

Country Profile: Libya

Equity in Education

September 2016

Since 2011, severe social and political instability driven by prolonged periods of conflict have disrupted the provision of quality education for Libyan children. The UN-recognised transitional government, elected in 2012, worked closely with international development agencies to rebuild the education system and to improve educational opportunities for children affected by the conflict. In 2014, an upsurge in fighting between military forces under the command of the transitional government and Islamic militias operating under the authority of the self-declared rival parliament, the General National Congress, led to further deterioration of an already weakened education system.

The 2015 ceasefire and the establishment of the 2016 Government of National Accord has created renewed hopes for greater stability across much of the country, an essential precursor to reconstructing the fractured education system. Principal challenges facing policy makers include rebuilding damaged schools, reaching internally displaced communities and ensuring that teachers are adequately trained to deliver quality education and to provide essential psychosocial support for children traumatised by the recent violence and instability. Meeting these post-conflict challenges remains the main pathway to improve equity in the provision of (and access to) quality education for all Libyan children, in particular young people whose schooling has been interrupted during the conflict.

Impact of Conflict

Prior to the outbreak of conflict, free primary education for children aged 6 to 15 years had resulted in high enrolment rates (96%)¹ and gender parity for male and female students (GPI score of 1.0).² The provision of high quality education remained problematic, however. More than a third of students (36%) did not complete primary education,³ insufficient numbers of teachers received professional training and almost two thirds of schools lacked adequate sanitation. Despite these limitations, literacy rates among young people (90%) were higher than average for the region, especially for young men (96%) compared to young women (84%).⁴

To date, the impact of conflict on the Libyan education system includes the destruction or occupation of school buildings, intimidation and killing of teachers by military groups, and the implementation of a new curriculum aligned with international standards. As of 2016, nearly two thirds (64%) of schools are reported to have sustained damage from the conflict and many schools continue to be used as shelters for internally displaced persons.⁵

Conflict has also prevented a significant proportion of Libyan children from having safe, ongoing access to quality education. As well as the direct impact of fighting, factors that have created

¹ http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Libya_COAR_2013.pdf

² <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/s-acaps-sdr-libya-humanitarian-impact-of-the-conflict-5-jun-2015.pdf>

³ http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Libya_COAR_2013.pdf

⁴ <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/s-acaps-sdr-libya-humanitarian-impact-of-the-conflict-5-jun-2015.pdf>

⁵ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_lby_report_multi_sector_needs_assessment_update_february2016.pdf

further barriers to Libyan children's ability to access educational opportunities include the psychosocial impact of war, recruitment as child soldiers and the destitution experienced by abandoned and orphaned children.⁶ Young girls have also experienced an increased risk of early marriage and gender-based vulnerabilities.⁷

Community-based reports suggest that upwards of 80% of children attend school across the country as a whole,⁸ although the UN estimates that up to 150,000 children need immediate assistance to maintain access to education.⁹ In addition, ongoing concerns over safety travelling to school and insecurity of school buildings has kept many students out of school even where opportunity to attend school exists.¹⁰

Children living in the middle of conflict zones and those already susceptible to multiple disadvantage are most at risk of having their education interrupted. The impact of renewed fighting in 2014 was particularly marked in Benghazi and the surrounding region, where as many as 57,500 children had their schooling disrupted, enrolment rates dropped by 50% and only 65 schools out of 239 remained operational.¹¹

Internally displaced children in Libya remain one of the groups most likely to experience disruption to their education as a result of the ongoing conflict. This is often due to lack of space in local schools and lack of funds to pay for books, tuition and other basic educational necessities.¹² Of the 400,000 internally displaced persons,¹³ UNICEF estimates that 21% of displaced school-aged children remain out of school.¹⁴

Policies and Interventions

The Ministry of Education has worked closely with international development agencies and in-country civil service organisations to rebuild the education system and reach children most severely affected by the conflict. For example, the transitional government established mobile education units to reach those most in need but significant challenges remain in terms of capacity building and on-the-ground resources. The UN estimates that there is an \$8 million funding gap needed to meet Libya's basic educational needs.¹⁵

UNICEF have played a critical role in providing educational opportunities to children affected by the conflict. Activities include providing 'School-in-a-Box' kits,¹⁶ running children's clubs in regions where school have closed, providing temporary education for children living in refugee camps, funding an enhanced training programme for teachers to improve the quality of education provision, offering specialist training for teachers to provide psychosocial support to vulnerable children,¹⁷ as well as further training workshops to support the development of child rights advocates, and delivering peace-building and mine-risk education.¹⁸

Many UNICEF-led interventions have been delivered in partnership with local NGOs and civil society organisations, such as the Scouts, who have remained operational on-the-ground throughout periods of heightened conflict. As of 2016, UNICEF reported that up to 6,000 children were reached through catch-up classes and other educational

⁶ <http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1727&context=jiws>

⁷ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hrp_final_19_11_2015.pdf

⁸ Based on REACH MSNA findings: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_lby_report_multi_sector_needs_assessment_update_february2016.pdf

⁹ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hrp_final_19_11_2015.pdf

¹⁰ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_lby_report_multi_sector_needs_assessment_update_february2016.pdf

¹¹ http://www.unicef.org/mena/EDUCATION_DRAFT_8.pdf

¹² <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/s-acaps-sdr-libya-humanitarian-impact-of-the-conflict-5-jun-2015.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/libya/figures-analysis>

¹⁴ http://www.unicef.org/mena/EDUCATION_DRAFT_8.pdf

¹⁵ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hrp_final_19_11_2015.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ http://www.unicef.org/education/laj_59380.html

¹⁸ http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Libya_Annual_Report_2014.pdf

activities, and just under 65,000 children received educational supplies. Current activities focus on ensuring that 47,000 internally displaced school-aged children to access quality education through targeted educational programmes,¹⁹ as well as providing prefabricated classrooms to the Ministry of Education in order to support the reconstruction of schools and other basic infrastructure.²⁰

There have also been examples of local community action leading to improved access to education for some of the most disadvantaged children. Typically, the most vulnerable children are poorer students living in the middle of conflict zones, namely, young people whose families cannot afford to send them to private schools when fighting forces school closures. One school in a working-class area of Benghazi was able to re-open after the local community raised funds to repair structural damaged encouraged the headteacher to resume her role. While local children were able to continue their education, there were serious risks associated with operating close to the frontline of fighting and a number of students sustaining injuries from shelling.²¹

While it is too early to measure the long term impact of conflict on school-aged children in Libya, sustained efforts by local communities, government ministries and international development agencies to improve equity in the provision of and access to quality education is critical in order to minimise the impact of the conflict (as far as may be possible) on the educational opportunities of the most disadvantaged children.

¹⁹ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HAC_2016_Libya.pdf

²⁰ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hrp_final_19_11_2015.pdf

²¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35422918>