



CRS-supported teachers help children with literacy and numeracy in a child friendly space in Kilis, Turkey. Photo by Sevket Kizildag for CRS

# Emergency Support for Children

## EDUCATION AND CARE FOR REFUGEE AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### OVERVIEW

Catholic Relief Services is expanding efforts across the Middle East to provide increased education and psychosocial support to thousands of children uprooted by crisis. The escalation of turmoil in the region has called for a significant expansion of programming and assistance for those who are the most vulnerable: children.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, the Middle East now has more than 4.9 million refugees and 11 million people who are internally displaced, more than half of whom are under the age of 18. Syrians represent a large majority of those uprooted—66 percent of the internally displaced in the region, and 98 percent of the refugees. Other people include Iraqi internally displaced and refugees, as well as refugees from Sudan, Libya, Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia and Eritrea. A smaller number come from various other African countries.

The children caught up in this turmoil have unique emotional and psychological vulnerabilities, with the potential to suffer lifelong damage from trauma and destroyed opportunities. Many children have limited

access to education, few safe spaces to interact with others, and heightened stress within families. Falling behind in their cognitive and social development, it is not uncommon for them to experience a diminished sense of well-being and belonging.

### PROGRAMS FOR UPROOTED CHILDREN

Education plays a vital role in providing structure, a sense of normalcy, and healing for children in crisis. CRS is providing assistance to more than a million Syrians across the Middle East and Europe, as well as to more than 150,000 uprooted Iraqis. These people include more than 50,000 school-aged children whom we support in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza and Egypt.

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**“Children are the biggest losers in this conflict. We try to take them from the voices that they were hearing in Syria. When they hear a voice, they think it is the sound of a rocket. If they see a star in the sky, they think it is a plane.”**

– Hasan, Syrian refugee and teacher in Kilis

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With the growing needs across the region, CRS is addressing the critical needs of children in two ways: through access to quality education and psychosocial support.

## 1. Access to quality education

Providing children with access to quality education helps them to not only catch up to their grade level and develop skills for their adult lives, but also to have social interaction, and to adjust and integrate to their new lives and community. CRS education activities vary by country, based on the local needs, structures and support already in place.

CRS education support includes:

- Uniforms, school fees, transportation, registration support and advice for refugee families
- Construction, restoration and repair of the physical structures that serve as learning environments
- Essential education equipment, materials and supplies
- Provision of teacher salaries
- Professional training for teachers and school administrators
- The establishment of parent-teacher associations or similar community organizations to strengthen relationships between schools and the local community
- Classes that provide remedial support and exam preparation for in-school children to improve learning outcomes and clear certification pathways
- Weekend and holiday classes to help students adjust to the new curriculum (particularly if they have missed years at school)
- Catch-up classes for children not yet in school to help them achieve an appropriate level (academically and socially) to enter a mainstream school

## SNAPSHOT OF EDUCATION ACTIVITIES



CRS supports education programs carried out by Caritas Jordan for Syrian refugees living in urban areas in Jordan. Photo courtesy of Murad Saidawi/Caritas Jordan

**In Jordan:** According to Jordanian law, Syrian refugee children are allowed to access government schools. However, many children face numerous challenges to exercising this right including long distances between their homes and schools; classroom overcrowding; financial constraints; fear of discrimination and lack of teacher interest; bullying; adjustment to a different curriculum; catching up on lost years of education; and reluctance to attend due to fear or anxiety. As a result,

30 percent of Syrian children are out of school. CRS and its local partner have supported 15,800 Syrian refugee children and their families with education and social protection services; remedial programs for children who are in school; a catch-up program for children who are out of school; recreational activities; advice services for parents dealing with registration and finding school options; and training and development opportunities for teachers and school administrators.

**In Egypt:** With funding from the UNHCR, CRS provides education grants to registered Syrian and non-Syrian refugees to enable them to pay for school fees, materials, uniforms and transportation. In addition, for non-Syrian refugees (such as children from Sudan and Ethiopia), issues of language, ethnicity, prejudice and legal status mean that few attend Egyptian government schools. As a result, communities have established their own refugee schools—62 of them in total. CRS supports one third of these community schools with education materials and professional support to enable them to strengthen their systems, teaching and learning outcomes.

**In Turkey:** CRS works with two local partners to support eight “formal” schools in two locations. Although Syrian refugees can legally attend Turkish government schools, language issues and delays in getting required papers mean that this is not viable for many Syrian children. At CRS-supported formal schools, CRS is helping 5,206 students to complete their primary- and secondary-level education in Arabic, using a modified Syrian curriculum. CRS provides materials; teacher salaries; facilities’ rent, water and electricity; and trainings for teachers and administrators. In the past 3 years, CRS has supported 54,600 children and their families with education, child friendly spaces and other social services.

## 2. Psychosocial support for emotional healing and recovery

For children to learn, they must be emotionally ready and open to the learning environment. CRS creates safe spaces and opportunities that allow children to ease their fears, loneliness and insecurities, and start to heal, communicate and trust. CRS' psychosocial activities are aimed primarily at children aged 5-12, although teams are working to include older children and parents, particularly mothers.

The primary way CRS supports children with psychosocial support is through child friendly spaces—large tented or covered areas that provide a safe, secure space for children to take part in informal education, and recreational and counselling activities. Children typically visit child friendly spaces two to three times per week. Through a series of games and activities, they

are encouraged to express their creativity; develop their social and interpersonal skills; strengthen their self-confidence, trust and self-reliance; and resume normal childhood activities, like play. CRS support for child friendly spaces includes:

- Establishment and upgrading of the actual spaces: improved tents, provision of heating, installation of toilets and water supplies, and development of community gardens
- Provision of materials, furniture, play items (like Lego) and other supplies
- Daily snacks for the children
- Salaries for the 'animators' working in the child friendly spaces
- Trainings and ongoing support for the animators and staff on methodology
- Information sessions for

teachers, administrators and parents to recognize severe signs of trauma and understand how to refer children who need additional support

- Providing counsellors on staff or establishing links with organizations that specialize in psychological counselling or mental health

CRS adapts programs to what is most relevant and appropriate for the local context. For example, some child friendly spaces have expanded their mission to include numeracy and basic literacy, to help prepare children to enroll in formal school. In Iraq, the child friendly spaces serve as non-formal learning centers, with the intention of developing them into more formal schools.



Children aged 6-12 take part in comprehensive activities at child friendly spaces in northern Iraq. Photo by Kim Pozniak/CRS.

## NO STRINGS PUPPET-BASED METHODOLOGY AND HEALING

As part of the response, CRS utilizes two films, *Red Top, Blue Top* and *Out of the Shadows*, with an accompanying puppet-based methodology to increase wellbeing and enhance social integration among children who have experienced psychosocial distress. The films are uniquely designed to create an imaginary world – similar to the environment in which the children live – using symbolism to tackle difficult and sensitive topics, and making it easier for children to confront their fears and anxieties.

The films were developed especially for the Syrian crisis in partnership with No Strings International. They create a forum to develop and strengthen social connection as well as deliver key messages about accepting those who are different (*Red Top, Blue Top*) and facing or overcoming fears (*Out of the Shadows*), among others. After children see the films, animators organize creative activities using puppets to reinforce these



Marwa Nawaja, 10, from Homs, holds a puppet she has made at a summer school run by CRS partners the Good Shepherd Sisters in the village of Deir al Ahmar, Lebanon.  
*Photo by Sam Tarling for CRS*

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**“You see the telltale signs of trauma among these children: stuttering, bedwetting, the fear of things they did not fear before. If they hear a simple thing, they panic—thinking it is an explosion or someone coming to get their dad.”**

– Randa Zoumot, Caritas Jordan counselor to Syrian children  
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key messages. The children interact with the puppets to express ideas and feelings and then create their own puppets.

These activities (referred to as No Strings) are integrated into other child-friendly programming, summer camps or school activities, or may be standalone. They target boys and girls aged 6 to 12 years.

No Strings activities take place in six countries. In Lebanon, where the legal framework severely limits the amount of interaction that NGOs can have with Syrian children or schools, the short films and puppets have been used widely and to great effect by local education providers. In Gaza, following the devastating bombardment in 2014, CRS adapted the puppet-based trauma healing methodology at child friendly spaces, using live theater performances, rather than the No String films, which proved successful.

## ABOUT CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIP

Since its establishment in 1943 to support refugees fleeing war-torn Europe, CRS has grown to become one of the world’s leading humanitarian relief and development agencies. We provide lifesaving emergency relief in the wake of natural and man-made disasters, and address chronic issues of poverty and injustice through innovative and sustainable development programs.

In its response to emergencies, CRS takes a comprehensive approach that addresses urgent lifesaving assistance with a view to full recovery. Our goal is to help people survive with dignity, get back on their feet, rebuild their homes and lives, and strengthen their long-term stability and resilience. By tailoring programs to local contexts and needs, CRS follows the community’s

lead for their meaningful engagement and ownership of programs. We work to build the capacity of individuals, the local Church and thousands of small, local grassroots agencies that share our focus: to serve the poorest of the poor, to respect local customs and tradition, to empower communities to address their own development and to apply long-term, integrated, sustainable solutions.

