

Summary of BLN Program Assessment (2021-2024)

Prepared for Association Ushagram Suisse

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The **Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) program**, implemented by the **Sawa for Development Association (Sawa)** and supported by **UNICEF** and the **Lebanese Ministry of Education**, has provided basic education to **Syrian refugee children aged 8-14** in **Mansoura, Qabb Elias, and Khiara**. The program was designed to **reduce illiteracy and facilitate student integration into the Lebanese public school system**.

Between 2021 and 2023, the program evolved in response to changing conditions, transitioning from remote learning during COVID-19 to a fully in-person model with expanded geographic reach and strengthened coordination with schools. However, economic pressures, security risks, and policy shifts affected student retention and school placements.

In 2024, the program adapted further in response to Lebanon's worsening crisis and the evolving situation in Syria, incorporating new psychosocial interventions, retention programs, and preparations for refugee reintegration into Syria.

Following the conclusion of funding from Ushagram Suisse, Sawa continued its work in a more limited capacity, focusing on supporting BLN graduates, assisting displaced Lebanese populations, and exploring educational pathways for students—whether in Lebanon or Syria.

Part 1: 2021-2023 Program Assessment

2021: Remote Learning During COVID-19

Due to pandemic restrictions, Sawa launched the BLN program using WhatsApp-based remote learning, serving 225 students. Teachers provided audio and video lessons, but major challenges emerged:

- Delayed textbooks and limited access to printed materials.
- Unreliable internet and electricity, affecting participation.
- Cultural barriers, including early marriages and limited female attendance.

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Remote learning via WhatsApp was not sustainable long-term.
- Live teaching and structured assessments were necessary.
- Educational materials should be stored for continuous student access.

2022: Transition to In-Person Learning

With COVID-19 restrictions easing, Sawa shifted to tent-based, in-person learning for 100 students, improving retention and engagement.

Key Developments

- Enrollment process streamlined with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education.
- Municipal concerns emerged about NGOs not coordinating transparently.
- Security and economic conditions continued to affect student attendance.

Expansion Plans

Sawa explored new program components:

- Preschool education for younger children.
- After-school support to prevent dropouts.
- Vocational training for older students (tailoring, IT, agriculture, mechanical repair).

2023: Expansion and Challenges

The BLN program expanded to 200 students, adding Khiara as a new location. Classes were fully in-person, taught by 8 trained teachers.

Key Improvements

- Increased coordination with public and private schools to improve student placements.
- Technology integrated for tracking student progress and parent communication.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite progress, significant obstacles remained:

- Security risks and restricted camp access.
- Economic hardship, leading to child labor and school dropouts.
- Limited public school capacity, requiring private school enrollments.

Potential Enhancements

To address these issues, Sawa considered:

- Digital content storage to support students who miss class.
- Hybrid learning models combining in-person and online education.

- Community learning centers for long-term stability.

Part 2: 2024 Updates and Developments

1. Expanded Coordination and Leadership in the Bekaa Region

In 2024, Sawa became the co-chair of the BLN sub-group in the Bekaa area, working alongside UNICEF and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to coordinate BLN programs across the region.

- Monthly meetings with all NGOs implementing BLN programs in the Bekaa are now led by Sawa.
- Minutes are shared with stakeholders, and updates from MEHE (Ministry of Education and Higher Education) and UNICEF are disseminated.
- This expanded governance role allows for better coordination, avoiding duplication of efforts and streamlining educational interventions.

2. Rising Barriers to Education Due to Lebanon's Crisis

The economic collapse and ongoing Gaza conflict have worsened conditions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

- 50% of families have stopped their children's education due to financial hardship.
- 70% of households lack sufficient food, forcing many children into child labor (which increased to 7.3% in 2023).
- Early marriage remains high at 23% among adolescent girls, affecting their school attendance.
- 689,000+ people have been displaced internally since October 2023, further limiting access to schooling.

3. 2024 Impact: Enrollments, Performance, and Integration

- 100 students enrolled (65 girls, 35 boys).
- 321 BLN graduates transitioned to public schools.
- Retention support introduced for at-risk students in grades 6-9 to prevent dropouts.
- Four trained teachers delivered 80+ hours of classes per month.

4. New Retention Program for At-Risk Students

A new initiative targeting students in grades 6-9 aims to prevent dropouts by offering individualized learning support in key subjects:

- Mathematics, Arabic, Foreign Language, and Science.
- Remote learning sessions with 160 hours of tailored tutoring.
- Priority given to girls and students scoring below 8/20 in multiple subjects.

5. Crisis Response and Future Plans

With Lebanon's crisis deepening, Sawa has outlined key strategies for sustaining and expanding the BLN program:

- Advocacy for inclusive education policies: Collaborating with MEHE to secure more afternoon shifts for Syrian students.
- Securing additional funding for transportation and school materials.
- Increasing teacher training to handle the unique needs of displaced children.

6. The Future: Integration and the Return to Syria

- 258,000 individuals have returned to Syria, including Lebanese and Syrian families.
- Sawa is exploring ways to facilitate student transitions back into Syrian schools in coordination with NGOs inside Syria.
- Challenges include reintegration into the Syrian curriculum and ensuring students do not lose academic progress.

Conclusion

The BLN program has had a significant impact from 2021 to 2024, providing education to Syrian refugee children and helping them transition into formal schooling.

With Lebanon's political and economic instability, the future of refugee education is shifting. More emphasis is now being placed on preparing students for potential reintegration into Syria, aligning education efforts with emerging return policies.

While funding from Ushagram Suisse has ended, its contribution remains important in shaping the program's success. Moving forward, flexibility and collaboration will be essential in ensuring Syrian students continue to receive education—whether in Lebanon or Syria.