



## Supporting Moderate Education in Syria

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# CONTENTS

A. Project Background and Achievements .....	2
A1. Working Environment .....	2
A2. CBO Capabilities .....	2
A3. External Factors .....	2
A4. Objectives and Achievements .....	3
B. Education. ....	7
B1. Remedial Learning .....	7
B2. Self-Learning Program .....	8
B3. Teacher Training .....	8
B4. Material Assistance .....	9
B5. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	9
C. School and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rehabilitation .....	11
C1. School Rehabilitation .....	11
C2. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	12
D. Psychosocial support and Child Safeguarding .....	12
D1. PSS 1.0 .....	12
D2. PSS 2.0 .....	13
D3. Child Safeguarding .....	14
D4. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	15
E. Social Reintegration .....	15
E1. Pilot .....	16
E2. Evaluation Findings .....	18
E3. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	19
F. Technical and Vocational Education and Training .....	20
F1. Results .....	21
F2. Qualitative Research .....	23
F3. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	23
G. Presentations .....	24
H. Overall Lessons for Future Programming .....	24

## A. Project Background and Achievements

The Supporting Moderate Education in Syria project, known locally as Injaz 2, began in December 2018 with \$9 million in initial funding for 15 months. Through 10 costed and no-cost amendments, the project concluded on December 15, 2021, having received and expended \$23,885,664 in U.S government funding. This funding included co-funding from the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in the U.S.

### A1. Working Environment

Injaz 2 followed more than three years of U.S. government-funded support to the Syrian education sector in the northwest of the country and approximately six months of interventions in the northeast, known as Injaz 1. At the time, the education system in Northeast Syria (NES) was struggling to make up for five years of psychosocial trauma and severely limited foundational learning caused by primary and secondary exposure to ISIS ideology among many children and youth and the closure of secular schools, leaving them susceptible to violent extremism. The aim of Injaz 2 was to revitalize and stabilize the education sector in Northeast Syria as a bulwark against radicalization by providing youth with a moderate, secular education and skills that would reduce the risk of their recruitment by violent extremist groups.

In Raqqa and Deir Ezzor governorates Injaz 2 provided school-aged children with psychosocial support (PSS) and remedial literacy and numeracy to combat extremist ideologies and achieve stabilization objectives by revitalizing the education sector. Specifically, the project teamed up with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to 1) rehabilitate schools; 2) provide PSS and remedial literacy and numeracy as well as Self-Learning Programs (SLPs) at child centers and through teams embedded at formal schools; 3) train teachers on PSS, remedial literacy and numeracy, and SLP teaching strategies; and 4) pilot vocational education based on labor market assessments. In 2021, Injaz 2 expanded into Hassakeh governorate through rehabilitation of schools' WASH facilities.

### A2. CBO Capabilities

Injaz 2 worked with eight CBOs in Raqqa, eight Deir Ezzor, and in the last four months one in Hassakeh, the capabilities of which ranged from very basic to much stronger, and most improved over time. Working with a finite pool of skilled trainers, all the CBOs seemed to find the same high-caliber trainers, but competition among them led to a rotation of training staff and increases in salaries for those who were highly qualified. In terms of management, the receptivity of CBOs to capacity building from Injaz 2 ranged from an appreciation of the guidance on improving practices to considering it an intrusion into their independence. There were examples, however, of CBO management removing staff from positions due to poor performance or malfeasance raised by Injaz 2. In one instance, Better Hope for Tabqa replaced an under-performing accountant at its TVET center; Emaar Al Mansoura replaced a rehabilitation supervisor with a more skilled employee; Bidaya replaced a trainer recruited without a transparent and open recruitment process; and in another instance, Future Makers replaced a M&E Officer who provided false documentation during the recruitment process.

### A3. External Factors

In October 2019, Turkey conducted an offensive into north-eastern Syria, code-named Operation Peace Spring, against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). As a result of Turkish forces capturing Ain Aiesa town, the IDP camp in which Injaz 2 hosted its largest static child learning center of 1,400 children disbanded. In the immediate aftermath of the military incursion, Injaz 2 provided temporary relocation assistance to several staff who fled the Turkish-held areas north of the M4 highway. Per NEA's directive, we suspended programming for three days before reinstating all activities but those in the Ain Aiesa IDP camp.

When the COVID-19 outbreak hit in March 2020, Injaz 2 responded by quickly developing more than ten different solutions to the problems that COVID-19 posed to our program. Not everything worked well, and nor was everything approved, but there several useful innovations. For example, we developed an

intranet network, or ‘Private Cloud’, that connects communities in internally displaced people (IDP) camps to each other, and children to their teachers, so they could continue to learn remotely without internet. The simple intranet system was built using affordable and open-source technologies. It was a simple system but one that allowed Injaz 2 to keep delivering an education to the vulnerable children in the IDP camps. Even people who are unfamiliar with technology proved able to learn and adapt to the challenges involved with setting it up. (See Success Story, p. 10)

#### A4. Objectives and Achievements

Injaz 2 Results Monitoring Plan				
Level	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Results
Project Objective 1	Indicator 1.1: Number of students enrolled in USG supported educational programming	7,533 students enrolled before program start	62,444 students enrolled	<b>Cumulative Progress: 64,102 (32,004 girls) students enrolled</b>
	Indicator 1.2: Increased percentage of marginalized children/youth enrolled in USG supported educational programming	49% before program start	41% children enrolled	<b>Cumulative Progress: 48% increase in children enrolled</b>
Increase equitable access to moderate, secular educational opportunities that can reduce the influence of extremist groups/ ideology	Indicator 1.3: Number of schools rehabilitated with USG funding	77 schools before program start	811 schools rehabilitated	<b>Cumulative Progress: 912 schools rehabilitated</b>
	Indicator 1.4: Number of children potentially impacted by schools rehabilitated with USG funding	0 children before program start	317,763 children impacted	<b>Cumulative Progress: 378,963 children impacted</b>
	Indicator 1.5: Number of learning environments supported by USG assistance that have improved safety, according to locally defined criteria	0 learning environments before program start	824 learning environments	<b>Cumulative Progress: 935 learning environments with improved safety</b>

Injaz 2 Results Monitoring Plan				
<p><b>Project Objective 2</b></p> <p><b>Strengthen the capacity of education actors to deliver quality education services that counter the pull of extremist groups/ ideology</b></p>	Indicator 2.1: Number of education staff trained on Self-Learning Program (SLP)(RETIRED)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Indicator 2.2: Number of education staff trained on Psycho-Social Support (PSS)(RETIRED)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Indicator 2.3: Number of education service providers who demonstrate improved delivery as a result of the project capacity building activities	3 providers before program start	15 education service providers	<b>Cumulative Progress: 16 education service providers with improved delivery</b>
	Indicator 2.4: Percentage of students demonstrating higher literacy scores.	9% increase in proficient readers; 4% increase in advanced readers; 16% decrease in novice progress readers; 12% decrease in non-readers	10% increase in proficient readers; 5% increase in advanced readers; 10% decrease in each of the categories of novice progressive readers and non-readers	<b>Cumulative Progress: 67% increase in proficient readers; 30% increase in advanced readers; 10% decrease in novice readers; 43% decrease in non-readers</b>
	Indicator 2.5: Percentage of students demonstrating higher numeracy scores.	34% tested as developing learners; 50% tested as emerging performers	25% increase in numeracy scores	<b>Cumulative Progress: 33% increase in developing learners; 33% decrease in emerging learners; 83% increase in outperformers</b>
	Indicator 2.6: Percent of individuals with improved reading skills following participation in USG-assisted programs	0% at program start	85% of individuals with improved reading skills	<b>Cumulative Progress: 100% of individuals with improved reading skills</b>
	Indicator 2.7: Number of educators who	28 educators at program start	9,943 educators	<b>Cumulative Progress: 10,152 educators have</b>

Injaz 2 Results Monitoring Plan				
	complete professional development activities with USG assistance			received at least one training from Injaz 2
	Indicator 2.8: Percentage of SLP students that successfully progressed from one grade level to the next	0% at program start	85% of SLP students	<b>Cumulative Progress: 87% of SLP students</b>
<b>Project Objective 3</b>	Indicator 3.1: Percent of parents/caregivers who report participating children/youth demonstrate improved mental well-being or coping abilities	0 before program start	80% of parents/caregivers	<b>Cumulative Progress: 92% of parents/caregivers</b>
	Indicator 3.2: Number of children provided with USG-funded psychosocial support (PSS)	7,533 children before program start	62,444 children	<b>Cumulative Progress: 64,102 children (32,004 girls)</b>
<b>Enable youth to maximize the benefit of educational opportunities through psychosocial support and a safe learning environment</b>	Indicator 3.3: Number of household members and/or caregivers who participated in PSS activities	0 before program start	40 household members and/or caregivers	<b>Cumulative Progress: 252 caregivers (137 women)</b>

Injaz 2 Results Monitoring Plan				
	Indicator 3.4: Number of children enrolled in the USG-funded pilot social reintegration (SR) program	0 before program start	140 children enrolled	<b>Cumulative Progress: 465 children (239 girls) enrolled</b>
	Indicator 3.5: Percent of social reintegration children who demonstrate improved critical thinking or mental wellbeing	0% before program start	75% of SR children	<b>Cumulative Progress: 45% of children improved critical thinking; 58% improved emotional regulation; 47% improved social and emotional learning</b>
<b>Project Objective 4</b>  <b>Increased access to employment or self-employment</b>	Indicator 4.1: Percent of individuals who complete USG-assisted workforce development programs	0% before program start	57% of individuals	<b>Cumulative Progress: 60% of individuals</b>
	Indicator 4.2: Percent of SMES-funded trainees who demonstrate increased job-oriented skills (RETIRED)	N/A	N/A	<b>N/A</b>
	Indicator 4.3: Percent of USG-funded TVET graduates who report being employed or self-employed six months after graduating from the program	0% before program start	56% of USG-funded TVET graduates	<b>Cumulative Progress: 68% of graduates</b>
	Indicator 4.4: Number of Injaz-funded trainee graduates who received additional post-training support	0 before program start	24 trainee graduates	<b>Cumulative Progress: 79 trainee graduates</b>

In addition to the project results listed above, Injaz 2 won the 2020 Society for International Development-Washington chapter's best in show for innovation for the intranet in the Abu Khashab formal IDP camp in Deir Ezzor (see Success Story, p. 10). Also, several project staff co-authored a blog published on Devex

on lessons from working on PSS in a post-ISIS context: <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-psycho-social-support-for-children-counters-the-legacy-of-violent-extremism-in-syria-97573>

## **B. Education**

Educating out-of-school girls and boys in NES — especially marginalized children — required a conducive informal educational environment. Injaz 2 targeted children who were displaced, had often lost primary and secondary caregivers, or who otherwise experienced a breakdown of their family unit. As a result, many lost their sense of identity and hope. These children lived in both formal and informal internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, the latter which lacked basic services, including health, hygiene, food, shelter, and education.

The conditions these children faced have prevented many from mastering the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy required to pursue further education and realize their full potential as productive adults. In informal camps, Injaz 2 collaborated with skilled CBOs that had relationships with community leaders and teachers. In these informal camps that had no formal schooling, the project funded tented classrooms and staffed them with trained teachers. Most children started with basics: letters, numbers, how to hold a pen, and how books work. Project staff first trained CBO partners' trainers, who then trained the teachers, many of whom did not have formal pre- or in-service training. Trainers helped identify new educational topics or challenges, with support from Injaz 2 staff via WhatsApp and through bimonthly meetings, making CBOs beneficiaries, too. Furthermore, CBO partners' trainers led training of other CBO staff, replacing the need for Injaz 2 technical staff to facilitate these sessions. As one example, partner Bidaya's trainers taught staff from partner Amal Al Baghouz on how to deliver the remedial literacy curriculum to children enrolled in the social reintegration activity. Trainers employed by partners Wifaq, Future Makers, Inmaa al Furat also trained the Deir Ezzor and Raqqa local councils' Education Committee's trainers, who then trained formal schoolteachers on remedial literacy, numeracy and SLP teaching strategies.

### **B1. Remedial Learning**

The Injaz 2 remedial learning program was implemented to provide remedial numeracy and literacy to children who were unable to attend school due to the conflict or due to the upheaval caused by the conflict. Providing children with remedial literacy and numeracy was a pathway to then integrate them into formal schools or in the Self-Learning Program (SLP) at a grade 2 or 3 level.

Continuing with an approach started under Injaz 1, the remedial numeracy program curriculum, originally developed by the International Rescue Committee and augmented with Injaz-funded technical assistance, was designed to cover the main standards and areas of knowledge required in the first two grades according to the international education standards in (number sense, operations, and geometry). The curriculum covered two levels – emerging and developing – in 12-week increments, for a total of six months.

The remedial literacy curriculum was developed by an education expert originally funded by Chemonics' NEA-funded programming in Northwest Syria (known as the Idarah project) and also used on Injaz 1. It was designed to cover the main standards and areas of knowledge required in the first two grades according to the international education standards in reading, writing, and hearing. The curriculum covered four levels: non-reader (7 weeks), novice reader (7 weeks), advanced (5 weeks), and proficient (7 weeks). Injaz 2 then collaborated with remedial literacy trainers to improve the initial curriculum by incorporating instructor feedback, including writing and advancing reading comprehension.

Offered in formal and informal IDP camps, the partner CBOs conducted diagnostic tests for literacy and numeracy and assigned children to classrooms by age and skill level. Injaz 2 introduced recreational,

social and emotional learning (SEL) and later PSS as an integrated component of education programming.

## **B2. Self-Learning Program**

The Self-Learning Program and accompanying materials were developed by UNICEF, UNRWA, and the Syrian Ministry of Education. The program aligns with the Syrian national curriculum and enables children with limited or no access to schooling due to the conflict to sit for government exams. Injaz 2 began by providing SLP for grades 1-6, but expanded to include grade 7 in the fall of 2021, due to credible concern that some of the children who were finishing up grade 6 would be married off if there were no other educational opportunities for them to pursue.

Injaz 2 made an effort to refine the curriculum for grades 1-3 to eliminate contentious material using a tool shared by then DFID under Idarah that, for example, could be seen as inadvertently promoting violence. This was flagged for the CBOs for grades 4-6, but by the time Injaz 2 concluded it had not yet been done for grades 7-9, as the CBOs were having difficulty identifying and evaluating contentious material on their own. Injaz 2 also developed and facilitated training on SLP teaching strategies, designed to help instructors learn how to deliver the content.

Injaz 2 began providing SLP in March of 2018 in Ain Aissa camp in Raqqa under Injaz 1 and continued it there under Injaz 2 until October 2019, when the camp was dissolved following the Turkish invasion. Programming continued in the Abu Khashab formal IDP camp in Deir Ezzor, where the CBO Bidaya utilized this curriculum for children in the camp who were able to join SLP directly, if they were of the appropriate age to start school, or after having graduated from the remedial education (RE) program. RE graduates generally joined SLP grade 2 or 3, depending on their performance on an SLP placement test, with most joining grade 3.

Given the funding parameters under Injaz 2, SLP was originally funded over a six-month timeline, with 2–3-day breaks between semesters and a one week break at the end of a grade, to enable teacher to grade exams. This contrasted with the education committees in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, which spread out the same material over a nine-month timeline.

SLP was also offered in a number of child centers run by Injaz CBOs, but this service was significantly cut when NEA decided in June 2019 to close a number of centers due to funding limitations. NEA kept three facilities open for children with disabilities, which only offered remedial education.

## **B3. Teacher Training**

The closure of many formal schools due to the conflict, on top of the fighting itself, led to a massive brain drain of qualified teachers in Northeast Syria as people fled the area. This resulted in a nascent formal education system and the need for informal/non-formal education opportunities for children who lost out on education during the years when the formal system was closed and were too old to join the re-organized formal education system.

In an effort to support the system, Injaz 2 provided educators of both formal schools and those working in informal/non-formal settings with different forms of training. The project also provided a training of trainers (ToT) to formal schoolteachers, with the expectation that the ToT graduates would cascade the knowledge out to other teachers in the formal education system.

Injaz 2 ran two tracks of educator training: CBO educators, which included teachers, child protection officers (CPOs), PSS and social reintegration facilitators, and other relevant CBO staff; and formal education teachers. For CBO educators all training – on remedial literacy, remedial numeracy, SLP, PSS, and child safeguarding – was mandatory. In addition, every new employee that joined a CBO had to

attend the child safeguarding training, and all teachers, CPOs, and facilitators attended PSS training.

For the training of formal education teachers, Injaz 2 coordinated with the education committees in each governorate to nominate teachers who would be trained by master trainers. These master trainers were trained in SLP Arabic and math, SLP teaching strategies, remedial education, and the Injaz 2 PSS program. The master trainers then provided training on the same subjects to the formal education teachers nominated by the ECs. The training of formal education teachers ran from 2018 and through August 2021 before the start of the last academic year supported by Injaz 2, which concluded in November 2021. The ECs could only make teachers available during the winter and summer breaks in the academic calendar (generally in February and August each year).

In addition to the more formalized training, the project's training team provided direct mentoring and support to the CBO teachers to form teacher learning circles and WhatsApp groups, where project staff could communicate with all of the teachers at once. These circles and groups enabled teachers to share problems – such as how to keep children engaged – and source collective advice on how to address them. This direct mentoring was especially important when the education programming went temporarily fully online (RE and SLP) during the pandemic, and the Injaz team was able to provide feedback on the videos the teachers prepared for online learning.

#### **B4. Material Assistance**

Due to the conflict, many schools were lacking the number of desks and chairs they needed to serve the full cadre of students in each school. Some schools and education assemblies had desk parts, most often the metal frame that needed wooden components to be functional, and others simply needed more desks to be created. Injaz 2 worked to support the education committees and the education assemblies to meet many of these desk needs. The needs were identified solely by the committees or assemblies and then the project worked to establish the desk refurbishment efforts.

Supplying desks to schools and the relevant education committees was first undertaken by Injaz 2 in 2019, utilizing three different approaches. In the early days, the project worked with Raqqa and Tabqa councils to collect the metal structures and worked with a CBO to establish a desk workshop to produce and install wooden parts (desk top box, seat backs, and seat bottoms). As soon as all metal structures were fixed, the workshop was upgraded to produce metal structures and another workshop was established. The project then shifted to Deir Ezzor and supported the council to produce desks, however the need was so large, and thousands of metal structures were at schools across Deir Ezzor. Therefore, instead of collecting the structures and centralizing the production, the project used a hybrid approach that supported the CBOs to establish their own mobile workshops (six workshops) to rehabilitate desks at each school and worked with vendors to produce wooden parts and full desks as needed for the CBOs.

Once the refurbished desks and full desks were considered by the CBO or vendor to be finalized, the Injaz 2 partnership facilitators (PFs) checked them to make sure they aligned with the clearly stated specifications provided. Desks that were poorly constructed or poorly put together were reported by the PFs, and the CBO or vendor was asked to rectify the situation so that all desks were of the same specifications and quality.

#### **B5. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Even prior to the covid pandemic, challenges arose in how to keep students focused on learning and how to keep track of them. In extreme cases, some children dropped out and returned multiple times and the project and the partner CBOs did not have a means to track their attendance. Once the pandemic-related restrictions took hold, learning became that much harder. This led to creative solutions to continue learning to the greatest degree possible (see box).

## SUCCESS STORY

### Using Technology to Continue Learning



With the closure of schools, child learning centers, and vocational centers in NES due to covid, Injaz 2 worked closely with CBOs to provide programming through new platforms. To support distance learning for the most vulnerable children in IDP camps, beginning in March 2020, project-trained CBO teachers recorded video lessons based on the Injaz 2 remedial literacy and numeracy curriculum and SLP grades 1 -6, incorporating technical feedback from the training team on quality and content of the videos. To

help circulate these videos with the limited resources available, Injaz 2 set up a “closed” intranet system with an old laptop as a server in the Abu Khashab formal IDP camp, making the system economical and and easy to replicate. In Abu Khashab, the teachers who were resident in the camp first started walking tent to tent to share videos and written content by Bluetooth to children’s devices. Then teachers outside the camp who could not enter were assigned to review homework assignments and tests. Children could tune into online classes with their peers, providing a more social educational experience and allowing teachers to provide real-time feedback and reach children en masse.

The intranet also enabled teachers and students to access the “cloud”, where the project stored and managed files that students could view and download on demand. The digital library of remedial education, SLP, and psychosocial support videos was easily accessible through multiple channels, including Google drive, an intranet server, or a dedicated YouTube channel. Overall, these interventions contributed to the sustainability of educational resources and to local resilience as waves of covid prevented continuous in-person learning. Children with access to the intranet in fact had better learning outcomes than children in the informal IDP camps where there was no intranet access. So intranet directly resulted in better learning outcomes.

The network’s communication software and operating system were free and open source but the data exchanged within the intranet did not reach the public internet, providing protection against groups, such as ISIS, who may have wanted to interfere with the delivery of in-camp education but did not do so during the life of the project.

Other lessons learned from this process include the following:

- CBOs introduced “supporting teachers” to assist in classrooms with children with learning difficulties. This support was also needed in classrooms with non-readers and novice readers. Formative and summative test results demonstrated that learning outcomes improved with the introduction of supporting teachers.
- For children transitioning from remedial education (literacy and numeracy) to SLP, CBOs needed to introduce English lessons (1-2 hours per week to know the alphabet), These teachers started providing lessons from the SLP book 1 for English while children were still enrolled in levels 2-4 of remedial education, excluding non-readers.
- When children transitioned from remedial education to SLP, CBOs identified the need for one month of bridge lessons to include geometry basics. Injaz 2 tried to layer bridge lessons on top of grade 3 SLP which did not work well given time constraints and the need to sequence content. Injaz learned that there should be one month of bridge lessons before starting SLP grade 3.
- Injaz piloted embedded teams of CBO teachers to provide remedial literacy in formal schools where children struggled with the SLP curriculum. Though designed to serve as a

complementary resource to allow schoolteachers to focus on SLP, the pilot was disruptive and resulted in tensions between CBO teachers and formal schoolteachers given that the former had a higher pay scale than those employed in the formal sector. Injaz 2 was not able to properly co-plan with the ECs and school managers on how to design school-based interventions in a conflict-sensitive manner and the lack of adequate engagement contributed to resistance from formal schoolteachers.

- CBOs continued to struggle with implementing a more structured approach to conducting teachers' evaluations and should offer refresher training in areas where teachers struggle. This is an area where Injaz 3 could provide additional coaching to CBOs.
- Mixed-level classrooms, especially with children more than two years apart, proved to be challenging. CBOs did not have sufficient training and resources to support multi-level classrooms. Instead, they often put children outside of a given age range on a waiting list. Injaz 3 could consider conducting more training on multi-level instruction and facilitating consultations with CBO partners on additional resources in the classroom as needed.

When it came to the distribution of desks, if the project was responsible for delivering them, they were easy to track at schools and assemblies. But in other instances, large quantities of desks were delivered to the education committee of a governorate with no ability to track where they were then later distributed. Tracking and locating these desks would have required better coordination with and greater responsibility taken by the committees and assemblies for reporting on their desk distribution. Injaz 2 noted the same lack of tracking inventory when it came to the distribution of SLP textbooks donated by UNICEF. The agency required frequent reporting on the distribution of textbooks and confirmation of classroom use by students. However, the assemblies were unable to provide this data and Injaz 2 could only report on distribution to assemblies' warehouses.

## C. School and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rehabilitation

The physical damage to schools and other public facilities in NES was enormous. The predecessor project Injaz 1 conducted Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME) assessments in both Raqqa and Deir Ezzor governorates. The data highlighted the level of destruction and damage to primary and secondary schools across the operating area. This data served as a basis for Injaz 2 planning for large-scale rehabilitation of school facilities in close consultation with local councils, their education committees, which were followed up by site visits by CBO partners and Injaz 2 field staff.

### C1. School Rehabilitation

Injaz provided funding for rehabilitating schools in Deir Ezzor, Hasakah, and Raqqa Governorates, including in Tabqa. Light rehabilitation of a school covered different things depending on the needs of each school and the budget available at that time. Repairs undertaken by CBO partners included painting, tiling, plastering, electricity repairs, roof insulation, chimney maintenance, gutter maintenance, whiteboard maintenance and installation, installation or maintenance to doors and windows, playground maintenance, plumbing, metal bars maintenance or installation, and in some cases installation of rail ways, and wheelchair passageways.

In all schools where light rehabilitation was conducted, WASH facilities were also repaired. WASH rehabilitation involved providing plumbing and water system maintenance and repair when and where needed, as well as repairing, providing, and attaching bathroom fixtures and accessories, along with cleaning, which in certain instances was sufficient to get the facilities in working order. In other instances, maintenance and repair of latrines and electrical systems (network maintenance, wiring maintenance, main panel check, and the repair and maintenance of electrical accessories) was provided by CBO partners. Many of the school WASH facilities that were rehabilitated were also painted with murals to make them more attractive.



*Before\_ Al Mustaqbal School*



*After\_ Al Mustaqbal school*



*Before\_ Safsaf Sharqi school*



*After\_ Safsaf Sharqi school*



*Alwahda school prior to WASH rehab*



*Alwahda school following completed WASH rehab*



*Aldahmash school prior to WASH rehab*



*Aldahmash school following completed WASH rehab*



*Altarifawi school prior to rehab*



*Altarifawi school post rehab*



*Altali'a Alwusta school prior to rehab*



*Altali'a Alwusta school post rehab*

In addition to school restoration, Injaz helped winterize the buildings by providing the means to heat the school to make it operable during the cold winter months. In the project's first winter, this was limited to the distribution of heaters, 1,000-liter fuel tanks, and distributing approximately 50 liters of diesel fuel per classroom. As soon as work started in Deir Ezzor after the liberation of ISIS, there was a new problem that classrooms lacked doors or windows. Therefore, the winterization activities focused on the installation of doors and windows in addition to providing heaters, tanks, and fuel. In 2020, Injaz put a heater into almost every classroom and a fuel tank in every school, and the Deir Ezzor local council was able to provide the schools with free fuel. At this point the winterization was scaled back to installing doors and windows, and metal bars when needed to increase the security of distributed materials.

## **C2. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

One of the challenges of making further improvements in several locations was the damage done to the main municipal sewer lines. In these instances, local officials asked that facilities be provided with sewage pits, but this is something Injaz 2 was unable to do due to the environmental concerns they would raise and the restrictions in the cooperative agreement against construction. Another challenge raised by the NES WASH working group was the need to increase the formal education sector's ability to maintain rehabilitated WASH facilities. Injaz 2 also noted that some schools struggled to maintain cleanliness and functionality of repaired items and prevent theft of water taps. This is an area where Injaz 3 can coordinate more closely with the WASH working group to identify successful approaches to improving maintenance.

## **D. Psychosocial support and Child Safeguarding**

The Injaz PSS programming sought to support the psychosocial wellbeing of children who had been negatively affected by their experiences living in a conflict environment in NES. In addition, as a part of its duty of care responsibilities, Injaz 2 worked with CBOs to develop safe learning environments for these same children, be this in remedial education, SLP, or for those under 18 enrolled in the Injaz vocational training. By the close of Injaz 2, the project had developed two separate, but related PSS curricula: the original PSS program referred to as PSS 1.0 and an updated PSS 2.0 trauma recovery program called Better Together, which integrated caregivers into the programming.

### **D1. PSS 1.0**

Injaz 2 provided psychosocial support (PSS 1.0) to all children in its education programs: remedial education and SLP in formal IDP camps, including Abu Khashab; informal IDP camps; and in formal

schools (where only PSS 1.0 was provided, no remedial education or SLP) in Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, and Tabqa. Additionally, in the final quarters of Injaz 2, PSS 1.0 was offered as a stand-alone program for 300 children in Alhattash and Aljarbou informal IDP camps for those who were not yet enrolled in remedial education due to space constraints.

The PSS 1.0 curriculum is grounded in SEL concepts,<sup>1</sup> focusing on establishing a safe and supportive learning environment, relaxation, and meditation, as well as problem solving. The curriculum aims to serve children between the ages of 8 and 16 but has been used with children as young as 6 and as old as 18.

The PSS 1.0 program originally consisted of 17 structured PSS activities, six types of unstructured activities, and seven relaxation activities, such as breathwork, free drawing, sports activities, puppet theatre, and storytelling. Structured activities are those that have been established specifically to support children's psychosocial wellbeing and unstructured activities are more recreational in nature. The PSS 1.0 curriculum is captured in the Teachers Guidebook and the PSS activities are included in the PSS Activity Booklet. Both of these guides were developed by Injaz and are available in English and Arabic.

In 2021, an additional 15 structured activities and three relaxation activities were added to the curriculum. These newly added activities were available only in Arabic and were developed in response to some of the key findings of the PSS formal school and IDP camp evaluation reports. Therefore, by the end of Injaz 2, the PSS 1.0 program consisted of 32 structured PSS activities, six types of unstructured activities, and 10 relaxation activities (which are also structured).

The structured Injaz PSS 1.0 program was established as a three-month program, with children normally participating in at least two structured PSS activities and three recreational and/or relaxation activities per week, for a total of 3 to 3.5 hours of PSS programming weekly. The children, therefore, generally participate in one PSS activity per day of learning for approximately 40 minutes. Many children, however, stayed with the program longer than three months and continued to participate in the PSS activities, repeating activities. This was also a reason behind the development of new activities in 2021. Some of the children enrolled in an Injaz child learning center in a formal IDP camp participated in integrated education and PSS programming for multiple years under Injaz 2.

## **D2. PSS 2.0**

Integrating findings of the baseline assessment of PSS 1.0, the Better Together curriculum was developed by a PSS and trauma professional of Syrian origin who is specialized in adapting evidence-based trauma programming to include parent support for families that have experienced conflict. She reviewed the PSS 1.0 curriculum and developed a new curriculum for children and caregivers that includes trauma recovery sessions along with SEL. It integrates caregivers into the program and expanded the curriculum to be implemented over a minimum period of eight weeks. This initial timeframe was driven by funding and contractual time constraints. Implementation indicated the need for additional time to absorb and practice new concepts and to provide an adequate number of make-up sessions for those who had unexpected absences during the course of the program.

The PSS 2.0 curriculum, which was peer reviewed by USAID, required a core team of four facilitators per cohort, two to work with the children and two to work with the caregivers when they split, and then all four supporting the joint family sessions. Once a week a caregiver and 1-2 of their children would gather in separate tents, children together and caregivers together, for a one-hour session with their peers; following this, the children and their caregivers were reunited for a one-hour family session.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://casel.org/>.

Injaz piloted the curriculum in the Abu Khashab formal IDP camp in Deir Ezzor governorate. Recruitment for the program was conducted by the CBO's child protection officers. They handed out fliers about the program and also went around the camp to introduce the concept to caregivers. Participation was limited to 1-2 children per caregiver to ensure that there was enough room in the tents for the children and their caregivers and also to ensure that in the family sessions the amount of time needed for an activity would not be dramatically different between families. The Injaz 2 team delivered two rounds of the trauma recovery program, and at its close, had waiting lists of caregivers interested in participating. We found that enrolled caregivers were actively generating interest in the program among their neighbors and social networks such that demand exceeded the supply capacity at the pilot stage.

The curriculum was written for children between the ages of 8 and 14 and was found to be most effective among younger children (8-11). Caregivers were asked to commit to the whole eight-week program and were not allowed to switch with their fellow caregivers from the family should they no longer be able to attend. This was deemed by the curriculum developer as possibly being disruptive, as the new caregiver would not have been a part of the group and already worked their way through the curriculum. Therefore, when a caregiver had to drop out of the program, this meant that their child or children also had to drop out of the program. A family was considered to have dropped out of the program after missing two weeks of programming. Weekly make-up sessions were conducted for families that had to miss a week's sessions to support retention in the program and address scheduling conflicts. This was found to be very useful and should be built into similar future programming.

The following table provides details of the Better Together sessions by week of implementation.

<b>Better Together Implementation Plan</b>		
<b>Week</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>WEEK 1</b>	Child 1	Recognizing My Feelings
	Parent 1	Emotional Awareness
	Family 1	Sharing Our Emotions
<b>WEEK 2</b>	Child 2	Listening and Speaking
	Parent 2	Communicating Effectively
	Family 2	Building family Communications
<b>WEEK 3</b>	Child 3	Problem Solving
	Parent 3	Problem Solving & Praise
	Family 3	Family Sharing
<b>WEEK 4</b>	Child 4	Conflict Resolution
	Parent 4	Effective Discipline
	Family 4	Appreciating Our Family
<b>WEEK 5</b>	Child 5	Managing Unwanted Reminders
	Parent 5	Managing Unwanted Reminders
	Family 5	Dream Control
<b>WEEK 6</b>	Child 6	Redirecting My Thoughts
	Parent 6	Grief and Anger
	Family 6	What We Want From Each Other
<b>WEEK 7</b>	Child 7	Facing Fearful Reminders
	Parent 7	Facing Fearful Reminders
	Family 7	Appreciating What We Have
<b>WEEK 8</b>	Child 8	A Hopeful Future
	Parent 8	Planning for the Future
	Family 8	Celebrating Our Family

### **D3. Child Safeguarding**

Recognizing that children in emergencies are at a higher risk of exposure to abuse and exploitation, Injaz 2 made a commitment – and expected the same commitment from all CBO partners – to protect children within all activities and facilities and to promote a culture of child safeguarding at all times. This was

achieved through a variety of means, such as establishing robust policies and systems for protection and reporting and implementing survivor-centered approaches in all subawards and activities. Injaz 2 worked closely with CBO partners to develop individualized child safeguarding policies that the CBOs agreed to. Additionally, the CBOs hired child protection officers (CPOs) that were trained by the project.

By the end of the project, there were 14 CPOs working in the formal and informal IDP camps where it operated and in the vocational training program settings. They included:

- 8 CPOs (4 women) focused on children in the remedial education and SLP programs
- 4 CPOs (2 women) focused on children in the social reintegration programs
- 2 CPOs (1 women) focused on children (under the age of 18) in the TVET programs

These CPOs observed children in the remedial education, SLP, and social reintegration activities and in TVET activities where there were trainees under the age of 18, and intervened when problems arose that made the learning environment unsafe for the children. These problems ranged from smaller concerns such as children yelling at one another, bullying one another, pushing in line, or not following covid hygiene rules, to more serious concerns, such as children who appeared to be suffering from abuse or neglect.

Injaz 2 training for the CPOs, which ranged from three to four days depending on the circumstances, included child safeguarding (CSG) definitions and concepts, case management, referrals, and the core concepts of PSS. The CSG tracker acted as a feedback loop that was regularly reviewed by the project training team to monitor what information the CPOs provided and used to clarify the details of concerns that arose and how best to act upon them.

The CPOs for the remedial education, SLP, and social reintegration activities attended each lesson for about ten minutes and checked in with the teachers to discuss positive discipline, issues in the classroom, and class attendance. They conducted home visits and awareness sessions that stemmed from what they saw in the classroom or what was reported to them by the teachers. For example, they conducted home visits for children who were not attending class to try to understand why they were not attending and encouraged the children and their caregivers to allow the child to return to learning or to discuss concerning behavior of a child. They also held awareness sessions with children to discuss issues that were impacting a larger number of children, such as covid protection measures. The CPOs were also responsible for helping the children with queuing as they entered and left class and helping with covid prevention measures by taking children's and teachers' temperatures prior to class. The CPOs were also available to provide disinfectant gel prior to class and to ensure that everyone had a mask and was maintaining distance from one another.

For TVET workshops, the CPOs engaged in trainee WhatsApp groups that were used throughout the theoretical and practical pieces of the curriculum. The CPOs followed the discussions in these groups to ensure that they were appropriate and ensure that there was no bullying or misbehavior from or towards those under 18. The TVET CPOs also visited the training centers daily or as often as possible when there was in-person training taking place to check in with the trainees. The CPOs worked to ensure that communication was appropriate online and in-person, to address issues as they arose, and to ensure the physical safety of the environment of the in-person trainings. During their training, the CPOs provided with CBO's code of conduct, examples of misconduct as well as recommended responses based on levels of severity.

#### **D4. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

The pandemic prevented the project from conducting an endline survey for the PSS 1.0 activity, but while the program was running and after it was completed, CPOs observed that even though the activities were providing treatment to children in school, caregivers were either not supporting the healing or even contributing to the trauma at home. The idea of designing PSS 2.0 to include caregivers and home visits grew organically out of feedback received in the camps. The second challenge that persists in NES is the lack of a referral system for child safeguarding and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs beyond those that are immediately addressed by trained lay persons such as child protection officers and PSS facilitators.

## E. Social Reintegration

In 2019, under the Tribal Sponsorship Program, tribal leaders in NES negotiated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) for the release of family members of ISIS fighters from isolation camps. Isolation camps were makeshift detention centers that hold families of people associated with ISIS activities. The largest isolation camp in NES was Al Hol, which by the end of Injaz 2 was home to about 69,000 displaced people, of which 95 percent were women and children with limited access to health care, education, and psychosocial support. Successful negotiations led to nearly 1,500 women and children associated with ISIS fighters being returned from these isolation camps to areas of Raqqa, Tabqa, and rural Deir Ezzor over four waves beginning July 2019.<sup>2</sup>

### E1. Pilot

Prior to the pilot Injaz 2 intervention, there was no evidence of any established youth social reintegration program or post-return programming in NES. Though the challenges were significant, there were enormous opportunities to scale up an evidence-based social reintegration program in communities across NES once its effectiveness has been documented.

The social reintegration (SR) program was developed in 2021 to find ways to support children with direct exposure to ISIS. This could be because they lived in a formal IDP camp such as Al Hol with families that had members who were directly involved in ISIS or who had family members themselves who were directly involved with ISIS.

The program worked with children aged 8 to 14 with direct ISIS affiliation and children without such an affiliation in an effort to avoid further stigmatizing those children with a direct ISIS affiliation. In the pilot, the ratio of ISIS affiliated to non-affiliated was about 1 to 3.

The program was piloted in two locations by separate CBOs in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor over a period of seven weeks in September and October 2021. The length was compressed from eight weeks due to covid restrictions and time constraints related to getting the necessary legal approvals before the project closed. Injaz 2 was unable to engage with caregivers, as was done under the PSS 2.0 trauma recovery program, because spouses of ISIS fighters are considered by the State Department as members of a designated terrorist organization. Pre- and post-intervention surveys were conducted with a sample of the children to try to understand how their psychosocial wellbeing changed after having participated in the program. Details about the baseline and endline results are covered in the section below.

The program consisted of two components: the social reintegration curriculum and remedial literacy for children who tested into one of the remedial literacy levels of Injaz's remedial education program. The social reintegration component of the program was developed as an eight-week curriculum by an external

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<sup>2</sup> El-Khani, Aala. A case for the development and implementation of a reintegration program for youth in Northeast Syria with a focus on preventing and countering violent extremism. Chemonics, Washington D.C., June 2021.

partner with experience developing and implementing preventing violent extremism (PVE) programs in locations such as Nigeria and Pakistan. It was implemented with a total of 465 children (240 girls): 235 in Raqqa and 230 in Deir Ezzor. The curriculum focused on four main themes:

1. Social and emotional learning;
2. Peacebuilding and value-based education;
3. Critical thinking and peace building;
4. Resilience

The session content was as follows:

WEEK	MODULE	DAY	ACTIVITY/THEME
WEEK 1	Social and Emotional Learning	Day One	Welcome and Setting the Scene
		Day Two	Introduction to SEL
		Day Three	Framework for SEL
		Day Four	Complimentary Circles
		Day Five	Identifying Stress
WEEK 2	Social and Emotional Learning and Peacebuilding and Value-Based Programming	Day One	Identifying and Expressing Emotion Through Art
		Day Two	Practicing Mindfulness
		Day Three	Creating a Peace Tree
		Day Four	Understanding Diversity
		Day Five	Creating a Peace Identity
WEEK 3	Peacebuilding and Value-Based Programming	Day One	Agreeing to Disagree
		Day Two	Improving Learning Culture
		Day Three	Conflict Resolution
		Day Four	Perspectives on Peace
		Day Five	Dialogue and Peace Building
WEEK 4	Critical Thinking and Peacebuilding	Day One	Knowledge Application
		Day Two	Data Differentiating
		Day Three	Information Classification
		Day Four	Problem Solving and Teamwork
		Day Five	Debate
WEEK 5		Day One	Thinking Outside the Box

	Critical Thinking and Peacebuilding	Day Two	Challenging Assumptions
		Day Three	Evidence Based Reasoning
		Day Four	Deductive Reasoning
		Day Five	Inductive Reasoning and Breaking Stereotypes
		WEEK 6	Resilience
		Day Two	Identifying Positive Traits
		Day Three	Appreciating Others
		Day Four	Overcoming Setbacks
		Day Five	Building Trust
WEEK 7	Resilience Cont.	Day One	Coping Skills
		Day Two	Building Perseverance and Self-Control
		Day Three	Learning to Deal with Loss
		Day Four	Enhancing Trust
		Day Five	A New Chapter

Injaz 2 set up a peer review of the curriculum by a USAID PVE expert, a trauma expert of Syrian origin who designed the PSS 2.0 program, a regional disability and inclusion expert with extensive experience in Syria, and inputs from the two participating CBOs facilitators. After the seven-week pilot concluded, Injaz 2 worked closely with the CBO facilitators to further adapt the curriculum to be more easily engage non- or low-literacy children and to incorporate suggestions from those who had implemented the content in a classroom setting. Furthermore, after the pilot concluded and the curriculum was modified, Injaz 2 conducted a refresher training of each activity and of the gender awareness training per the facilitators' requests.

For the remedial literacy component, prior to the start of the program diagnostic, literacy tests were conducted so the children could be placed in the appropriate level: non-reader, novice reader, advanced reader, and proficient or beyond proficient reader. The children were then grouped into cohorts, each of which met five or six times a week, depending on if there were make-up sessions being conducted. Each day they would have two remedial literacy sessions lasting 45 minutes each with a remedial literacy teacher and one social reintegration lesson lasting 90 minutes with a social reintegration facilitator, for a total of three hours of programming daily.

**E2. Evaluation Findings**

As a part of this pilot, the Injaz monitoring and evaluation team developed a bespoke pre- and post-test survey to gain a better sense of how the pilot affected children across the learning areas. The survey integrated questions or components designed to measure social and emotional skills among elementary school-aged children that have been validated among Arabic-speaking youth populations by

organizations such as the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Injaz 2 drew on:

- Social-Emotional Response and Information Scenarios (SERAIS),
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale,
- Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale,
- Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (RISC-10),
- My Learning Mind, and
- Empathy Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents

The children were interviewed utilizing the same questions prior to the start of the program and after its conclusion to understand if the program yielded changes in these learning areas. In total, 322 children were sampled at baseline and 302 at endline and we were able to match baseline and endline responses for 294 children, which still represents a sample for the population that is considered representative at a 95% confidence level with a margin of error less than 5%, in line with standard research practices.

The results of the baseline survey found that self-esteem was higher among returnees and children with ISIS exposure, suggesting that adverse life experiences may increase self-esteem, at least among younger students. Other results suggested that all students could benefit from learning that increases “cognitive integrity”<sup>4</sup> as well as creative problem-solving abilities, and that younger groups (ages 7-10), those who cannot read, girls, and participants with ISIS exposure may benefit the most.

Peacebuilding: The clearest emergent trend in terms of peacebuilding was that the returnee cohort had below-average scores on 4/5 questions, suggesting that returnees can strongly benefit from peacebuilding programming. The fact that returnees, readers, and older groups reported overall high rates of resilience suggests that perhaps resilience is also developed through experiential learning and that general education or literacy programming may also increase resilience.

There were clear differences by age group. Older students generally outperformed younger students in SEL, resilience, and critical thinking, suggesting that these skills increase with age and lived experiences. Separating age cohorts during training would likely be more constructive for both younger and older students. Older students may also benefit from tailored programming that focuses on areas where they performed lower: peacebuilding and self-esteem/self-efficacy and is relevant to their age and life circumstances. A 14-year-old, for example, will likely need different SEL strategies for her stage in life than an eight-year-old.

The results of the endline survey found that overall, students showed an average increase in 8% of capacities across learning areas and showed statistically significant increased capacities in three of the four areas listed above. Younger students (ages 8-10) showed the highest increases across all learning areas. The highest gains were seen in the areas of resilience: 15% increase; and peacebuilding: 20% increase. Critical thinking increased by an average of 5%. SEL overall increased by 3%. While overall SEL increases were modest, students notably increased their emotional regulation (one aspect of SEL) by 17%.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://inee.org/measurement-library/social-emotional-response-and-information-scenarios-serais#:~:text=Social%2DEmotional%20Response%20and%20Information%20Scenarios%20\(SERAIS\)%20is%20a,mong%20elementary%20school%2Daged%20children.&text=This%20tool%20is%20part%20of,in%20our%20Measur%20Review%20Criteria](https://inee.org/measurement-library/social-emotional-response-and-information-scenarios-serais#:~:text=Social%2DEmotional%20Response%20and%20Information%20Scenarios%20(SERAIS)%20is%20a,mong%20elementary%20school%2Daged%20children.&text=This%20tool%20is%20part%20of,in%20our%20Measur%20Review%20Criteria).

<sup>4</sup> According to the tool used, cognitive integrity is the habit of interacting with differing viewpoints for the sake of learning the truth or reaching the best decision, the tendency to express strong intellectual curiosity.

Girls showed statistically significant increases in all areas, while boys, who started out more strongly in critical thinking and SEL did not show statistically significant increases in these areas. These findings suggest that girls who start out with the least skills gain the most in the program.

ISIS-affiliated children had similar positive outcomes to their non-ISIS affiliated peers. However, the emotional regulation of the former increased dramatically compared to their peers (it started much lower): 29% increase versus 13%.

Both teachers and students found the program to be successful and engaging. Teachers said the program gave children new tools to express themselves and engage with their “inner worlds”; they reported positive changes in children’s individual behaviors as well as in their abilities to work together.

### **E3. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Overall, the program’s strengths included building resilience, providing students with a greater understanding of peacebuilding and related values, and a stable, nurturing learning environment with caring teachers to reinforce the curriculum’s learning and contribute to the curriculum’s SEL themes. Some of the program’s weaknesses reported by teachers were the short time period for an intensive curriculum and that some of the activities needed to be adapted for less literate children from writing exercises into drawing, painting and play. A longer timeframe and additional learning modules could improve the curriculum, as could more in-depth training on all modules for teachers.

Because older students (14+) did not show any statistically significant results in any learning area, the curriculum appears to be most appropriate for younger cohorts. It was designed for an age ceiling of 14; however, the CBOs registered several children who were older. There were very few older (14+) participants with ISIS exposure who took part in the program because many such youngsters are income-earners for their families and do not have time to attend educational programs. There is a gap in social reintegration services for teenagers.

Additionally, there were very few older (13+) participants with ISIS exposure. Upon investigating why, we learned that many such youngsters are income-earners for their families and do not have time to attend educational programs. As this is an at-risk group, follow-on programs may consider how to include working children.

## **F. Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

The first subawards to conduct TVET training were granted in April 2019, and the first training began a month later. Over the life of the program, three CBOs provided TVET training in Deir Ezzor and one in Raqqa.

Prior to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, these four CBOs trained on 12 different vocations (see box). These vocations were selected based on local market assessments conducted in northern Syria. The curricula were developed by Injaz TVET partners and specialized partnership facilitators, though in some cases the CBO made use of former curricula used in TVET schools in Syria before the conflict.

The training was provided to youth and adults through two modalities: 1) an in-person approach where trainees attended a TVET learning center five days a week for 2-3 months, depending on the vocation being studied, and 2) a blended learning approach where trainees would study the theoretical component of the program online utilizing the Moodle platform<sup>5</sup> and then if they passed the theoretical exam, would proceed forward, participating in in-person practical sessions at a TVET center, with this practical component being shorter, mostly lasting around two weeks.

#### **Injaz 2 Funded Vocational Training**

1. Accounting and inventory management
2. Agricultural nurseries
3. Carpentry
4. Clothes making
5. Computer lab (advanced)
6. Dairy production
7. Electricity installation
8. Electronic appliance repair
9. Mobile phone repair
10. Modern irrigation
11. Plumbing
12. Welding

Most in-person training had a three-month duration, while the blended training mostly lasted for two months, with the exception being computer basics, which had a duration of only one month.

The shift to a blended approach was necessitated by the pandemic and related lockdowns. Blended learning was piloted in May 2020 and began exclusively in October 2020. The different types of training provided using the blended approach was limited to seven vocations that were evaluated to be deliverable using such an approach: 1) agricultural nurseries, 2) computers (both advanced and basic),<sup>6</sup> 3) dairy production, 4) electronics appliance repair, 5) finance and inventory management (equivalent to accounting and inventory management above), 6) mobile phone repair, and 7) solar panels and electricity installation (equivalent to electricity installation above).

The switch to blended learning led to a large increase in trainees registering, but not a great deal more graduates. Therefore, in agreement with NEA, it was determined that Injaz 2 would align the reporting to what was done in education, which was to report on the number of students that registered in a program and then two weeks into the program, based upon who was attending, report on the number of trainees that had enrolled. The graduation rate would then be calculated based upon the number enrolled and not the number registered. This was done because there were a lot of trainees who would register for the blended learning, but never participate.

For the blended learning groups, trainers also put together WhatsApp groups that included all trainees in a cohort, where they could ask questions and the trainers could communicate important pieces of information. Trainees could also ask questions during the theoretical component via the online platform

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<sup>5</sup> Moodle is a free software, a learning management system providing a platform for e-learning and it helps the various educators considerably in conceptualizing the various courses, course structures, and curriculum, thus, facilitating interaction with online students.

<sup>6</sup> The computer lab training focused on preparing trainees to work as external computer consultants in the international market, while the computer basics course was intended to provide trainees with a basic understanding of how to use a computer and different Microsoft programs, such as Word and Excel. The intention of the basic course was to improve their skills, but without any expectation that this would necessarily lead to increasing their employment opportunities, therefore, in agreement with NEA, we did not conduct check-ins with computer basics graduates.



then simply stop attending, as the first component of the training is online and there is not the face-to-face aspect of knowing your trainer and your training colleagues; it is more anonymous, and therefore there are fewer consequences for leaving the program. The other possible factors are unreliable electricity to power devices, and unreliable internet with low bandwidth. Trainees had to wait until they had access to sufficient internet to download course materials and interact with trainers and fellow trainees using data plans that support WhatsApp on mobile phones.]

In the in-person training, women were slightly less likely to graduate than men, with both in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. For blended learning, however, we saw that women had a slightly higher graduation rate. This is likely due to the higher level of dropouts and people leaving the program, possibly because fewer women enrolled, and could be that women are more committed than men once they enroll because there are fewer educational and economic opportunities for women, especially for women not willing/able to go to an in-person program.

*Employment/Self-employment:* At the first check-in at one month after graduation, we found that employment/self-employment rate of graduates was very similar at 48% for in-person graduates and 49% for blended learning graduates. This implies that graduates under both approaches are had a relatively equal level of success in finding work one month after they graduated from the program. At the six-month check in, the situation had improved overall, with many more graduates reporting employment or self-employment among both in-person and blended learning graduates. In -person graduates reported an employment/self-employment rate of 73% versus 65% for blended learning graduates. Some of these graduates entered a pre-pandemic market. All of the blended learning graduates entered a pandemic-affected market. While female in-person graduates saw an increase in the employment/self-employment rate of 27%, this was only an increase of 10% for blended learning graduates. Additionally, women who participated in the in-person training seemed to have an advantage in finding employment/self-employment at six months post-graduation. This could stem from the additional commitment and effort women, in particular, need to put forward to be able to participate in in-person trainings, which might mean they are more dedicated to finding employment/self-employment. It is also possible that such women have more supportive social systems that encourage them to work or do not prevent them from working, as this system allowed them to attend an in-person training that focuses on helping people find employment or to become self-employed. Furthermore, as noted above, a number of women graduated and entered a pre-pandemic labor market, which saw women leave the workforce on a global scale.

*Income:* The findings showed similar impacts on graduates' incomes one month after they graduated, independent of the learning approach utilized. The data indicated a sizeable difference between the genders, with the incomes reported by women on average being much lower than for men. Overall, the average monthly income for in-person graduates and blended learning graduates increased and did so more significantly than at the first check-in. The findings indicated that six months after graduation, in-person graduates earned more and saw a larger increase in their incomes on average than blended learning graduates. Along with this difference in earnings between in-person and blended learning graduates, the incomes reported by women were on average much lower than those for men.

## **F2. Qualitative Research**

After the first cycle of blended learning took place, Injaz 2 conducted qualitative research through focus group discussions with graduates, trainers, and employers to try to identify any curriculum gaps that might exist. This process inspired the project to update three curricula – finance and inventory management, mobile phone repair, and solar panels and electricity installation – and to make other adjustments to improve the training. It also encouraged the project to consider developing advanced courses, which it did for solar panels and electricity installation. The finance and inventory management and solar panels and electricity installation training were reviewed and upgraded by experts in both fields. The updated curricula were used starting at the end of 2020, as was the advanced solar curriculum. Additionally, a

one-time advanced computer lab training was also conducted to update their knowledge and to provide them with a computer, as computer lab graduates were not previously provided with a start-up kit. Injaz also informed the USAID-funded vocational training program based in Amman of the gaps and subsequent upgrades to the curricula. The USAID program funded several of the same CBO partners for some of the same vocations, using the same original curriculum.

### **F3. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Understanding that class size was important to project outputs and indicators, the CBOs sought to enroll as many students as possible. However, this approach ran up against the trainers' ability to provide higher quality training to fewer participants. Tension between training a few people very professionally is good for market growth, but not good for M&E outputs and indicators.

In terms of gender equity, the program was challenged in attracting an equal number of female trainees. For the in-person training, 35% of trainees were female compared to 24% of trainees under blended learning. While many of the in-person training were single sex, only four trainings were single sex in the blended learning trainings. The trainings that were male only or strongly male dominated took place in Deir Ezzor, which is considered to be more conservative, especially when it comes to education for women and girls. When we look only at the blended learning that took place outside of Deir Ezzor, we find that the percentage of women increased but only to 28% (448 of 1,627). Therefore, it did not seem as though the location of the training was the sole factor, as 28% is still much lower than the 35% of female enrollees in the in-person trainings.

For the CBOs that served as trainers, examiners, and accreditors of their courses, their became a conflict of interest as well as a lack of interest by participants in having an accreditation from a CBO. In the last cycle of training, the Raqqa local council began providing accreditation, but this too lacked the level of credibility participants were looking for.

## **G. Presentations**

Injaz 2 presented on our participatory approach to disability and inclusion assessments piloted in both northwest and northeast Syria at the biannual UK Education and Development Forum (UKFIET) conference in 2019. We presented again at the next UKFIET conference in 2021 on impact of the shift from in-person to blended learning in vocational training. We presented on the PSS 1.0 baseline assessment findings at PeaceCon 2020 hosted by the US-based Alliance for Peacebuilding. We also presented on the PSS 2.0 and social reintegration pilots and research findings to smaller working groups facilitated by the same organization. In Q4 of 2021, Injaz 2 presented to the 35-member D-ISIS Coalition's Stabilization Working Group on the social reintegration pilot and research findings. In April 2022, we will present at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) annual conference on the Injaz 2 pilots in trauma-informed psychosocial support and social reintegration and key research findings. Throughout the life of the project, Injaz 2 delivered a number of briefings of START and UK (then-DFID and later FCDO) officials on technical areas of our program.

## **H. Overall Lessons for Future Programming**

Should future programming in this space maintain its focus on stabilization activities, the following perspective should be kept in mind when conducting education programming. Experts in the field of PVE argue that a critical mind would is not easily deceived by recruitment efforts of extremist groups. By helping teachers to think critically, they can cascade that learning to children to think critically as a key

element of de-radicalization. Teachers can't teach what they haven't learned. Critical, analytical thinking was not part of the regime approach to teaching. When it comes to teaching numeracy and literacy how the material is delivered makes a difference. Additionally, increasing emphasis on gender diversity, specifically gender awareness in the classroom, and gender and disability inclusion through training and whenever possible by reflection, are also strong recommendations.

In terms of more specific lessons for future programming, capacity building, particularly facilitation skills training was especially important for CBO partners. Investing in the CBO/facilitators' capacity and offering constant support and monitoring, was extremely helpful in this program. This was especially true of innovative programming, such as the PSS and social reintegration activities. For the PSS program, the recruitment process took time, as it was complicated by the fact that caregivers needed to be informed about the program and then once they are signed up, the CPOs needed time to organize the cohorts so that children would not miss their scheduled remedial education or SLP classes. Other considerations included the right gender balance for caregivers in a cohort and, what time of day the caregivers are able to attend such a program.

For social reintegration, extending the duration of activities with children would enhance their value significantly. The same curriculum activities can be implemented over a longer duration with a maximum of three social reintegration activities per week and two recreational activities. This would result in a 12-week program.

Working with CBOs more broadly, program design that starts by looking at what activities are needed then determining which partners are suitable would be a better approach than continually assigning new sets of activities to partners based on unrelated skill sets. Several but not all partners succeeded at pivoting from remedial education to PSS and social reintegration, for example. But each of those activities, along with TVET, would benefit from implementers specialized in specific activities who can offer a comparative advantage.