and responses to them – as in the case of Jordan, a lower-middle income country with a strong government mandate and capacity – are becoming more politically intricate and are receiving higher levels of international funding. There is increasing recognition at an international level of the significance of transition from a humanitarian to development response, yet international guidelines and frameworks for this remain subject to interpretation and contextualisation, and the ability to follow them depends on the continued availability of funding to the range of actors who are best placed to address different needs. In the current context in Jordan, frontline agencies are struggling to advocate for all education needs while systemic reform takes place.

Creating systemic change is a slow, long-term process. Vulnerable children need support now or risk not benefiting from participation in the education system at all. Humanitarian and development responses need not be binary: with structured planning, collective, expected outcomes can be agreed that will meet humanitarian need while at the same time reducing the risk to and vulnerability of people and systems. Those sectors who are making the humanitarian–development transition should consider the following:

- Transitional frameworks and a common narrative are needed in order to provide a structure that functions clearly over time and to comprehensively address the complex issues involved in a protracted context. A transitional framework should include national-level medium- and long-term goals which can be funded by the same means.
- Frameworks should be drafted in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, not just ministries and donors but also, for example, those

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receiving assistance and those working in education provision, including national and international non-governmental organisations.

- Agreements around actors' roles and responsibilities should be clear, and should include plans and timeframes for transferring responses to other sectors or ministries for those needs that the sector development plan does not reflect.
- Humanitarian plans should allocate sufficient time and resources to line ministries to build capacity to meet all the needs identified in the development plan.
- Government partners in protracted crises should be offered sufficient capacity development in transitional/recovery approaches as well as in development approaches.

- All responses, whether humanitarian, transitional or developmental, should be linked by the common approach of doing no harm.

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This article is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily represent the view of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

1. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (2016) *Guidelines for Transitional Education Plan Preparation* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002449/244900e.pdf>
2. Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation Jordan *Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2018–2020* www.jrpsc.org
3. Ministry of Education (2018) *Education Strategic Plan 2018–2022* <http://bit.ly/EducationStrategicPlan-Jordan-2018-22>

