

PROJECT NOUR:

EDUCATING PALESTINIAN AND SYRIAN REFUGEES IN BEIRUT, LEBANON, 2021



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PROJECT NOUR: EDUCATING PALESTINIAN AND SYRIAN REFUGEES IN BEIRUT, LEBANON, 2021



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Cover photo: Participants in Project Nour, Burj Barajneh refugee camp, September 2021.
Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.

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1 Centre for Global Education

The Centre for Global Education is a development non-governmental organisation that provides education services to enhance awareness of international development issues. Its central remit is to provide learning that will enable individuals and organisations to address the causes of poverty, inequality and injustice at local and global levels. The Centre enables learners in formal and informal education sectors 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.



Centre for Global Education's library.

The Centre for Global Education provides training and resources to local target groups that tailor development education content and practice to their needs. We consider the development process in Ireland within the context of the global South and support multiculturalism and mutual respect by providing opportunities to learn about other cultures, faiths and lifestyles. The Centre supports the view that we can learn more about ourselves and local communities by extending our knowledge and experience of the wider world. The local and global axis of development education is central to its learning methodology and informed by the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher. The Centre's activities include the provision of a library on our premises to support research and teaching on international development issues. We also provide: continuing professional development training to teachers; publish a bi-annual, peer reviewed development education journal, [Policy and Practice](#); compile research on development issues; and currently support two overseas programmes delivered to Palestinian refugee children in the Gaza Strip and Beirut, Lebanon.

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2 Project Summary

This is a report on activities delivered in year two of a two-year project (2020-2021) in Burj Barajneh 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 1 June to 30 September 2021.



Some of the 100 children who participated in the CGE / Women's Program Association project in Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

The project had five main aims:

1. To provide educational support services to 100 children aged 6-13 years unable to attend schools and suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by exposure to severe poverty in the refugee camp of Burj Barajneh.
2. To provide psychosocial care to help address mental health problems among the child participants caused by the severe social and economic problems in the camp.
3. To provide a hot meal to every child daily for the duration of the project.
4. To provide the children with eight field trips outside the camp to leisure facilities, parks and nature reserves to escape the often stressful living environment in Burj Barajneh.
5. To provide a safe and structured play environment inside the camp which supported formal sector learning, cultural events, arts and crafts, and fun!

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of extended lockdown, the project start date was delayed from 1 March to 1 June and the programme ended on 30 September 2021. CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, visited the programme from 3-10 September 2021 to meet the project staff and young people, evaluate year two of the programme and plan for future delivery of the programme should funding become available. The activities delivered by the project and described in this report are all the more commendable for being undertaken in the midst of a pandemic and an economic crisis in Lebanon.

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 national currency. Lebanon's national **debt** in 2020 stood at \$97.92 billion or 170% of its GDP, which is the **highest** in the world. Then just a few months later, on 4 August 2020, Beirut's port suffered one of the largest non-nuclear **blasts** in history when 2,750 tonnes of Ammonium Nitrate recklessly stored in a hangar since 2014 exploded. 217 people were killed, 7,000 injured and 300,000 displaced with the material damage estimated at **\$4.6 billion**.



A memorial at Beirut's port reads 'Act for Justice', September 2021 | Stephen McCloskey.

As a result of Lebanon's economic meltdown, the UN **reported** this year that 82 per cent of its population is suffering from multidimensional poverty meaning that they are subjected to deprivations in one or more of the following indicators: access to health insurance, electricity, public utilities (water, sanitation etc), Internet access and employment. All of this has taken place against a wider backdrop of social and economic upheaval since October 2019 with widespread protests against austerity measures taken by a corrupt and sectarian political elite.

This has added to the poverty of Palestinian and Syrian refugees across Lebanon as the prices of day-to-day necessities have increased and wages have depreciated. The social and economic situation has been made even more difficult by the arrival of 29,000 refugees fleeing the war in Syria, many of whom have taken refuge in the 12 Palestinian camps in Lebanon. According to the UN mission for Palestinian refugees, this has created "urgent needs in the areas of cash, food, housing assistance and emergency health". In commenting on the combined impact of COVID-19 and Lebanon's economic crisis, UNRWA **stated** that "Poverty rates, which were already high (65 per cent) amongst Palestine refugees, are likely to have increased considerably over the past year". It added that:

“UNRWA fears that this latest catastrophe (the port explosion) will push vulnerable communities in Lebanon further into despair, including Palestine refugees, who are already amongst the most marginalized groups in the country”.

3 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 eight Palestinian camps in Lebanon. 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; career guidance; and leadership and entrepreneurial skill building activities. In 2013, recognizing the educational crisis for newly arrived Syrian refugees, the WPA founded its own community school, the Nour Center ('Nour' means light in Arabic), which provides educational services and psycho social support for 200 Syrian and Palestinian children and youth living in Burj El Barajneh.



The Nour Center was established by the Women's Program Association in Bourj Barajneh Refugee Camp in 2013. Photo Stephen McCloskey.

WPA has a team of over 100 project and fixed term staff and in 2020 it reached 16,000 individual beneficiaries. WPA's mission is to build a generation of women and youth with equal rights and opportunities to assume an active role in the development of their community and to increase their opportunities for decent livelihood by building their knowledge, capacity, and assets. This is achieved through a series of programs and activities under four sectors: namely, Livelihood, Protection, Education and Social Stability. The WPA's mission is to: protect and empower women, children and youth, both Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the host community, giving them the opportunity to play active roles in the community.

One of the WPA current activities is to support a social enterprise that grows vegetables and herbs in a garden on the roof of their building in Burj Barajneh. The garden's produce is sold at a subsidized price in the camp and to outside organisations and the profits used to support the work of the organization.



Organic and vegetable garden on the roof of the Women's Program Association building in Burj Barajneh refugee camp. October 2020. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

4 Background to project

There are [479,537](#) 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 Palestinian Refugees Syria (PRS) who fled to Lebanon after the start of the war in Syria in 2011. [Sixty per cent](#) of PRS (262,000) have been displaced at least once by the war, 4,000 have been killed and 50,000 are estimated to have left the country.

The war in Syria has resulted in approximately 29,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria seeking sanctuary in the 12 UNRWA camps in Lebanon. This has resulted in camp services becoming over-subscribed, particularly in the crucial areas of health and education. Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) are often competing with Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL) for employment, often in low-paid, manual jobs which perpetuate poverty. A [report](#) by the American University of Beirut (AUB) found unemployment levels at 23.2 percent for PRL and 52.5 percent for PRS which make it 'challenging for many families to afford basic needs and to access services in times of need such as hospitalization and specialist care'.



Burj Barajneh refugee camp. September 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

The report also worryingly flagged that PRS are 'almost completely reliant on UNRWA to cover their health needs' reflecting the concerning level of dependence among PRS on the UN, NGOs and other international agencies working in Lebanon. 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 36 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.

Burj Barajneh Camp

The League of Red Cross Societies established Burj Barajneh camp in 1948 to accommodate refugees who fled from Galilee in northern Palestine. The camp is in the southern suburbs of Beirut, near Beirut International Airport. Burj Barajneh suffered heavily throughout the Lebanese civil war when nearly a quarter of the camp's population was displaced. Men from the camp generally work as casual labourers in construction, and women mostly work in sewing factories or as cleaners.

// The living conditions in Burj Barajneh are extremely hazardous, especially for children. The camp is a labyrinth of narrow alleyways with low-hanging inter-twining water pipes and electricity cables that have caused more than 50 fatalities, mostly children, from electrocution.



Burj Barajneh refugee camp. Low hanging wires make the camp's environment treacherous, particularly for children | September 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

The living conditions in Burj Barajneh are extremely hazardous, especially for children. The camp is a labyrinth of narrow alleyways with low-hanging inter-twining water pipes and electricity cables that have caused more than 50 [fatalities](#), mostly children, from electrocution. The tight alleyways and overhanging buildings mean that large areas of the camp are denied natural light. A combination of poor sanitation, a limited diet, low incomes and inadequate housing contribute to illness and mental health problems. 63% of PRL and 75% of PRS live with a relative who has suffered an acute illness in the last six months.

5 Project Nour

The project was delivered in the Nour Center in Burj Barajneh which was founded in 2013 to meet the educational needs of newly arrived Syrian children and Palestinian young people. The project participants were 100 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children living in Burj Barajneh camp aged between 6 and 13 years, 24 of whom were Palestinian and 66 were Syrian. An estimated 50-60% of Syrian children living in Lebanon are not attending school because they are not registered with UNRWA and unable to access UN services. Many Palestinian children drop out of school because their educational and economic opportunities are so limited in Lebanon and because they want to contribute to the family income through work in the informal economy. The Nour Center provided a safe and supportive environment for the children where they could receive psycho-social support and educational activities within the camp community. At an individual level, students at the Nour Center were able to develop personal competencies, and life and interpersonal skills which can prepare them for re-engagement with education or for vocational training toward employment.



Children participate in a role play about education as part of the CGE/WPA Project Nour in Burj Barajneh refugee camp. September 2021 | Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

Project aim

To provide education and psychosocial support services to 100 Palestinian and Syrian children aged 6-13 years in the Burj Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

Project Objectives

To provide 100 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children, aged 6 to 13, with:

- Formal education in a community setting, which will enhance their understanding of key areas of the schools' curriculum including literacy and numeracy;
- Psychosocial support and stress management to help alleviate mental health problems caused by poverty and trauma;
- Family workshops to enable parents to extend psychosocial support into the household;

- A hot meal daily for the duration of the programme;
- Life skills that build their self-confidence and enable them to deal with the pressures and demands of life in the camp;
- Eight x one-day field trips over the duration of the programme to leisure facilities and parks to play and have fun.

Project delivery

The project was delivered over a period of four months (June to September 2021) to 100 Palestinian and Syrian children aged 6-13 years. They were divided into four groups of 25 and attended the Women's Program Association from Monday - Friday, 9.30am to 12.30pm. 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. The children received training in key areas of the curriculum: Mathematics, English, Arabic, literacy, numeracy and arts and crafts. Each child received a hot meal every day and was taken on two field trips per month outside the camp to leisure parks and nature reserves where they could play and have fun.

The daily schedule of delivery was as follows:

CLASS 1 (ALAA MADRATI)						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30 - 10:15	Life Skills					
10:15 - 11:00	Arabic					
11:00 - 11:15	BREAK					
11:15 - 11:45	English					
11:45 - 12:30	Math					

CLASS 2 (DIALA FARAJ)						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30 - 10:15	Arabic					
10:15 - 11:00	Life Skills					
11:00 - 11:15	BREAK					
11:15 - 11:45	Math					
11:45 - 12:30	English					

CLASS 3 (Rana Mohamad)						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30 - 10:15	English					
10:15 - 11:00	Math					
11:00 - 11:15	BREAK					
11:15 - 11:45	Life Skills					
11:45 - 12:30	Arabic					

CLASS 4 (Abir Shwiekh)						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30 - 10:15	Math					
10:15 - 11:00	English					
11:00 - 11:15	BREAK					
11:15 - 11:45	Arabic					
11:45 - 12:30	Life Skills					

PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. Formal Education

The children received classes every day from 9.30am - 12.30pm that covered key areas of the schools' curriculum including Arabic, English, Mathematics and Life Skills. The classes enabled the students to learn key formal sector skills in a community setting when they are unable to attend school. The training was facilitated by staff of the Women's Program Association.



The Women's Program Association Team: Mariam Sweidan, Tahani Charif, Mariam al-Shaar and Sabrine al-Shaar. Burj Barajneh refugee camp, September 2021.

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. The activities were delivered using active learning methodologies that involved regular interaction between the facilitator and the children.



Children participating in an arts and crafts activity as part of Project Nour, Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut. September 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.



"Children produced arts and crafts of the highest quality by recycling everyday objects into toys, household objects and clothing."

3. Day Trips



Children enjoying a day trip as part of Project Nour. 11 August 2021. Courtesy of WPA.

Project Nour provided two day trips per month to the 100 children to leisure facilities, nature reserves and to the river for swimming. It provided them with an opportunity to escape the pressured environment of Burj Barajneh which lacks safe play facilities and is a densely populated, concrete environment that limits the children's capacity to enjoy their childhood. The children really enjoyed this aspect of the project.

4. Receiving a hot meal

One of the Women's Program Association's many achievements in Burj Barajneh has been the creation of Soufra, a catering business that produces food in the camp and sells it at subsidised prices. A vertical garden on the roof of the WPA building grows a range of vegetables that sustains Soufra's catering activities. The children participating in the programme received a hot meal every day made possible through Soufra and NIPSA's support.

The food menu was:

- Hot meal
- Sandwich Labneh /cheese.
- Chocolate, cheese and Zaatar croissant.
- Dates and coconut pastry.
- Cheese and Zaatar manakesh.
- Juice



Children enjoying a meal during one of the day trips as part of Project Nour. Beirut, Lebanon. 27 August 2021. Courtesy of WPA.

5. Cultural activities

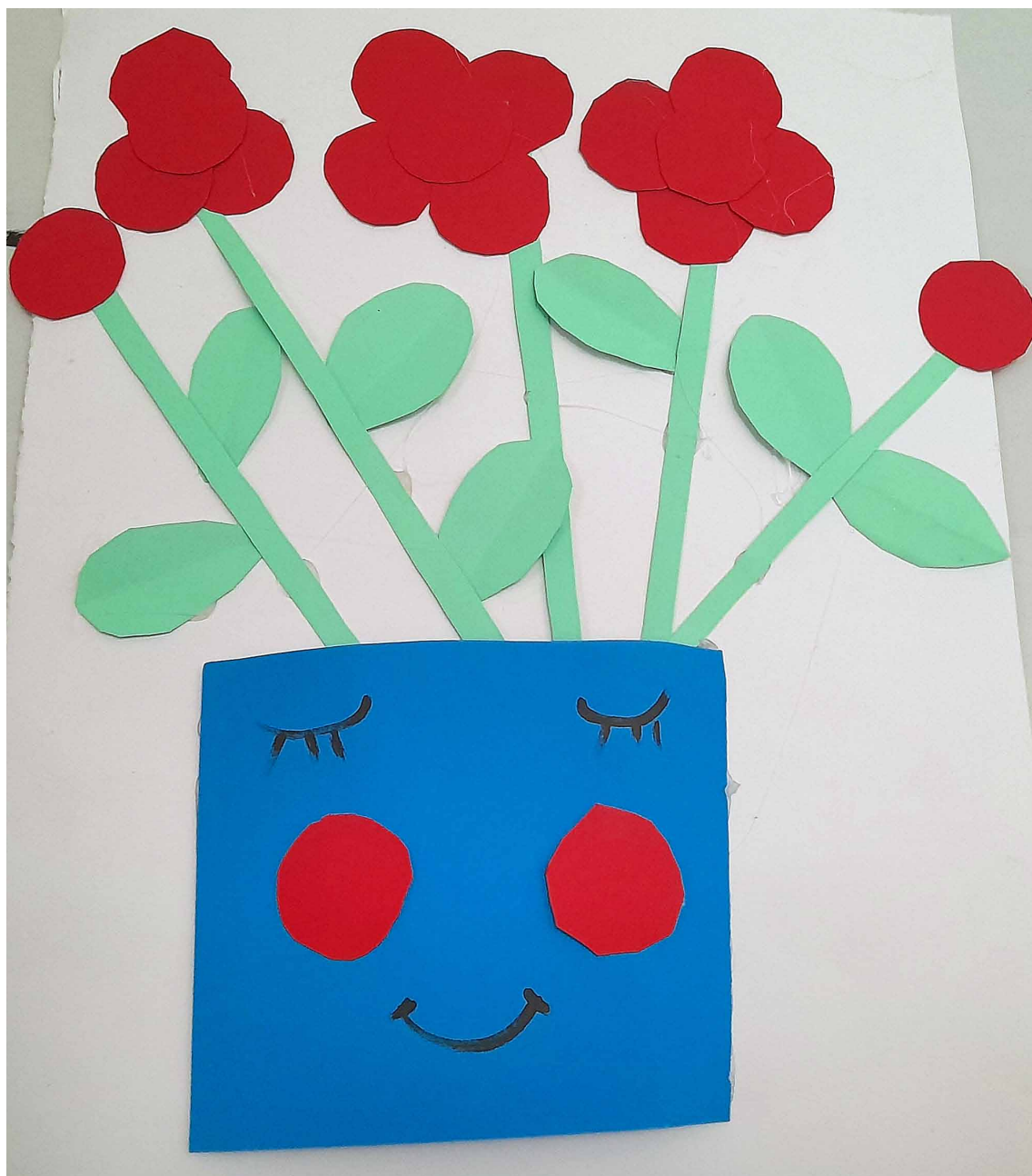
The children had the opportunity to participate in cultural activities including traditional dance which is a central element of Palestinian and Syrian life. *Dabka* is traditional Palestinian song and dance that young people learn from an early age. The children also composed and acted out role plays focused on important social issues such as street children and homelessness.

Right: Children participating in a project Open Day on 16 September 2021 that celebrated the achievements of Project Nour. Courtesy of WPA.



6. Evaluation

In September 2021, CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, visited Burj Barajneh to meet the project staff including: Mariam al-Shaar, Director of the Women's Program Association; Tahani Charif, Project Manager, Sabine al-Shaar, Project Co-ordinator, and the facilitators and young people. The arts and crafts produced by the young people was of a consistently high quality and is a great credit to the facilitators. The young people were congratulated on behalf of NIPSA and the Centre for Global Education. The children were given NIPSA stationery provided by Geraldine Alexander which was greatly appreciated.



Arts and Crafts produced by the young people were of great quality and involved recycling everyday objects in the camp. Photo: Stephen McCloskey.

As part of the project evaluation, Stephen McCloskey interviewed two parents with children enrolled on the programme to ask for their assessment of the activities. They were pleased that their children had the opportunity to learn in a structured play environment when they are unable to attend school. Both parents were illiterate and learnt from their children when they shared the outcomes of their activities at

the end of each day. Their main frustration was that the programme was too short at just four months and they wished it had a longer timescale. They noted that the children brought home the meals they received during the project to share with siblings. This is a reflection of the severity of poverty in the camp. In summary, the parents were delighted with the project activities and outcomes and said that their children enjoyed the classes, day trips and cultural activities which really strengthened their learning.

It isn't clear yet if the project can be supported by NIPSA in 2022. The Centre for Global Education is hoping to maintain project delivery for at least another year to build upon the success of the activities delivered in 2020 and 2021.



Learning the family tree as part of Project Nour, September 2021. Photo: Stephen McCloskey

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*Project Nour open day, Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon. 9 September 2021.
Photo courtesy of Women's Program Association.*

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