



**SYRIA
EDUCATION
PROGRAMME**

**MANAHEL
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**LEARNING
BULLETIN**

This issue focuses on the launch of the Manahel – SEP II programme in February; improvements to and further dissemination of the Child Safeguarding Policy; establishing School Community Committees to promote participatory decision-making; and the expansion of Special Education Centres. In addition, the issue covers the implementation of the Teacher Qualification Support initiative and training on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Education Directorates protection personnel.

Building Hope for Future Generations: Manahel-SEP II's launch

The second phase of the Manahel – Syria Education Programme (2023 – 2027) - to continue strengthening the primary school education system in conflict-affected Northwest (NW) Syria - was launched in February.

The landmark event was attended by the UK Special Representative for Syria, Ann Snow, and influential education stakeholders in the region, local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and partner representatives from Social Development Direct, Action for Humanity, School to School International, Takaful Al Sham, Orange and the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU).

Under the theme, “Building Hope for Future Generations”, the launch focused on delivering improved education through stronger partnerships. Delegates at the event were greeted by testimonies from children expressing their hopes for their education and ambitions for the future:



“I want to be a paediatrician to treat all sick children.”

Female pupil



“I want to be a teacher and I wish the shelling to stop.”

Female pupil



“I wish I could have the healing superpower to cure everybody.”

Male pupil



“I want to be an engineer to rebuild Syria.”

Male pupil

The second phase of the programme will build on the delivery of quality education, safety, protection and inclusion and seek to extend and scale up best practices, supporting the education system to reach children across the region, not just those in Manahel-supported schools.

The event featured the launch of the improved Manahel – SEP website <https://sep.manahel.org> a space that hosts a range of resources which support education in NW Syria. To learn more about the programme and Syria's children dreams and aspirations, watch [this video](#).

Child Safeguarding Policy ready for wider dissemination

The Manahel Protection Team made significant progress improving the Child Safeguarding (SG) Policy in January and February, taking into account key stakeholders' contributions. After receiving final approval from Education Directorates (ED), the team completed the dissemination of the policy to all stakeholders.

Looking ahead, a conference is planned to share and discuss the policy with local NGOs and partners, ED personnel and several organisations with the aim of fostering collaboration and commitment to safeguarding principles to ensure all children across NW Syria are protected from harm.

Furthermore, a learning circle to build the support of school staff, making sure that they have comprehensive understanding of the approved SG policy and ultimately adhere to it is planned. The team is also working on developing a protocol for the implementation of the policy across all schools. This will serve as a detailed guide for the ED protection and SG personnel and will help with the effective functioning of the SG policy.

LESSON LEARNED: Experience highlights the importance of cultivating ownership amongst grassroots partners - in this case, the EDs. EDs have been supported to lead initiatives scaling across the region's education system. Additionally, locally tailored policies that consider cultural and contextual factors ensure effectiveness and relevance. Piloting and refining policies over time has allowed Manahel to develop valuable new supporting activities such as the code of conduct which is now signed by those coming into contact with school children.

Establishing School Committees to promote participatory decision-making and community ownership

School Community Committees (SCCs) play a key role in building community support for schools and coordinating with schools and SG officers on child protection issues such as school absenteeism, and dropout prevention.

To support this work, the Manahel periodically recruits new committee members to address shortfalls in numbers. At the beginning of the year, Manahel helped recruit SCC members in 128 schools which will support continued representation and engagement at the grassroots level. Additionally, the creation of 107 SCCs in newly integrated Manahel schools has expanded participatory mechanisms across the school network. There will now be consultation on the SCC Terms of Reference with ED personnel and stakeholders to define roles and responsibilities.

In the first two months of this year, SCCs successfully advocated and mobilised community support for several schools. They liaised with Civil Defence (White Helmets) to address sewage issues in Anas Ibn Malik and Talada schools, ensuring hygienic and safe bathroom facilities for children. They also coordinated community donations for construction materials to improve schoolyard safety.

LEARNING POINT: Involving the community in decision-making through SCCs is crucial to building support for long-sustainable change. Manahel has learned that these committees provide powerful platforms for community members to have a say in matters concerning schools, fostering ownership and commitment to education. Participatory decision-making processes within SCCs also ensure that decisions reflect the needs and priorities of the community. This approach enhances the effectiveness of interventions and promotes transparency and accountability.

More Special Education Centres to improve children's learning outcomes

Manahel established nine additional Special Education Centres (SEC) in February, bringing the total to 50. SECs play an important role in reintegrating students with disabilities who had previously dropped out of education and helping students with learning difficulties such as speech, visual or hearing impairments.

Each SEC is equipped with essential tools and furniture needed to cater to the diverse requirements of both students and teachers. Beyond the expansion of centres and the infrastructure they provide, their influence lies in the impact on the community and the teachers, who feel specific needs are being addressed.

Special education students are divided into three groups based on their needs and level of integration: those primarily engaged in resource room activities due to conditions like Down Syndrome and autism; students who participate in both resource room and mainstream classroom activities, receiving supervised shadowing sessions for learning difficulties; and those fully integrated into mainstream classrooms with targeted support sessions as required, addressing challenges such as learning difficulties.

500

children attend Special Education Centres

(70% are girls).

LESSON LEARNED: Special Education teachers have been facing the challenge of having to condense session times because of the need to accommodate larger numbers of students. Another challenge has been managing commitments and times between resource rooms and mainstream classrooms. This highlights the importance of flexible scheduling to accommodate both the needs of students and the constraints of teachers and also emphasises the significance of proactive planning and collaboration between special education instructors and teachers.

Enhancing teachers' skills through the Teacher Qualification Support initiative

In January 2024, the Manahel team implemented the Teacher Qualification Support initiative, which centres on organising Learning Circles (LCs) for teachers to improve their skills and knowledge. LCs were introduced by the programme in 2018 and use materials tailored to each theme including PowerPoint slides and pre- and post-evaluation assessments. The themes of this academic year (2023-2024) include: use of curriculum and lesson plans, inclusive education, methods for solving classroom problems, creating safe and educational classroom environments and pedagogy: using diverse teaching techniques.

The primary objective of this initiative is to foster self-directed learning among teachers. Revisiting pertinent topics relevant to all educators equips them with the tools to identify and address areas of weakness, ultimately enhancing their performance throughout the school year. The educational resources are compiled and accessible through a folder on the cloud.

In addition, the Manahel field team harnessed the power of social media outreach and shared the link to the materials on the [Idea Bank Facebook page](#), reaching over 16,000 male and female teachers in NW Syria.

LESSON LEARNED: Use of social media to promote the Teacher Qualification Support initiative underscored the value of making the most of diverse communication platforms to reach and engage a wide audience of educators. This experience also pointed to new opportunities for disseminating materials. It is worth noting that the programme now hosts the <https://sep.manahel.org/> website, which serves as an important dissemination tool and resource hub.

Socio-emotional training and well-being activities for safer learning environments

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) training which fosters children's psychological wellbeing and prepares them to deal with conflict-related challenges is at the core of Manahel's purpose.

A three-day training programme took place at the start of the year to improve ED protection personnel's knowledge of SEL and its impact on school children. During the theoretical and practical course, 29 trainees learned how SEL interventions can equip children with vital skills to navigate cognitive, emotional, and social challenges.

Meanwhile, efforts to promote psychological wellbeing focused on delivering structured group psychosocial support (PSS) activities to children. To address resource gaps, schools were equipped with PSS kits provided by Shafak Organisation. Additionally, the team initiated a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Child Functioning Screening (CFS) assessments, actively engaging caregivers through informative awareness sessions.

Looking ahead, plans are underway to further support Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) within the education system, including updating service mapping and organising learning circles on MHPSS, thus reinforcing the commitment to the holistic wellbeing of students.

LESSON LEARNED: Children's wellbeing is central to the programme, though Manahel also recognises the need to also promote the wellbeing of school staff in fostering a positive learning atmosphere. That is why different strategies will be implemented over the coming months, including PSS sessions led by SG officers, group activities chosen by school staff, and staff care programmes. Nurturing the mental and emotional health of educators and staff is crucial for their effectiveness and resilience in their roles.

Manahel partners' workshop to increase collaboration and effectiveness

Manahel initiated a review of the partnership governing structure in order to improve collaboration between partners after a number of changes to the structure.

A half-day workshop with partners was organised to establish mutually agreed partnership principles. Further, collaborative efforts were made to update communication matrices and tackle partnership challenges.

Partnership principles agreed include:

One team approach: when working on Manahel we are all one team working towards improved education for the children of NW Syria.

Transparent and timely communications: sharing information in a regular and open way for effective planning and mutual support in the face of challenges.

Proactive management of risks: sharing contextual analysis and promptly reporting risk incidents to enable collaborative mitigation measures.

Complementarity: recognising the value of synergistic collaboration where each partner's skills, experiences, and resources complement each other for greater impact.

LESSON LEARNED: This experience emphasises the value of ongoing assessment and adjustment in partnership governance to enhance effectiveness and maximise impact in driving improved education outcomes for the children of NW Syria. We have learned that our efforts are complementary, and that each partner brings something valuable to the table that the other partner may lack or possess to a lesser extent.

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 600,000 children through school, home, and after-school education and by responding to children's psychosocial and protection needs.