

R&R Syria AISBL

Annual Report 2014

As adopted by the Ordinary General Assembly on 20 June 2015

I. Executive Summary

Having concluded the year 2013 as a year of establishment, our young international NGO Relief & Reconciliation for Syria AISBL (“R&R Syria”) started the year 2014 as a first year of full exercise under Belgian law. The Royal Decree granting full legal personality was signed by the King of the Belgians on 18 December 2013 and published in the *Moniteur belge* on 22 January 2014. By the end of 2014, R&R Syria counted altogether 192 members worldwide.

In 2014, R&R Syria pursued its vision to combine conflict transformation with humanitarian aid in response to the Syrian crisis, uniting potentially opposed communities around a common cause: the future of the youth. Following the establishment of our first Peace Centre at the Syrian-Lebanese border in July 2013, R&R Syria further developed its work in the Akkar region of Lebanon throughout the year 2014. We could maintain and expand our work with those persons we served in 2013, who are mostly living in informal refugee camps scattered across the region, and we could also start working in the Alawite villages of Akkar. In 2014, R&R Syria was hence active at the main Peace Centre in Bkarzla and in four outreach centres across Akkar: the Al-Ihsan Educational Centre in the plain of Minyarah as well as in the municipalities of Michmich, Kroum Arab and Hissa. We covered more than 20 tented settlements in our educational and psychosocial work, enrolled 682 students in our regular educational activities and distributed food baskets and other survival aid to 2,161 most vulnerable families, reaching more than 11,000 individuals.

The Syrian crisis has lost none of its ferocity. To the contrary: the situation is still getting worse every day, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries where by the end of 2015 more than 4 million Syrians have stranded as refugees. Amongst all neighbours, Lebanon is certainly suffering most from the refugee crisis. Political violence has been spilling over into this small country that is itself still torn apart by the traumatic experience of civil war and occupation.

II. Activities in 2014:

R&R Syria and our Lebanese chapter (“R&R Lebanon”) obtained their legal personality in 2013. In 2014, two other national chapters obtained an own legal personality under their respective law: R&R Germany and R&R France. We could hence establish official bank accounts in Belgium, Germany and France. The Lebanese bank account is still pending.

In 2014, we obtained our first public grant for supporting our humanitarian emergency aid, but we pursued our strategy to be a membership-based organisation that is relying mainly on private donations, for keeping our independence and for ensuring the sustainability of our work. The 192 members of R&R Syria in 2014 were active in 12 national branches around the world.

(a) Peacebuilding Activities

The main activities of R&R Syria were taking place in the premises and surroundings of its first Peace Centre in Bkarzla, a small village in the Akkar region of Lebanon, only 12 km from the Syrian border. Having established the Peace Centre under the auspices of a local Steering Committee, composed by moral authorities of all major communities present in the region, we could develop and consolidate our work in this conflict zone. The Peacebuilding Programme Line is also the overarching programme for our work in Lebanon, providing for all our basic infrastructure.

With about 1.5 million Syrian refugees and nearly 1 million Palestinians and others, Lebanon has become the country with the highest ratio of refugees per capita in the world. And the situation is getting worse as refugees are running out of savings and the international influx of aid is decreasing. The Syrian conflict has spilled over into Lebanon where the sectarian balance after 15 years of civil war followed by Syrian and Israeli occupation is still very fragile. The Akkar region is one of the hotspots in Lebanon. The security situation in 2014 remains however a mixed picture. In some areas of Lebanon, a significant improvement could be recorded, most notably in Saida and in Tripoli. The continuous heavy fighting in Tripoli between the Alawite neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen and the surrounding Sunni areas ceased in May 2014 with the implementation of the Security Plan by the Lebanese Army. However, violence occurred in some parts of Akkar in August and September and the kidnapping and beheading of Lebanese soldiers by forces claiming allegiance to ISIS in the Bekaa provoked a raise of resentment and violence against Syrian refugees throughout the country. Also in Akkar, curfews were imposed on Syrians and some refugees were expelled from their camps. Arbitrary arrests, raids and threats against Syrians were on the raise.

R&R Syria pursued its long-term strategy in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation in 2014. We could reach one of our main overarching objectives: working with all communities present in the region of our first Peace Centre despite all political differences. Following R&R Syria's specific methodology, we had already established links with all main communities present in Akkar in 2013, involving moral authorities in the steering committee that precedes the establishment of the Peace Centre: Sunni, Maronite, Orthodox and Alawite leaders from both Syria and Lebanon were amongst them. In 2014, we could expand also our operational work to the youth of all these communities, most notably through the establishment of two further outreach centres where our operational programme lines in the fields of humanitarian emergency aid, educational work and psychosocial support were implemented. The main Peace Centre in a Maronite village and the first outreach centres in the Syrian refugee camps of the Minyarah plain and the Sunni city of Michmich were hence completed by two more outreach centres in the mixed village of Kroum Arab (Sunni and Orthodox) and the Alawite municipality of Hissa.

Following this mile stone, the third phase of our peacebuilding strategy could be launched: bringing together not only moral authorities but also the youth of all these communities. It took us five more months before we could do a first step in this direction, bringing together for the first time the youth of the Alawite villages with the youth of Bkarzla, Michmich and the Syrian refugee camps at the occasion of our festival at the end of the summer. The first interactions were still quite timid and more opportunities are needed for fostering links. It is our plan to pursue this strategy, which should ultimately lead to the establishment of a regular youth club that is coming together at least once per month in the premises of the Peace Centre. We are not yet there.

Considering the fact that peacebuilding and conflict transformation, contrary to humanitarian aid, are goals that can barely be achieved in the short term, we have consolidated our strategy in 2014 and we are pursuing the establishment of bonds of trust and friendship first of all between R&R Syria and all communities present in our operational areas and secondly between the communities themselves. Our approach of submitting ourselves to the consensus of all communities present and of sustaining a presence of international volunteers that are serving the youth of all communities has been very beneficial in this regard. More efforts are needed to solidify the emerging structures of cooperation in form of our steering committee and in form of local youth movement.

(b) Humanitarian Emergency Aid

Under the directives of the Humanitarian Programme Line Lebanon 2013-2015 we provided for material help to the youth and their families. These activities also served as a first contact point. In close cooperation with national and international organisations, we responded to those needs that had so far been neglected. Most notably, we provided support in the field of survival aid through the distribution of food-baskets and life stock to most vulnerable families and through the operation of water wells.

The humanitarian catastrophe provoked by the Syrian crisis further deteriorated in 2014, with the estimated number of persons killed throughout the conflict being put at more than 220,000 men and women by the end of the year, a large percentage of which were children. More than 9 million Syrians lost their home, more than 3 million became refugees in neighbouring countries. Inside Syria, access to humanitarian survival aid was all too often restricted to political conformity. Large amounts of international humanitarian assistance were channelled exclusively to government-controlled areas. And even within these areas, distributions were often limited to households chosen by the Syrian government and its agencies according to political criteria. In Lebanon, the refugee crisis was still sharpening. In 2014, the influx of Syrian refugees continued. By the end of the year, more than 1.2 million refugees had registered with the UNHCR. The real number was supposed to be higher still. Credible estimations speak of at least 1.5 Syrians in Lebanon. In 2014, the UNHCR and other international agencies improved their assessment of the situation. However, the overall amount available decreased; the WFP had to lower the amount of monthly cash-for-food assistance from \$27/month to \$19/month and restrict it to most vulnerable households.

By its modest size and structure, R&R Syria is not in a position to provide large-scale humanitarian emergency aid to an entire area. However, we continued our strategy to give targeted assistance to families we work with under the auspices of our educational work and to provide survival aid to families in our operational areas. In 2014, R&R Syria received a first public sub-grant by the British government to distribute food baskets and life stock at a larger scale, including the operation of clean water wells in areas without drinking water. The grant of \$125,000 was awarded in the end of April 2014 and the implementation period was extended until the end of the year. By 31 December 2014, R&R Syria could exhaust approximately two-thirds of this grant through the distribution of survival aid to more than 11,000 most vulnerable individuals. The project had set as objective to cover only 7,800 individuals but according to the wishes of the communities we serve, we had to distribute less aid items to a larger amount of persons. Still, our field staff was prevented from implementing the full size of the grant by unforeseen problems with regard to the management of cash-flow from Belgium to Lebanon. The transfer of larger amounts of financial resources to Lebanon provoked the total break-down of our bank transfer system. The complete picture of this break-down, which resulted in the impossibility to wire any more money via bank transfers, only became clear in the last quarter of the year.

The implementation of this first public sub-grant gave us many lessons learned, most specifically for the improvement of our financial architecture and the management of our cash-flows. In consequence, a process of reform and consolidation was launched for the year 2015. The field staff of R&R Syria concluded that large-scale public grants should not constitute more than 50% of R&R Syria's total revenues, giving hence the possibility to ensure the independence and sustainability of our work. According to this point of view, short-term and punctual distributions may be needed in some cases of emergency, but they are only complying with R&R Syria's overarching goals if they are resulting in a continuous and long-term relationship.

(c) Educational Activities

Education is at the heart of R&R Syria's daily activities. Education is key for the future of the youth, in Syria but also in Lebanon. Under the directives of the Educational Programme Line Lebanon 2013-2015, we offered educational activities along four main projects: a) intensive language classes for achieving basic literacy and numeracy, b) remedial classes in support of those children in need who could not integrate public schools, c) community-based education in form of our informal camp school for those Syrian refugees who could not integrate Lebanese schools, d) a "Work & Learn Scheme" with basic literacy and numeracy modules combined with vocational training for those who could neither integrate formal nor non-formal education because of their necessity to work.

Despite great international efforts, the educational crisis of Syrian children considerably worsened in 2014. According to UNICEF, about 440,000 of the officially registered 1.2 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon alone are school-aged children. Only between 40,000 and 70,000 of them could access regular schools in 2014. The risk of a lost generation became a heavy liability for the future of Syria and its neighbouring countries that are aching under the refugee crisis. UNICEF said to have granted

\$500 million to the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education for integrating Syrian refugee children into public Lebanese schools. But according to R&R Syria's experience on the ground, confirmed by local UNHCR and UNICEF staff, less Syrian students were integrated into Lebanese schools in the school year 2014/15 than in 2013/14. The root causes of this perceived tendency have not yet been clearly determined; they may be related to an increase in hostilities towards Syrian refugees or to a change of administrative policy. By the end of 2014, the school year for second-shift classes, foreseen for Syrian students in the afternoon, had not yet started. And worse still: even those Syrian children who could integrate public Lebanese schools were practically barred from receiving a school degree after grade 9 or 12.

In 2014, R&R Syria's crisis response in the field of education took a central role in our daily field work and also in our expenditure. The **specific objective of all educational activities**, as formulated in our Educational Programme Line, remained to integrate the maximum number of Syrian students possible into Lebanese schools. Also according to our surveys and focal group meetings with Syrian communities, we considered this option still as the best option available. By doing so, we followed the principle of continuous care, which means never to opt for a "shoot-and-run" solution but always to maintain relationships as far as possible with those children we serve. Individual child-tracking helps us to monitor and evaluate the development of each child.

Besides the lack of space or political will, the lack of French language skills is one of the main reasons that prevent Syrian students from accessing Lebanese schools. Contrary to Syria, the Lebanese curriculum for most main subjects is mainly taught in French. The starting point for R&R Syria's work with most of our students were hence **intensive language classes** in French or English for in average two hours per day over two months. Having started on a rather informal basis in the framework of our Ramadan Volunteers summer programme, we further developed the methodology of these classes along the UN standards of Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN), including also basic knowledge of Arabic and math if needed. In 2014, altogether 363 children were enrolled in such Basic Literacy and Numeracy classes. A big majority of them could continue their education in other activities with R&R Syria. Only 30 of them were transferred to educational activities of other NGOs who opened a learning centre close to their location in late 2014.

We continue to take care of children even if they could enrol into public schools. Before the conclusion of the school year 2013/14, with the financial support of the partnership with the Irish NGO "Schools for Syria", we could increase the number of students enrolled into our **remedial homework help classes** to altogether 221 by the end of the school year 2013/14. We were operating this activity at least two afternoons per week in four locations: at the Peace Centre in Bkarzla, in Michmich, in Kroum Arab and in Hissa. With the beginning of the new school year 2014/15, we decided to stop funding homework help in Kroum Arab because the external evaluation of 2014 told us the language level in the primary school there was sufficiently high to ensure a full integration of Syrian students into class. The homework help in Bkarzla, Michmich and Hissa continued throughout the summer vacation in the form of "cahier de vacances" classes and fully resumed with the beginning of the new school year 2014/15.

For those Syrian refugee children who could not integrate into Lebanese schools, we had already started with the beginning of the school year 2013/14 community-based education in form of an **informal camp school** in the Camp Al-Ihsan, situated in the plain of Minyarah. The community targeted by this camp school had chosen in focal group meetings the use of the Lebanese French curriculum as baseline for all teaching activities in order to maintain a chance for their children to integrate Lebanese schools at a later moment. In June 2014, we successfully concluded the first year of this informal camp school, having enrolled 70 students in three classes, animated by three Syrian teaching volunteers and two international volunteers. In spring 2014, UNICEF approached us offering to fund the expansion of this form of community-based education to all refugee camps of Akkar not covered by other actors in the field of education. At the same time, the Lebanese charity initiative Malaak offered to fund the expansion of the campus of the first camp school to 14 new class rooms. We decided to pursue both offers because of the high demand for any regular form of education by Syrian refugees in the area. The expansion of the campus by Malaak was achieved in August 2014 and we could start preparatory intensive classes there on 15 August, followed by the start of the regular school year on 12 October. In the end of 2014, 340 students from a dozen surrounding camps had enrolled in the new Al-Ihsan Educational Centre. R&R Syria provided for the entire school equipment, all learning materials, school books and the allowances for now 15 local teaching volunteers and 2 international teaching volunteers, all of them full-time pertaining hence to five teaching hours per day in 14 school classes and 1 pre-school class. The UNICEF project however, despite several outreach visits to more than 300 informal camps of Western Akkar, did not materialise in a grant, for the Lebanese government prevented the UN from funding any non-formal educational activities covering more than 2 teaching hours per day.

Last but not least, R&R Syria's educational activities also included the development of our **“Work & Learn Scheme”** targeting those older students beyond 15 years of age who could neither enrol in formal nor in non-formal education because of their necessity to work. This scheme was the most flexible of all educational activities, starting with foreign language classes and including also vocational training for sowing and the production of accessories. After the conclusion of the school year 2013/14, we tried to systemise the scheme and conform it to the UN standards of Basic Literacy and Numeracy classes along three competence pools: Arabic, math and one foreign language. We implemented the Work & Learn Scheme mainly in Michmich and at the Al-Ihsan camp school, giving students the flexibility to choose which of these competence pools they wanted to integrate into their schedule. In Michmich, all three modules were offered, at the Al-Ihsan camp school only the foreign language module, most notably for Syrian teaching volunteers to improve their French competences and for other interested adolescents for learning English. The communities we serve required a further development of the Work & Learn Scheme, especially in the field of vocational training modules, which were only implemented in a very basic form. In 2014, 95 students enrolled altogether in different classes offered under the Work & Learn Scheme.

The set-up of R&R Syria's educational activities has considerably evolved over the year 2014. The involvement with local communities under the provisions of the Peacebuilding Programme Line described above gave us a solid ground for replying to the most urgent needs, which are sometimes changing rapidly. It was unclear to what extent Syrian refugee children could be enrolled into

Lebanese schools. In 2014, it became clear that far fewer places were available than scheduled. For this reason, the development of community-based education became a main priority. For ensuring the quality of this form of education, all R&R teachers and teaching volunteers received regular training sessions, ideally once per month, in order to improve their pedagogical skill set in response to the educational crisis and in order to implement different life-skill modules in the field of conflict transformation and environmental awareness into their teaching. Much more efforts are needed to cover the needs in terms of education in the Akkar region alone. The continuous educational work R&R Syria implemented with altogether 682 students in 2014 made a great difference, but was still not enough to reply to all needs on the ground.

(d) Psychosocial Activities

Taking care of the youth also entails addressing the deep trauma Syrian children experienced in the war. Under the directives of the Psychosocial Programme Line Lebanon 2014-2015 R&R Syria strived to address the traumatic experience most children lived through. Foreseen from the onset, this programme line was completed only in the first half of 2014. Until the end of the year, it was still the most under-developed of all three programme lines covering the daily operations under the overarching peacebuilding activities.

Psychosocial activities were implemented with the youth of all five locations R&R Syria covered in Akkar: the main Peace Centre in Bkarzla as well as the Al-Ihsan camp school and the outreach centres in Michmich, Kroum Arab and Hissa. Students enrolled in educational activities were regularly invited to attend recreational activities organised by R&R Syria's local and international volunteers throughout the year, either on a punctual or on a regular basis. We tried to offer at least once a joint outing to all students enrolled with R&R Syria in 2014, but the exact number of those covered could not be assessed. Daily child animation was offered by local volunteers to children enrolled in the Al-Ihsan camp school, but could not be extended to other locations. In the second half of 2014, after the conclusion of the special summer programme, international volunteers started implementing regular dance and sport activities once or twice a week, both for women and for men. The establishment of local youth clubs foreseen in the Psychosocial Programme Line, could only be achieved in Michmich and the Al-Ihsan camp, mainly relying on own local initiatives. There was no funding yet available for the employment of a full-time child psychologist giving professional care to those children in special need, even though R&R Syria paid a regular allowance to one Syrian teaching volunteer at the expanded Al-Ihsan camp school who had pursued studies in psychology.

The further development of psychosocial activities outside the special summer programme Ramadan Volunteers should be considered as a priority for the future. The needs are tremendous in this field even though local communities put less urgency on the crisis response in terms of psychosocial support than on survival aid and education. Different UN-funded agencies were offering psychosocial activities in our operational areas, but mostly without professional capacities for psychological counselling or psychotherapeutic treatment. In the whole of Akkar, only one psychotherapist offered regular sessions for traumatised Syrian refugee children.

(e) Ramadan Volunteers

2014 saw the second edition of our Special Programme Ramadan Volunteers Lebanon. We continued the success of the last year and could accommodate 21 international and local volunteers at our Peace Centre in Bkartzla. Besides the organisation of two monthly intensive classes both for French and English, Ramadan Volunteers implemented a large variety of activities. Most notably, we had for the first time short-term summer volunteers who only staid for up to two weeks and who were involved in the organisation of a summer camp in the mountains of Michmich lasting for five days and involving the local youth club of Michmich and more than 50 Syrian refugee children. Our former long-term volunteer Greg Shaheen made this summer camp possible both with a fundraising campaign back home and the organisation of workshops with local volunteers.

The Ramadan Volunteers programme is a special moment of the year, which sees the condensation of all regular programme lines into one single summer experience. Volunteers from around the world and from most diverse communities are the backbone of this programme. They have been complemented by local volunteers and international visitors who came for a short period of time or a specific project such as the implementation of the yearly Peace Iftar. This year's Peace Iftar took place in the Al-Ihsan camp and involved Christian priests as well as the Sunni Secretary General of the national Deir al-Fatwa of Lebanon. Puppet groups and the circus of our partner organisation Arcenciel complemented the event with a child-friendly programme.

The Ramadan Volunteers programme was seen by all those involved as a huge success. The key question on the overall satisfaction in the anonymous online evaluation survey, in which 19 out of 21 international summer volunteers participated, gave 100% positive results: 35% saying they were extremely satisfied, 53% saying they were quite satisfied and 12% saying they were somewhat satisfied. The clear recommendation is to repeat the experience again.

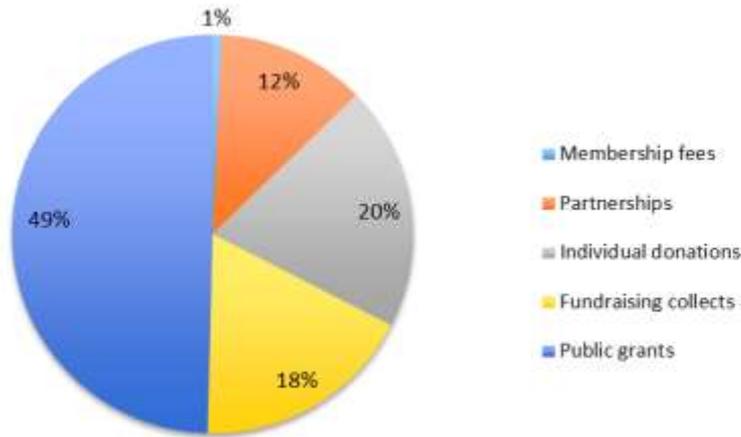
III. Financial Records

The total expenditure by R&R Syria in 2014 were **€210,378.91** as detailed in the financial records annexed to this Annual Report. The total revenues of R&R Syria in 2014 were **€197,377.05** as detailed in the aforementioned financial records. This means that R&R Syria was running a deficit in 2014 of **€13,001.86**, which has to be reported into 2015.

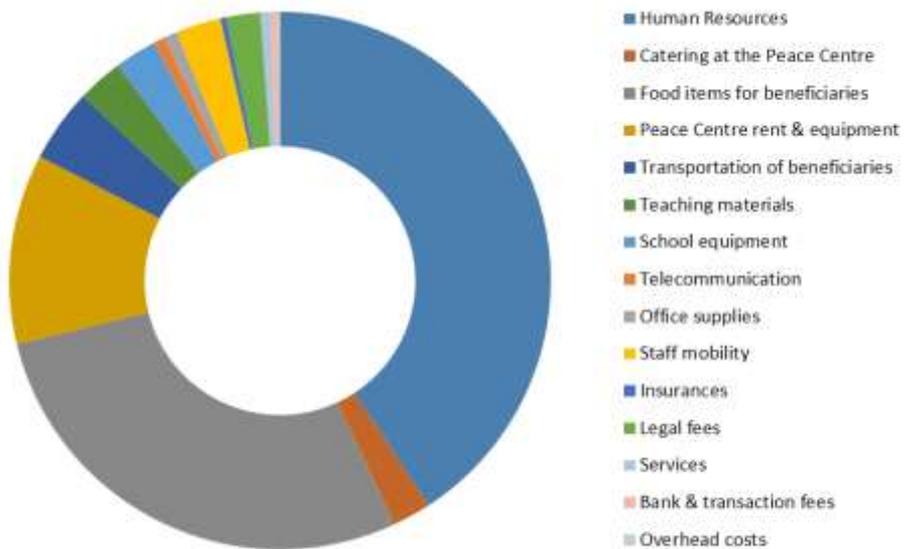
In 2014, R&R Syria has hence more than quadrupled its operational turnover in comparison with the fiscal year 2013. We could further reduce the amount spent for overhead costs outside our countries of implementation to merely 0.14% of all expenditure. In terms of revenues, 46% of all income was generated through the first public sub-grant R&R Syria received from the British government whereas the remaining 54% were covered by private funds, either through membership fees, individual donors, collects or private partnerships.

Here an overview of all revenues and all expenditure in 2014 as summarised in the detailed financial records adopted by the Ordinary General Assembly:

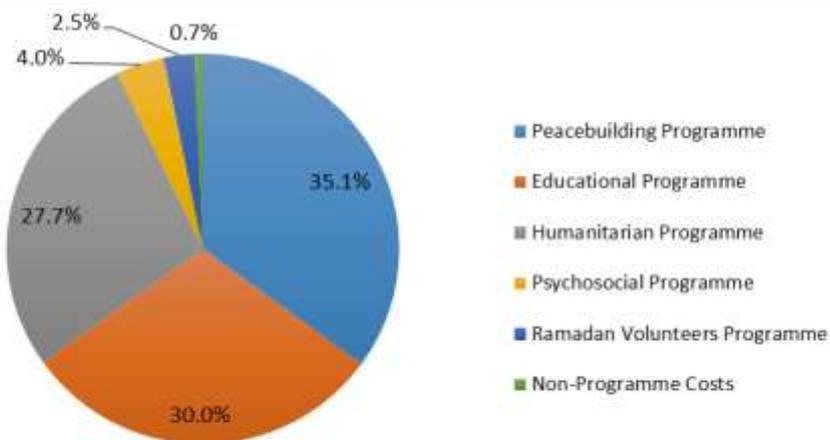
Revenues after categories



Expenditure after categories



Expenditure after R&R Programme Line



Revenues after Categories

Membership fees	1,268.54 €	in %:	0.64
Partnerships	22,275.05 €	in %:	11.29
Individual donations	36,802.10 €	in %:	18.65
Fundraising collects	33,017.34 €	in %:	16.73
Public grants	91,862.16 €	in %:	46.54
Balance from 2013	12,151.86 €	in %:	6.16

TOTAL REVENUES 197,377.05 €

Expenditure after Categories

Human Resources	85,758.76 €	in %:	40.76
Catering at the Peace Centre	4,830.83 €	in %:	2.30
Food items for beneficiaries	59,209.93 €	in %:	28.14
Peace Centre rent & equipment	24,052.65 €	in %:	11.43
Transportation of beneficiaries	9,248.95 €	in %:	4.40
Teaching materials	5,759.98 €	in %:	2.74
School equipment	5,365.33 €	in %:	2.55
Telecommunication	1,366.39 €	in %:	0.65
Office supplies	1,647.68 €	in %:	0.78
Staff mobility	5,686.87 €	in %:	2.70
Insurances	757.49 €	in %:	0.36
Legal fees	4,270.07 €	in %:	2.03
Services	1,241.70 €	in %:	0.59
Bank & transaction fees	890.74 €	in %:	0.42
Overhead costs	291.53 €	in %:	0.14

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 210,378.91 €

Expenditure after R&R Programme Line

Peacebuilding Programme	73,791.48 €	in %:	35.08
Educational Programme	63,198.08 €	in %:	30.04
Humanitarian Programme	58,299.19 €	in %:	27.71
Psychosocial Programme	8,341.97 €	in %:	3.97
Ramadan Volunteers Programme	5,361.85 €	in %:	2.55
Non-Programme Costs	1,386.34 €	in %:	0.66

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 210,378.91 €