

Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program  
A complement to the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)

RES-360°

High achievement in a context of  
protracted displacement:  
What helps UNRWA students learn  
under adversity

# Palestine Refugees Education Resilience Case Report





## About the ERA case report series

This report has been produced by the Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) team at The World Bank (HDNED) and analyzes the adversity, the resilience assets, and the education system response in a particular country or context. It makes use of available data collected through the ERA 's conceptual framework and/or tools, as well as review of other secondary sources. While the report complements those produced as part of the SABER series, the approach taken also differs in that it does not seek to benchmark or provide regional and international comparisons. Rather, in keeping with resilience theory and good practice (presented herein), the process is one of collecting and analyzing data as it pertains to the local relevance of education services in countries affected by significant adversities.

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# Introduction

## Education Resilience Approaches (ERA)

Violence, conflict and other contexts of adversity present a significant challenge to the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Moreover, as highlighted in the World Development Report 2011, countries affected by violence and conflict often face severe development challenges and many are characterized by weak institutional capacity and political instability. The impacts of pervasive violence and conflict are especially felt by the poor and traditionally excluded communities not least because such contexts often exacerbate existing inequity in social service delivery, including education services (World Development Report, World Bank 2011). However, research and practice in situations of adversity have also highlighted how education can protect vulnerable children and youth providing them with an appropriate environment within which to nurture their psychosocial well-being and better protect them.<sup>1</sup>

Responding to the “Learning for All” objective of the World Bank’s Education Strategy 2020, the ERA program builds upon and complements the body of work on protection and emotional well-being in difficult contexts by focusing on the education system level features that can also support the pursuit of positive learning outcomes in adversity. Also, ERA addresses the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States and its focus on resilience within country-led fragility assessments agreed in Busan (Korea). Learning and competence in contexts of adversity have been identified as resilience factors in individuals, along with other non-cognitive skills such as purpose, empathy, perseverance, etc.<sup>2</sup> Today’s resilience studies emphasize that individuals can recover, continue to perform, and transform positively in times of adversity by dynamically engaging with their environment (including other actors and relevant and accessible services). Schools and education systems can support this dynamic process for students through integrated approaches that target their protection, socioemotional well-being and learning outcomes.

For more than 40 years, resilience studies have tried to understand the capacity of human beings (and their communities and organizations) to recover from crises, to continue to perform in spite of adversities and to transform positively in the midst of difficulties.<sup>3</sup> We now know that resilience is neither a special, super-human gift nor a trait in only a few individuals. Resilience occurs ordinarily in the interactions between people, as adversity triggers the need to understand our problems, to express our emotions and to develop competence and skills to overcome them—including academic and productive skills. Certainly, many studies identify schools and teachers as important contributors to resilience in children, adolescents and youth. What is more, in education systems resilience can be promoted through the provision of relevant and quality services that foster the interactions among students, teachers and parents to address both learning and well-being.

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1 See for example Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003; *INEE Minimum Standards for Education* (revised) 2010.

2 See for example Gamerzy, Masten and Tellegen 1984; Werner and Smith 1992; Gizir and Aydin 2009 on education resilience in spite of adverse economic situations, Masten et al. 2008 on education resilience in spite of homelessness and transitory situations, Boyden 2003 education resilience in conflict-affected settings and Borma and Overman 2004 on education resilience in spite of social exclusion.

3 See for example, Garmezy 1985; Rutter 1987; Masten and Coatsworth 1998; Luthar 1991; Luthar et. al. 2000; Masten 2001; Benard 2004; Ungar and Liebenberg 2005; Ungar 2011/2012.

While the roots and forms of adversities—especially of violence and conflict—differ greatly from one country to the next, by applying resilience theory, the ERA Program has been able to develop an overarching framework through which to focus on learning outcomes and questions of relevance and quality even in times of pervasive adversity across varied contexts. As an approach, ERA does not provide rigid methods or formulas, rather it offers a guide to understand learning in spite of adversity. It does so through offering flexible diagnostic and research tools firstly to gather evidence of this process within a particular context and then to furnish general lessons learned. In so doing, ERA does not advocate for a specific intervention or stand-alone program. Instead, it employs a resilience lens to understand learning in contexts of adversity and identify the risks as well as assets present in education communities, with the aim of aligning those assets with existing education services and supports.

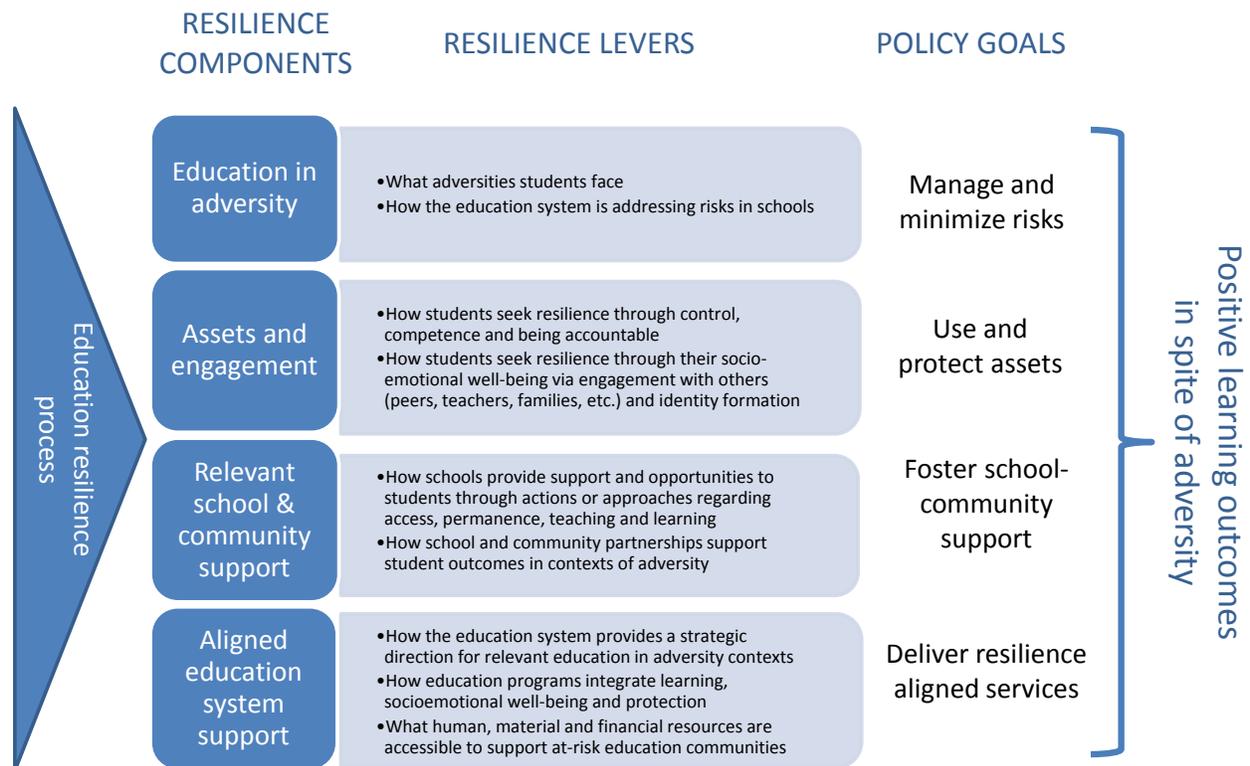
Thus unlike the other SABER domains, ERA does not benchmark nor provide regional and international comparisons. Instead, ERA complements them by offering lessons discerned from a process of collecting and analyzing data at a local level on the relevance of education services in difficult country contexts.

Finally, the findings related to the assets and strengths of students under stress should not be seen to preclude or negate challenges faced by education communities (students, families, teachers and education administrators) nor by the education system itself. ERA's approach to this study does not diminish the need for wider and comprehensive efforts to address the sources of adversity in each context. Rather, adopting a resilience approach provides a means for education systems to understand both risks and assets in education communities in order to align their institutional policies, programs and available resources to better address the needs of at-risk children and youth.

## ERA methodology

For education systems, ERA complements other diagnostic tools such as the World Bank's System Approach for Better Education Results (SABER). Unlike SABER—an approach based on quantitative metrics against which the performance and status of education systems can be assessed—ERA provides a more flexible framework to collect information on what matters most to foster education resilience. It focuses on risks, assets, interactions and available supports, although these are defined independently in each country context. Similar to SABER, ERA has organized the available evidence on Education Resilience around policy goals (which are called Resilience Components) and Resilience Levers, which guide data collection of the evidence to facilitate understanding of the resilience process in each context and to share lessons across countries. Figure 1 below presents the ERA program's components and levers.

Figure 1. Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Framework



The ERA program relies primarily on the collection of mixed-methods data. Three primary tools are being developed:

- (i) **Resilience in Education Systems (RES-360°):** A process for a rapid 360° diagnosis of the risks, education community assets and potentially relevant education programs in a country;
- (ii) **Resilience in Schools (RES-School):** An assessment of how resilience can be fostered through the core school functions (access and permanence, teaching and learning, school management, school climate and community relations); and
- (iii) **Resilience in Education Settings Research (RES-Research):** An education resilience research training module for universities, local researchers and agencies working in fragile, conflict and violence affected contexts.

The Palestine Refugees case study is part of a group of five initial pilot country case studies that supported—through consultations, prototyping and pilot applications—the development of the ERA methodology and the program tools listed above. The sequence of the five pilot country cases is presented in the table below starting with the first case, Rwanda.

**Table 1: Sequencing of the ERA program development and respective country case studies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>ERA framework component</b>
<b>Rwanda</b>	Development of the Education Resilience framework (institutional resilience component)
<b>South Sudan</b>	Initial prototype of an education resilience research approach with a university based in a fragile context (RES-Research)
<b>Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)</b>	Further development of the ERA framework and piloting of the qualitative education resilience training module (RES-Research). Findings guided the initial design of the resilience in schools questionnaire (RES-School)
<b>Latin America (Colombia, Nicaragua and Honduras)</b>	Development and piloting of the mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) education resilience research training module (RES-Research)
<b>Honduras</b>	Development and piloting of the RES-360 <sup>o</sup> tool

## The approach for the Palestine Refugee case study

This country report and the data presented herein form part of the development of the resilience research training module, called “Resilience in Education Systems Research” or RES-Research. An initial version of the RES-Research training module (focused on qualitative methods) was conducted in the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan with local researchers, including consultants, university and Palestinian Authority staff. This initial approach was qualitative and focused on the voices of students from UNRWA schools in these three regions. Qualitative data approaches lend themselves to the study of education resilience, as they better uncover the more complex and unobservable human and social factors that cannot be captured through quantitative data collection and analysis alone.

The research design incorporates elements of various methodologies—including action research, phenomenological approaches, and the construction of a grounded theory. Ninety-six in-depth interviews were conducted for 30 minutes with academically high-performing Palestinian students. Students came predominantly from UNRWA schools (72 students) however a small sample of public school students (24 students) were also interviewed in order to better verify the findings. Students were purposefully selected for the interviews based on the following pre-defined criteria:

- i) Students who experience higher adversity than their peers
- ii) Students who had obtained acceptable to high grades, and
- iii) Equal gender representation

All interviews followed a similar format and all students participated with full consent and anonymity. English translations of Arabic interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Key themes and concepts emerged through a rigorous process of coding and categorization.

It is important to note that as a qualitative study, generalization across settings is limited as the samples are not statistically representative. For this study, also, the sample between public schools and UNRWA schools is not intended for comparison across systems; rather, interviewing some students from public schools served as a check against which one may consider the identified risks and resilience concepts beyond the UNRWA school youth population. In addition, the data analyzed pertained to students in Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan. This excludes two other fields of UNRWA's operations, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Thus the findings presented here speak to Education Resilience Components as they relate to UNRWA schools in three fields only.

Finally, the findings related to the assets and strengths of students under stress should not be seen to preclude or negate challenges faced by Palestinians communities (refugee or non-refugee) nor by the UNRWA system itself. ERA's approach to this study does not diminish the need for wider and comprehensive efforts to address the sources of adversity. Rather, adopting a resilience approach provides a means for education systems to understand both risks and assets in order to align their institutional policies, programs and available resources to better address the needs of vulnerable children and youth, precisely by engaging with their individual and social assets.

As a pilot study under ERA, the scope of this study does not represent the full gamut of information that the ERA framework and tools in their final form seek to collect. The UNRWA case study focuses on the first three Education Resilience Components: a collective understanding of education in adversity, assets and engagement, and school level supports. Discussion of the fourth component—alignment of the education system—will be based only on secondary data pertaining to the institutional priorities and structure of the UNRWA system. To begin, some background on UNRWA is provided.

## The Palestine Refugee context (UNRWA)

Palestine refugees are provided free basic education by a dedicated UN Agency—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war which forcibly displaced over 700,000 Palestinians, the UN General Assembly created a system of support to manage the crisis. Intended only to provide temporary assistance to the refugees while a more permanent political solution was sought, UNRWA began operations in 1950. Over sixty years later and it remains, constituting the only UN Agency dedicated to meeting the needs of a specific population of refugees within a given region and unusually directly providing services to this population.

Today UNRWA manages nearly 700 schools, hires 17,000 staff, educates more than 500,000 refugee students a year and operates across five different fields (the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria). Total UNRWA beneficiaries now number about 4.7 million and education is one of the basic services that UNRWA provides them with (the others include health, relief, shelter, micro-finance and community support). Its education program provides a basic education cycle to Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA uses

the curriculum of these host authorities<sup>4</sup> and works in close cooperation with their Ministries of Education to deliver its services.

The particular relevance of UNRWA for this report is however that its students have been found to outperform for the most part those in public schools in the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan (Patrinis et al. forthcoming). This is contrary to what might be expected from a resource-constrained administration for refugee students who face a multitude of adversities in their daily lives.

Resilience aligned evidence allows a better understanding of the school and system level factors that may be fostering this Education Resilience. In so doing, it may help identify relevant practice and policies for other countries in conflict or post-conflict situations to better understand how schools can remain effective, relevant and perform well in spite of the difficult contexts within which they operate.

### Who are the Palestine refugees?

As of 1952 UNRWA has defined its beneficiaries as, “any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period June 1, 1946 to May 15, 1948 and who lost both home and livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”.

UNRWA registered refugees are officially known as “Palestine refugees”. This definition excludes those who fled to areas outside of UNRWA’s five fields of operations. Refugee women are not able to pass on their status to their children if they marry a non-refugee, however descendants of male UNRWA refugees do inherit UNRWA’s administrative title. In addition, only 1948 refugees are officially covered by the Agency.

Based on this definition, UNRWA registered refugees therefore represent a subset of actual Palestine refugees. They currently number around 4,700,000.

(Source: Bocco 2010; www.unrwa.org)

## Findings

### Education Resilience Component 1: Creating a collective understanding of education in adversity

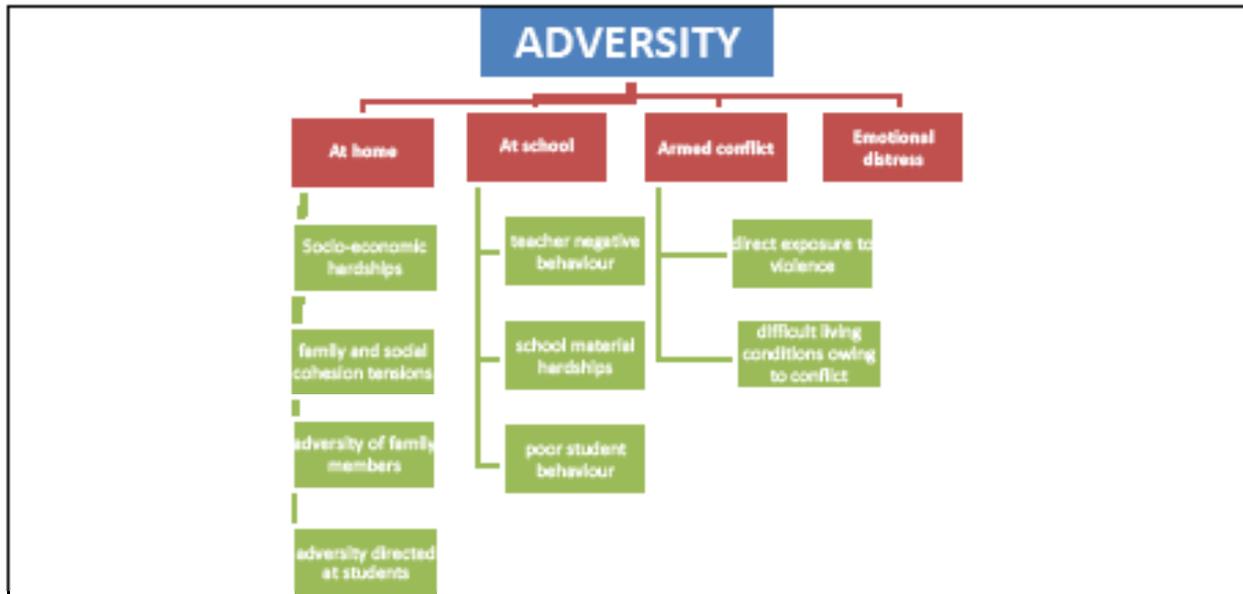
#### Proximal adversity matters

A wealth of data on the adversities faced by Palestine refugee students was collected. Of note, while the students recognized the range of adversities they live under, it was those proximal sources of adversity in their lives that mattered most to them when it came to learning. In other words, while the external context of armed conflict, violence or being a refugee was well understood by the young people, its negative impact was felt in more tangible terms at home and in school. For example, students spoke of their socioeconomic hardships at home—such as unem-

<sup>4</sup> There are thus four host authority curricula as implemented by the Ministries of Education in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza.

ployed parents, incarcerated family members, and limited access to basic resources. Adversity at school was also important as shown by the typology of adversity presented below which shows the varied ways in which the Palestinian students (Palestine refugees and public school students) perceived adversity to affect their lives and learning process.

**Figure 2: Typology of adversity for Palestinian students**



**Education provides collective meaning and purpose**

Conversely, armed conflict and refugee related adversities were usually referenced as sources of motivation for students’ studies. For example, when asked about whether being a refugee had a positive or negative impact on her, one female student from the West Bank replied: *It urges me to study harder since we are refugees who had to leave their land and have to work hard to improve our status and prove our identity.*

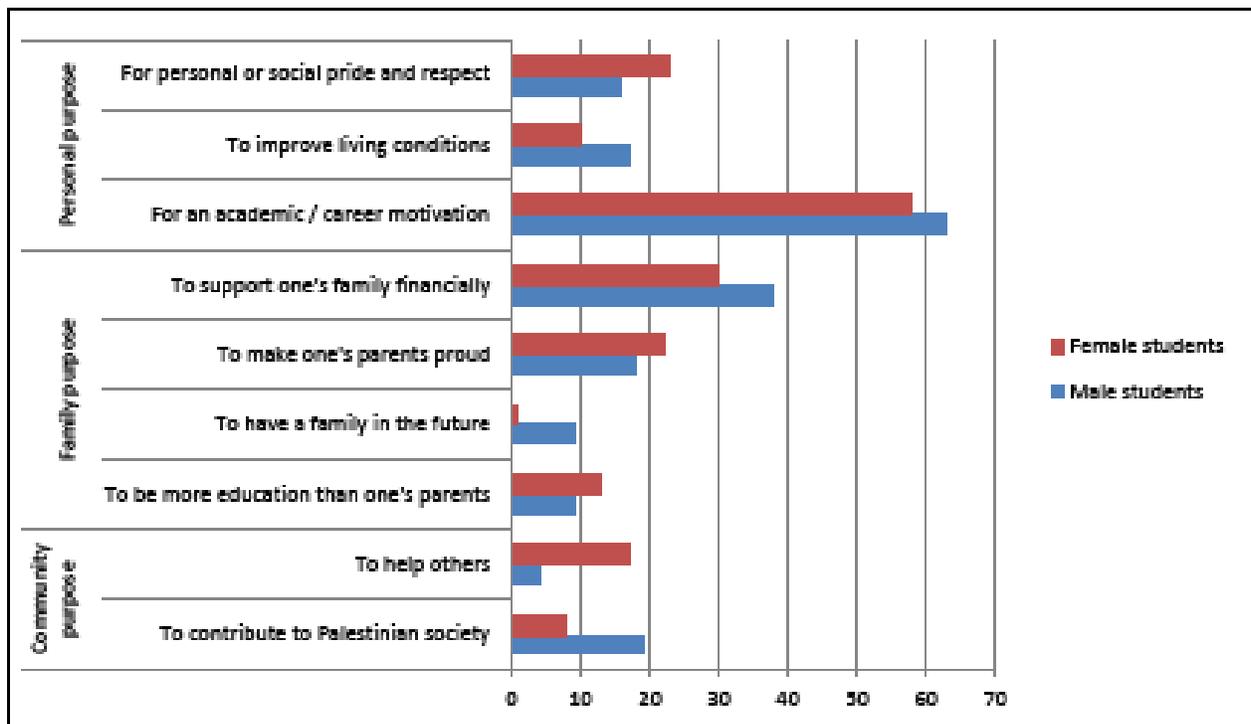
Learning and being successful at school motivates these students and provides them with a clear purpose, not only at the individual level but also in terms of the well-being of their families and wider community improvement objectives. They perceive education as being relevant to addressing their adversities and providing them with a clear path and structure for their future. Reflective of this, the meaning and purpose they assign to education is not simply perceived in terms of economic betterment but reflects wider social goals related to wanting to contribute to Palestinian society.

Figure 3 below provides a more disaggregated picture of what education means to Palestinian youth (refugees and public

*What motivates me is that I have a goal in my life, which is to become a doctor and work here and serve my country Gaza-Palestine. I want to become an important person in the society, and being a doctor means being an important person in our society.*  
Male student, Gaza

school students), expressed by the number of times a particular meaning was attributed to learning and doing well in school in spite of their difficult living conditions. Overall, academic and career motivations were most frequently noted in the interviews as mechanisms through which to define meaning and purpose. In addition, girls more commonly noted a general altruistic sense of purpose to help others, to make their parents proud, and to be respected in society, while boys were more often explicit about the role of education in supporting Palestinian society and ensuring financial and material stability and well-being.

**Figure 3: The meaning that resilient Palestinian youth attribute to education (disaggregated by gender)**



Moreover, the above meaning and purpose attributed to education was collectively developed and reinforced by their schools, at home and among peers who stressed the importance of learning in spite of the armed conflict. Education thus held a collective value of social and cultural importance among Palestinian youth.

## Education Resilience Component 2: Supporting a Positive Engagement and Assets in Education Communities

### Control, competence and accountability; Setting tangible education-related goals

Setting education-related goals and objectives not only facilitates the learning process but also appears to provide students with a sense of control and competence in even the most difficult of moments as it creates purpose, hope and supports their persistence of their motivation to study hard. Put otherwise, focusing on their learning provides at-risk youth with a sense of proactive control over certain elements of their situation. One female student in Gaza explained this in reference to her experience in the 2008-2009 war in Gaza: *I can't describe the fear that we lived in... I was the only one at home who was studying for final exams. My father used to ask me when he saw me studying why I wasn't afraid. We all used to sit in the same room during the days of the war, and my father didn't go to work so we followed his lead, but studying for my exams was the most important thing for me to do especially during the days of the war.*

In contrast to the uncertainty presented by living in a violent and conflict affected context, many of the youth consulted for this research spoke of how they set themselves clear goals and objectives related to education. Common themes were goals to hold well-educated professions: to be doctors, engineers or teachers. Indeed, in the most part goals did not represent misguided notions of what could be achieved. Instead they were realistic and feasible. As such the students were also well aware of the limitations they faced, as this male student in Jordan expressed:

*Student: When someone loses his mother, father or his country, he may leave school and go get a job, but someone else may study hard at school because he wants to make his family proud of him and continues studying although he is facing some difficulties in his life.*

*Interviewer: Will education solve these difficulties?*

*Student: No, but he goes to school so that he can achieve his dreams.*

*My motivation is to have a good future, and to know where my future lies, and to put a goal in front of me. And I've put education as a goal in front of me and I have to do it, so I have to learn and know all the subjects and pay attention to the teacher's explanation, and to have a better future.*  
Male Student, Gaza

### Engagement with others, wellbeing and identity; learning with socioemotional support

Students were knowledgeable and articulate regarding the question of what helped them learn academically in contexts of adversity: it required both quality pedagogy and socioemotional support. For example, referring to what makes a good teacher, one male student in Gaza said:

*She [my principal] is one of a kind. She says yes whatever you ask her for. She helps a lot whether you are sick or you have a problem at home. She also goes to give condolences along with teachers when a member of a student's family dies. That really affected students and encouraged the sense of belonging. They felt they have a value at their school and that makes them do better. There was a student who had lots of help from teachers and benefited a lot and did much better.*

**Female Student, Gaza**

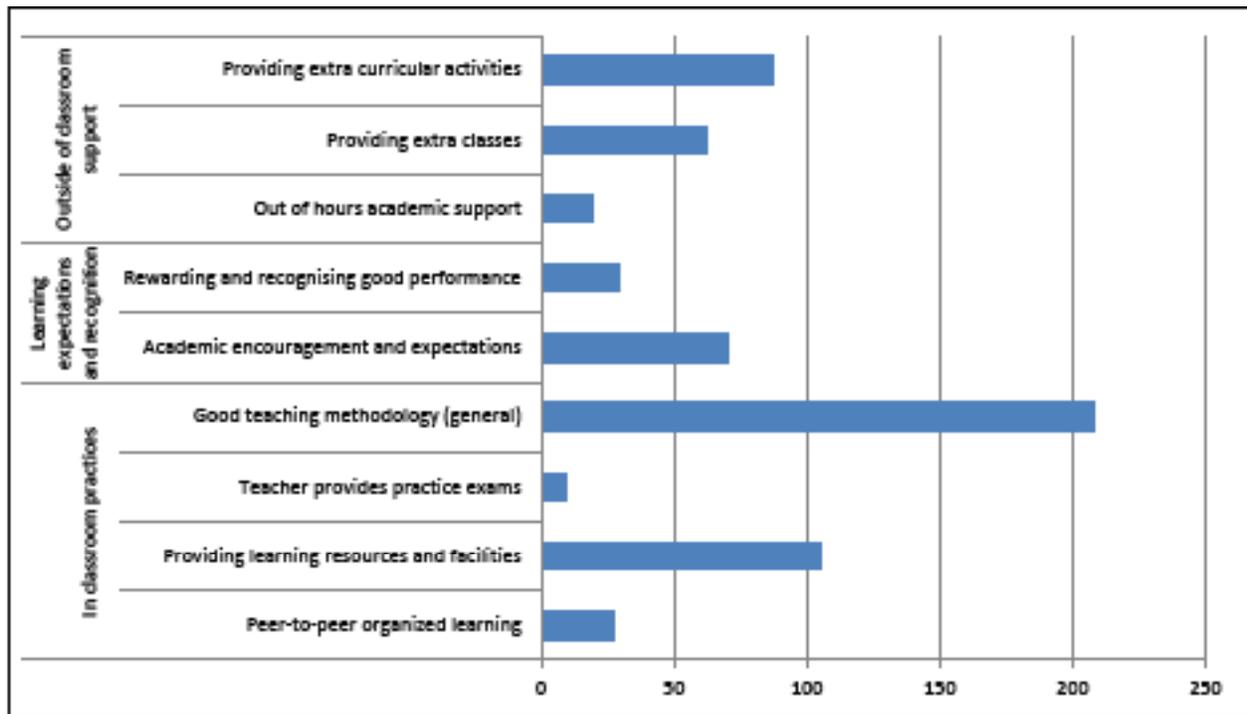
*That he can provide the information clearly and he doesn't differentiate between the students, and he should give us more than what is in the textbook to accommodate our ideas. He should give everything that is useful for the students, and help us to be creative and think, not only memorize and follow the textbooks word-for-word. A girl in Gaza also explained the additional important qualities of her teachers in supporting her socioemotional well-being. With reference to the impact of conflict in Gaza she explained: *Teachers were with us all the time. They even visited us at home. That gave me a great motivation. It really feels good when you see that someone cares when you are in an ordeal.**

Learning in difficult living contexts is about much more than having effective teaching methods. Empathy, respect and trust were common themes in the students' descriptions of effective teachers and head teachers, comprising important sources of implicit and explicit socio-emotional support. Students gave numerous examples of teachers providing them with personal guidance, acting as confidants and directly responding to the adversities they faced. Students respect the commitment demonstrated by their teachers, which also appears to play a key role in motivating students to study hard and identify a community purpose in education.

However, students were also good critics of what makes a quality pedagogical process. This included teachers being able to simplify or clarify topics for the class and ensuring that they did not depart from a lesson until everyone understood. For example, a male student in the West Bank explained why he likes learning English: *It's an easy subject to learn, our teacher simplifies it for us and makes us like it. I like his teaching method, he explains the lesson and makes sure we all understand, and if there was anyone who didn't understand something, he would explain everything to him.*

Students spoke of the effectiveness of their teachers not simply relying on course materials but also helping them through supplementary materials and practical experiments, periodic tests, having high expectations for all students and recognizing their efforts in the classroom, and equity promoting measures (out-of-hours support). Students were well aware of the role school staff should play in supporting their learning process and largely perceived their teachers and principals to be committed, competent and well-prepared. The different ways in which teachers provided academic support are presented in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Academic guidance provided by UNRWA teachers (as expressed by the number of times students referenced a certain form of support across 72 interviews)**



In practice, academic guidance and socioemotional support forms an integrated approach to teaching and learning in UNRWA schools. Consequently, students often referenced liking their teachers and feeling supported by the high expectations their teachers had for them, along with the recognition given to their efforts and the way they were respected and treated as equals in the classroom. Time and again students spoke of how these expectations and recognition motivated them to learn by providing them with a sense of purpose, inclusion and heightened responsibility to study hard and achieve good results in spite of adversity. In other words, it is precisely this dual function that teachers have assumed that not only ensures the relevance of education for students but also provides them with supportive opportunities to “navigate” the challenges that adversity may otherwise pose to their learning process.

### Education Resilience Component 3: Enabling Relevant School Level Support

#### School permanence through a welcoming and understanding environment

The data collected from UNRWA schools also points to the important role of school staff in providing a welcoming school climate by understanding the challenges students face. Student narratives provided many examples of how teachers, principals and counselors understand

the challenges they experience and how they help them in times of need. For instance, school staff were often noted to be very approachable and going above and beyond their professional duties to support students and ensure they are able to continue learning effectively in spite of the adversities they experience. This included a significant amount of out-of-hours support as described by this female student in Gaza: *We had a teacher in the sixth grade. She used to come to our home and teach me math every day. I was the smartest student in her class and always get the highest marks in math, and I'm still good at math thanks to her. Whenever I need help with any school subject even if it's not math, I go to her house.*

UNRWA teachers are themselves Palestine refugees and as such hail from the same at risk population. They are also part of the same physical communities as the youth and were educated by the UNRWA system. A major benefit of staff that share or have shared many of the same adversities as their students is that they have useful insights into their students' lives—specifically the types of adversities they face—and are as such presumably better able to support them through culturally appropriate and locally relevant approaches that allow them to find meaning and purpose. This was expressed by one girl in Gaza who noted: *The best thing about my teachers is that they treat us like any normal students, they treat us like citizens who live in their own country. They always talk to us and tell us about our rights.*

Figure 5 presents other themes students discussed regarding the support provided by UNRWA schools and staff that encourages them to study hard and do well in school. In addition to teaching and learning practices (previously discussed) and supportive relationships across the community (which will be discussed in the next section), school management, discipline and accountability were important themes.

**Figure 5: How UNRWA schools provide relevant support to Palestine refugee students (expressed by the number of times it was referenced by students across 72 interviews)**



## Learning is supported by many actors including teachers, students, peers and family members

In addition to the dual academic and socioemotional support role of teachers, the data collected points to important sources of support at the level of the household, family members and peers. This has created a mutually reinforcing network of support that reaches across the community and echoes much of what is well known about healthy child development processes. Parents, siblings and peers reinforce the learning process by providing students with additional opportunities to seek information, knowledge and clarity on a particular topic, ensuring the most viable learning environment possible.

Moreover, students spoke of how their schools deliberately connect to this wider community of support to facilitate students' learning processes. Parents appear to be closely connected to the school and students noted how they check in on them or are contacted by the school in case of problems. In a pattern that was present across a number of interviews, when one boy in Gaza was experiencing problems keeping up with his studies owing to his participation in the school parliament, his teachers informed his father who helped him to catch up at home: *While I was in the parliament, my father used to ask me about my study. He also used to come ask about me at school. Teachers used to tell him that I wasn't doing well which made him more aware of my studying while at home and I started to improve.* Another boy from the West Bank responded to the question of whether his parents were involved in his learning process by saying: *Yes they know about every grade I get at school. My father sometimes calls the teachers to ask about my grades and when I get home he would ask me and tell me not to lie because he knows exactly how much I get. My mother also comes to school every two weeks to ask about my grades. They do the same for all of us.* In other words, the high expectations and high value placed on learning is strongly reinforced in the home.

Another notable way the education system appears to be building on organically occurring sources of support was through the use of peer learning techniques in the classroom. They not only provide academic guidance but encourage students to develop important non-cognitive skills as well. This program appears to be popular in Gaza and quite a number of students vocalized their support for it:

*Interviewer: Are there academic support programs at the school? Have you participated in them?*

*Student: Of course, I participated in them as a teacher. I came to the school half an hour early and explained to the girls anything they were having trouble with.*

*Interviewer: What is your opinion of these support programs?*

*Student: They are excellent. Maybe the girls can't understand because of the large number of students in the class, so they benefit a lot from these support periods and they are useful.*

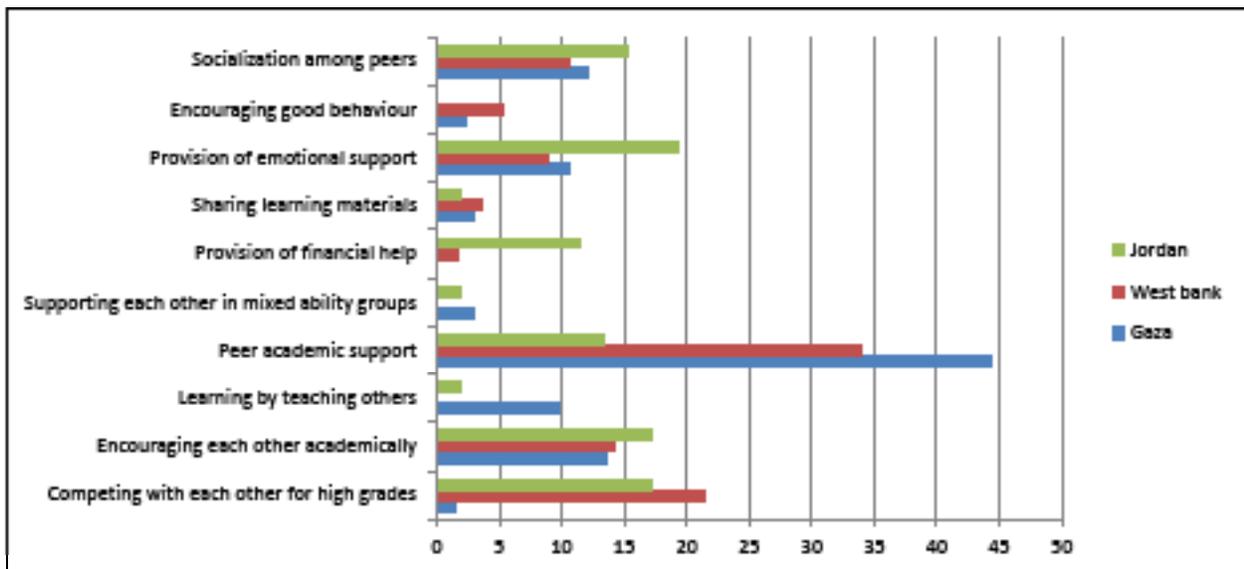
*Female student, Gaza*

*Interviewer: What do you think of the academic support programs that your school has been holding?*

*Student: They are so useful and beneficial to weaker students who can use high performers to help them understand hard materials or test them with some questions. That saves embarrassment from asking this of a teacher. You know that girls feel relaxed when dealing with each other... We gather with high achievers to read and study and ask about the things that are hard to understand and the high achievers help us in that. If we all don't understand something, we ask our teacher to help us. Sometimes we conduct workshops in the school breaks to discuss issues related to Arabic, Math or Science or we broadcast some programs on the useful ways of reading, studying and obtaining marks. We may print all that and distribute it among the students.*  
 Female student, Gaza

This is also captured in Figure 6 below which expresses the range of ways in which peer interactions supported the learning process for Palestine refugee students (expressed by the number of times it was referenced across 72 interviews and disaggregated for UNRWA's fields of operation).

**Figure 6: How peers support the learning process**

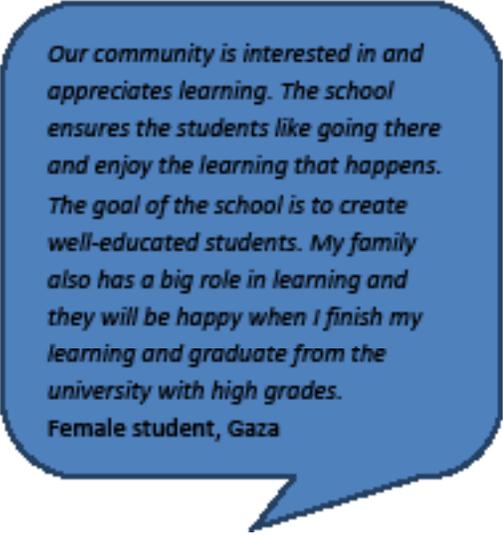


**UNRWA's close partnership with the refugee community has helped create a shared accountability for learning outcomes**

The participation of so many stakeholders in supporting the learning process appears to have created a strong matrix of accountability for learning outcomes that stretches across the classroom, school, household, community and even societal level. Just as students benefit from high expectations placed on them by teachers, principals and parents, so they also have high expectations and a clear vision of what their schools and teachers should offer and the benefits that their family and home environment can provide. Students are well aware that their hard work will be rewarded by the broader actors within their community and thus success at school presents viable options for improving their personal, familial and community conditions. In the

first instance this points to a high level of transparency across the refugee community as to the different roles that each actor has to play in order to ensure that the collective meaning and purpose of education is realized to its utmost potential.

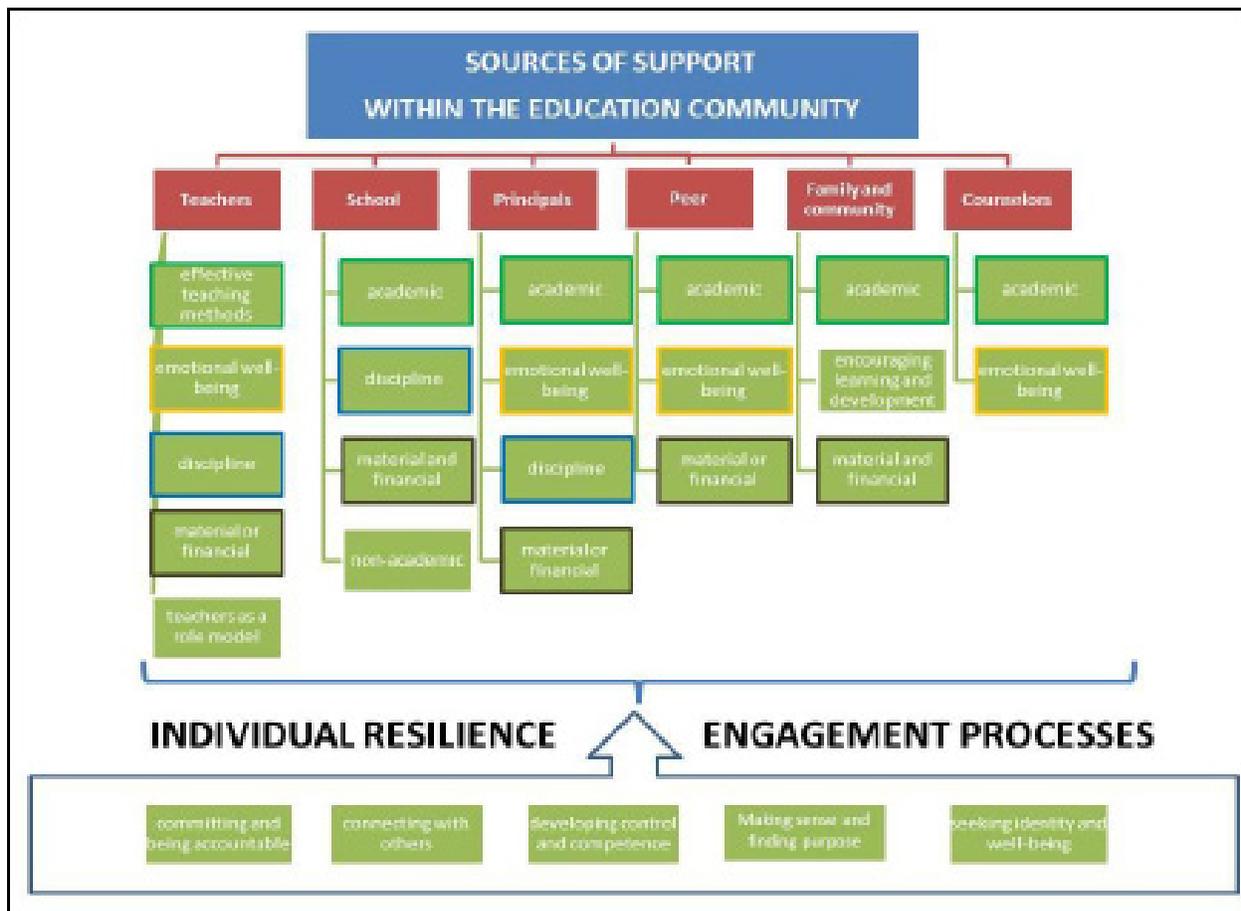
It also suggests however that each of these actors holds the other accountable for playing their part in securing quality learning outcomes. In this way, UNRWA presents itself as an example of shared or reciprocal accountability for education whereby actors in the system are accountable to each other, and monitor and support each other's actions. In general, as a community that is largely defined by the adversity it faces, Palestine refugees are thus committed to the project of educating their youth as a way of addressing, and even controlling, this adversity to the best of their abilities. For example, when asked about his parents checking on his school performance, one boy in the West Bank said: *Yes, my father always calls my teachers and the principal, and one of my teachers...knows my father and uncle very well, because he went to school with my father, so he always talks to my uncle about my performance at school, and my father sometimes calls him and visits him at school, that's how he checks on my performance at school.*



*Our community is interested in and appreciates learning. The school ensures the students like going there and enjoy the learning that happens. The goal of the school is to create well-educated students. My family also has a big role in learning and they will be happy when I finish my learning and graduate from the university with high grades.*  
Female student, Gaza

Figure 7, below, presents the different sources and types of support mentioned by the students interviewed for this study. This data reflects much of what is known about resilience theory: Students who exhibit resilience engage in a dynamic resilience process with other supportive actors whereby they are able to “navigate” the opportunities provided even in contexts of adversity. The data also reveals that UNRWA schools make beneficial opportunities readily available and that these are reinforced across the wider learning community both implicitly and explicitly by the UNRWA system. Thus, this case study concludes with some system level references.

Figure 7: Typology of support for Palestine refugee students



### Education Resilience Component 4: Aligning the Support from the Education System

In order to understand how the UNRWA education system may be fostering education resilience, secondary data is drawn upon that pertains to UNRWA’s system level structures and operations. In so doing several key factors were identified that align to some of the ERA’s policy goals: (i) collective understanding of education in an adverse context; (ii) support for the assets and positive engagement existing in the Palestine community; and (iii) alignment of system level support to allow schools to provide services relevant to each field context.

**UNRWA deliberately recognizes the adversities that its students face and actively seeks to address them**

Although it may seem obvious that recognizing the adversities that students face is a much needed first step in being able to provide support, this can not necessarily be assumed in

contexts of adversity where political tensions and sensitivities may be overriding. However, UNRWA's status as an Agency that was specifically set up to manage the adversity experienced by the refugees means that recognizing their adversity and addressing it actually defines its approach. In this way promoting equity of opportunity for refugees underpins the UNRWA system. The system in many ways appears to go still further than this as it explicitly recognizes the resilience of the refugees and the need to support them, as evidenced by this quotation from the current UNRWA Commissioner General:

*UNRWA's work, in spite of multiple challenges, was made easier by the exceptional resilience and resourcefulness of the Palestinians. Their accomplishments have become part of the folklore instilled in each succeeding generation of refugees. They reveal the depth of the refugee will—the universal will of refugees, if I may say so—to self-improvement, to shape their lives against overwhelming odds, and to contribute positively to the dynamic of development in their communities, in the societies hosting them, and the world at large.*

Filippo Grandi, UNRWA Commissioner General speaking at the 30th Anniversary Conference of the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, 7th December 2012.

### Since its inception UNRWA has made education a clear and unwavering priority for refugees

For over 60 years UNRWA has reiterated the importance of education to empower and promote the human development potential of its beneficiaries. UNRWA's prioritization of education is part and parcel of the high cultural premium placed on learning by the refugees: the Agency has helped to prioritize learning as a component of refugee identity and continues to reinforce this. Maya Rosenfeld, in her article, "From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back", discusses this issue in more depth and points to the positive impact of this on learning outcomes (2010, 291). She contends that:

*...the consolidation of UNRWA as an education-centered agency facilitated a transformation in the educational and occupational profiles of second and third generation refugees of both genders...UNRWA's pioneering efforts to universalize a basic education of nine years and to promote the attainment of secondary and professional education enabled young Palestinian refugees to achieve an "educational advantage" over their peers in the Arab host countries...<sup>5</sup>*

Available evidence suggests that this prioritization and innovation in education was the result of early gains that have since been capitalized on. For example, according to Sam Rose, UNRWA's

<sup>5</sup> Rosenfeld argues that while this "educational advantage" persisted until the 1980s, it has since not been reproduced in large part owing to the adverse conditions and development in the region including the inadequate funding for UNRWA. While the context within which UNRWA operates has indeed presented numerous challenges in recent decades, the data reviewed for this study indicates that the educational advantage does indeed persist across three fields of operation for which the adversities faced by other students are comparable to those of the refugee students on a number of levels. This does not negate the fact that there have been decreases in student performance over the last few years and that in the absence of such externalities learning performance could be higher still.

initiatives in education “were revolutionary in the Near East of the 1960s”, and “far ahead of the curve in the region” (2010, 233). Rosenfeld notes that this created an “educational advantage”, for refugees over their non-refugee peers in the Arab world, which persisted for many decades (2010, 290). Indicative of this, by 1964, at least 79 percent of Palestine refugee children of primary-school-age were enrolled in UNRWA, government and private schools, even though there were no compulsory requirements (Dickerson 1973).<sup>6</sup> Also by this time, girls comprised 45.7 percent of the total primary school population of UNRWA schools and 36.8 percent of the total secondary enrollment. The proportion of girls to boys had risen rapidly each year and the enrollment of girls at UNRWA schools was higher than for most of the national school systems in the Middle East (although full equity was not reached and this gap was progressively marked the higher the grade) (Dickerson 1973). UNRWA’s teacher training program was also responsible for early gains: improving both the number of qualified teachers from the refugee population, but inadvertently contributing to out-migration especially to the Gulf countries (Dickerson 1973). UNRWA’s prioritized support for education is also reflected in its budget allocation. Overall, education accounts for approximately half of the overall budget (which in 2012 totaled 655 million USD).<sup>7</sup>

### UNRWA focuses on ensuring local relevance and flexibility

UNRWA is explicit about the need for its education services to balance the specific needs of the population it serves, the variance in the contexts within which they live and the need for compatibility and competitiveness and the global education priorities of the international community. Indeed, UNRWA states that its vision for education is in accordance with the broader UN vision and it therefore situates its educational developments and priorities within the global frameworks of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) initiative.<sup>8</sup> According to the Agency’s Commissioner General: *The fundamental goal of UNRWA’s Education programme is to ensure that the children who come out of our schools know how to think in a critical, independent, intelligent manner; And to do this, we need to review the manner in which they learn.*<sup>9</sup>

Yet the Agency seeks to meet these internationally defined education challenges by implementing locally defined innovations and strategies. One important approach is through the high participation of the refugee community in running all aspects of the education program. UNRWA staff understand the context that their students live in and are able to deliver education in a way that speaks to those realities. Or as Bocco (2010, 245) notes: The practice of teachers is embedded in their local experience: they themselves are refugees and share the same experiences of

6 Dickerson qualifies this with comparison to enrollment rates of no more than 45 percent for boys and 20 percent for girls of elementary-school-age during the mandate period. However, figures showed that not all school-age refugee children were enrolled in school, and there was a gap between actual and ideal enrollment. This gap was difficult to calculate at the time due to patchy statistical data, and high migration rates.

7 UNRWA, *UNRWA programme budget for 2012- 2013*. Accessed 9 August 2012: [http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial\\_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf).

8 UNRWA, *UNRWA programme budget for 2012 – 2012*. Accessed 8 August 2012: [http://unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial\\_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf](http://unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf).

9 UNRWA, *UNRWA education: learning together*. Accessed 8 August 2012: <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2012080244052.pdf>.

most pupils' parents. This study has also revealed the extensive commitment of parents, families and community members to the education project.

In terms of educational innovations, while UNRWA field offices use their respective host country curriculums and thus apply the associated textbooks and other learning resources they also offer various additional programs. This includes programs on human rights (running since 2000) for which it has developed supplementary teachers' guides and student books, educational storybooks and some cross-community summer camps. The human rights program has also been extended to a TVET course offered by UNRWA and is integrated into teacher professional development courses. In Gaza a more advanced form of human rights teaching takes place and UNRWA students there study a dedicated curriculum receiving one lesson a week on human rights. In recent years several additional academic support projects have also been added in some UNRWA fields. Of note, remedial support programs have been introduced in the West Bank and Gaza as well as extra support for students with learning disabilities. Following poor test performance in Gaza—where especially high failure rates were noted in Mathematics and Arabic—a “Schools of Excellence” program was initiated in January 2008. Among its components were efforts to reduce class sizes, hiring of extra teachers and running remedial summer courses. Similar measures followed for the West Bank field in 2009.

### **Relevant school level support is reflected in a constant commitment to foster well-prepared and supported teachers**

The data presented in this study demonstrates that UNRWA's refugee students feel a greater sense of responsibility to their learning outcomes, and a heightened sense of education success possibility as a result of having well-trained and effective teachers. The quality of UNRWA's teaching force (numbering 22,000 teachers) is a story of a gradual yet constant commitment to improvement. In 1964, it was estimated that approximately 90 percent of UNRWA teachers were not fully qualified to practice teaching, and the great majority had only completed secondary education. In particular, UNRWA schools noted a shortage of qualified science and math teachers, as well as inadequate provision of simple laboratory equipment (Rose 2010). What was originally a two year pre-service program in the 1950s was upgraded in 1993 to a four-year university level teacher education program (which leads to a first university degree) offered by the three UNRWA Faculties of Educational Sciences and Arts (FESA) in Amman (Jordan) and two Educational Science Faculties in Ramallah (the West Bank). In 1997 a two-year pre-service teacher-training diploma, focusing on grades 1-3 was introduced in Lebanon and caters for around 100 future teachers a year. UNRWA's Institute of Education in Amman has also developed an in-service training model which is implemented by the Education Development Centers in the fields, while the FESA in Jordan also offers an in-service three-year teacher education program to help teaching staff upgrade their qualifications from the previous two-year diploma to a first university degree in order to meet new standards set by the Government of Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Aspiring teachers can also undertake online distance-learning courses in Elementary Education and the Higher Diploma in Education which are offered through a recently established branch of the Arab Open University. Stated goals of the in-service training are focused on supporting teachers to adapt to curriculum changes, improve their teaching

methods and develop their educational and supervisory skills.<sup>10</sup> Finally, teacher remuneration attempts to maintain parity with host authorities' public sector salaries (which notably results in some economic volatility).

## Policy options/recommendations

UNRWA was chosen as a pilot for the ERA program because of the important lessons that it could present for other school systems operating in adversity. Its success in achieving positive learning outcomes in spite of adversity has been evidenced by quantitative research on international assessments and, as presented in this report, the voices of students who have presented evidence regarding what helps them in terms of endogenous and exogenous factors related to their schools and how their schools have proved adaptive and responsive to their needs. From this, some policy level recommendations are extrapolated that may further strengthen the enabling environment for education resilience both within UNRWA as well as within systems operating within similar contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> See UNRWA website page on teacher training, accessed 14th August 2012. <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=734>

**Table 2: Palestine Refugees Education Resilience Lessons Learned****Education system level**

- Education system policies, programs and schools services should reflect a collective understanding of the adversity students face
- Early emergency education response and its gains made should be consolidated and integrated through longer term plans and policies
- Systems should strive to meet the needs of their students and ensure relevance including through adaptive, flexible and innovative responses

**Teachers and human resources**

- Students are keenly aware of what makes a good teacher and feel a heightened sense of responsibility to their learning outcomes when teachers invest in them and share in their educational goals (collective and personal)
- Teachers and principals should understand the context within which their students live and strive to make the education services they deliver meaningful and relevant to their realities
- Teachers are the primary source of support to foster learning in spite of adversity and need relevant training, motivation and expectations to assume this role: this may require adaptive and flexible approaches to teacher training and support

**School level**

- At-risk students learn better through a combination of academic and socioemotional strategies, which benefit from active-learning, peer support and community relations
- A positive school climate helps create a more protective environment for at-risk students that could contribute to positive education outcomes
- Schools can support school success, safety and well-being through their core access, teaching-learning, school management and community relations functions

**Community level**

- A school-community partnership is a relevant approach to support the combined learning, socioemotional and safety needs of students
- Sustainability of school-parent-community alliances can be supported by education systems through its policies, structures and resources

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### Online links

UNRWA emergency appeal

<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1413>

UNRWA programme budget for 2012- 2013

[http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial\\_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/financial_updates/2011/Blue%20Book%202012-2013.pdf)

UNRWA education: learning together

<http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2012080244052.pdf>

UNRWA web page on teacher training

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UNRWA Article: One Laptop Per Child and UNRWA Partner to Provide Laptops for Palestinian Children. <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=662>

UNRWA School services web page

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UNRWA emergency appeal, 2010

<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1413>)

UNRWA Education Reform Strategy

<http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2012042913344.pdf>



## RESILIENCE POLICY GOALS

1. **Manage and Minimize Adversity in Education**
  - Identification of adversities faced by students
  - Identification of current responses to risks in schools
2. **Use and Protect Positive Engagement and Assets in Education Communities**
  - Resilience through control, competence and being accountable
  - Resilience through socioemotional well-being, engagement with others and identity formation
3. **Foster Relevant School & Community Support**
  - Relevant approaches to access and permanence
  - Relevant approaches to learning and teaching
  - Relevant approaches to school management, school climate and community relations
4. **Align Education System Services to the Resilience Assets**
  - Meaningful and relevant strategic direction for education in contexts of adversity
  - Innovative education programs for learning, socioemotional well-being and protection
  - Available and equitable human, material and financial resources

