

Surge in literacy and numeracy achievements

The proportion of Grade 3 students in Manahel-supported schools who are classed as 'proficient readers' has risen from

25% to 37%



in just one year, Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) reveal.

Girls studying Grade 4 maths are now outperforming the boys across key higher order tasks after closing the traditional gender performance gap in the subject. In one Grade 4 test they overtook the boys by 2.7% after trailing behind them by 11.5% at Grade 3.

Key lesson learned

Delivery of EGRA/EGMA in NW Syria could impact the performance of female students because cultural norms mean enumerators cannot access data to inform the way female students are taught. A teacher-led early grade learning assessment (TEGLA) for SEP II could address this.

Manahel tracking of the progress of 9,371 students between the first and second semesters confirms student progress, with 15.44 % of students now able to read at level 5 or level 6 compared to fewer than 1% of tracked students at the start of the academic year.

There have been improvements in numeracy too, with almost 12% of students now at level 4 (able to answer two multiplication problems while satisfying all previous levels) compared to just 4.3% of students at the start of the first semester.

Overall, 68.63% of students have shown improvement in literacy since the start of this academic year and 74.16% of students have shown improvement in numeracy.

There were further specific improvements in the performance of students with disabilities, with 11.27% now reaching the top two reading literacy assessment categories compared to 0% at the start of the academic year.

Refocusing support after the earthquake

The devastating earthquake in February caused significant damage extending across the entirety of the programme's operating areas in Idlib and Aleppo governorates in Northwest Syria (NW Syria).

Tragically, initial reports showed that at least 11 school staff and 131 students within Manahel-supported schools lost their lives, with a further 28 staff and students injured and more than a quarter of Manahel schools damaged.

The project pivoted its objectives following the disaster to centre on maintaining children's daily routines and restoring normality wherever possible by addressing emergency interventions and safety concerns. This prioritised safe learning environments and a focus on improving children's psychosocial wellbeing.

Emergency preparedness measures developed and refined since inception proved fit for purpose when tested by the earthquake and enabled the programme team to respond appropriately and as swiftly as possible.

Manahel provided immediate and regular updates to FCDO and also identified the need to preserve the existing system, practices, and procedures to minimise disruption, maximise coordination efforts with other organisations to avoid duplication, and ensure more children had access to learning opportunities.

The impact of the earthquake meant that, whilst some planned activities like data analysis were able to continue, some were cancelled or suspended. Revised activities included scaled up psychosocial support (PSS) activities to focus on psychological first aid. Where possible, Manahel also conducted light repairs to earthquake-damaged schools and worked with others to provide shelter for families temporarily housed in schools.

Safe opening of schools

Special welcome packs were among a range of initiatives delivered by Manahel to create a safe and welcoming environment for students as the new semester got underway in the wake of the earthquake.

The pack, which was delivered to 157 schools providing a full technical delivery to early grade students, included an orientation to the schools safeguarding mechanism, code of conduct, and reporting mechanisms for students. It also included a modified evacuation plan that included specifics on earthquake-related evacuations.

Meanwhile, Manahel continued to engage caregivers and students in providing community-informed awareness sessions with the goal of promoting resilience and healthy coping strategies. These awareness sessions were modified to focus on student wellbeing, ability to deal with cumulative post-earthquake stress, and ways to stay positive. Sessions reached a total of more than 68,000 children and 4,000 caregivers.

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Re-categorising schools to prioritise support

A Manahel-led drive to ensure that resources reach the schools that need them most resulted in changes to the number of classrooms in 26 schools and a shake-up of the way all 337 Manahel schools are categorised.

The three new categories group schools according to the level of Manahel targeting, safeguarding, and security support that they receive and were designed to help Manahel prioritise schools with the most vulnerable children and rapidly allocate additional resources when they become available. The 337 schools are now categorised as follows:

34 special education centres which provide a full technical delivery to early grade students;

93 schools where school staff are paid by partner organisations but there is some technical delivery;

210 schools that only benefit from the safeguarding system, some support with school running costs, and rehabilitation work through coordination with other actors.

The new categories were developed in liaison with partners. Schools were previously only categorised according to whether they were Quality Education (QE) or access only schools. A total of 26 schools have meanwhile lost or gained classrooms as part of Manahel mapping designed to ensure an appropriate spread of resources.

Communities get a new voice on protection

Community representatives in NW Syria have a new opportunity to hold the education system to account over protection-related issues after creation of new regional level committees.

These committees operate at Education Assembly (EA) level, are led by the regional Caregivers' Associations, and are designed to enable community representatives to directly influence the education system.

They are based on elected Community Protection Committees of SGOs, caregivers and students first introduced at school level during SEP-1 to advocate for greater protection measures and policies and strengthen localisation.

Manahel supported the school-based protection committees to adapt in the wake of the earthquake by prioritising 121 schools for light repairs support to improve school safety conditions and ensure children's safe access to schools.

It has also supported the new Education Assembly level protection committees to develop a Terms of Reference (TOR) which will serve as a road map for their work and strengthen their ability to advocate for children's rights in the future.



Key lesson learned

The implementation of regional Protection Committees highlights the need for a systematic and comprehensive assessment to ensure their effectiveness in achieving the desired objectives. Collaborative efforts from all stakeholders are crucial in establishing a well-defined and agreed-upon role for these committees within the education system.

Teacher development

Teacher progress across five key competency areas has increased by an average of almost 80% during the second semester, Manahel performance assessments reveal.

The five competencies cover teachers' support for students with disabilities, their use of examples from local environment and student experience, relationship skills, regular communication with parents and use of learning outcomes to monitor student progress.

Pre- and post-assessments conducted by lead teachers showed that teacher progression across the five areas had increased on average by 78.71% (81.42% female, 73.16% male) while teachers' self-assessment reported a rate of 71.70%.

Parents undeterred by earthquake

Parents and caregivers refused to let the earthquake interrupt their children's education, with over 90% still sending their children to school even in the aftermath of the February disaster, a survey shows.

The survey aimed to provide an overview of parent and caregiver perspectives on school activities (including school-level communication and coordination, and quality of activities) and initial insight into the situation on the ground after the earthquake.

It showed 97% of parents and caregivers were still sending their children to school, even in situations where schools were partially damaged or showed visible cracks in their infrastructure, because they did not want their children's academic progress to be interrupted.

The same survey showed that parents and caregivers with children in special education centres had an 89% satisfaction rate with aspects such as school-level communication and coordination, and quality of activities, with more than 95% of parents with children with severe disabilities believing that teachers are qualified and able to accommodate their child's unique situation.

Key lesson learned

The absence of real-time data collection by education directors revealed that there is a crucial gap in efficient resource mobilisation and advocacy, as actors don't have necessary information to provide targeted and timely support. Enhancing data collection mechanisms and fostering collaborative partnerships are imperative to enable informed decisionmaking and foster a more effective educational ecosystem. Better oversight of resources when collaborating with other partners will help avoid missing opportunities to fill funding gaps and maximise impact specifically in times of crises.

Parents back Manahel PSS support

Parents have backed Manahel's decision to step up PSS sessions for students and parents in the wake of the earthquake.

Almost 90% of beneficiaries of the sessions say they were satisfied or very satisfied with activities after Manahel decided to send mobile PSS teams to provide extra support in schools.

More than 40% of respondents also said they would like to see additional sessions provided, with different topics, to improve their knowledge on promoting children's wellbeing and to prevent boredom among children.

Next month's priorities

1	Collaborate with downstream partners for activity design planning.
2	Engage with Education Directorates to discuss summer and academic year programming.
3	Initiate planning for TEGLA, including material development and training preparation/delivery.
4	Initiate grant agreement discussion with downstream partners.
5	Conduct a review process on Manahel and partners activity management process over the bridging year.

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 UK, 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.