



BRIEFING PAPER

Manahel, which in Arabic means 'fountains' – of hope, of knowledge, and of life -, is the northwest component of the FCDO-funded Syria Education Programme (SEP). Delivered by Chemonics, Manahel provides education to primary school-aged children and, since 2018, has benefited over 580,000 children through school, home, and after-school education and by responding to children's psychosocial and protection needs.

This Briefing Paper describes how Manahel has developed and established sustainable and resilient approaches to education and how its risk management processes contribute to programme success. As implementation moves to the next phase of SEP II¹ later in 2023, the Paper identifies areas and options for support from other donors in addition to FCDO.

BUILDING HOPE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Manahel has established educational and safeguarding practices to more than 50% of primary schools in northwest Syria, improving learning outcomes and building the resilience of 583,602 children since inception. Of these children, Manahel has supported approximately 150,000 in the 2021-2022 academic year alone.

Manahel's support to the education system in northwest Syria has included direct support for schools, including paying education staff stipends for over 16,000 school staff, combined with capacity building of Education Directorates (EDs) to provide support, and coaching to schools. Manahel provides grades 1-4 teacher stipends to the formal education sector through a secure payment system. EDs are responsible for strategic planning and overseeing implementation, developing new policies, and managing resources. Beneath the Education Directorates are the eight Education Assemblies which oversee the day to day running of schools.

Each year, EDs sign a memorandum of understanding on a range of risk mitigation measures to prevent and push back on political interference.

IMPACT OF MANAHEL

Manahel has supported children with formal education and 16,293 school staff, at a cost of less than £2 per child, per month.

Math and literacy scores have improved significantly since 2018. Fifty percent of Manahel students entering grades 3 and 4 are now in the top two categories of proficient reader and progressing reader².

Despite ongoing conflict, Manahel has improved the resilience of 76% of supported children in 2021/2022.

Qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that Manahel's stipends to 16,293 school staff has kept schools open and increased learning outcomes.

In focusing both on keeping schools open, inclusive and safe, and on quality teaching and learning in the early grades (1 to 4), Manahel is ensuring children receive a foundation in learning that prepares them to be productive, economically active citizens who are more likely to stay in Syria and build the economy and less susceptible to persuasion by terrorist causes.

DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES TO LEARNING, SAFETY, AND INCLUSION

Assessment is established as a best practice tool in northwest Syria. Assessment helps teachers, learners, parents, and others to understand the depth and breadth of learning undertaken so next steps can be discussed and planned. Manahel was the first organization to assess children’s learning using Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Math Assessment (EMGA) during the Syrian crisis. Internationally recognized EGRA and EMGA increased knowledge amongst FDCO and development partners on what works to improve children’s learning in emergency settings. Manahel consistently demonstrated that it is possible to deliver international learning assessments in Syria, encouraging other NGOs to also use these tools.

Evidence is driving improvements in learning. Conducted each semester, assessments inform the remediation activities to improve literacy and numeracy. Over an eight-week period, children at Manahel summer camps receive tailored literacy, numeracy support, and psychosocial support sessions. Summer camps have been consistently successful because they prioritise time on task and target the most vulnerable children. Manahel introduced the practice of providing an average of twenty numeracy and literacy additional lessons per month with the objective of filling the gap experienced by children who had been displaced by ongoing conflict and displacement.

Performance against impact

49.2% of all sampled learners in G3 and G4 in 2021 are in the top two reading categories.
The Y5 benchmark was 44%.



Psychosocial support builds the capability of children to achieve their potential. The Syrian conflict has left psychological scars on students, leaving many of them in situations of depression, anxiety, stress, aggressiveness, and isolation to various degrees. For some of them, this is aggravated by the domestic violence they are subject to at home. To respond to students’ psychosocial and emotional needs, Manahel has offered all students psychosocial structured support (PSS) sessions as well as tailored individual support for those students who need it. Through interactive and enjoyable activities, group PSS sessions have contributed to the improvement of students’ wellbeing, built their self-confidence and sense of purpose, and provided them with a moral compass to guide their behavior and decisions. Ninety-one percent of Safeguarding Officers assessed demonstrated improved awareness of psychosocial impediment.

Inclusive education is a core tenet of sustainable development. Manahel has consistently used a gender and social inclusion (GESI) lens in designing and implementing interventions to increase access and equity in outcomes. Recognising that girls in grades 5-6 are particularly at risk due to the onset of adolescence, Manahel introduced after-school clubs to fill knowledge gaps and help the girls become more confident, thereby reducing the risk of dropout and failure to transition. Manahel’s outputs on girls’ education have all been

exceeded, with girls more regularly attending and parents and caregivers more willing to send their girls to school.

Manahel promotes special education strategies and practices and has raised teacher attitudes towards children with disabilities to 77% acceptance. Before the conflict, children with disabilities were either uneducated or segregated from mainstream education. Manahel conducts child functioning screening to identify those with special requirements. Manahel increased the number of special education centers from 17 to 34, these centers support 182 children (51% female) and support children with individualized education plans.

Manahel is creating an enabling environment that supports wider change across the education sector. Manahel works with independent actors, including local NGOs and EDs, to provide support for schools, pedagogical supervision for teachers, learning assessment, psychosocial support and safeguarding for children. Manahel supports the EDs in Idleb and Aleppo to develop approaches and policies that enhance sustainability and scale impact to the most marginalised children and increase learning outcomes. This support has promoted improved governance and accountability in the sector increasing the impact of Manahel interventions beyond directly supported schools.

Manahel's technical approach is designed around sustainability given the uncertainty of its operating environment. Manahel continues working with EDs to build EDs capacities and policies that convert successful practices in schools into protocols. Local procedures for reporting safeguarding allegations, inclusion practices in schools, literacy and numeracy formative and summative assessment and other key practices that have been fully integrated into schools in northwest Syria.

Manahel's support is building a more resilient education sector. Manahel develop learning materials such as literacy and numeracy booklets and teacher guides that align with GoS curriculum and are enforced by EDs to potentially benefit children beyond Manahel support. Manahel's technical approach allows EDs to continue to enforce successful practices using a policy framework and the supervision and coaching by instructors. This year, Manahel has members of its staff providing in-house coaching at the EDs with the goal that the EDs understand, own, and implement their own activities in future. Furthermore, Manahel is careful to ensure that the education structures it supports are in line with the GoS education system to maximize the extent to which Manahel investments can transfer over if the regime retakes the areas in which Manahel works. Manahel coordinates and work closely with NGOs and other local entities to ensure resources are competently utilized and access to education is maximized. With regular support and joint planning with Manahel, the Civil Defense (known as White Helmets) and Health Directorate provided schools with water supplies and awareness on school evacuation and mine-risk education. Consistency in this coordination allows for a sustainable practice between EDs and the local actors that could last beyond the duration of the project.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND SECTOR RESILIENCE

Risk management is central to building a resilient and sustainable education sector. Taken collectively, Manahel's risk management processes are instrumental in protecting its operations from interference, building confidence among donors, and asserting the importance of the independence of key education actors, including EDs. Alongside, Manahel's support for processes and frameworks to strengthen education delivery, risk management play a central role in creating resilience and pathways to sustainability.

Manahel has developed efficient and effective finance, risk, and compliance systems supported by dedicated grants and compliance teams. In one of the most difficult and fast-changing operational environments in the world, Manahel's multi-layered management and accountability process ensures robust reporting and financial oversight. Manahel has a dedicated risk team to track changes in the conflict, enabling the program to operate safely and provide confidence to donors. Chemonics are successful stewards of funds from diverse donors including the EU, JICA, GIZ, the U.S State Department,

Manahel has transparent clear red lines on political interference and makes direct payments to teachers and lead teachers, instructors and lead instructors, and safeguarding officers through an e-voucher mechanism that ensures no funds pass through or into the hands of terrorist or politically problematic organizations. Each academic year, Manahel and the EDs sign an MoU which outlines the scope of the agreement between the two parties including Manahel-designed policies to mitigate the risk of political interference and the donor redlines. Furthermore, Manahel screens key ED staff, who receive a stipend, to remove those with any political affiliation from the delivery of education. Manahel also screens its field staff to ensure their integrity.

Manahel seeks to proactively engage the EDs to counterbalance any political interference and has built strong relationships that Manahel can also use to notify the EDs against being susceptible towards any such interference. If there is any emerging risk of interference, Manahel engages the FCDO on the topic and agrees on the next steps for addressing it.

Manahel pays stipends via an e-voucher system, using a two-part verification system, to mitigate the risk of HTS/SSG intercepting donor funds, so that stipends go directly to school staff and supported ED roles. Manahel uses a vetted hawala agent and conducts checks on payroll information submitted and monitors 100% of distribution points to ensure HTS does not collect any revenue from stipends. Beneficiaries have the contact details of Manahel and the donor whistleblowing and fraud teams to report any concerns raised.

Manahel identifies fiduciary risks and monitors grantees' performance against these fiduciary risks. Manahel monitors procurement of all goods, checks Value for Money (VfM) of all goods procured within the program, provides coaching and support during procurement of goods, and performs spot-checks. For all grantees, Manahel completes an annual or end-of-grant Statement of Progress/Completion which will provide examples of best practice and lessons learned. Manahel maintains and requires all grantees to keep and manage asset registers that includes any items has the value of more than £500 and to report any loss of equipment.

OPTIONS FOR SUPPORT

Several areas of the Syria Education Programmer’s operation can be funded with minimal risk which support safe, more sustainable, quality teaching and learning in northwest Syria.

1. Supporting quality improvements in learning outcomes

Among these areas is the process for assessment and remediation which includes the annual Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA), and eight-week summer schools focused on numeracy, literacy, and psychosocial support. This package would also include teacher training and learning materials, which are adapted based on EGRA and EGMA results supporting more sustainable quality improvements in the sector, with one off payments for per diems, printing, and training costs.

2. Supporting inclusive education

Further options for support include funding a comprehensive Gender Equality and Social Inclusion package which includes After School Clubs, improving teacher awareness and skills on inclusion and inclusive pedagogies, child functioning screening and Special Education Centers. This support would put in place long term measures to embed and sustain more inclusive policy and practices in Northwest Syria’s education sector.

3. Support for paying stipends

Whilst they are a necessary precondition of improving learning outcomes and keeping schools functioning, paying teacher and staff stipends represent recurrent costs that currently cannot be met from other means, despite moves by the Salvation Government to consider paying, or partially paying, teachers in grades 7 and above. Indeed, paying teacher stipends and ensuring these are free from political interference may represent one of the best options to continue to build a resilient, secular, education sector in northwest Syria. Case management Winterisation support.

SEP-II (2023-2027) aims to enhance equitability of education for girls and boys by **strengthening the quality and inclusivity of formal primary education in Northwest Syria.**

The goal of SEP-II is to **increase the equitability and quality of the education system in Northwest Syria (impact), ensuring more children (at least 50% girls) are in school and reading by the end of primary education (outcome).**

SEP II will aim to directly impact 120,000 girls and boys per year in formal primary education through evidence-based and data-driven education programming and will positively impact the entire primary school-aged population (approximately 500,000) indirectly through enhanced policy delivery.

SEP-II will focus on **four key areas:** (i) Strengthening local education systems so that they are accountable, effective, and responsive (ii) Enhancing school level capacity to deliver inclusive, gender responsive and quality learning, (iii) Developing effective systems to support inclusion, mental health & child protection, and (iv) Generating more predictable financing for sector implementation, including teacher salaries.

With additional budget, SEP-II’s reach, and sustainability can be significantly enhanced. The FCDO core budget for SEP-II is £31.3m (\$38m) over 50 months. FCDO will seek to secure additional funding up to £37.8m (\$46m) and potentially extend SEP-II by an additional two years.

SEP-II activities will be focused on Northwest Syria, territory in which formal education is administered by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) as of 2021 and comprised of Idlib and Aleppo governorates.

4. Other options for assistance include:

Quick-wins, short-term interventions like winterization and case management that address the needs currently affecting children’s access to education negatively. Furthermore, invest in community-based school committees and look for opportunities to engage youth in community initiatives to improve school conditions, such as school refurbishment.

1 From mid-2023, SEP-II will support girls and boys through evidence-based and data-driven education programming. SEP-II will achieve this by focusing on four key areas:

- Strengthening local education systems so that they are accountable, effective, and responsive
- Enhancing school level capacity to deliver inclusive, gender responsive and quality learning
- Developing effective systems to support inclusion, mental health & child protection, and

- Generating more predictable financing for sector implementation, including teacher salaries.

2 EGRA/EGMA 2021

- **Progressing readers:** students who read 23 CWPM or more but scored less than 80 percent on the comprehension subtask
- **Proficient readers:** students who scored 80% or more on the reading comprehension subtask.