20 May 2016

Dear Hosts of the London Supporting Syria and the Region conference (Germany, Kuwait, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United Nations),

Thank you for convening donor and regional governments in February 2016. This was a major step forward in securing significant assistance for millions of Syrians displaced by the conflict.

The Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-Education) was proud to lead the effort to secure private sector support, with Executive Chair Sarah Brown announcing over $75 million in value of contributions from business and partners to educate 1 million Syrian children who are currently out of school. Vital to these unprecedented commitments is the business community’s growing role in collaborating via strategic partnerships and contributing not simply finance, but their networks, creativity, and delivery.

It has been heartening to see the progress since London. We believe that it is now possible to get almost every Syrian child in Jordan into school in the coming months, and to build on success in Lebanon and Turkey to reach even more children. But we all need to maintain the pressure on governments to deliver the pledges they made in London.

Given the importance of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in delivering these pledges and maintaining this pressure, GBC-Education is pleased to share the update you requested on key private sector commitments made in London.

- GBC-Education member Pearson has invested over £1.5 million for their three-year 'Every Child Learning' partnership with Save the Children, to increase educational opportunities for Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan. Member RELX Group has supported second language skills teaching for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon as part of a global partnership with the International Rescue Committee. Makhzoumi Foundation has continued its healthcare and vocational education programs in Lebanon serving Syrian refugees to increase their opportunity of securing their livelihoods. IKEA Foundation has continued to implement their "Can’t Wait to Learn" program in partnership with War Child to provide quality education in mathematics, literacy and psychosocial support to children in Jordan, Lebanon and Sudan. Scholastic through its My Arabic Library commitment has continued to work with donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector partners to develop the Global Book Fund.

- Other companies are developing strategic partnerships to address barriers to education in countries affected by the Syrian crisis. GBC-Education member Discovery Learning Alliance, in partnership with sQuid, committed to delivering a combined program. They have more fully defined the services—including attendance monitoring, delivery of learning tools and teacher support, and tracking of student progress services.
GBC-Education member NRS International is identifying recipients of their temporary learning spaces for refugee children. Arup is offering strategic advice on infrastructure to the Lebanese Ministry of Education. Breteau Foundation is finding partners in the region for refugee education and compiling applications for tablets, particularly in Arabic.

GBC-Education members ITWORX Education (via The EuroMENA Funds) and Global Learning are at advanced stages of planning to provide a digitized Smart School solution targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Separately, Global Learning has also made progress on their Syrian Virtual School project that targets students inside Syria, while ITWORX is beginning a pilot project in Turkey.

GBC-Education member The Speed School Fund is fundraising to help Syrian refugee children transition and continue in Lebanese schools, successfully. GBC-Education member Vitol Foundation is gearing up for the next phase of their pilot program to bring the Bridge platform to refugee education in partnership with McKinsey & Co. Separately, McKinsey is working with the Lebanese Ministry of Education and international partners to support the operationalization of Lebanon’s refugee education strategy in coordination with the non-formal education sector. Other commitments from GBC-Education members and partners, worth millions in value, are providing non-formal education in Lebanon and Jordan.

Many of these new innovative partnerships between business and NGOs are already showing real success. For example, Big Bad Boo, an educational entertainment company, is partnering with UNICEF, Save the Children and 25 other NGOs to provide animated cartoons and over 500,000 books to Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees throughout the MENA region and Macedonia, based on their award winning program 1001 Nights. 1001 Nights was developed to teach civic education and provide psychosocial support in formal and informal learning environments. In total, this program will provide support to over 60,000 refugee children.

We are also seeing a rapid increase in the willingness of universities to help. Private sector funding has enabled Kiron, a university platform for refugees, to increase student enrollment by 80% from 1,250 to 2,250 within the last 4 months. The platform is supported by businesses such as BMW Foundation, Google as well as the Schöpflin Foundation. Kiron is looking now for additional support to enroll up to 50,000 refugees as students. Elsewhere, Jusoor has established a partnership with St. Antony’s College at the University of Oxford to sponsor two Syrian refugee students pursuing a Master’s degree. They also have three new scholarship programs -100 Syrian Women, 10,000 Syrian Lives; the Jusoor Hardship Fund; and Jusoor and London School of Economics Scholars at Risk Scholarship - and are continuing to administer and fundraise for other scholarship tracks. We are confident that many other universities will come forward with announcements of places for Syrian students and faculty members, helping to build the generation that will then rebuild Syria.
Partnerships are also improving the coherence of the business effort. One example is the combination of private sector donation of devices with shipment to Lebanon by Aramex, a leading global provider of comprehensive logistics and transportation solutions. Thaki has deployed devices to programs organized by Malaak School, Teach for Lebanon, Theirworld, Home of Hope, and ReBootKamp.

Partnerships among NGOs have also made a significant difference to the education landscape. Through partnerships with NGO Theirworld, Rumie is now working to export the LearnSyria EdTech project to Jordan and Lebanon.

I visited Jordan and Lebanon earlier this month to evaluate this progress and consult donors, businesses, and governments on further needs. Since the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference, even more companies and partners are joining GBC-Education’s efforts. These include:

- **SABIS**, a network of global international private schools, established a school for the children of low-income, financially disadvantaged families in Mtein, Lebanon in 2012. The school currently serves around 250 students. The school does not charge any fees, yet maintains the high quality of the SABIS system.

- **Laureate International Universities**, the world’s largest network of higher education institutions with a presence in over 25 countries, partnered with a Lebanese NGO in February to run a pilot project (with the potential to scale) for Syrian teachers to receive online training to improve their English language skills, as well as pedagogical training to teach English (with the potential for formal accreditation).

- **Visa Europe** has donated £1 million to Save the Children, for refugee children’s education, psychological support, recreation activities and child-friendly spaces. In addition, Visa Poland donated €100,000 for refugee children in Turkey.

- **GBC-Education member Crescent Petroleum** has partnered with Edraak, the first nonprofit Arab Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform to develop an online curriculum, for a series of English language courses with the objective of increasing job readiness skills and furthering opportunities for employment. The curriculum was developed in partnership with the British Council and has evolved from one online course to a series of courses emphasizing the need for English language skills across the Middle East.

- **With support from the technology industry in Silicon Valley**, ReBootKAMP (RBK) has established a coding boot camp in Jordan. These boot camps are immersive vocational programs that are alternatives to traditional four-year computer science degrees and provide equivalent technical skills, knowledge, and soft skills. The first course received great reviews, including a Syrian refugee student who said he “learned more in the first four days than one year
at the University." Upon completing the course, graduates will work either in the tech industry in Amman, in RBK's consultancy, or with Silicon Valley companies that have partnered with the initiative.

- Ustad Mobile has developed a science and maths learning platform accessible even by feature phones with no connectivity, to be launched in Jordan. The app also enables digitization through its simple attendance and results-tracking system for schools, enabling them to digitize their records in real-time using just one phone per school.

- MBC Hope, the corporate social responsibility arm of MBC Group, is running several projects and initiatives for refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. These now include training for girls and projects building social cohesion and tackling gender-based violence. They have also built the first youth centre in Zaatari camp run by youth, with courses on computers, graphic design, English, and employment readiness. MBC Hope also leverages its extraordinary media reach to build awareness and raise funds for the effort. Syrian education will be a major part of its Ramadan broadcasting.

- New York University's (NYU) Global TIES for Children and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are embarking on an ambitious initiative to ensure children living in crisis contexts build the skills they need to thrive. Marrying programme delivery with cutting-edge science, the IRC will integrate into learning spaces low-cost strategies developed specifically for use in conflict-affected contexts to strengthen children’s cognitive, academic, and social-emotional skills. NYU will rigorously evaluate the strategies in order to build an evidence base about what works to improve children’s learning. The initiative is funded by Dubai Cares as part of their commitment to support innovative approaches to education in emergencies.

- University of Geneva’s InZone is running digital and blended vocational courses in Jordan, with trained local facilitators as support. Partners include Princeton University, x2go-MIT, Purdue University, Edraak, and Flux Foundation.

- Funzi, a mobile learning and information service, currently delivers entrepreneurship and job skills courses in Arabic and English in the region. Since March 2015, they have served over 40,000 learners in Iraq, and are expanding to Jordan and Turkey. They are also in the process of implementing services directly into Syria in collaboration with a UN organization and aim to deliver education to over 250,000 users in the region.

- A growing number of regional players are joining the fundraising effort. For example, approximately 85% of UNHCR’s funds raised in UAE now come from individuals and businesses.

These are just some of the initiatives underway, adding over $90 million of value to the collective effort to get 1 million Syrian children into school.
We now commit, as GBC-Education and our partners:

- to continue to expand this effort, with a strong focus on delivery of pledges;
- to coordinate and align our plans with the innovative and vital approach of the new Education Cannot Wait – a Fund for Education in Emergencies;
- to produce new research in the coming weeks that highlights best practice of business engagement on education for Syrians; identify the gaps in the education plans where business support could be a game-changer; and provide targeted advice for new business players ready to help;
- to explore innovative solutions to bring together businesses that want to help, and provide donors with the information they need to work quickly and effectively with the private sector to provide education in future emergencies.

A massive continued effort is needed to get 1 million Syrians to school. The private sector is stepping up to the plate.

We look forward to continuing this discussion, including at our events in Istanbul.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Fletcher

Director of Global Strategy
Global Business Coalition for Education