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*This policy brief provides a summary of the preliminary education impacts generated by the No Lost Generation (NLG)/Min Ila cash transfer program during the first few months of implementation. The Min Ila cash transfer substantively increased* ***attendance*** *rates for children in second shift schools in the pilot governorates of Akkar and Moutn Lebanon – the schools within which the program operates. While there is suggestive evidence that Min Ila increased* ***enrolment in*** *second shift schools, in line with administrative enrolment data which suggests higher enrolment in pilot areas, we are currently unable to definitively attribute this increase to the program due to the fact that impacts on school enrolment appear to be dampened by limited capacity of the second shift schools to register all of the children who wanted to enrol, hence also limiting the number of children who could register for the cash transfer. The administrative enrolment data shows that while enrolment increased 41% in 2016/2017 in non-pilot governorates, enrolment increased 51% in pilot governorates, even given the supply capacity constraints. In short, more children go to second shift school overall and of these children, children from pilot areas spend significantly more time in the classroom. These findings are preliminary. More analysis and administrative data are needed to gain a deeper understanding of the program’s effects.*

## Context

Lebanon has one of the highest per-capita ratios of registered refugees in the world (LCRP 2015-2016).[[1]](#footnote-2) Out of a population of 5.9 million, 1.5 million are displaced Syrians. Most Syrians arrived with limited savings and have struggled to earn steady incomes to meet their families’ basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and shelter. These basic needs tend to require immediate attention, which means that Syrian families often forgo education and its long-term benefits in favor of short-term needs. Consequently, more than 2.6 million children are out of school not only in Lebanon, but also in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (UNHCR 2016).[[2]](#footnote-3)

This sudden influx of Syrian refugees has created an education crisis in Lebanon that affects Syrian and vulnerable Lebanese children. The Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) project in the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has partnered with international donors, the United Nations and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to implement education interventions to address this crisis. These efforts include introducing an afternoon shift in public Lebanese primary schools for displaced Syrian children—the so-called “second shift”. As a result of these efforts, almost 158,000 children were enrolled in formal education for the 2015–16 school year. The 2015 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (known by the acronym VASyR) – a nationally representative assessment carried out by the UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Food Program (WFP) – found that Syrian children are more likely to be out of school as their age increases, with a particular increase in dropout rates starting around 10 years of age.

## No Lost Generation/Min Ila

In the 2016–17 school year, UNICEF Lebanon started Min Ila in partnership with WFP and in cooperation with MEHE, a cash transfer program for displaced Syrian children in the governorates of Mt. Lebanon and Akkar designed to address the income-related barrier to school attendance alongside existing interventions addressing non-income constraints (e.g. Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) for children out of school for more than 2 years). Syrian children aged five to nine years old who live in the Mt. Lebanon and Akkar governorates and are enrolled in a second-shift school receive a basic monthly education transfer of US$20, to cover a portion of the indirect costs to going to school such as school snacks, transportation, and appropriate clothing and shoes. Syrian children aged 10 years of age and older who are enrolled in a second-shift school receive a larger monthly education transfer of US$65, to also factor in the higher monthly earnings of a working child in this age group. The education transfer lasts for the duration of the school year, and payments are made every month on an ATM card (the so-called “Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organizational System for E-cards” or LOUISE). While no conditions must be met in order to receive the cash, school attendance is monitored and follow-up (via household visits) are scheduled if children do not attend school regularly. The purpose of these visits is to 1) record reasons for drop-out, and 2) to refer households to existing complementary services, to help children back into school.

## The Evaluation

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti lead the independent impact evaluation of Min Ila. The purpose of the study is to measure the immediate effects of the program on displaced Syrian children’s school participation. The study compares beneficiaries in the pilot governorates of Mt. Lebanon and Akkar with households that would otherwise be eligible for the program, but live in the neighboring non-program governorates of North Lebanon and South Lebanon. The appendix to this brief describes the evaluation design in more detail.

The evaluation follows the same 1,456 displaced Syrian households with children aged 5 to 14 over time, with baseline data collected in September and October 2016 and rapid follow-up data collected in February and March 2017. By focusing on households in the vicinity of second shift schools, the evaluation attempts to isolate the effect of the Min Ila program on children who can access a school. The rapid follow-up data allow for an immediate assessment of program impacts on schooling outcomes. The evaluation will investigate impacts on broader aspects of child wellbeing – including child labor – relying on a final wave of follow-up data scheduled to be collected at the end of the 2016-17 school year.

## Impacts on Enrolment

There is suggestive evidence that the program modestly increased second shift school enrolment. However, school capacity constraints may have dampened this effect. It appears that over half of the second shift schools in the study had reached full capacity during the registration phase, preventing children from enrolling. After the program started, nearly 40 percent of the children in the pilot areas enrolled in a second shift school with another 10 percent expected to enrol but seemingly unable due to capacity limits at their nearest second shift school. New 2nd shifts were opened in response to the increased demand in other parts of the pilot governorates; however, this change was not captured by the study because the sample was selected from existing 2nd shift schools. We therefore currently cannot report with sufficient confidence on the modest remaining increase in school enrolment.

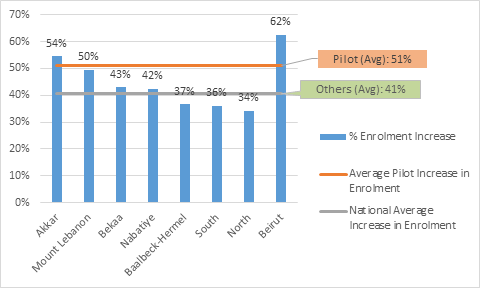
Aggregate MEHE figures suggest that formal school enrolment rates of displaced Syrian children increased rapidly across the country from the past (2015-2016) to the current school year. This study also found that schooling rates increased in both treatment and comparison areas from nearly 60 percent at baseline to nearly 80 percent at follow-up. School enrolment increases were particularly pronounced for children aged 5 to 9, whose self-reported school enrolment increased from slightly over 60 percent to nearly 90 percent.

## Impacts on Attendance

The program increased school attendance for children who were enrolled in a second shift school by 0.63 days per week on average. In other terms, children enrolled in a second shift school spent roughly 20 percent more time in school compared to similar children in comparison areas. As a result of the program, children 5 to 9 years old attended second shift school 0.7 more days per week and children 10 to 15 years old attended second shift school 0.5 more days per a week compared to similar children in comparison areas. Children receiving the Min Ila program benefits attend school on average 4.1 days per week, which means that they are in school over 80 percent of the time possible.

## Reflections on Study and Program Implementation

This study was designed to capture program effects among children living in the vicinity of an active second shift school. The rationale was that these children could readily enrol in a second shift school in response to the program, allowing the impact evaluation to capture the impact of increasing the demand for education through a cash transfer program. However, over half of all second shift schools in the pilot areas of the study reached full capacity while registering children and had to turn away children who wanted to enroll. While MEHE was prepared to open new 2nd shifts in existing schools to accommodate the increase, as in previous years, in some areas there were no additional schools in which to open new 2nd shifts. This situation may have created a ceiling effect for the study because it is impossible for the program to increase enrolment above the capacity of the second shift schools. In other words, the program cannot demonstrate its full potential to generate enrolment effects due to the limit on spaces to enrol children in second shift schools. Due to the sample being selected from areas with existing schools, enrolment in newly opened 2nd shifts not located near the sampled schools could not be captured. In this scenario, limited impacts on school enrolment do not necessarily reflect a limited impact on schooling outcomes. On the contrary, assuming that addressing the second shift school capacity constraints would increase school enrolment by an additional 10 percent, the potential for the program to increase both attendance and enrolment is substantive.



## Appendix: Study Design and Technical Explanation of Results

The study uses a geographic regression discontinuity design (RDD) to identify the impact of the Min Ila program. RDDs can be used to identify program effects when programs are allocated based on an assignment variable. Well-known RDD examples include allocation of scholarships based on test scores and allocation of employment and health programs based on the age of the beneficiary. The intuition behind the RDD is that those who are just below the threshold to receive the program (e.g. those whose test score is just too low to get the scholarship or those who are just too young to get the health program) are very similar in all respects to those who are just above the threshold and therefore serve as a valid comparison group. RDDs rely on relatively “mild assumptions” to identify credible program impacts.[[3]](#footnote-4)

In our setting, households that are located near the border separating pilot and non-pilot (comparison) governorates are compared to each other. In essence, distance to the pilot governorate border can be interpreted as the assignment variable. Those children who live just outside the pilot governorate border are likely to be similar (on average) to those who live just inside the pilot border and can potentially serve as a credible comparison group.[[4]](#footnote-5) While a full description of the estimation strategy is beyond the scope and purpose of this brief, the strategy can be illustrated in three figures. A more extensive baseline report established that households living in comparison governorates are an appropriate comparison group. Hence, differences between the pilot and comparison groups after the pilot commenced can be attributed to the Min Ila program rather than to other differences between the two groups.

**Figure 1** shows the spatial distribution of the households in the study, differentiating them by pilot (small dots) and comparison (small triangles) status. The figure also shows the catchment areas (2.5km radius) around all of the second shift schools near the households (large circles), confirming that study households mostly live in the vicinity of active second shift schools. The households and schools broadly cluster around the borders separating the pilot governorates of Akkar and Mt. Lebanon from the comparison governorates of North Lebanon, South Lebanon, and El Nabatieh. The data collected for households in the pilot governorates can be pooled and compared to the data collected for the comparison governorates, as shown in the following graphs.

**Figure 2** shows that the program was rolled-out as planned with only households in pilot areas receiving the transfer. The horizontal axis represents households’ GPS distance to the border separating pilot and comparison governorates (the border itself is highlighted with a vertical red line). The dots to the left of the border represent clusters of households in the control areas and dots to the right represent clusters of households in the pilot areas. The higher up the cluster of households is located on the graph, the greater the fraction of households receiving the program. The households in the control areas (left of the border line) are located at the bottom of the graph indicating that they did not receive the program. The households to the right of the border line sit half way up the graph, indicating that many but not all of them received the program. In part, households did not receive the program because they sent their children to other school types in which children do not receive Min Ila (primarily first shift schools). However, we suggest that capacity constraints also played a role in incomplete program take-up.

**Figure 3** shows the impact of program on attendance in the week prior to the follow-up interview.  The vertical axis represents the number of days attending school in the last week. Dots represent local averages for groups of households and the fitted lines approximate average changes in school attendance as we move away from the border. There is a visible jump in days of school attendance at the border and the difference between the treatment and control areas increases with distance from the border. The jump at the border represents the effect of the program, discussed above.

**Figure 1: Map of Study Households and Second Shift Schools**

**Figure 2: Program Enrolment by Distance to the Border**

**Note.** The horizontal axis represents distance (in km) to the border separating the pilot governorates (Akkar and Mt. Lebanon) from the comparison governorates (North, South, and El Nabatieh). The vertical red line represents the border itself. The vertical axis represents the proportion of households participating in the Min Ila program, measured based on administrative data. Dots represent local averages for clusters of households. Linear OLS regression lines were fitted to the left and the right of the border. Grey areas represent the 95% confidence interval around the regression line.

**Figure 3: Impact of Min Ila on Second Shift Attendance**



**Note.** The horizontal axis represents distance (in km) to the border separating the pilot governorates (Akkar and Mt. Lebanon) from the comparison governorates (North Lebanon, South Lebanon, and El Nabatieh). The vertical red line represents the border itself. The vertical axis measures the number of days of school attendance in the week prior to the rapid follow-up interview by children attending second shift schools. Dots represent local averages for clusters of households. Linear OLS regression lines were fitted to the left and the right of the border. Grey areas represent the 95% confidence interval around the regression line.

1. Government of Lebanon and the United Nations (2014). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Missing Out: Refugee Education in Crisis. (2016). UNHCR. Available:   
   <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/missing-out-refugee-education-in-crisis_unhcr_2016-en.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Lee, D. and T. Lemieux. (2010). “Regression Discontinuity Designs in Economics”, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 48(2), 281-355. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Importantly, this “geographical RDD” identifies the effect of the program on those households and children living close to the border (the so-called “local treatment effect”), which may or may not be identical to the effect of the program on the full sample in the pilot governorate. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)