



# PROJECT NOUR:

## EDUCATING PALESTINIAN AND SYRIAN REFUGEES IN BEIRUT, LEBANON, 2020



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THE NIPSA GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPING WORLD FUND 2020

# PROJECT NOUR: EDUCATING PALESTINIAN AND SYRIAN REFUGEES IN BEIRUT, LEBANON, 2020



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## Centre for Global Education, December 2020

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Cover photo: Burj Barajneh refugee camp, October 2020. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is a report on activities delivered in year one 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 15 June to 15 October 2020.



*Some of the 75 children who participated in the CGE / Women's Program Association project in Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, 2020. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

The project had five main aims. The first was to provide educational support services to 75 children aged 7-12 years suffering from the acute effects of trauma caused by exposure to severe poverty in the refugee camp of Burj Barajneh. The second aim was 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. The third aim was to provide a hot meal to every child daily for the duration of the project. The fourth aim was 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. The fifth aim was 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, the project timeline was changed from 1 March - 31 August 2020 to 15 June to 15 October 2020. All educational activities in Burj Barajneh camp were suspended from March to mid-June 2020 because of a coronavirus lockdown across Lebanon. The activities were successfully concluded in October and CGE Director, Stephen McCloskey, visited the programme in mid-October to meet the project staff and young people, evaluate year one of the programme and plan for year two. 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. The number of COVID-19 cases in Burj Barajneh and other Palestinian refugee camps is spiking and, at 19 November, there had been a total of 2,695 registered COVID-19 cases among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, 52 current hospitalised cases and 89 deaths.

The wider context in Lebanon since the start of the project has been catastrophic. There has been social and economic upheaval since October 2019 with widespread protests against austerity measures taken by the government and an economic crisis caused by the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound. Two governments have been formed and collapsed over the past year and Lebanon defaulted on a debt repayment which sent the currency into freefall. This has added to the poverty of refugees in Burj Barajneh as the prices of day-to-day necessities have increased and wages are now worth less. The social and economic situation was made even more volatile on 4 August, when there was a massive blast in the harbour of Beirut which killed 203 people and made 300,000 homeless. On commenting on the port explosion, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees expressed its 'fears that this latest catastrophe will push vulnerable communities in Lebanon further into despair, including Palestinian refugees, who are already amongst the most marginalized groups in the country'.

*Right: A memorial to the victims of Beirut's port explosion on 4 August 2020 made by Lebanese artist Hayat Nazer from the debris of the explosion. October 2020 | Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*



## 2. ABOUT OUR PARTNER ORGANISATION

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 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.

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 2019. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

The WPA's Director is Mariam Al Shaar, pictured below in the organic garden. Mariam is experienced in project management and in meeting the needs of local and international funders. Mariam was born in the Burj Barajneh, where she now lives, to Palestinian parents. She has been a social worker for almost twenty years, and manages education, vocational-skills training and microloans programmes delivered by the WPA. In 2013, with seed funding from Alfanoor, a venture philanthropy, she founded Soufra, a catering business that employs women from Burj Barajneh camp.



*Mariam Al Shaar, Director of the Women's Program Association. October 2019. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

### 3. BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

There are 470,000 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 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. October 2020. Courtesy of 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 environment in Burj Barajneh is 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 with an acute illness in the last six months.



*Burj Barajneh refugee camp. Low hanging wires make the camp's environment treacherous, particularly for children | Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey*



## 4. 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 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children living in Burj Barajneh camp. 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 interpersonal skills which can prepare them for re-engagement with education or for vocational training toward employment.



*Children participate in a role play about street children as part of the CGE/WPA Project Nour in Burj Barajneh refugee camp. October 2020 | courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

### Project aim

To provide education and psychosocial support services to 75 Palestinian and Syrian children aged 7-12 years in Burj Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

### Project Objectives

To provide 75 Palestinian and Syrian refugee children, aged 7 to 12, 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;
- 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 to 75 children aged 7-12 years. They were divided into three groups of 25 and attend the Women's Program Association from Monday - Friday, 8.30am 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	Class 2	Class 3
Time	Schedule	Mahmoud	Diala	Rania
8.55-8.30	Morning period	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion
9.40-8.55	First period	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
10.15-9.40	Break	-	-	-
11.00-10.15	Second period	English	Life Skills	Arabic
11.45-11.00	Third period	Arabic	English	Life Skills
12.30-11.45	Fourth period	Life Skills	Arabic	English

### Gender breakdown of participants

Class 1		Class 2		Class 3		Total
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
15	10	15	10	14	11	<b>75</b>

### Lessons were delivered in the following subjects:

<b>English</b>	Letters Numbers Days of the week Months of the year Vocabulary Food pyramid Personal identity
<b>Arabic</b>	Letters Personal identity Senses Letters and words Days of the week
<b>Mathematics</b>	Numbers Summation Subtraction Multiplication Tables (1,2,3,4)



Life Skills	Focusing Team work Communication Imagination Problem solving
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## Project Outcomes

### 1. Formal Education

The children received classes every day from 8.30am – 12.30pm that covered key areas of the schools' curriculum including Arabic, English, Mathematics and Life Skills. The managers of the project had to quickly adapt to delivery under the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. This meant delivering the classes in smaller groups and ensuring that the children had access to PPE, including sanitiser and masks. The Women's Program Association also established WhatsApp groups to provide students with activities to complete during lockdown. These activities focused on the mental wellbeing of children during lockdown to ensure they had regular communication with their peers and facilitators.



*A facilitator and children in class during Project Nour, Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon. October 2020 | Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

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



Art work produced by the children and facilitators who participated in Project Nour, Burj Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut. October 2020. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.

### 3. Day Trips



Children enjoying a day trip to the river as part of Project Nour. Beirut, Lebanon. Courtesy of WPA, October 2020.

Project Nour provided two day trips per month to the 75 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 program received a hot meal every day made possible through Soufra and NIPSA's support.



*Children enjoying a meal during their day trip to Wadi Al-Limon, Beirut, Lebanon. June 2020. Courtesy of WPA.*

#### 5. Cultural activities



*Children dancing during a celebration day in October 2020 that marked the end of year one of Project Nour. Courtesy of Stephen McCloskey.*

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.

## 6. Evaluation

In October 2020, 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, Sabrine al-Shaar, Project Co-ordinator, and the facilitators and young people. A presentation on the project was delivered as part of a celebration day on Tuesday, 13 October by Mahmoud Alkhatib who works in the Nour Center. 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.

Despite a very difficult year in which COVID-19 delayed the delivery of the project and altered the way it was delivered, the facilitators and young people produced excellent work. Plans for the delivery of year two are well advanced. WPA aims to increase the number of programme participants in 2021 from 75 to 100 and to complete the project, COVID-19 allowing, between March and August 2021.





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Wall mural. Project Nour, Burj Barajneh refugee camp. October 2020.

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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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