



SNAPSHOT

Reducing Resource Strain on Education Sector in Zahle



Photo: Lebanese and Syrian students at Saint Georges Intermediary School in Zahle.

“With the money saved from education expenses this year we are now in less debt, and we can buy more fuel for heating this winter.”

-- *Lebanese parent, Zahle, Beqaa*

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Lebanese schools are struggling to accommodate the growing number of Syrian refugee students. According to the UNHCR, Lebanon hosts more than 350,000 school-age Syrian children. The large number imposes a significant challenge to the education sector, as schools are already overcrowded. The quality of education has suffered in g, and tensions are rising between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees as competition for resources increases.

An OTI partner, Saint Georges Intermediary School in Zahle in the Central Beqaa, is enabling both Syrian and poor Lebanese students to continue their education. This school has taken on 90 Syrian students since the start of the Syrian crisis. The school provided education for these students either for free or at a reduced rate during the 2012-2013 academic year; however, the school could not afford to do so the 2013-2014 school year. A total of 29 Syrian and 11 Lebanese students could not afford the fees and risked missing the academic year. Some Lebanese parents have lost their jobs because of competition in the work force due to the influx of Syrian workers. After learning that fees might increase, some of these families had initially transferred their children from the private Saint George School to a lower quality public school.

Saint Georges Intermediary School was able to provide free books to 190 students. In addition, it provided school fees to 29 Syrian and 11 Lebanese students, saving them from spending the academic year at home. Toni, a father of two students, said, “I removed my kids for one week from this school until the director called me to tell me that they could provide free books and support with fees.” This support helped families save an average of \$300, which prevented many from going into debt and helped others afford additional fuel for heating in winter.

OTI also provided stipends for five teachers, which allowed the school to redirect their stipend funds to hire a psychologist to provide support to students in need. The psychologist has been extremely valuable in helping at-risk Lebanese and Syrian students and preparing them to be more productive during class. Additionally, rehabilitation of school toilets and increased access to clean water improved hygiene for the students and the broader community.

Contact: Marialice Ariens, Program Manager, e-mail: mariens@usaid.gov; telephone: (202) 712-4031; Web: www.usaid.gov– Keyword: OTI