Iraq is a country of about 31.7 million inhabitants. Although it is an oil producing country, it is considered in the low middle income group with a gross national income per capita of US$ 2,380. According to the new constitution approved by referendum in 2005, powers over the education system are shared between the central government in Bagdad and the established regions. Until now, the sole region established is the Kurdistan Region that is of particular interest to Syrian refugees’ education. This region has its own Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education.

According to UNHCR, as of December 2, 2013, there were 206,137 registered Syrian refugees to Iraq residing at 95% in the Kurdistan Region and mainly concentrated in the three governorates of the Region as follows: 50.4% in Duhok, 36.2% in Erbil, and 10.4% in Slemani (Sulaymaniyah), in addition to 2.4% residing in Anbar governorate that doesn’t belong to Kurdistan Region, and 0.6% dispersed in other governorates across Iraq.

About 40% of Syrian refugees live in 9 camps, 7 of them having a population between 2,000 and 6,000 persons, one of them having a population of around 13,000, and the biggest one (Domiz) having an estimated population of about 45,000 persons (while the number of registered persons in this camp is about 87,000). The refugees originate mainly from three Syrian governorates, with 60.9% originating from Al-Hasakeh governorate. It is believed that these refugees are mainly of the Kurdish ethnic group, although formal learning of Kurdish language was not allowed in Syria’s schools.

Since Syrian refugee children have not previous mastery of Kurdish language, those outside the camps have to enroll in the schools established in the Kurdistan Region for the internally displaced persons from Iraq using Arabic as language of instruction. At the onset of the crisis,
permissions to Syrian refugee children to register in these schools were not issued on a steady basis. However, in 2013, the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Region has waived the school placement policy and allowed children without documentation to take equivalency tests in order to be placed in the schools. It has also issued instructions to all schools to register Syrian refugee children at any time during the academic year.

**D. SOCIAL CLIMATE AND ATTITUDES**

Available information points out to the solidarity that has been shown by the Kurdistan Region inhabitants towards the refugees arriving from Syria. However, as noted by a field observer, in one boys’ school, ethnic diversity of the students was cited as a cause of conflict, while at the girls’ school, headmistress identified this diversity as a means that brought girls together and created bonds. Girls bonded over the fact that they were all displaced and all spoke Arabic.

**E. POPULATION OF PRIMARY CONCERN FOR EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS**

According to UNHCR, Syrian refugee children of the age group 5-11, corresponding roughly to kindergarten and primary education level, account for 12.1% of the total population of Syrian refugees in Iraq, that is 24,943 children, while persons of the age group 12-17, corresponding to intermediate and secondary education levels, account for 9.4% of the total population of these refugees, that is 19,377 adolescents, for a total of 44,320 school age children, with slightly lower number of girls in the 12-17 age group and a distribution of around 18,000 children residing in the camps and 26,000 children residing outside the camps. It should be noted that the percentages of school age children (total of 21.5%) contrast with those concerning the other Syrian refugees host countries where these percentages are slightly higher (total of around 33%).

**F. EDUCATION STATUS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES**

1. Educational Opportunities

As of October 2013, 12,000 Syrian refugee children were enrolled and attending school, mainly in the schools established in the refugee camps, representing an overall enrollment rate of about 27%. In fact, as noted by various reports, education prospects for Syrian refugee children and youth residing in non-camp settings have been limited in the Kurdistan Region due to a number of reasons the most salient of which being the limited number of schools using Arabic as a language of instruction and the limited absorption capacity of these schools for new pupils at the basic education level as well as at the secondary school level. For example, in Erbil area, less than 800 Syrian refugee pupils at basic education level and 239 at secondary school level were enrolled in these schools, accounting respectively for only 8% and 5% of the total pupils’ population of these schools. In addition, distance to such schools from the areas where the Syrian refugees are settled that can easily exceed 30 or 40 minutes’ drive, and financial constraints, including transport costs in view of the absence of public transportation system, the cost of learning materials, uniforms, daily pocket money, and school-time snacks, discourage a great number of Syrian families to send their children to the schools. To which one should add the uncertainty about continued stay in the Kurdistan Region or return to Syria.
In addition to formal education provided to Syrian refugee children in Iraq, 7,658 children have been supported to enroll, 6,890 children have received psycho-social support, and adolescents in camp and urban locations/host communities were given access to technical and vocational training, life-skills, and entrepreneurship training, in addition to 1,700 persons who enrolled in literacy classes.

2. Implementation arrangements

As mentioned above, education of Syrian refugee children in Iraq has mainly relied on two kinds of arrangements, i.e. providing school spaces in the camps, and allowing out of camps refugee children to enroll in the schools set for the Arabic speaking IDPs. However, as revealed by various needs assessment, the absorption capacity of existing school buildings has appeared to be insufficient to accommodate the expected number of out the camps Syrian refugee children. Thus, as of October 2013, 18 schools were under construction, 14 under renovation, and 63 temporary learning spaces/classrooms were installed to cater for the education of Syrian refugee children, both within refugee camps and outside the camps.

3. Quality of Education

In Syria, the Syrian Kurds were not entitled to study their Kurdish language (Kurmanji accent). They spoke Kurdish at home. Hence, they are capable only to successfully study in schools where Arabic is the language of instruction. Therefore, they are studying in Iraq, in Arabic language, the same curricula adopted for the IDPs. Thus, apart from the differences between the Syrian and Iraqi accent and some terms, pupils should not encounter major learning difficulties due to the change in the curricula.

The major threat for the quality of education in out of camp schools concerns the overcrowding of the classrooms whereas, in Erbil, at the basic education level pupils per classroom ranged from 38 to 65 and at the secondary school level they ranged from 35 to 45, while availability of teachers at the basic education level should not pose a major problem. In fact, according to the available information on Erbil schools, pupils/teacher ratio stands at 16/1 meaning that, while classrooms are overcrowded, teachers have reduced work load and could be used for extra teaching hours provided that learning spaces/classrooms are made available. At the secondary school level, in order to attain minimum standards of quality more classrooms should be provided and more teachers should be hired, since pupils/teacher ratio at this level is definitely high standing at around 37/1, at least in the surveyed Erbil schools. In the new schools built in the camps, Syrian teachers have been hired. Before starting their service, they participate in a quick training on the Kurdish Arabic curricula and on dealing with students affected by a conflict to be also able to provide psychological support. Within this framework, 127 teachers have been trained.

4. The threat of a “lost generation”

Despite the fact that Syrian refugee children in Iraq do not constitute more than 6% of the total Syrian refugee children in the five host countries, the very low overall enrollment rate of these children in schools (27%) bear the threat of a “lost generation” lacking the basic competencies and skills for a productive and worthy life. This is particularly the case for those who live outside the camps and who have little chances to enroll in any school at any level, if things remain as they presently are.