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Syria war will leave generation illiterate



CRISIS: A whole generation of Syrian refugee children could be left illiterate if they are forced to wait for a political solution to the ongoing crisis

UN official: Education crisis must be addressed

The conflict in Syria and the refugee crisis it has created could result in a "whole generation" of young people being left illiterate and uneducated, a senior United Nations official has said.

Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the Regional Hub of the UN Development Programme, said innocent Syrian children cannot wait several years for a political solution to end the conflict that has ruined their education.

Shafi made the comments on the sidelines of the launch of the Knowledge Summit, which is to be held in Dubai in December. Results of the Arab Reading Index will be released during the summit.

Last year, the results of the index, which looks at the literacy rate in Arab countries,

By Sarwat Nasir
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showed just 41 per cent of school-age Syrian children are classed as studying 'pre-university education'. The figure was 40 per cent in Yemen.

Shafi said: "There should be interim solutions. We shouldn't wait until the whole crisis is solved politically, this may take years.

"If we don't address the educational crisis of the Syrian refugees, we may risk the whole generation of Syrians being uneducated and illiterate - which is not acceptable for rebuilding Syria."

FULL STORY PAGE 4

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Education is a lifeline for our young

Fears for uneducated young Arabs

Providing an education for young people in the Middle East is crucial to improving the region's prosperity and ensuring they are not swayed by extremist ideas.

Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the Regional Hub of the United Nations Development Programme, told 7DAYS that political unrest is the "biggest obstacle" the region faces

He said the Arab Reading Index and Arab Knowledge Programme, to be unveiled in December, will provide the necessary data that decision-makers need to address literacy rates.

Shafi said: "Reading is an important criterion that helps evaluate a society's progress, intellectual openness and cultural development.

"We will spare no effort in our mission to make reading a habit rooted in every individual in our society.

"A 'reading society' is better prepared to

By Sarwat Nasir
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address the risks of extremism, he said. "It is a society that is culturally aware and equipped to find solutions for its social, economic, political and environmental problems."

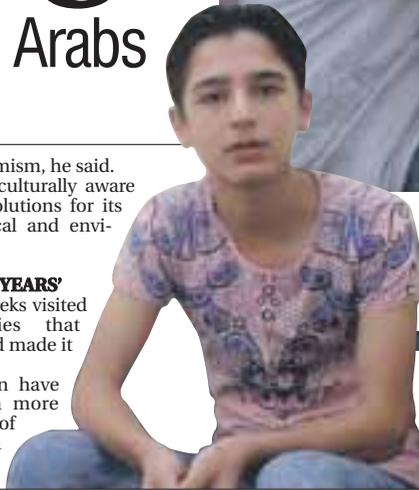
'NO SCHOOL FOR TWO YEARS'

7DAYS has in recent weeks visited several Syrian families that have escaped conflict and made it to the UAE.

Most of those children have not attended school in more than two years because of the violent situation in Syria.



NO SCHOOL: Mohammed Yaser Al Mousa's (inset) parents are trying to find him and his three siblings places at a school in Sharjah. Main image: Syrian refugee children play in a camp



One Syrian expat, Mohammed, who asked not to give his surname, has six children who moved from

Syria to Sharjah four months ago but do not yet have places in schools.

He told 7DAYS yesterday: "My children haven't been to school for two years and they are very behind with their education. They aren't reading

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28 MILLION

A total of 28 million children around the world are now displaced, according to a UNICEF report. Half of the world's refugees are children

how will they manage in the future?" Mohammed said he has struggled to find places in school for his children and they all remain at home. He said: "We tried the charity schools that have low tuition fees but they are full."

BOOK DRIVE TO REACH MILLIONS

The UAE's Reading Nation initiative has this year raised more than Dhs80 million to pay for books for millions of children in the developing world. HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, said that while reading was often taken for granted in many parts of the world, in some schools up to 30 children could share a single book. Yemen was among the first recipients of the initiative.

'MY CHILDREN ARE JUST SITTING AT HOME'

Another Syrian family is facing the same problem. Mohammed Yaser Al Mousa, a 14-year-old Syrian expat (pictured left) and his three siblings are also waiting for a spot to open in a 'charity school'. Mousa's mum, Roudha, told 7DAYS earlier this month: "It makes me sad to see what's happened to my country, but I feel relieved that we have escaped. "However, the problems don't seem to stop. My kids have been sitting at home. "They read books and I teach them what I can, but they need to go to a proper school." A recent UNICEF report revealed that there are 28 million children around the world who are displaced. A separate report found that 45 per cent of refugee children came from just two countries: Syria and Afghanistan. sarwat@7days.ae

HONOUR THE BEST LIBRARIAN

A new award has been launched to recognise the important role librarians play in encouraging the next generation of readers in the UAE, writes *Chris Fraser*. The School Librarian of the Year Award, introduced by the Emirates Literature Foundation, launched yesterday. Pupils, parents and fellow teachers can nominate librarians from schools across the UAE. Isobel Abulhoul, CEO of the Emirates Literature Foundation, said: "A library is a place where you are welcome, and there are lots of exciting things for a child to discover. "School librarians play a vital part in creating this culture and environment and they are, in a way, unsung heroes." Nominations can now be made online by pupils, parents and teachers at elfdubai.org/en/librarian-award. The closing date for nominations is December 15 and the winner will be announced at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature on March 5. The winning librarians from an Arabic school and an international school will each receive a trip to the Warner Bros Studio Tour in London and accommodation for four people, among other prizes.

UAE banks bail out 1,700 debt-hit firms

An estimated 1,700 companies in significant debt have been offered a lifeline since the UAE's banks introduced their own informal bankruptcy arrangement earlier this year.



SUPPORT: Al Ghurair

The UAE Banks Federation yesterday said its members were able to put in place restructuring for a total Dhs7 billion of outstanding loans for more than 1,700 SMEs and corporates. It follows an agreement between the banks in March to help business owners avoid collapse. It was also intended to limit the number of business owners fleeing the country to avoid defaulting on their debts – a crime under UAE law. As of last November, the banks were collectively owed about Dhs5 billion as a result of owners 'skipping' the country. The arrangement came before the announcement of the UAE Bankruptcy Law earlier this month. Commenting on the new law, Abdulaziz Al Ghurair, Chairman of the UAE Banks Federation, said: "We commend and welcome the legislation of the bankruptcy law, which the government has recognised as a pre-requisite for the country's economic development, and an essential tool to maintain the well-being of the business and economic environment. "All banks were involved and responsible for considering every option to support their clients, and help them stay in business and succeed, especially SMEs which represent over 90 per cent of the country's non-government GDP."

or writing properly. "We can only teach them in Arabic, but they can't read or write properly in English. "More than half of the world speaks English –

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