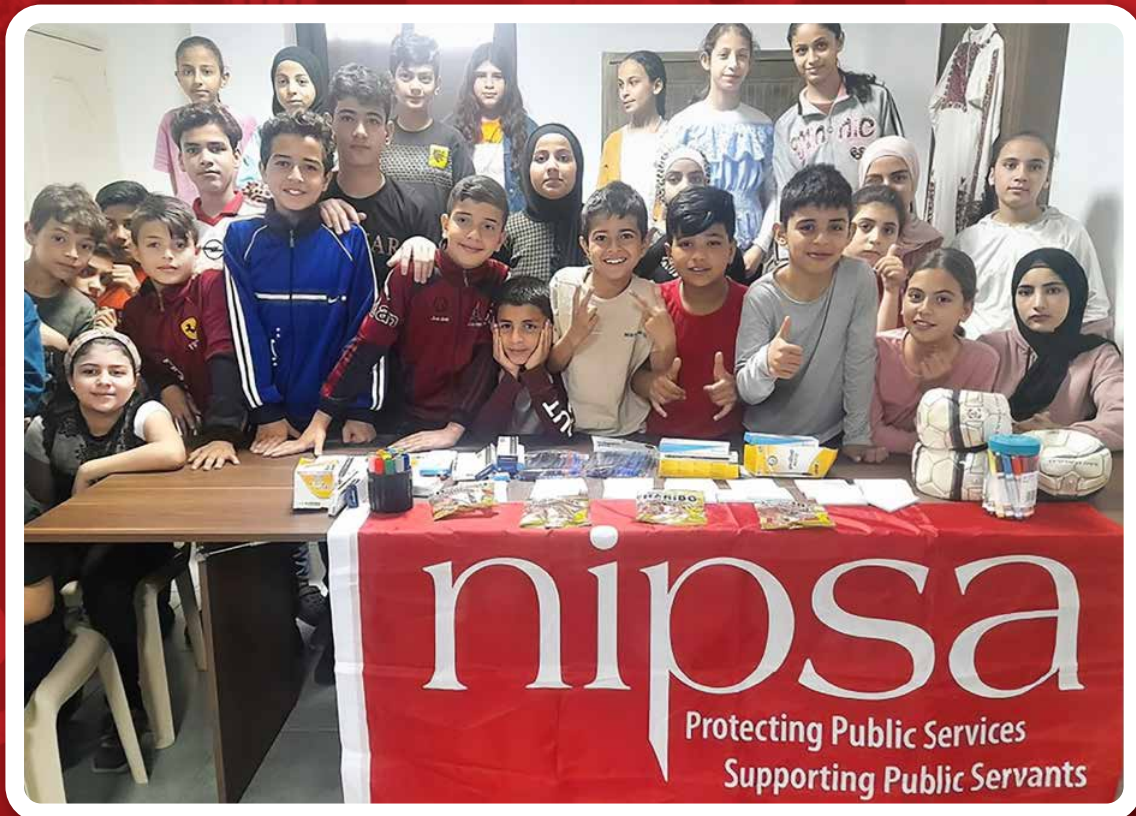




Chance to Learn: Educating Palestinian and Syrian Refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, 2023



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Acknowledgements

The Centre for Global Education would like to thank the staff, volunteers and Board of Directors of the Women's Program Association, our partner in Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, for their exemplary and professional delivery of this project. We also thank our funder, the NIPSA Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund, without whom this project could not have been delivered. We reserve our greatest thanks for the one hundred children who participated in the project and the facilitators who led their activities. We dedicate this report to Geraldine Alexander, Deputy General Secretary of NIPSA, who managed the Global Solidarity Fund with great dedication for many years and retired earlier this year. We wish her a very happy retirement.

Centre for Global Education, November 2023

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Cover photo: Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, 15 May 2023. Centre for Global Education.

Citation: McCloskey, S (2023) 'Chance to Learn: Educating Palestinian and Syrian Refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, 2023'; Belfast: Centre for Global Education.

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1 Project Summary

This is a report on activities delivered in year two of a two-year project (2022-2023) in Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, jointly managed by the Centre for Global Education (CGE), a development non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Belfast, and the Women's Program Association, a Palestinian NGO based in Lebanon. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund. The activities described in this report were delivered from 01 March to 31 August 2023.



Some of the 100 Palestinian and Syrian children who participated in the CGE / Women's Program Association project in Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, from March to August 2023. Photo May 2023. WPA.

The project's overriding aim was to provide education services to 100 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children aged 6-14 years who had dropped out of formal schooling or are at risk of doing so, to enhance their access to educational opportunities and skills development. The content of the educational activities focused on Mathematics, Arabic and English, core components of the school curriculum. The project also provided psychosocial care to help tackle mental health problems among the children caused by exposure to extreme poverty using interactive group activities and one-to-one counselling. Every child received a breakfast every day for the duration of the project and were taken on two field trips outside the camp to Playland, an amusement park, and an environmental conservation site at Al-Awali, a river in southern Lebanon. They also participated in cultural activities and memorial events to mark important dates in the Palestinian calendar such as Eid Al-Adha. For parents of the young people, the project provided their children with a safe and structured play environment inside the camp which supported formal sector learning, psychosocial care, arts and crafts, and cultural activities.

The activities were successfully concluded in August 2023 and CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, visited the programme at the half-way point in May to meet the project staff and young people, evaluate year two of the programme and plan for future activities. At the time of writing, funding has not been secured for the programme in 2024 but we are hopeful that NIPSA will extend its support of the project.

The wider context in Lebanon

Lebanon is in the midst of an economic crisis that has seen the Lebanese pound collapse against the Dollar and prices for food, fuel and energy surge beyond the reach of the majority of people. The crisis began in October 2019 when the government tried to impose austerity measures on an already impoverished

population which resulted in widespread protests and upheaval. In March 2020, Lebanon's economy was sent spiralling into freefall when the state [defaulted](#) on a \$1.2 billion Eurobond debt repayment which triggered a 90 per cent depletion in the value of the currency which was trading at LPB90,000 to the Dollar in September 2023. The World Bank has [described](#) this brutal contraction as one normally associated with 'conflicts or wars'. And, then the economic crisis deepened further when Beirut was [rocked](#) by 'one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history' at its port when 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate recklessly stored in a warehouse ignited on 4 August 2020 to kill 217 people and injure 7,000. The blast left 300,000 people homeless and the [cost](#) to the economy was estimated at USD \$15 billion.



A memorial to the victims of the Beirut Port explosion on 4 August 2020 (left) and the remnants of the grain silos damaged by blast to the right. Photo: 15 May 2022. Centre for Global Education.

The port explosion has compounded the hardship experienced by Lebanese citizens with Save the Children [finding](#) a year after the blast that 'hundreds of thousands of children are going to bed hungry, often without having eaten a single meal that day'. One of the consequences of these multiple crises has been a spike in [emigration](#) with a total of 215,653 people leaving the country between 2017 and 2021. Most of those leaving are young professionals causing a 'brain drain' in a number of vital sectors, particularly medicine.

The weakness of Lebanon's pound has caused a [spike](#) in the cost of transportation by 508 per cent, and the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages surged to 304 per cent by October 2021. Palestinians were already living on the margins of Lebanese society before the crisis being [excluded](#) from 40 occupations and forced into low paying jobs in the informal sector. A [third](#) of Lebanon's 180,000 Palestinian refugees depend on quarterly cash assistance from UNRWA and 62 per cent [experienced](#) a drop in income during the COVID-19 pandemic. While people across Lebanon are suffering from the economic crisis, it is particularly impacting Palestinian refugees denied the property, employment and citizenship rights of the Lebanese. A socio-economic [survey](#) carried out by UNRWA in September 2022, involving 498 interviewed Palestinian refugee households, found that 93 per cent of individuals live below the poverty line mostly as a result of the spike in consumer prices caused by the economic crisis. Sixty-two per cent of families had reduced the number of meals consumed within the previous week and half of families consulted had started to incur debt over the previous three months. In April 2023, the Centre for Global Education published a report on the impact of Lebanon's economic crisis on Palestinian refugees. This report is based on field visits carried out in May, September and November 2022 to nine Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and is available [here](#).

2 Women's Program Association

The Centre for Global Education's project partner is the Women's Program Association (WPA), a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 2008 and operating in nine Palestinian camps in Lebanon. The WPA's mission is to promote integrated development with a focus on economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods through provision of protection, livelihood, education and social stability activities for Palestinian refugee women and youth. The WPA works to enhance the quality of life of refugees and their opportunities for employment. The WPA is immersed in the refugee camps where it operates and works directly with families and community members. Its programmes and activities include: delivering education services to children; providing women with professional and vocational training; women and youth empowerment; career guidance; and leadership and entrepreneurial skill building activities.

One of the WPA's programmes is called the Community Mobilizing Programmes. Through training and mentoring, the project equips community activists with the necessary methods and tools on conflict transformation to constructively and proactively address local conflicts. The community activists form working groups from the local community in their locations and worked together to identify local conflicts, analyze them and address them with a conflict-sensitive initiative. As a result of the project, community activists and working groups have implemented social actions based on discussions and analysis conducted on issues pertaining to each camp.

3 Background to project

There are **479,000** registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon living in 12 camps operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA is the UN mission established to provide for the welfare of Palestinian refugees following the **ethnic cleansing** of Palestine in 1948. In the absence of a census, UNRWA estimates on the basis of take-up of its services, that **180,000** Palestinian refugees are residing in-country. The lack of precision in regard to numbers is in large part owing to the 29,000 Palestinian Refugees Syria (PRS) who fled to Lebanon after the start of the war in Syria in 2011, most of whom are living in UNRWA camps in Lebanon. This has increased pressure on camp services, particularly in the crucial areas of health and education. PRS are often competing with Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL) for employment in low-paid, manual jobs which perpetuate poverty. UNRWA provides 61,000 out of Lebanon's 180,000 Palestinian refugees with quarterly cash assistance, and the 29,000 PRS with monthly cash assistance.



Mar Elias Refugee Camp, Beirut. 12 July 2023. WPA.

The surge in refugee arrivals from Syria has exacerbated a marginal existence for Palestinians in Lebanon where the majority of refugees and their descendants have not been naturalised despite fleeing to the country in 1948. According to **UNHCR**, Palestinians are reportedly denied access to 40 professions including medicine, farming, fishery and public transportation which forces them into 'menial, low-paying jobs in the informal sector'. They are also prohibited from owning property which contributes to their exclusion from key aspects of social, political and economic life in Lebanon.

Mar Elias Camp

Mar Elias Camp is one of three Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut and is the smallest with an area of about 200 square meters. It is located to the south-west of Beirut and was founded in 1952 by the Congregation of St. Elias to host Palestine refugees who arrived from the Galilee region of Palestine. It is inhabited by Palestine refugees, as well as a large non-Palestinian population, many of whom have had different migratory experiences, whether internal displacement because of war or other forms of internal migration (e.g. economic opportunity, the rental market, geographical location, etc.). There are

330 families or 1,767 people living in the camp including 748 PRL, 50 PRS, 400 Syrians, 100 Lebanese and 150 people from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Philippines, Sudan and other African and Asian nationalities. These days, only a few Christian Palestine refugee families reside in the camp. The camp is described as the political and media capital for Palestinians in Lebanon because of the presence of a number of factions with a national leftist orientation dominating.



Mar Elias refugee camp, 7 September 2021. Centre for Global Education.

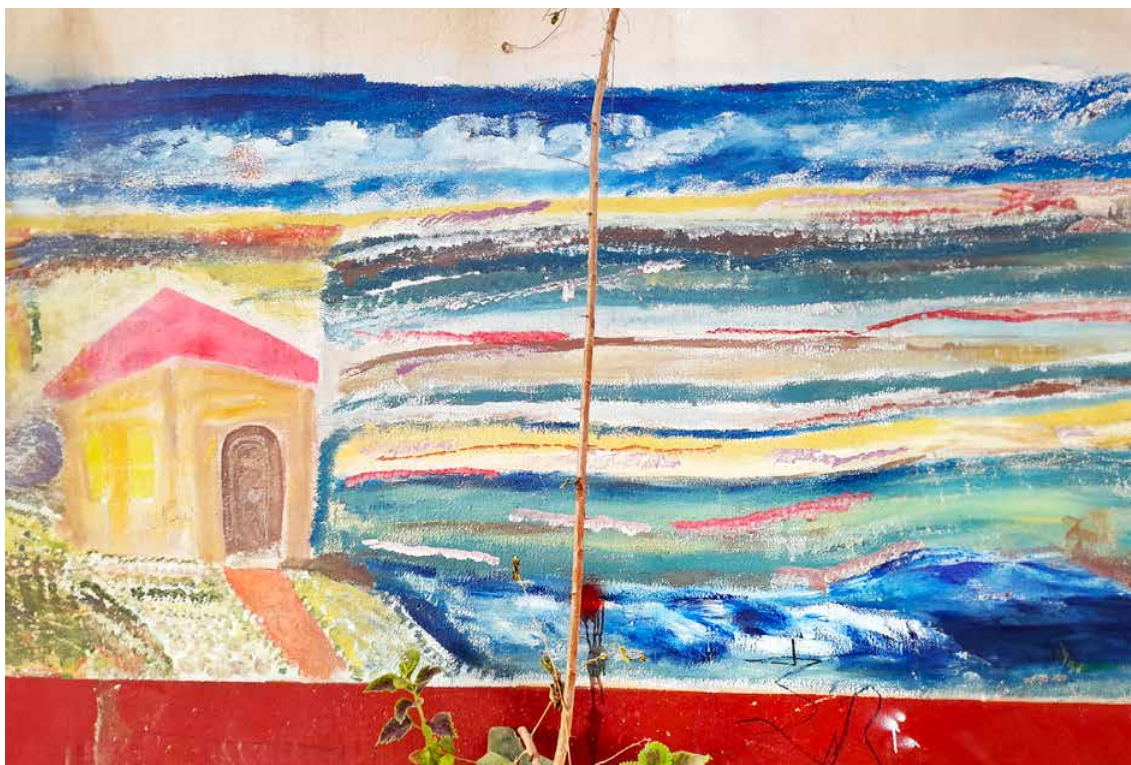
Healthcare

Mar Elias camp has one UNRWA health centre providing primary health care. Health services in the camp include general curative care and specialized consultations, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health, provision of maternal and child health, and school health campaigns. The centre receives an average of 52 patients per day. It also includes a pharmacy, a dental care unit and a laboratory for essential tests. In addition, UNRWA covers a percentage of hospitalization expenses by Palestine refugees. The majority of them do not benefit from any external forms of health insurance and rely on UNRWA's support. The agency supports both secondary and tertiary health care through yearly contracts with hospitals including the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) as well as private and governmental hospitals. Despite the support provided by UNRWA, many patients have difficulties paying for their share of the costs.

Education

Kabri Elementary School is the only grade 1-6 (6-12 years) co-educational school in the camp comprising 220-240 students. During the COVID-19 pandemic remote teaching methods were implemented with a

hybrid teaching scheme applied in the 2021-22 school year. This involved 50 percent attending school and staying at home by rotation.



Wall mural in Mr Elias refugee camp, 7 September 2021. Centre for Global Education.

Relief and Social Services

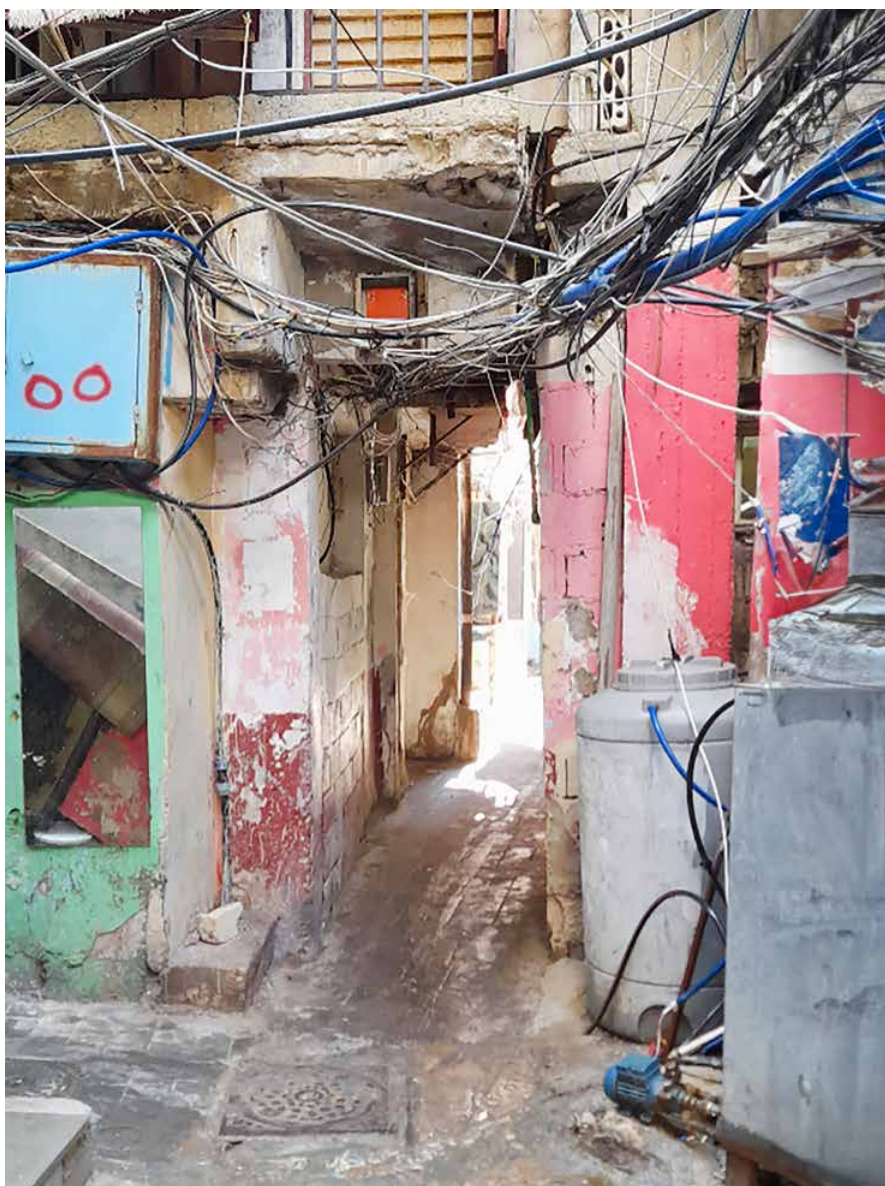
A core focus for social protection is providing Social Safety Net (SSN) support to the most vulnerable Palestine refugees to ensure that they are better able to meet their basic food needs. Assistance is issued quarterly to more than 28 families (119 individuals) in the camp. UNRWA underwent a reform to strengthen social service interventions through professionalizing its social workers. Through this, a family-based approach has been provided to support beneficiaries, helping strengthen their psychosocial resilience and social inclusion. Community-based organizations (CBOs) in Mar Elias also provide services including social development, recreational activities, employment opportunities for women and activities for the elderly. UNRWA works closely with several of these CBOs to support vulnerable persons in the camp. As poverty has increased so has the number of refugees requesting help from UNRWA's SSN programme.

Protection

Lebanon's worsening socioeconomic situation has exacerbated the mental health and psychosocial needs of many in the camp, particularly given the existing vulnerabilities of the Palestine refugee community before the crisis. Increasing stress has contributed to greater tensions or conflict within families and between individuals. Street crime, drug use and theft have increased as poverty and desperation grow. Violence against women and children is an ongoing concern, and the economic crisis has led to an increase in gender-based violence, child marriage, school dropout, child labour and overall parental neglect as parents struggle with the situation. UNRWA works with partner organizations on gender-based violence, mental health, psychosocial support and child protection programmes. The Agency also provides legal aid and emergency cash assistance and participates in activities such as campaigns to tackle harassment, bullying and drug abuse.

Camp infrastructure

UNRWA sanitation services include the collection and disposal of solid waste; the cleaning of roads and streets; insect and rodent control; maintenance of water; and sewer and storm water systems. These services were expanded following the Syria crisis and the additional influx of people. The water and sewage systems recently underwent a partial replacement which solved a major flooding problem and provided the camp with a new water treatment plant and distribution network. Further interventions are planned to tackle the remaining elements of the sewage system. However, high salinity of the water in large parts of Beirut remains a key challenge. A reverse osmosis system was installed for water desalination allowing Mar Elias households to receive potable water in their shelters. Recently, UNRWA implemented a rehabilitation project for infrastructure networks. The entry of building materials for the rehabilitation of shelters and infrastructure requires permissions from the Lebanese authorities. UNRWA is not responsible for provision of electricity in the camp: a few hours a day are provided by the Lebanese national grid, and generators are operated by private entities. Since 2021, the cost of electricity has risen dramatically with the rising cost of fuel, making it increasingly out of range for some, and leading to changes in daily life such as not running a fridge or limiting hours of electricity at night.



Mar Elias. May 2023. Centre for Global Education

4 Chance to Learn

The 'Chance to Learn' project was delivered in Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, and provided 100 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children, with six months of formal education activities in a non-formal community setting to enhance their comprehension of core subjects in the Elementary school curricula: English, Math and Arabic. The children who participated in the project had either dropped out of school or were at risk of dropping out because of pressure to contribute to their families' income. The project also provided psychosocial support activities to children with mental health problems caused by exposure to severe economic poverty and a stressful domestic environment. Project participants received a breakfast every day and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and field trips. The project created an environment where these young refugees could explore their potential and build a strong foundation for their future education.



Children participate in an Arabic class as part of the 'Chance to Learn' project in Mar Elias refugee camp. 12 July 2023 | Women's Program Association.

Project aim

To provide education and psychosocial support services to 100 Palestinian and Syrian children aged 6-14 years in Mar Elias refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon.

Project Objectives

The project objectives were as follows:

- To provide a safe location for children to learn within a community environment;
- To enhance the formal educational knowledge and skills of children not registered in full-time education in Lebanon or at risk of dropping out of school;
- To provide psycho-social support to children suffering from trauma and stress;
- To provide the children with two field trips outside the camp;
- To enable young people to develop life-long learning skills that will enhance their prospects for employment and engagement with full-time education;
- To provide the children with a breakfast every day;
- To provide opportunities for cultural activities and arts and crafts.

Project delivery

The project was delivered over a period of six months to 100 children aged 6-14 years. The project was implemented over five days per week, Monday to Friday, and the students were attending four hours per day. They were divided into four groups of 25 and attended the Women's Program Association from Monday – Friday, 8.30am to 12.30pm or 1.00pm to 4.00pm. Each group was facilitated by a trained member of the WPA team with the necessary skills and experience to deliver education activities and psycho-social support. Each child received a breakfast every day and was taken on two field trips over the duration of the project.

The content of the lessons was as follows:

English	Letters Numbers Days of the week Months of the year Sentence structure Introducing oneself Family tree Parts of the body Shapes Vocabulary and Conversation Food pyramid Personal identity Time and Clock Countries and Continents The four seasons
Arabic	Letters Personal identity Senses Letters and words Days of the week Months of the year Long and Short Sounds Learning about Nature Professions Syntax Words and Syllables
Mathematics	Numbers Summation Subtraction Multiplication Tables (1,2,3,4) Time

Life Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing Team work Communication Imagination Problem solving Bullying Awareness Child Labour Awareness Removing Negative Energy Puppet Theatre Role Play
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PROJECT OUTCOMES

1 Formal Education

The children received classes that covered key areas of the schools' curriculum including Arabic, English, Mathematics and Life Skills. The children attended English, Arabic, and Maths classes that were specifically tailored to their needs and designed to make learning engaging and fun. The English classes introduced them to the basics of the English language, including vocabulary, grammar, and conversational skills. Through interactive activities, games, and storytelling, the children developed their language abilities while also gaining an appreciation for different cultures and ways of communication. In the Arabic classes, the children explored their native language in depth. They learned to read and write Arabic, delving into its rich history and literature. This not only strengthened their language skills but also fostered a sense of cultural identity. Mathematics classes were a space for the children to discover numbers and problem-solving. Through hands-on activities and creative exercises, they grasped fundamental mathematical concepts, improving their analytical skills and critical thinking. These classes aimed to make mathematics less intimidating and more enjoyable, instilling a love for numbers and logic.



2 Arts and Crafts

All of the children had the opportunity to participate in classes focused on arts and crafts, including drawing, wall murals and paper crafts. Artistic expression was encouraged that allowed children to unleash their self-expression, imagination, creativity and develop their fine motor skills. The classes also observed international days such as Refugee Day on 20 June in which they produced art and had discussions on the life of a refugee. The paper crafts often complemented the core curriculum subjects (literacy and numeracy) and resulted in colourful wall murals.

3 Day Trips

Chance to Learn provided two day trips over the duration of the project for the 100 children. The first trip was for children aged 6-9 years. They were taken to Playtown, a leisure facility for children where they could have fun in a safe environment as well as get creative and build friendships. This outing was met with enthusiastic participation, fostering not only enjoyment but also aiding in the development of social skills.



Children enjoying a day trip to Playland in Beirut. August 2023. WPA.

The second day trip was for children aged 10-14 years. They were taken to Al-Awali river to cultivate a sense of adventure and appreciation for the outdoors, promoting teamwork and unity. The outing facilitated a deeper connection with nature, camaraderie with peers, and instilled valuable life lessons on cooperation and environmental conservation.



Children enjoying a day trip to Awali river in southern Lebanon. August 2023. WPA.

4 Receiving a Snack Daily

The children received a healthy breakfast everyday comprising seasonal fruits, cupcakes, crackers, corn flakes, sandwiches and biscuits with jams in addition to a water bottle.

5 Cultural activities



Children performing Dabka as part of the Chance to Learn project. July 2023. WPA.

The children had the opportunity to participate in cultural activities including traditional dance which is a central element of Palestinian and Syrian life. Dabka is traditional Palestinian song and dance that young people learn from an early age. The project marked special occasions such as Mother's Day, Eid Al-Adha, and International Dance Day, fostering a sense of cultural heritage, community, and inclusivity.

6 Graduation Ceremony

A graduation ceremony was organised in August 2023 for participating students. The event showcased their achievements in cultural diversity, arts and crafts, language proficiency, and formal education. Certificates were distributed to 100 students, and families and representatives of the community were invited to the event.



Participants in the 'Chance to Learn' project receiving a completion certificate in August 2023. WPA.

7 Project Outcomes

The learning outcomes achieved by the 'Chance to Learn' programme in 2023 included the following:

- Enhanced formal education provision to 100 children aged 6 to 14 in key areas of the schools' curriculum: Arabic, English and Mathematics.
- Enabled students to reveal diverse talents, fostering self-discovery and creative passion through various activities, including *Dabka* dancing, drawing, arts and crafts, and singing.
- Supported improved communication and interpersonal skills contributing to students' confidence, expressiveness, and social engagement.
- Provided personalized learning by grouping students according to their educational levels that supported tailored instruction, improving understanding, retention, and academic performance.
- Promoted inclusion and diversity through collaborations with local community organizations and supported inclusivity, as children interacted with peers with special needs, fostering acceptance and breaking down barriers.
- Fostered cultural awareness, through special events celebrating Eid Al-Adha and important dates in the Palestinian calendar.
- Provided psychosocial care to children particularly impacted by mental health problems caused by stress, a difficult domestic environment and exposure to severe poverty.

Evaluation

In May 2023, CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, visited Mar Elias to meet the project staff including: May Khashan (Project Co-ordinator); Imad Alawneh (Mathematics teacher); Siham Zammar (Life skills teacher); Aline Howejeh (Arabic teacher); Salwa al-Haj Hassan (Life skills teacher) and Maya Moussa (English teacher). He also visited the Women's Program Association and met with Leila Kaissa (Director) to discuss the how the programme could be delivered in 2024 should funding become available.

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Appendix 1: WPA Team in Mar Elias 2023

Name	Position
May Khashan	Co-ordinator
Siham Zammar	Life Skills Teacher
Aline Howejeh	Arabic Teacher
Salwa al-Haj Hassan	Life Skills Teacher
Imad Alawneh	Mathematics Teacher
Maya Moussa	English Teacher



Chance to Learn Facilitators. 15 May 2023. Centre for Global Education. From left to right: Imad Alawneh, May Khashan, Siham Zammar, Aline Howejeh, Salwa al-Haj Hassan and Maya Moussa.

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The Centre for Global Education (CGE) is a development non-governmental organisation that provides education services to increase awareness of international development issues. Its central remit is to promote education that challenges the underlying causes of poverty and inequality in the developing world and effect action toward social and economic justice.

The Centre equips individuals and organisations to understand the cultural, economic, social and political influences on our lives that result from our growing interdependence with other countries and societies. It also provides learners with the skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary to facilitate action that will contribute to poverty eradication both locally and globally.

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