



## education department



## education reform

*final report 2015*

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### executive summary

This is the final report of UNRWA Education Reform (2011-2015), as although work must continue to embed, sustain and build upon its achievements in the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) period, the funded implementation period of the Reform ended in December 2015. The Education Reform Strategy (ERS) was designed to bring about transformational change to classroom practices and thus improve children's learning outcomes through the adoption of a systemic and interrelated approach. It was formally endorsed by the UNRWA Senior Management and the UNRWA Advisory Committee in 2011.

Over the past four years, the Reform has been vehicle for change at three key levels - policy level, strategy or structural level, and individual capacity development level - and in eight interrelated programmatic areas, addressing teachers, curriculum, student assessment, student inclusion and well-being. All levels were underpinned by strengthened planning, monitoring and evaluation, and measurement of impact. This systemic approach reflects global evidence that educational reform cannot be achieved by concentrating on one element only, as articulated in the call to "strengthen education systems" (World Bank, 2010) and to "promote education in a holistic manner" (BMZ, 2010).

There have been numerous achievements of the Reform, from the clearly articulated strategic direction, through the Agency-wide policies - Teacher, HRCRT, and Inclusive Education (IE) - to the strategies that guide the policy implementation - HRCRT, IE, the Common Monitoring Framework, Research Strategy, the Curriculum Framework, and the TVET Strategy.

Within this clearly articulated direction there has been much achieved with regard to the strengthening of the capacity of teachers, school principals and other education cadre, to better enable them to deliver quality education; this has been through key professional development programmes, e.g. School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) programmes I and II, Leading for the Future (L4F) and Core Knowledge, and Skills and Competences for Strategic Support Staff.

The ultimate test of the effectiveness of the Reform design and implementation is, of course, education-system-level change where students drop out less frequently, do not repeat grades and their learning outcomes improve; this leads to a more efficient and effective system. The key indicators of an efficient and effective system are: student dropout; student survival; co-efficient of internal efficiency; and student achievement. This 2015 Reform progress report shows that across all fields there have been gains in these areas, with: Student survival rates at the highest they have been in the last five years in the basic education cycle (93.5 per cent for boys against the target of 91.8 per cent and 95.5 per cent for girls against a target of 95.5 per cent).

Cumulative dropout rates for elementary boys and girls and preparatory boys are at their lowest rate in the last five years, with a slight decrease in the preparatory girls' rate, despite a small increase in Jordan since the last reporting period. Overall, the rate still remains lower for girls than since the beginning of the Reform. Agency-wide dropout for elementary boys is 1.95 per cent and the 2015 Reform target was 2.4 per cent; for elementary girls, the dropout rate is 0.96 per cent against the Agency target of 1.4 per cent. For preparatory boys Agency-wide, the dropout rate is 3.55 per cent against a target of 5.5 per cent, and for preparatory girls, it is 2.92 per cent against a target of 3 per cent.

The coefficient of internal efficiency is at its highest since the Reform began (0.91). This means that the UNRWA education system has become more efficient with more students graduating on time; this exceeds the reform target of 0.90.

With regards to the achievement of students, the Monitoring and Learning Achievement (MLA) of 2013 showed an increase in student mean score, but most crucially as part of the Reform the MLA has become a means of providing far greater insight into how the UNRWA education system is impacting on its students' learning outcomes. The design of the MLA test and the way in which it is subsequently analyzed now generate information about student performance levels, i.e. in relation to the expected performance at the tested grade levels; about student learning skills and competences, i.e. if they are able to reason and apply knowledge or if their competencies are limited to knowledge recall; and about the way in which a subject is taught with regard to its content domains, for example grammar and dictation content domains in Arabic and geometry, numbers and operations content domains in math. The findings of the 2013 MLA were disseminated to all fields with each school receiving a 'School Sheet' which detailed its own students' performance in these key areas.

Baselines and target indicators have also been generated from the 2013 MLA and the 2016 MLA, which will be implemented in all fields, including Syria, which was not included in 2013 due to the conflict, and will give a very clear indication of how UNRWA is supporting its students with regards to quality, equity and inclusiveness of the education provision.

There has been recognition of the quality and innovativeness of the UNRWA Education Reform in the host countries, the region and even at a global level among key education stakeholders, in relation to the design, development and operationalization of the process and the modalities of its teacher training programmes. From the outset, the active engagement of educationalists from all fields, and colleagues from other programmes and departments, led to high-quality products, wide ownership and enhanced capacity. At the programmatic level, the multimedia, blended learning approach, adopted for the flagship training programmes, enabled teachers, school principals and education support cadre to learn as they worked, i.e. in situ, trying out new ideas on a day-to-day basis. Similarly, the Toolkits developed to support teachers in the classroom in delivering human rights education, to identify and address the special needs of their pupils, and to review the textbook they were about to use in the lesson - to see if it supports the development of student competencies and is in line with UN values - have been widely showcased for their innovative approach.

What was perhaps unexpected was the way in which the Reform would help those educationalists impacted by the Syria crisis better respond to the evolving needs. When the crisis began the Syria education team continued determinedly to implement the Reform, likely due more to a need for a level of normalcy and to not be left behind, rather than as a means to help mitigate the impact of the crisis. However, the process of undertaking the programmes and of implementing the policies and strategies empowered the teachers, school principals and education cadre - as individuals and as a community. This provided a strong foundation for the schools to better respond to the needs of the students impacted by the emergency, by changing their classroom and school practices to being more inclusive and child-friendly and by engaging with each other, and with parents, to meet the new challenges together. In this way the system, most specifically in Syria but also in Lebanon, was better able to embrace the (project-funded) innovative UNRWA Education in Emergencies (EE) interventions.

The additional costs of the reform, i.e. over and above the salaries of key staff, are detailed in the full report. The reform was mainly funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) project, 'Implementation of UNRWA's Education Reform Strategy', which was finalized in December 2015 with all funds having been spent. The French Government provided funding specifically for the Agency-wide Education Management Information System (EIMS) and, although progress here was impacted by a number of factors, with the funding extended to October 2016, the project will go-live in all fields in September 2016. There was also key support from Irish Aid in the early phase of the Reform, namely for the development of the research strategy and then the subsequent Agency-wide research into classroom practices and reasons for student dropout.

The ongoing support of the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM) (USA) for Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT) education has enabled the HQ Education Department to strengthen the existing programme - in line with the overall Education Reform, through the development and implementation of an HRCRT Policy, Strategy and Teacher Toolkit, as well as specific support to strengthening School Parliaments - with a culture of human rights, non-violent conflict resolution and tolerance now firmly in place in UNRWA schools. There has also been support to Inclusive Education, and since 2014 support from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) to strengthen psychosocial support provided to children. Funds were also received from Diakonia/NAD (an NGO) for inclusive education advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

The Reform has led to a rethinking of the way education is delivered in UNRWA schools. Not only has it changed the discourse and practices of the educationalists and built capacity at all levels across the Agency, but it also served as a model of reform and helped to better articulate the roles and responsibilities of the Headquarter and Field staff in line with the UNRWA Operational Development (OD) process of 2008. However, the Reform cannot be said to be over. Programmes that were developed in 2015, using the remaining funds of the SDC project (SBTD II for teachers of Arabic, English, Maths and Science and the training package of the new Field-level strategic support staff) still have to be fully implemented, as do a number of policies and frameworks. But crucially, it is the principles and practices of the reform that must be sustained, embedded and enriched over the 2016-2021 MTS period.

There are already concerns that the austerity measures of 2015, which led to larger class sizes and impacted negatively on educationalists, will take their toll and that this will be reflected in the performance of the 2015/16 school year.

The Reform was ambitious and has not always been easy to implement, due to impatience for change at some levels and resistance at others, but nothing like it has been undertaken in the region, and the value of the lessons learned in the process go well beyond UNRWA.

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