Education Under Fire:

A Rapid Study of Parents' and Teachers' Readiness for School Amidst Israeli Attacks on Lebanon

Maha Shuayb, Mohammad Hammoud, Nehme Nehme, Siham Antoun, Ola Al Samhoury, Maria Maalouf, Cathrine Brun, Itab Shuayb, Suha Tutunji and Yusuf Sayed.

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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Acknowledgements

The report is dedicated to the people of Lebanon, in particular teachers and all educators who are adamant to provide children with education amid the ongoing war.

List of Acronyms

CERD	Center for Educational Research and Development
CHWD	Children with Disability
CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
CRDP	Centre de Recherche et de Développement Pédagogiques
Father-CHWD	Father of a Child with Disability
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
LB	Lebanese
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
Mother-CHWD	Mother of a Child with Disability
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Parents-CHWD	Parents of a Child with Disability
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PuS	Public School
SG	Strategic Goal
SR	Syrian
SWD	Student with Disability
TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
TREF	Transition Resilience Education Fund
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Executive Summary

"Our children are eager to return to their studies and don't want to fall behind. Any form of education is better than none" (A Lebanese Mother, Tripoli).

Israeli attacks on Lebanon which engulfed most of the country on 28 September resulted in the displacement of over 1.3 million civilians, the killing of almost 3,500 civilians and injuring over 14,000. It has also resulted in the closure of schools. This rapid study examines the varied impacts of the war, particularly vulnerable groups, children with disabilities and Syrian refugee children. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups, which were conducted in mid-to late October 2024.

Our findings reveal that following Israeli attacks, 40% of public schools have been repurposed as shelters, whilst a further 30% are in war zone areas, severely limiting available space for schooling. By November 2024, over 1 million students and 45,000 teachers have been directly affected by the conflict, with 95% of public education teachers unable to access school. Forced displacement has significantly disrupted the lives of families and teachers, with many facing housing instability, loss of income, and rising living costs. A high percentage of parents and teachers have lost part of their income, with 77% of parents and 66% of teachers reporting financial strain due to the aggression. 95% of parents and 89% of teachers report an increase in household costs due to displacement and the war. The emotional toll on families and teachers is profound, with many displaced families living in overcrowded conditions, further complicating the ability to support their children's education. The financial burden on teachers, especially contractual staff, has been exacerbated by the suspension of afternoon shifts for Syrian students and ongoing salary devaluation.

While the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) allowed private schools to reopen one week into the war and announced the reopening of all public schools three weeks later, its policy sparked significant objections and concerns from both teachers and parents. As a result of the ongoing war, educational priorities amongst parents and teachers have shifted significantly. In areas directly affected by the aggression, just under half of parents consider education a high priority, while only about a fifth of teachers share this perspective. Many teachers in conflict zones feel unprepared to resume education, with over half expressing a lack of readiness under the current conditions. Similarly, in conflict-affected areas, only about two in five parents feel ready to continue their children's education. Families and teachers struggling with trauma or basic survival needs and often found it difficult to prioritise education.

In contrast, those residing in less affected areas displayed a greater willingness to resume schooling. Parents in regions not directly impacted by the conflict demonstrate a greater sense of preparedness, with about two-thirds feeling ready for their children to resume education. Among teachers in these regions, the situation is, however, still experienced as very challenging, with only about a quarter feeling prepared to return to school. Despite the strong sense of responsibility exhibited by teachers toward their students' education, many felt ill-prepared to begin classes by 4 November and expressed the need for additional time to adequately plan for the new realities they faced.

Children with disabilities in Lebanon face considerable challenges in accessing education. For instance, 17% of parents reported that their child has an intellectual disability, and about a quarter lack the necessary specialised support to address their learning needs. This has led to only a quarter of parents of children with disabilities believing that their child is ready to resume education, underscoring the barriers to inclusive education. The lack of specialised support and accessible learning spaces further hampers their educational progress.

Similarly, Syrian and Palestinian refugee children are facing increasingly difficult circumstances as they experience additional exclusion and underprioritising. Prior to the Israeli attacks, fewer than a third of Syrian school age children are attending school, and only a small fraction progress to secondary education. With the start of the war, access to schooling for Syrian refugees ceased. They were also excluded from MEHE weekly statistics and emergency planning. Only recently, the need to include them in the education emergency response materialised. Despite these obstacles, more than half of the interviewed and surveyed Syrian parents still prioritise their children's education. Palestinian refugee children too have suffered gravely with their schools also closing down for the past month and half. Additionally, many UNRWA schools, primarily serving Palestinian students, have been converted into shelters, leaving children without stable and supportive learning environments.

The study further highlights the differing views on the mode of schooling. Teachers in areas directly affected by the war show a stronger preference for online learning due to safety concerns, with nearly two-thirds of them favouring this approach. In contrast, parents, while acknowledging the benefits of online learning, show a stronger preference for in-person education, citing social and developmental benefits. In regions less affected by the conflict, a larger proportion of both parents and teachers prefer in-person learning, suggesting that the uncertainty and instability in conflict zones are driving the demand for more flexible and remote options.

The challenges associated with online learning, particularly for displaced families, are evident. Many families lack the necessary resources such as reliable internet, electricity, and digital devices. Connectivity issues are widespread, with only around 60% of teachers and 50% of parents reporting access to the internet. Furthermore, only half of teachers and a fifth of parents own a computer or tablet, which are essential for online education. The lack of consistent power is another barrier, with just over half of teachers and less than half of parents reporting sufficient electricity to support online learning.

Finally, the focus of education during this period is also a point of concern. Both parents and teachers, from areas both directly and indirectly affected by the conflict, prefer a mix of academic and recreational content. This suggests a shared understanding of the need to maintain educational standards while also addressing the emotional and psychological needs of students during such turbulent times.

The need for comprehensive support to resume education amidst the ongoing conflict in Lebanon has been clearly expressed by both teachers and parents. Financial assistance stands out as the primary need, with the majority of teachers (approximately two thirds) and parents (around three quarters) identifying it as crucial to continue educational activities. Teachers (half) and parents (over three fifths) also highlighted the need for digital devices like computers or tablets for online learning, while internet access was mentioned by more than half of teachers and almost half of parents. Additionally, both

groups pointed to the importance of having adequate space for learning and further technological support. Teachers, in particular, emphasised the need for psychological support, with over two fifths of teachers reporting a requirement for support for themselves, and nearly half noting that their children also need such assistance. Furthermore, about a fifth of teachers and a quarter of parents expressed a need for transportation support to facilitate school attendance, particularly for in-person learning.

The study emphasises the importance of an **inclusive response plan** to address the educational needs of all children, including Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, children with disabilities, gender, socio-economic status and displacement status. This will require an intersectional approach to enable tailored strategies for different groups and a coordinated efforts from all stakeholders involved in education. A key component is the development of a **medium-term response plan** that prepares for both current and worst-case scenarios, prioritising the minimisation of disruptions to education and ensuring continuity, even in the most challenging conditions. The ongoing crisis calls for **enhanced collaboration and coordination among government agencies, civil society, and international organisations.** Clearly defining roles and responsibilities is crucial for the effective implementation of the response plan. Further to this, **strengthening partnerships with civil society organisations**, NGOs, universities, and disability-focused organisations will also play a significant role. These partnerships can fill gaps in the education system and provide essential resources during the crisi s. **Strengthening online learning infrastructure** and expanding teacher training will be essential, particularly in conflict-affected regions like the southern border. **Investing in digital teaching capacity** is vital for ensuring educational continuity during prolonged disruptions. Additionally, **rebuilding trust in the teaching profession** is critical. **Addressing the financial instability teachers** have faced and offering fair compensation and support will be key to retaining educators and ensuring the success of recovery efforts. Improving **data collection and monitoring systems** will allow for a better understanding of the crisis' impact on students and teachers, guiding future interventions. Lastly, adopting a **flexible and responsive planning** approach will enable adjustments to changing circumstances, ensuring the continued provision of education despite ongoing challenges.

Introduction

The Lebanese education sector has endured a series of unprecedented crises over the past 14 years. Starting with the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, followed by Lebanon's economic collapse in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Beirut blast in August 2020, culminating in Israeli aggressions from October 2023, escalating from mid-September 2024. The World Bank (World Bank, 2021) ranked Lebanon's financial crisis among the top three most severe crises worldwide. This crisis, in which the local currency lost 98% of its value by February 2023 (World Bank, 2023) affected salaries and working conditions and triggered a prolonged series of teacher strikes, further deteriorating an already fragile educational landscape. This report is the second part of a series on the impact of war on education in the Middle East. A first report on Gaza was published in collaboration with UNRWA (University of Cambridge et al., 2024).

Lebanon's education system, already fraught with deep inequities and systemic issues, faced significant challenges prior to the current Israeli aggression. The sector's structural deficiencies were starkly evident in the disparities between private and public schools. With around 56.7% of students enrolled in private fee-paying schools and just 28% in public institutions, Lebanon's education system has long been a divided one. This inequity is further compounded by the substantial number of Palestinian refugee children enrolled in UNRWA schools and suffering various forms of social, economic and political exclusion. Lebanon's education sector has been deteriorating under the strain of successive crises, including the Syrian war beginning in 2011, the economic collapse in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut blast in 2020. These events have severely disrupted educational services and outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable groups of the population who face the most significant educational barriers. As a result, 40% of children in Lebanon drop out before they finish Grade 9. Children lost almost 60% of their academic years in the past 6 years. The ongoing Israeli aggression has further threatened the stability of the educational system, potentially leading to the loss of another academic year and adding to the accumulation of significant learning losses.

Over the last six years, Lebanese children have lost, on average, over 60% of their schooling (Nehme, 2023). Studies indicate a significant and alarming decline in learning outcomes, particularly among Syrian refugee children, who face the greatest barriers to both access to schooling and academic achievement (Chahine et al., 2024; Pushparatnam et al., 2023). Inequalities, long a feature of Lebanon's education system, have worsened amid these overlapping crises.

Israel's latest aggression on Lebanon is part of a recurring historical pattern of aggression on Lebanon. To date, Israel killed over 3,400 civilians while injuring more than 14,700, with more than 1.3 million people displaced across Lebanon (*Shelter Monitoring Dashboard*, 2024). With the prospect of a prolonged war and protracted displacement, the risk of losing yet another academic year looms large.

Israel has invaded Lebanon three times previously—in 1978, 1982 and 2006. During each of these invasions, Israel caused significant loss of life and destruction of infrastructure and civilian properties, killing and displacing thousands of people (Armstrong, 2024). Israel occupied southern Lebanon for 18 years, from 1982 until 2000. The withdrawal in 2000 came after the continued attack on Israeli military positions in occupied Lebanese

territory by the Lebanese resistance (Hezbollah), which forced Israeli forces to withdraw (Nilsson, 2020).

With the fear of a protracted and long conflict, this study aims to assess the impact of the ongoing Israeli aggression on schooling in Lebanon. In light of the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education's (MEHE) efforts to resume the academic year, the study focuses on the readiness of the education sector, the potential modalities for schooling, and the specific needs of teachers and parents.

The study addresses the following main research questions:

1. How has the aggression impacted teachers, parents, and students, and what is their readiness to resume educational activities?

2. Which educational modalities are most feasible in Lebanon amidst the ongoing conflict?

The study focuses on formal schooling (Kindergarten to Grade 12) and covers both the Lebanese and refugee student populations, as well as children with disabilities. To this end, an online survey, focus group and one-to-one interviews were conducted in the second half of October, just before public schools were preparing to open on 4 November.

The report is organised as follows:

- Chapter 1 outlines the study's methodology.
- Chapter 2 presents an overview of the impact of the war in terms of displacement as well as the response of MEHE.
- Chapter 3 discusses the research findings regarding the socio-economic consequences of the war.
- Chapter 4 examines the readiness and feasibility of resuming education.
- Finally, Chapter 5 offers recommendations and conclusions.

Chapter 1: Methodology

This report employs a mixed-method research approach to assess parents, students, and teachers' readiness to resume education amid the ongoing Israeli aggression. The quantitative component of the study utilises two online surveys conducted between 15 October and 31 October, 2024, targeting teachers and parents in Lebanon. Conversely, the qualitative component comprises one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with both national and refugee parents and teachers, conducted during the last two weeks of October. These qualitative data were gathered both online and through community researchers who visited shelters and households, providing a direct engagement with the participants' experiences.

Online surveys

Both online surveys were designed by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) team and deployed on 15 October, 2024. The two surveys included several questions that aimed to assess the readiness and challenges faced by teachers, parents, and students and their preferred learning approach (online vs. in-person). The survey was advertised on social media (Facebook, X, and Instagram) and administered through Survey Monkey. Researchers reached out to CLS's network of parents, teachers, NGOs, and professional organisations to encourage response rates from allLebanese governorates. The survey results were analysed using STATA and Excel, where different cross-tabulations were carried out.

Field visits and discussions

This study encompassed both displaced and non-displaced populations (not displaced since October 2023), requiring different approaches to data collection due to security and displacement-related challenges.

For the non-displaced population, focus group discussions were conducted with Syrian parents and teachers working with Syrian children in areas deemed safe during the study. One discussion was held online, while another took place in person. For teachers working with children with disabilities, an online focus group discussion was conducted. These interviews were facilitated by community researchers familiar with the communities, fostering mutual trust. Oral consent was sought by each researcher after explaining the purpose of the visit and discussion.

For the displaced population, a distinct approach was necessary given the sensitivity of the ongoing crisis. Security concerns, privacy limitations in shelters, and the volatile context sometimes made formal interviews impractical. Instead, we collaborated with a community researcher already supporting newly displaced populations. The community researcher had previous research experience and works as a teacher. During their visits, they presented the aims of the research study and explained that the information to be included in the report is anonymous and confidential. No personal data were collected. Participants were not asked for any information that identifies them. The researcher inquired about parents' readiness to resume schooling and the challenges they faced.

Community researchers followed broad guiding questions developed by the team, providing valuable insights into shelter conditions, cost-of-living impacts, and schooling priorities. Informal conversations explored residents' willingness to prioritise education, the availability of schooling spaces, and educational support provided by organisations such as Save the Children and UNICEF.

Given that less than 15% of the 1.3 million forcibly displaced people live in shelters, it was crucial to include the perspectives of those residing in homes. Due to security constraints, convenient sampling was used. Community researchers leveraged their networks to conduct telephone interviews. These insights were instrumental in gradually unraveling the complex interplay between displacement and education. Similarly, participants were not asked to reveal any information that might identify them.

Research ethics

Conducting research during war is crucial to ensure that interventions reflect the rapidly changing conditions rather than relying on pre-war assumptions (Goodhand, 2000). However, conducting research during war, extra care was taken to avoid placing anyone under additional stress. Given the heightened security risks in the context of war, several measures were implemented to safeguard participants.

We worked with community researchers which is considered a reliable mode of research in this context (Brun, 2013; De Alwis & Hyndman, 2002; Goodhand, 2000). For safeguarding, the study exclusively involved adult participants to minimise vulnerabilities. Orally informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews or discussions, ensuring their voluntary and informed participation. In the online survey, informed consent was provided with a question at the outset asking whether the individual agreed to participate in the survey.

To protect participants' identities and confidentiality, no audio recordings were made, and no identifying information, such as names, was collected. In shelters, where privacy is especially difficult to ensure, we opted to conduct informal visits instead of formal interviews to reduce risks and maintain participants' comfort and safety. However, in some cases, the residents preferred to sit down in groups to discuss the situation. In this case, notes were made and quotes have been included. In the online survey, no personal data was linked to the respondents.

The study received approval from the CLS Research Ethics Board (ref number CLS/EDC-2024-06).

Research sample

The online surveys were filled by 622 parents and 529 teachers for a total of 1,151 participants. The sample covered all eight Lebanese governorates, as shown in Figure 1. Due to data collection limitations, survey data is not entirely representative; however, using the mixed-methods approach and reliance on multiple data sources offered valuable insights into the readiness and difficulties faced for returning to school. The largest proportion of participants resided in Mount Lebanon, comprising 39% of teachers and 25% of parents, while Nabatiyeh had the smallest representation, with only 2% of teachers and 1% of parents. The underrepresentation of Nabatiyeh, Baalbek-Hermel, and

other southern governorates may be due to the high displacement rates and strict security measures in these areas, which are making residents reluctant to share data.
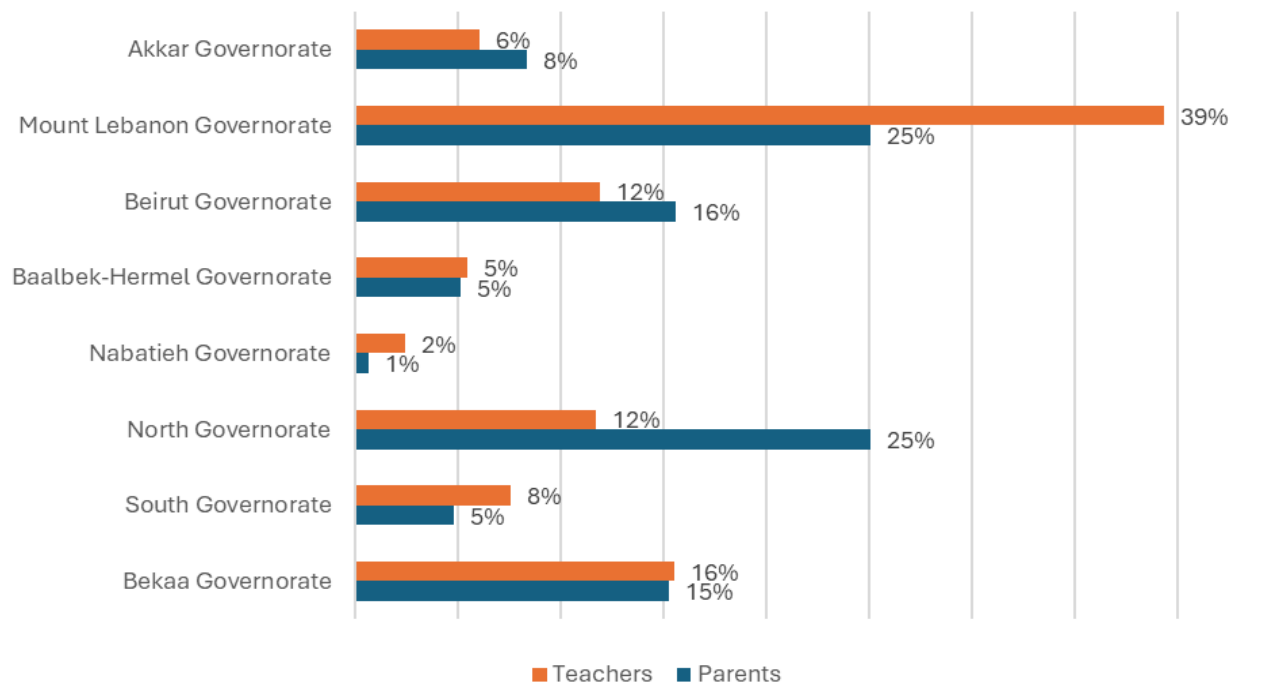
Figure 1. Sample distribution by governorate

The majority (80%) of our parent participants are Lebanese, with the remaining 20% distributed among Syrians (16%), Palestinians (3%), and other nationalities (1%). Most parents reported having a child in primary school (49%), while the rest had children in preschool (12%), middle school (21%), and secondary school (17%). Additionally, 61% of the parents have a child enrolled in private schools, 37% in public schools, and 2% in UNRWA schools.

The majority (61%) of teachers work full time, 77% are females, and 56% are aged between 31 and 50. A total of 43% of teachers teach in public schools, 58% in private schools, and 3% in UNRWA schools, with some teaching in more than one type of school.

Similarly, convenience sampling was used for the qualitative data collection as set out in Table 1. The focus group and individual interviews conducted with parents and teachers involved both in-person and online sessions, with participants residing in either shelters or households.

Table 1. Breakdown of Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Category	Governorate	Number of Participants
Online focus group with teachers		
Public sector	North, Bekaa, Beirut	6
Private sector	Beirut, Mount Lebanon	2
Students with disabilities	Beirut, Mount Lebanon	5
Focus group with parents		
Lebanese	Mount Lebanon	8
Lebanese	Mount Lebanon	3
Syrians	Bekaa	22
Syrians	Bekaa	17
Lebanese (of children with disability	Online: Beirut, Mount Lebanon	4
Individual interviews		
Lebanese parents	Beirut	7
Lebanese parents (of children with disabilities)	South	1
Teachers	Beirut, Mount Lebanon	4
Palestinian key education informant	Beirut	1
School/shelters visits		
Mount Lebanon, Beirut, North, Akkar	Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North, Bekaa	7 school/ shelters

Three online focus group discussions included three distinct groups of teachers: six female public sector teachers from the North, Bekaa, and Beirut governorates; two female private sector teachers from Beirut and Mount Lebanon; and five female teachers from Beirut and Mount Lebanon who work specifically with students with disabilities. In total, 13 female teachers from various sectors and governorates participated in these online focus groups, providing valuable insights from teachers across diverse backgrounds and settings, including those working with students with disabilities.

Five focus groups were conducted with Syrian and Lebanese parents in different governorates. In Mount Lebanon, eight Lebanese mothers participated from shelters, with an additional three joining from shelters in a separate session. In Bekaa, two groups of Syrian parents took part: the first group included 17 women and 5 men, and the second group included 9 women and 8 men. An online session was also conducted with four Lebanese mothers of children with disabilities residing in households in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

As for the Individual interviews, these were conducted with parents and teachers across different Lebanese governorates whereby a total of 32 interviews were conducted with

mothers, nine with fathers, and four with parents of children with disabilities. Regarding teachers, two were tenured and nine were contracted. Beirut had the highest number of interviews (7), followed by Mount Lebanon (10), Bekaa (1), North (6), and South (0). Of these interviews, 11 were conducted with individuals residing in households, while 27 were conducted with those in shelters.

Limitations

The ongoing conflict significantly impacted our data collection efforts, hindering our ability to secure a geographically-representative sample. The frequent displacements and security threats disrupted the reachability of respondents and reduced participation and completion rates of our online survey. This was mainly in areas that were most heavily affected by the aggression and where people were following strict security measures. Moreover, the online survey limited our reachability of the most vulnerable groups, including those without internet access or those in highly impacted areas, who were often unreachable. This gap likely resulted in underrepresenting some of the most affected demographics, potentially skewing the overall understanding of needs and conditions. Moreover, the presence of displacement centre officials during community researchers' visits, often limited open discussions, restricting the displaced populations' ability to express their views freely. Moreover, and due to desperate need, parents wanted a tangible outcome and hence were not interested to speak to anyone who could not improve their conditions directly. Additionally, the study's tight timeline reduced the sample size. Besides, we were unable to interview Palestinian participants due to challenges in securing contact with UNRWA and the time constraints. As the study was rapid and the situation not conducive to lengthy surveys and interviews, some themes and categories were not prioritised, such as gender as displacement, nationality and disability were emphasised. Finally, this study was conducted before the scheduled reopening of schools on 4 November. However, during the course of the research, attacks in Beirut escalated, leading to schools being closed again and reverting to online learning. As a result, the situation is rapidly changing, and the findings should be interpreted within the specific timeframe in which the study was conducted.

Chapter 2: The Lebanese education sector: Pre-existing challenges

"Before the war intensified, we were already demanding our rights, but now I think it's difficult to achieve them. They're saying there's a risk to the currency. They promised an increase for employees, but I doubt there will be any raise. I fear that these incentives might stop completely. We deserve an increase in our base salary."
(Undisplaced tenured teacher, Baalbek)

To fully grasp the ramifications of the ongoing Israeli war on Lebanon's education sector, it is imperative to first understand the structural and systemic challenges that predate the current crisis. Lebanon's education system is deeply inequitable, with approximately 56.7% in private fee-paying institutions, 11.8% in free private schools (CRDP, 2023). The public sector, often seen as a last resort, serves only 28% of students (CRDP, 2023), predominantly those unable to afford even the lowest private school fees. Moreover, nearly two thirds of private schools are religiously affiliated, and UNRWA schools provide education to approximately 39,144 Palestinian refugee children across 65 institutions (3.6% of the student population are in UNRWA schools) (UNRWA, 2024a).

Over the past decade, Lebanon's education sector has been beleaguered by a cascade of crises. Even before the onset of the Syrian war in 2011, which precipitated one of the largest refugee crises globally, significant disparities were evident. A UNICEF Situation Analysis (UNICEF, 2013) identified the most vulnerable groups as children with disabilities; Palestinian refugees (particularly boys in southern Lebanon); and disadvantaged Lebanese children in the northern regions, notably Akkar. While access to schooling was available for most Lebanese children, the quality of education was alarmingly deficient, disproportionately affecting over 20% of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups. The arrival of 1.5 million Syrian refugees from 2011 exacerbated these challenges, forcing an already strained public education sector to accommodate an additional 500,000 Syrian school-age children.

Despite Lebanon's historical reputation for producing a highly educated, multilingual youth workforce, recent trends reveal a sharp decline in educational outcomes. While early primary enrolment rates remain high (over 95%), more than 40% of Lebanese children drop out before completing Grade 9, and only one third complete 12 years of general education. Socio-economic disparities further compound these issues: 80% of students completing secondary education come from high-income families. Among Syrian refugees, enrollment rates are less than 30% for school-age children, with fewer than 4% advancing beyond Grade 9 (Nehme, 2023).

The decline in educational quality is starkly reflected in Lebanon's performance on international assessments. In PISA, 70% of Lebanese students (public and private) lack basic proficiency in reading foreign languages. Similarly, in TIMSS, Lebanon's average mathematics score fell from 449 in 2011 to 429 in 2018, significantly below the international benchmark of 500. Science scores plummeted to 377, placing Lebanon 38th out of 39 participating countries (CRDP, 2019).

Since 2019, Lebanon's education system has been further destabilised by an overlapping series of financial, economic, and social crises. Hyperinflation, currency devaluation,

and soaring poverty and unemployment rates have pushed families to the brink, with many unable to afford basic living or educational costs. This has driven a surge in school dropouts, as children are forced to work to support their families. The World Bank (World Bank, 2021) underscores the severity of the situation, warning of a sharp decline in learning quality and urging immediate interventions to curb the escalating dropout rates.

The cumulative impact of these crises has left approximately 700,000 children out of school, with profound learning losses (UNICEF, 2023) and adding to this is the missed teaching days by public school students since 2016, as discussed below (Nehme, 2023). This grim context underscores the urgency of addressing both the historical and compounding crises afflicting Lebanon's education sector, as it confronts the additional pressures of an ongoing war.

Loss of learning

To understand the impact of the crises on loss of learning, an assessment was conducted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies in November 2023, targeting 272 Grade 10 students distributed across public schools in five Lebanese governorates (Mount Lebanon, Beirut, North, South, and Bekaa). The assessment was based on previous official examinations as tools to measure competencies defined by the Ministry of Education. The assessment revealed a significant loss of learning, as evidenced by low pass rates in key subjects: only 3% of students passed the mathematics exam, 8% passed the Arabic exam, and 13% passed the English exam (Chahine et al., 2024). The study exposed severe deficiencies in basic competencies, particularly in mathematics and language skills, and highlighting the learning crisis, posing risks to continuity and progression in education.

Moreover, our survey of Grade 12 students which was conducted in May 2024 revealed that only 27% of private school students and 17% of public school students felt ready to take the official exams. The primary reason for this low level of readiness was the cumulative learning losses resulting from public school students who missed 765 teaching days since 2016 (Nehme, 2023). Contributing factors to the lost learning days include social and political instability, frequent teacher strikes, and roadblocks that have disrupted the academic calendar since 2019.The COVID-19 pandemic compounded these challenges, with extended school closures and a shift to online learning further entrenching educational inequities, particularly for students lacking access to technology and reliable internet (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2021).

As an indication of the trend in loss of learning, the percentage of Grade 12 students who believe that the knowledge and skills they have gained over the last three years are sufficient to continue their educational journey has decreased from 21% last year in 2023 to 19% this year in 2024 (11% in public schools, 26% in private schools) (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2024). This decline reflects the accumulation of loss of learning and a decline in the effectiveness of the current education system in preparing students for future educational stages.

Deteriorating quality of education

Prior to the ongoing aggression, both public and private schools have witnessed a marked decline in the quality of education. For instance, 39% of public Grade 12 students

reported that the quality of education in their schools was good this year (2023), a slight decrease from 40% last year (Hammoud, 2023). In private schools, only 52% of Grade 12 students reported the quality of education being good this year, a sharp decline from 68% the previous year. This suggests that the quality of education in private schools is deteriorating more rapidly than in public schools.

The overall decline in educational quality and the widening gap between private and public schools is further reflected in students' self-assessments of academic performance. While 45% of Grade 12 students in private schools rated their academic performance as good, only 35% of their counterparts in public schools reported the same.

Financial barriers to education

Prior to the current aggression, families were already struggling to afford tuition fees, as over half of the student population in Lebanon is enrolled in private schools. Our Survey with parents which was conducted in August 2024, revealed that the average annual tuition for private schools, including transportation costs, has soared to US$3,964 per child for this academic year (2024-2025), compared to $3,620 and $2,355 for the past two academic years, respectively (Hammoud & Brun, 2024). Meanwhile, the average household income reported this year is only $855 per month. Consequently, 65% of parents have resorted to borrowing money to cover educational expenses.

Moreover, 30% of parents have transferred their children from private to public schools, primarily due to the inability to afford private tuition, as reported by 84% of respondents.

Psychological wellbeing of students

Beyond academic challenges, students were already struggling psychologically prior to the intensification of the aggression. For instance, in May 2024, 44% of Grade 12 students reported poor psychological wellbeing (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2024). Likewise, 66% of parents indicated that the aggression has negatively impacted their children's psychological wellbeing. This emotional strain, compounded by the ongoing and escalated Israeli aggression and subsequent displacement, not only hampers students' current academic efforts but also makes it increasingly difficult for them to recover from the significant learning losses accumulated over the past years due to school closures and disruptions.

Children with disabilities

Data on the enrolment of children with disabilities in Lebanon is limited and unreliable. Official figures report only 8,558 children with disabilities aged 5–14, of whom around 3,000 are in government-funded institutions, with few others in public and private schools, leaving most out of school entirely (Koplewicz et al., 2018). A UN report estimates that 13% of children aged 0–17 have disabilities, but only 1% of school-aged children with disabilities attend mainstream public schools. Among Syrian and Palestinian refugee children with disabilities, 72% and 29% respectively are out of school (OCHA, 2023).

Discrepancies in data persist. UNICEF estimates 5.1% of children under 14 have disabilities, equating to about 45,000 children, much higher than government numbers. The World Bank

suggests disability rates may reach 15% of Lebanon's population (Darwich-Houssami, 2019; Koplewicz et al., 2018)

Accessibility in public schools remains inadequate. In 2009, only 5 out of 997 public schools met physical accessibility standards (Koplewicz et al., 2018). MEHE's 2011 survey found only 138 of 1,281 public schools willing to accommodate children with disabilities. Recent initiatives, including a national inclusion policy launched in 2023, aim to make all schools inclusive by 2030. However, this goal faces challenges from economic instability, limited funding, and the fact that 57% of school buildings are rented and non-compliant with accessibility standards(USAID, D-RASATI, MEHE, 2011).

Palestinian children at UNRWA schools

UNRWA in Lebanon provides education services to 39,144 Palestine refugee students in its 65 schools (UNRWA, 2024a). On 24 September, UNRWA initiated its Emergency Response in Lebanon, operating 11 emergency shelters nationwide. As of 6 November, 2024, 3,530 internally displaced people (IDPs) are registered in these shelters (UNRWA, 2024c). In collaboration with community-based organisations and local and international NGOs, UNRWA is offering a comprehensive range of services, including hot meals and psychosocial support activities. Moreover, UNRWA's education team is providing remote psychosocial support (PSS) to students and their families outside shelters, aiming to bolster resilience and improve wellbeing.

In anticipation of Phase II of its Education in Emergencies programme, UNRWA's education team has implemented an emergency tracking system to monitor the location of all students and staff. This system is designed to assess the workforce and adapt the educational modality for the 2024-25 academic year to be physical, hybrid, or remote as conditions allow. However, the 2024/2025 academic year, initially set to begin on 4 November, has been postponed due to ongoing insecurity. UNRWA is currently working to set a new start date and remains committed to providing education for 38,006 students, including 19,760 girls and 18,246 boys, across Grades 1 to 12.

As part of its response to the displacement crisis, UNRWA has integrated Palestinian refugees arriving from Lebanon into its core services in Syria, including education and health, while also providing emergency relief and multipurpose cash assistance. Palestinian refugees who have moved from Lebanon to Syria are accessing the same UNRWA services as those already residing in Syria. Out of the displaced group, 319 Palestinian refugee children (170 girls and 149 boys) who were formerly in Lebanon have now been enrolled in UNRWA schools in Syria, including 234 who were previously enrolled in UNRWA schools in Lebanon and the remainder who attended government or private schools there (UNRWA, 2024b). Following recent Israeli attacks on Lebanon, all UNRWA schools have all been closed down.

Syrian refugee children

Since the onset of the Syrian war in 2011, it is believed that around 1,5 million refugees came to Lebanon from Syria. There are close to 470,000 registered school-aged Syrian refugee children and youth between 3 – 23 years old in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2024). The educational response for this population has primarily focused on integrating them

into the state sector, particularly through second shifts in public schools designed to accommodate refugee students.

Currently, 110,000 Syrian children are enrolled in public schools, 97,000 attend private schools, and over 60,000 participate in non-formal education programmes (Jalbout, 2015). However, the enrolment rate remains alarmingly low at less than 30%, with one of the highest dropout rates recorded—fewer than 4% of Syrian children progress to secondary education (Shuayb, 2024).

The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and Lebanon's compounded crises, as Syrian children, already marginalised, were deprioritised in educational efforts, resulting in significant learning losses.

Despite substantial funding and support from the donor community to integrate Syrian children into the public education system, numerous legal and regulatory barriers persist. For instance, refugee children aged 15 and older must obtain residency permits to continue their education, yet over 70% of refugees lack these permits (EL Daoi, 2017).

Combined with poverty, discriminatory practices, and restrictive regulations, these barriers make Syrian refugees one of the most disadvantaged groups in Lebanon regarding access to quality education and educational attainment.

Teachers' conditions

During the 2022/2023 academic year, the total number of members of the educational body was 35,528, of which approximately 45%, or 15,947, were civil servants, including 12,000 classroom teachers, 3,250 administrators, and 697 in guidance and coordination roles. The remaining 55%, or 19,581, were employed on a contractual basis across 1,227 public schools. At the secondary school level, a higher proportion of teachers hold permanent positions, with 58% being civil servants. In contrast, primary schools display a significant imbalance, with contractual teachers nearly doubling the number of permanent staff. It is important to note that the income of contractual teachers is tied to the hours they teach; therefore, any reduction in the academic year significantly affects their earnings.

Since 1998, budgetary constraints have halted the recruitment of civil service teachers, leading to an increased reliance on contractual teachers. These teachers often have diverse qualifications; 54% lack a postgraduate degree, 20% hold a baccalaureate degree or less (CRDP, 2023), and only 4% hold a specialised degree. Moreover, contractual teachers generally receive lower salaries than their civil servant counterparts, with funding coming from MEHE, local municipalities, schools' funds, or various donors. Within the public sector, the majority of teachers are female, comprising 82% of the workforce. In contrast, the private sector employs approximately 45,000 teachers across 1,566 schools, with a workforce also predominantly female.

The economic crisis and substantial inflation have significantly impacted teacher salaries in Lebanon. Before the economic downturn, the average monthly salary for a primary education teacher was approximately 2 million Lebanese Pounds (LBP), roughly equivalent to US$1,330. Now, this amount has depreciated to about US$100 due to the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound in the current market.

According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies in 2023, the average

monthly income of a teacher in 2023 was $159 compared to $131 in the year before (2022), which shows no significant improvement in earnings over time (Hammoud, 2023). On the other hand, average monthly household expenses for teachers amounted to $827 on communication, electricity, transportation, medical bills, and food. It is worth noting that these figures did not account for the cost of housing, heating, education, and personal consumption, which reveals that essential household expenses of teachers amount to over 500% of their monthly earnings.

The dire situation and the lack of a strategy that addresses their basic needs left many teachers in despair. According to our 2022 survey, 73% of teachers were planning to leave the educational sector, which threatens the sustainability of this sector and puts the educational prospects of over a million children at risk (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2022). Moreover, the dire situation pushed 66% of teachers to work a second job to cover their living expenses. Two thirds of teachers also reported having to borrow money to secure basic needs (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2022). Furthermore, the crisis has further deprived teachers of their basic human needs, whereby 99% reported that the crisis had limited their access to medical services in 2022.

Chapter 3: Impact of Israeli attacks on the education sector in Lebanon

> "I used to have my own place, but now I'm sharing a tiny room with three other families. We do the dishes, and we wash our clothes by hand. There's hardly any water at the displacement centre." *(Teacher, Beirut)*

The Lebanese education sector, already frail due to a series of pre-existing challenges, now faces unprecedented threats exacerbated by a prolonged conflict and a multitude of crises. The compounded impacts of the Syrian refugee influx, Lebanon's severe economic collapse, and the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the recent Israeli aggression, have placed the sector in an increasingly dire situation. The loss of learning over the past six years, with children missing a significant portion of their schooling, reflects not only the severity of the current educational crisis but also the growing inequality within the system.

The quality of education, once a point of pride for Lebanon, has deteriorated sharply, and the growing divide between public and private schooling further compounds the difficulties faced by students, particularly among vulnerable groups such as Syrian refugees and children with disabilities. The ongoing conflict continues to hinder the country's ability to address these issues, threatening to extend the already catastrophic losses in learning. In this chapter, we take a closer look at the impact of the education sector amid the evolving emergency. Although these numbers change quickly, we find it essential to document the situation as it was during the study to provide a snapshot for understanding how the circumstances evolve over time.

Lebanon's education sector amidst latest round of escalations

Lebanon's education sector comprises 2,780 public and private schools, serving over 1 million Lebanese students and approximately 200,000 Syrian refugee children (110,000 registered in public schools primarily second shift, 30,000 registered in the morning shift, and 97,000 in private schools). Among these, as shown in Table 2, 1,227 are public schools, accommodating over 302,100 students (263,300 Lebanese) (CRDP, 2023) nationwide. As of 23 September, 2024, escalating Israeli attacks have forcibly displaced over 1.3 million Lebanese from southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and regions in the Bekaa and Baalbek. Consequently, around 40% of public schools have been repurposed as shelters for displaced civilians. This conversion, undertaken at the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, has imposed significant social and financial costs, revealing critical gaps in governmental planning despite prior anticipation of conflict and the development of emergency protocols.

While the Minister of Education initially expressed reluctance to use schools as shelters, mounting political pressure due to the scale of displacement left MEHE with limited options. As a result, only 350 public schools remain operational and unoccupied, with another 32% of schools located in high-risk areas, leaving the capacity and functionality of the remaining schools unclear. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the war's impact on schools across Lebanon's governorates:

Schools/ Governorate	Beirut	North and Akkar	Mount Lebanon	Bekaa	Baalbak Hermel	South	Al Nabatiyyeh	Lebanon
Total number of public schools	54	417	257	115	109	146	129	1227
Unsafe schools	0	0	42	14	86	115	124	381
Shelters	47	165	168	62	22	31	5	500
Can potentially reopen	7	249	47	39	1	0	0	343

In total, Lebanon has identified 1,118 potential shelter sites, of which 505 are public schools, 70 are public TVET (technical and vocational education training) institutions, and 19 are public university buildings. However, most of these schools lack the infrastructure to serve as shelters, as they are not equipped with essential facilities like kitchens, bathrooms, and heating.

Affected student and teacher populations

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) estimates that as of 4 November, 2024, approximately 549,675 students and 45,440 teachers and university academics have been directly affected by the conflict as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The number of students, academics and teachers in the governorates affected by Israeli attacks on Lebanon, according to MEHE estimates (MEHE, 2024a)

Concerned groups affected by aggression	Number (4/11/2024)
Public school students	159,784
Vocational and technical education students	23,265
Private school students	277,662
Lebanese university students	37,000
Students of private universities	52,000
Teachers in public and private schools	35,590
Professors of vocational and technical education	7,400
Lebanese university professors	2,450
Total number of pupils and students	549,675
Total number of teachers and professors	45,440

The above figures of 549,675 children produced by MEHE (Table 3) are very conservative estimates of the affected student population as they do not include Syrian children enrolled in the public sector, nor do they include Palestinian children enrolled in UNRWA schools or those enrolled in the non-formal sector. However, Table 3 included the revised numbers of affected children in the public sectors following Israeli expansion of attacks on new areas, especially the cities of Tyre and Baalbek. We note that the ministry has only adjusted the numbers of public education and did not update the number of children in private schools in the newly affected areas. a related to the educational process, can be calculated more accurately than the Ministry's numbers.

To capture the number of students missed above, using the statistical bulleting of the Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD or CRDP) for the year 2022 – 2023, we have developed Table 4 estimating the total number of affected children:

Table 4. Affected students in public and private academic, vocational education and higher education sectors before 4 November 2024

Sector	Number if affected students	Percentage	Note
Public schools	302,099	100%	All children in public ceased to attend school in after noon shift
Subsidised private schools	84,165*	66%	The number of students enrolled in free special education schools is 127,359.
Private education (unsubsidised)	277,551*	45%	The enrolment of 611,385 pupils in special education schools is free.
Syrian children enrolled in afternoon schools	110,000	100%	All afternoon school students are out of school. Estimates based on MEHE permits.
Children enrolled in non-formal education	66,036	100%	Educating non-Lebanese children in non-formal centers and schools managed by UNICEF and NGOs. This education is not yet active, and all students are suspended from education.
UNRWA school students	38,205	100%	Education in UNRWA schools is suspended.
Students in formal public vocational and technical education	63,067	100%	Official vocational and technical institutes are suspended until 4 November, 2024, meaning all their students are out of school.
Students in private vocational and technical education	18,000	50%	The estimated number, which constitutes about 50% of the total enrolment in private vocational and technical education in various governorates, which amounts to about 36,039 students.
Students of Lebanese university	66,323	100%	All Lebanese university students are suspended from education until 4/11/2024.

			The number is estimated.
Private university education students	70,000	40%	There are about 175,906 private university students, and 40% of them are likely unable to pursue university classes due to displacement or dangers.
Total	1,095,446		

* 70 free and non-free private schools, part of them in Beirut and the rest in safe areas, received displaced people, and the estimated number of students is about 15,000 students and their teachers are not counted in the table.

As indicated in Table 4, the number of students impacted is estimated to exceed 1.1 million, which needs to be covered in MEHE's response. In addition, teachers have been also impacted by the war. Table 5 shows the number of affected teachers.

Table 5. Administrative and educational bodies affected by the attacks

Sector	Unable to access schooling	Percentage	Note
Teachers and administrators in public education	35,528	95%	Public education has not yet started, and all teachers and administrators are suspended until 4 November, 2024, only principals and an administrative officer in displacement schools and in the registration of students are active.
Teachers and administrators in private subsidised schools	4,163	65%	The total number of free private tutors is 6,359.
Teachers and administrators in private education (unsubsidised)	19,015	40%	The total number of tuition private teachers is 47,055.
Teachers and administrators in public afternoon shift public schools	12,000	100%	Based on MEHE-estimates of teachers and administrators participating in afternoon schools that are suspended until further notice.
Teachers in UNRWA schools	1,655	100%	All UNRWA schools are not functioning.
Lebanese university Staff	2,296	100%	The Lebanese university is suspended until 4 November, 2024.
Total	74,657		

Table 5 does not consider non-teaching staff who are involved in the educational process such as school caretakers and those involved in transportation, impacting over 75,000 workers.

MEHE's education response

In the wake of the massive Israeli attacks on Lebanon, which resulted in widespread displacement and significant human loss, the MEHE undertook a series of measures to sustain education amid the crisis. These measures, while aiming to mitigate the disruption, have been met with mixed reactions and critiques, reflecting the complexities of responding to such an unprecedented situation.

Resumption of private schools

One of the Ministry's initial responses was Circular No. 40/M/2024 issued on 13/10/2024 (MEHE, 2024g) allowing private schools to resume operations at their own discretion. This decision was welcomed by some private schools, particularly Catholic institutions, but it drew criticism from various segments of Lebanese society. Many perceived it as a politically charged move, interpreted by some as prioritising certain sectors of society over others during a national crisis. Critics argued that this step, taken in the absence of a comprehensive national education plan, risked exacerbating the already stark inequalities between the private and public education sectors. Concerns were also raised about student safety, given the unpredictability of escalating attacks, and many displaced families viewed the decision as lacking sensitivity to their plight.

Development of the education response plan

On 6 October, MEHE announced an education response pre-plan centered on gathering data about displaced students and teachers via a digital registration platform. The platform aimed to facilitate enrolment in nearby schools; however, its effectiveness was limited as many families hesitated to share personal data online due to security concerns during the ongoing conflict.

Subsequently, MEHE declared that the academic year would commence on 4 November, with schools operating either in-person or online (799/M/2024). This announcement, formalised in the " Education Emergency Costed Response Plan (EECRP), September 2024 Crisis in Lebanon" outlined measures to resume schooling. These included double and triple-shift shifts in public schools and shortened school week to 21 hours compared to 30-35 hours: morning shifts of 7 hours over three days, and afternoon shifts of four hours over five days per week. The plan also allowed some schools to operate exclusively online, with MEHE providing digital resources for teachers.

To alleviate the economic burden on families, MEHE canceled public school registration fees previously set at over $50 for elementary students and $100 for secondary. This move was welcomed, given that such fees were seen as unconstitutional and contrary to Lebanon's legislation mandating free compulsory education. For private schools, the Ministry enforced Article 5 of Law 515/96, limiting the first tuition installment to 30% of the previous year's fees. However, delegating decisions about reopening to private school parent councils sparked further debate about the government's responsibility to designate safe areas for education.

Moreover, on 19 November, 2024, the Minister of Education and Higher Education Abbas Al-Halabi announced the launch of free internet of 20GB monthly for teachers and learners

to facilitate remote learning. This initiative includes the use of the "MAWARIDY, MADRISTI and CERD e-books" platforms from the Educational Center for Research and Development, allowing students to download books, lessons, and interact with teachers. The general distribution of these packages is set to begin on 20 November, 2024. It remains to be seen if the package will be sufficient for the online learning.

Strategic goals and gaps in implementation

MEHE's response strategy, supported by UNESCO, adapted its 2017 crisis education goals to address the 2024 context as shown in Table 6 (MEHE, 2024b; UNESCO, 2017).

Table 6. Response plans 2017 and 2024 (MEHE, 2024b; UNESCO, 2017).

Strategic Objective	UNESCO 2017	Ministry of Education and Higher Education / UNESCO 2024
SG1	Access to inclusive and quality learning opportunities for children and youth affected by crises.	Ensure access to inclusive and quality learning opportunities for students affected by crises.
SG2	Empower crisis-affected learners with values, knowledge and skills for life and work.	Ensure the provision of psychosocial support and promote wellbeing for students and professors affected by crises.
SG3	Education actors ensure quality education to achieve better learning outcomes.	Ensure that education workers provide quality education to improve education.
SG4	Education systems respond to and withstand crises.	Ensure that education systems are responsive to crises and resilient.

The 2024 plan was criticised for not being revised or adapted to the new war context; hence, its ability to respond to the new challenges has been questioned.

The strategic objectives – ensuring access to education, promoting psychosocial well-being, maintaining quality education, and building resilience in education systems – remain relevant but face significant implementation challenges. While welcoming the flexible nature and approach of MEHE plan in terms of learning modality (online/hybrid or in-person) critics noted that the plans heavily relied on theoretical data without adequate field-based insights, mapping, or coordination mechanisms. Additionally, online education solutions, psychosocial programmes, and transportation logistics were either incomplete or absent.

Financial constraints and international funding

The Lebanese government and the United Nations launched an emergency appeal (OCHA, 2024a) on 1 October 2024 for $425.7 million to provide urgent assistance to one million conflict-affected people from October to December 2024. The appeal calls for $15.4 million for the education sector (OCHA, 2024b) to address barriers to learning by providing models of in-person or blended learning using traditional and digital resources that can be used in online

and offline systems, as well as providing child-friendly spaces and supporting educational institutions with the necessary equipment. The proposed plan also aims to ensure inclusive learning by reducing barriers to learning to ensure equitable continuity of education for all learners, including displaced children and those affected by conflict, children and people with special needs.

The Ministry of Education also published in Education Emergency Response Costed Plan (EERCP) In response to the September 2024 Crisis (MEHE, 2024c). Detailing the need of the ministry and its directorates, which amounted to $ 25.510 million, and the Minister of Education and Higher Education tried at the international conference in Paris - October 24, 2024 to seek the support of the assembled countries for the education sector, which approved in-kind assistance, support and donations, mostly in kind, to be delivered to international organisations worth $ 800 million, in addition to assistance to the Lebanese army worth $200 million (France 24, 2024). The education sector received the French president's pledge to send a delegation to Beirut to discuss ways to provide support to the education sector (MEHE, 2024c)

As of the reporting date, US$1.5 million has been received from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) on 27 August 2024 and has been allocated to support education response in the South (MEHE, 2024c). The government emergency plan announced in October 2023 has not been allocated funding by the government, while the Ministry of Education's emergency plan, which was completed at the end of October 2024 and began to be implemented on 4 November, 2024, has also not received funding from the public treasury and depends on international organisations' funding for all their activities and is stalled. The interventions of international and civil organisations are limited to covering the cost of equipping and some of the activities of the ministry's plan, such as equipping schools for shelter and providing relief services. These schools (schools providing education services) will also receive funding from the Education Trust Fund (TREF) of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNICEF, to ensure that they provide the necessary educational materials, such as textbooks, and are able to provide vital psychosocial support services and medical examinations to help children cope with the effects of conflict (UNICEF, 2024). Dubai's ruler, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has pledged to sponsor the education of 40,000 learners (Khaleej Times, 2024) through civil society organisations. As for MEHE, it is still suffering from problems in securing teachers' salaries and correcting their wage allowances, which teachers and professors have been suffering from since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2019.

Teacher response and challenges

Contracted teachers who are paid per teaching hour, totaling 35,000 teachers and representing 55% of the education workforce in the morning shift, voiced strong opposition to resuming the academic year on 4 November. Many cited a lack of clarity about salaries and benefits, particularly for contracted teachers whose pay depends on actual teaching hours completed. A survey by the Association for Secondary Teachers revealed that 88% of participants felt unprepared for the reopening (Association of Secondary Public Education Teachers, personal communication, 25 October, 2024). The financial hardships faced by teachers, compounded by the 2019 economic collapse and the Lebanese Lira's devaluation, have left many earning between $200 and $500 monthly, with contracted teachers facing even greater vulnerability. Additionally, the suspension of afternoon shifts for Syrian students has eliminated a vital income source for over 10,000 teachers, further exacerbating their financial instability.

MEHE's education response reflects an effort to sustain education amid extraordinary challenges. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in addressing regional disparities, ensuring logistical readiness, and providing adequate support for students and teachers.

Student enrolment since the escalation of attacks

Since MEHE opened the registration on 17 October 2024 in public schools and despite complaints from teachers' and parents' associations, children and teachers started registering on the MEHE online platform. The analysis below examines the data provided by MEHE regarding student and teacher registration.

As of 3 November, 2024, 254,924 students have registered for the academic year 2024-2025, including 57,293 displaced students and 31,011 students from private schools (MEHE, 2024f). Similarly, 39.001 public school teachers have registered for the current academic year, including 5,979 displaced teachers.

Table 7. Detailed data on registration for the academic year 2024-2025 on the platform or across schools by 13/11/2024 (MEHE, 2024f)

| Governorate | Students registered in public schools until 31/10/2024 | | Schools | |
	Total Registered	Ratio compared students registered to 2023	Displaced	From private education
Mount Lebanon	45237		16050	7458
Baalbak Hermel	21446		3492	2834
South	29871		5603	4733
Nabatiyyeh	19474		3240	4728
Beirut	11855		4884	1008
North-Akkar	100375		17789	7362
Bekka	26666		6235	2888
Total	254924	92%	57293	31011

Table 7 provides an overview of student enrollment in public schools across Lebanese governorates as of 13 November, 2024, highlighting significant trends. A total of 254,924 students were registered, representing 92% of the enrollment figures from 2023, indicating a slight decline. Among these, 57,293 were displaced students, with the highest concentrations in North-Akkar (17,789) and Mount Lebanon (16,050), reflecting the regions' central role in hosting refugee populations. In contrast, Beirut and Nabatiyyeh reported significantly lower numbers of displaced students. Additionally, 31,011 students transitioned from private to public schools, likely due to Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis. The highest numbers of such transitions were in the South (4,733) and Nabatiyyeh (4,728), underscoring the economic pressures in these areas, while Beirut (1,008) and Bekka (2,888) reported fewer transitions. Regional disparities were evident, with North-Akkar registering the highest total enrolment (100,375), while Beirut had the lowest (11,855), reflecting differing population distributions and economic factors. In addition to Lebanese students, 18,303 non-Lebanese students – primarily Syrian nationals (13,511 out of 31000 Syrian children enrolled in public schools in 2023 – have registered in pre-noon shifts.

As for teachers' registration, MEHE's data indicates that 39001 teachers have been assigned to nearby or original schools. The North and Mount Lebanon account for the majority of registered teachers, while conflict-affected regions such as Baalbek-Hermel and the South struggle with lower teacher availability. These disparities underscore the logistical difficulties in deploying teachers to high-need areas amid displacement and insecurity.

Table 8. Number of schools that have opened in person and online (MEHE, 2024f)

Teachers								
Governorate	Mount Lebanon	Baalbak Hermel	South	Nabatiyyeh	Bekka	Beirut	North	Total
	8762	3417	4883	3350	3584	2154	12851	39001

Table 8 presents the number of schools that have opened in person and online. As of 4 November, 2024, 246 public schools had reopened for in-person learning, complemented by 28 partially open schools and 205 online schools. However, a closer look at regional distribution reveals stark disparities. Mount Lebanon and the North account for a significant share of operational schools, reflecting their relative stability. Regions heavily affected by conflict, such as Baalbek-Hermel, the South, and Nabatiyyeh, show minimal or no schools operating in-person, with reliance on online education where feasible. The Bekaa governorate illustrates a mixed approach, with 26 schools open in-person, 4 partially operational, and 4 online.

Table 9 provides a detailed snapshot of the operational status of schools across Lebanon. It highlights significant disparities in school openings across governorates, reflecting the uneven impact of the ongoing crisis on education. Out of the total schools analyzed, 303 are operational for in-person learning, while 297 are functioning online. This nearly even distribution between in-person and online schooling underscores the challenges faced by the education system in maintaining continuity of in-person learning amid conflict and displacement.

Table 9. Number of opened schools based on data published by MEHE in their weekly bulletin on 28/10- 4/11/2024 (MEHE, 2024e).

Schools/Governorate		Beirut	North and Akkar	Mount Lebanon	Bekaa	Baalbak Hermel	South	Al Nabatiyyeh	Total
Elementary: Actually working	Total	5	65	62	43	65	53	97	390
	Online	0	0	5	10	65	53	89	222
	In person	5	65	57	33	0	0	8	168
Secondary: Actually working	Total	17	43	61	25	19	27	18	210
	Online	2	1	8	6	16	27	15	75
	In person	15	42	53	19	3	0	3	135
Total schools in person Attendance		20	107	110	52	3	0	11	303
Total online schools		2	1	13	16	81	80	104	297
Number of private school buildings required to absorb the number of students		11	40	68	30	10	0	0	169

Regions such as Mount Lebanon and North and Akkar demonstrate higher levels of in-person school attendance, with 110 and 107 schools, respectively, operational for face-to-face learning. These figures suggest that these areas have been less affected by attacks, benefiting from relative stability and better access to infrastructure. In contrast, conflict-affected regions like Baalbek-Hermel, the South, and Nabatiyeh rely heavily on online education, with Baalbek-Hermel having only three in-person schools and the South none at all. This reliance on online schooling reflects the severe disruption caused by displacement, insecurity, and infrastructural damage in these regions, which prohibits in-person learning.

Elementary schools had a higher overall operational rate than secondary schools, with 390 elementary schools functioning in various capacities compared to 210 secondary schools. However, a greater proportion of elementary schools are dependent on online learning, with 57% offering remote education compared to 36% of secondary schools.

The disparities between governorates are particularly stark when examining conflict-affected areas. In Baalbek-Hermel, the South, and Nabatiyyeh, online education dominates as the primary mode of instruction, reflecting the extent of displacement and safety concerns. The lack of in-person schooling in these areas highlights the compounded challenges faced by students and teachers, including limited access to technology and connectivity, inadequate teacher training for online instruction, and the psychological toll of conflict.

The uneven recovery of the education sector is evident in the contrast between relatively stable regions like Mount Lebanon and North and Akkar and the ongoing struggles in conflict-affected governorates. This disparity suggests the need for targeted interventions to address gaps in access and equity. While online education serves as a stopgap measure, its effectiveness is limited by infrastructure challenges and socio-economic disparities, particularly in regions most affected by the conflict.
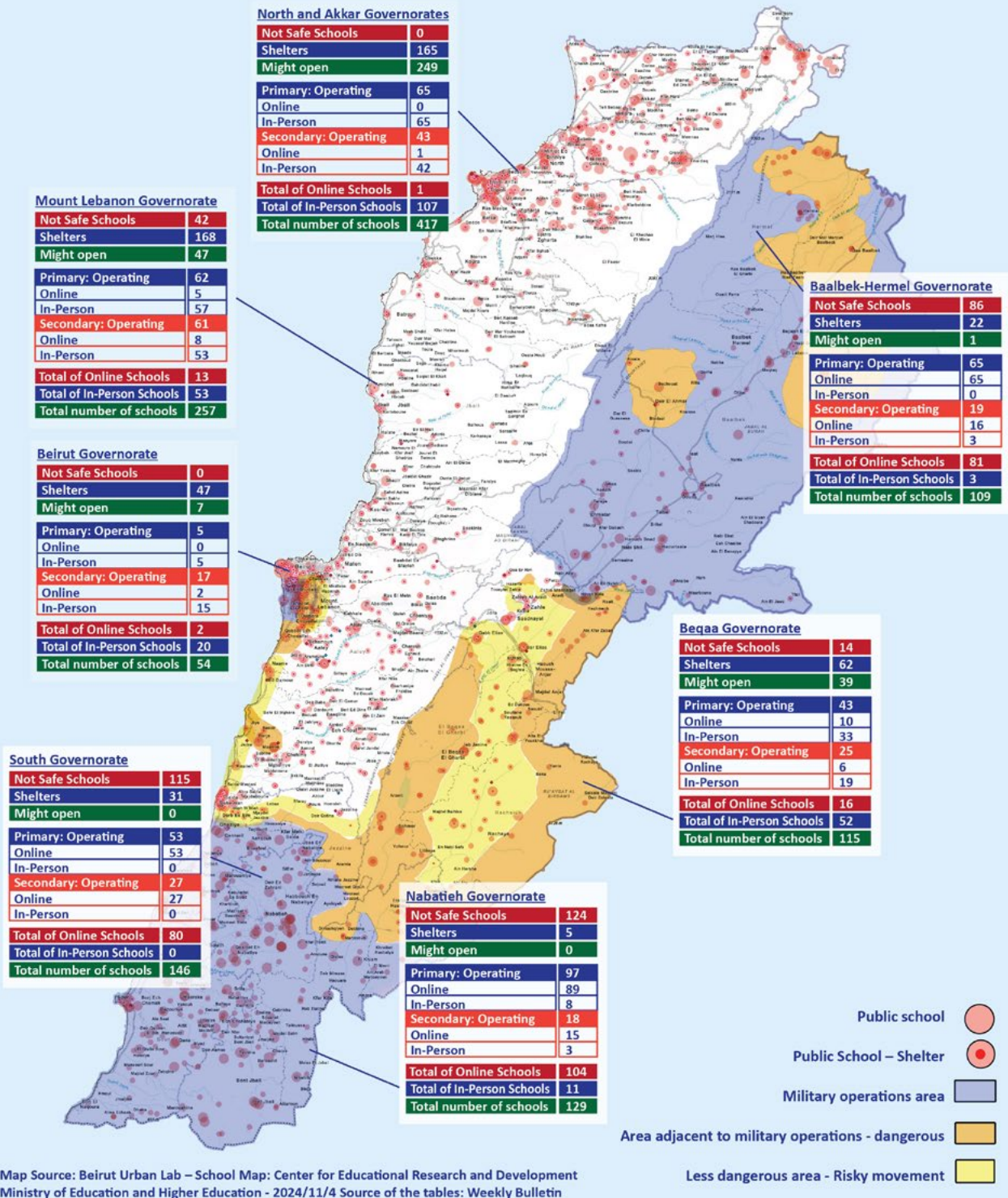
Distribution of the Public Schools in Lebanon

North and Akkar Governorates

Not Safe Schools	0
Shelters	165
Might open	249
Primary: Operating	65
Online	0
In-Person	65
Secondary: Operating	43
Online	1
In-Person	42
Total of Online Schools	1
Total of In-Person Schools	107
Total number of schools	417

Mount Lebanon Governorate

Not Safe Schools	42
Shelters	168
Might open	47
Primary: Operating	62
Online	5
In-Person	57
Secondary: Operating	61
Online	8
In-Person	53
Total of Online Schools	13
Total of In-Person Schools	53
Total number of schools	257

Beirut Governorate

Not Safe Schools	0
Shelters	47
Might open	7
Primary: Operating	5
Online	0
In-Person	5
Secondary: Operating	17
Online	2
In-Person	15
Total of Online Schools	2
Total of In-Person Schools	20
Total number of schools	54

Baalbek-Hermel Governorate

Not Safe Schools	86
Shelters	22
Might open	1
Primary: Operating	65
Online	65
In-Person	0
Secondary: Operating	19
Online	16
In-Person	3
Total of Online Schools	81
Total of In-Person Schools	3
Total number of schools	109

Beqaa Governorate

Not Safe Schools	14
Shelters	62
Might open	39
Primary: Operating	43
Online	10
In-Person	33
Secondary: Operating	25
Online	6
In-Person	19
Total of Online Schools	16
Total of In-Person Schools	52
Total number of schools	115

South Governorate

Not Safe Schools	115
Shelters	31
Might open	0
Primary: Operating	53
Online	53
In-Person	0
Secondary: Operating	27
Online	27
In-Person	0
Total of Online Schools	80
Total of In-Person Schools	0
Total number of schools	146

Nabatieh Governorate

Not Safe Schools	124
Shelters	5
Might open	0
Primary: Operating	97
Online	89
In-Person	8
Secondary: Operating	18
Online	15
In-Person	3
Total of Online Schools	104
Total of In-Person Schools	11
Total number of schools	129

Legend:
- Public school
- Public School – Shelter
- Military operations area
- Area adjacent to military operations - dangerous
- Less dangerous area - Risky movement

Map Source: Beirut Urban Lab – School Map: Center for Educational Research and Development
Ministry of Education and Higher Education - 2024/11/4 Source of the tables: Weekly Bulletin

Figure 2. Distribution of the public schools in Lebanon (source: Beirut Urban Lab)

Chapter 4: The impact of the war on families and teachers

"I have no income now. Both my government salary and my private school paycheck have stopped. My life has been turned upside down." *(Teacher, Beirut)*

In this section, we examine the impact of the Israeli attacks on families participating in the survey and interviews. It is worth nothing that the sample of the study is not representatives and captures the views of a segment of people. We explore a range of factors that have compounded the challenges faced by the families participating in the study, from forced displacements and loss of income to increased living costs and changes in living arrangements. The subsequent figures and data illustrate the severity of these disruptions and their implications on the educational landscape for both parents and teachers affected by displacement.
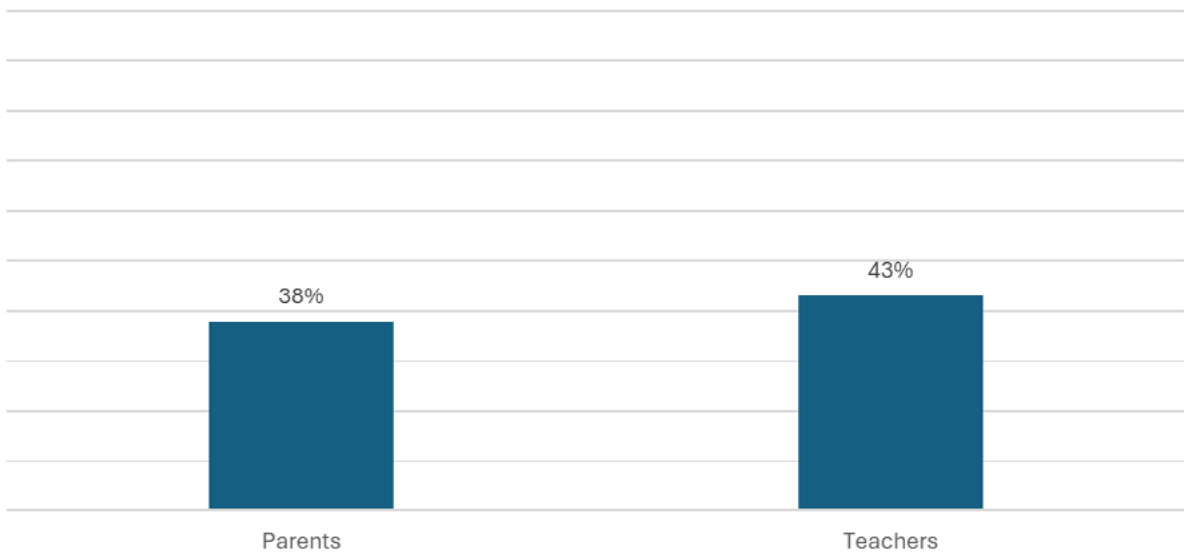
Displacement

Both interviewed parents and teachers indicated that they have endured significant housing instability marked by multiple displacements, limited resources, and profound emotional hardships. Families experienced abrupt displacement, often leaving their homes with no belongings and relying heavily on their social network for temporary shelter in regions such as Mount Lebanon, Akkar, Tripoli, and Beirut:

> *"When we were displaced, many things were missing. Sometimes we took risks by making a quick trip to retrieve items, or we are forced to live without them. The journey is long and difficult, and we are afraid of its dangers." (Mother, LB, Beirut, Household)*

Moreover, the emotional toll is immense, with many individuals feeling overwhelmed by the drastic changes to their living conditions, from having private homes to sharing cramped spaces with multiple families.

Figure 3 reveals that a significant portion of the survey respondents, including 38% of parents and 43% of teachers, are from regions directly impacted by the Israeli attacks on Lebanon.

38% 43%

Parents   Teachers

Figure 3. Residents from regions directly affected by the Israeli attacks

Within these affected demographics, a significant majority, 79% of both parents and teachers responding to the online survey, experienced forced displacement as a direct consequence of the war (Figure 4). This high rate of displacement among both groups is an indication of a high level of disruption to personal and communal stability and poses serious challenges to the continuity of education and employment, compounding the socio-economic stresses on parents, teachers, and students.

79% 79%
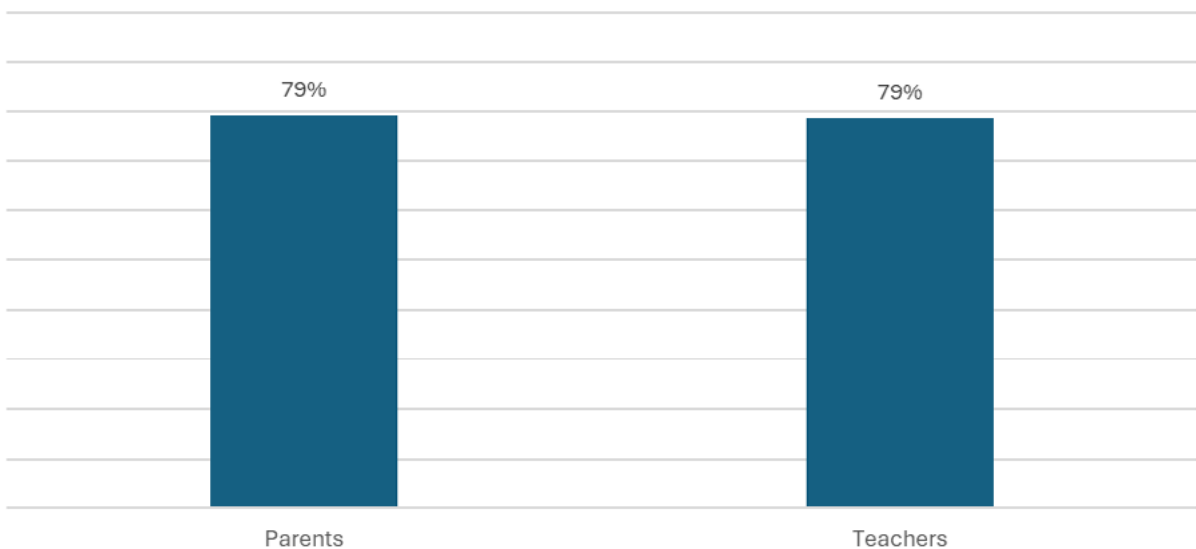
Parents   Teachers

Figure 4. Participants who were forcibly displaced due to the Israeli attacks

The majority of the survey participants, including parents and teachers who were forcibly displaced, have found temporary housing with friends or family – 45% of teachers and 41% of parents. Additionally, a significant number have rented accommodations—39% of teachers and 27% of parents. Others are staying with people they did not know before the war, in shelters, or are still seeking shelter.
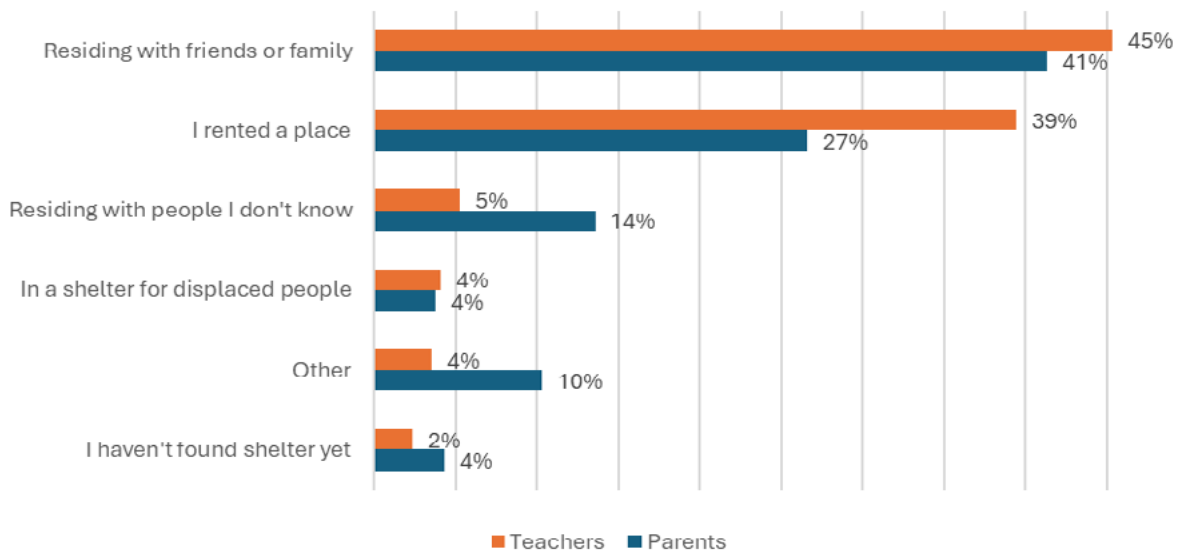
Figure 5. Place of residence of those were forcibly displaced due to the Israeli attacks

These varied living arrangements among internally displaced persons present significant challenges to implementing a uniform education plan and emphasise the value of MEHE's flexible plan for primary education. Each scenario entails different logistical and resource-based challenges that must be addressed to ensure educational continuity. Furthermore, the situation is complicated by the frequent movement of displaced individuals; for example, 25% of parents and 27% of teachers are still unsettled and continue to seek relocation to another place before the Israeli war in Lebanon ceases. This ongoing mobility adds another layer of difficulty, disrupting consistent educational delivery and access and requiring flexible and adaptable educational strategies to accommodate these changes.
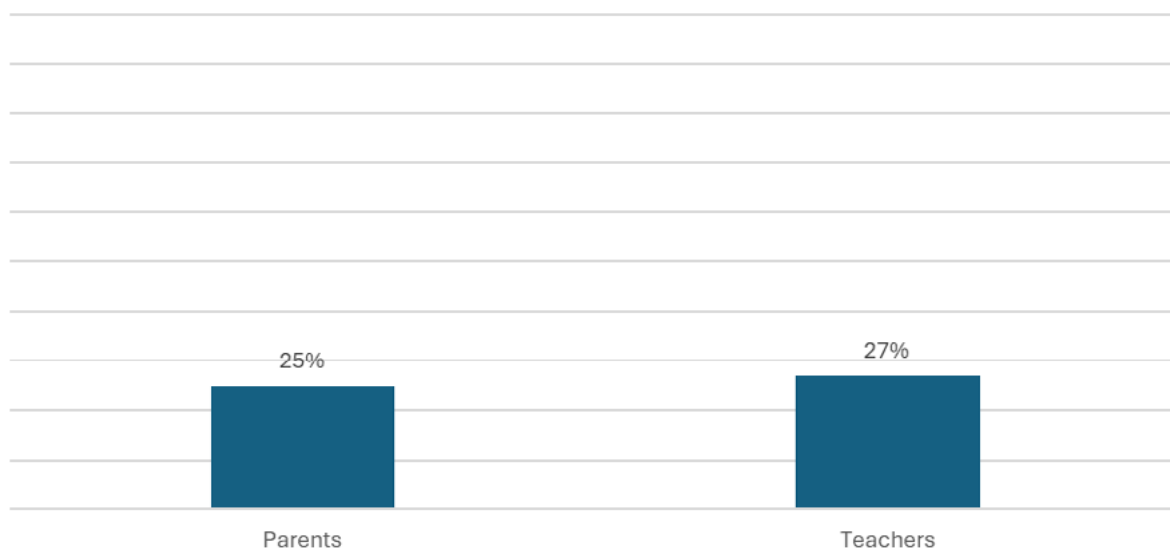

Figure 6. Participants who seek to move to another place before the end of the aggression

Among the parents and teachers who are not residents from regions directly affected by the Israeli aggression, a notable proportion have opened their homes to those displaced by the conflict, with 28% of parents and 24% of teachers reporting that they have taken in displaced individuals. This act of solidarity reflects the widespread impact of the

war across communities, extending beyond the immediate zones under attack. Hosting displaced families not only indicates a significant level of support and cooperation among residents but also introduces new dynamics and potential strains on resources and space within these welcoming households, which could affect their daily routines, including educational activities.
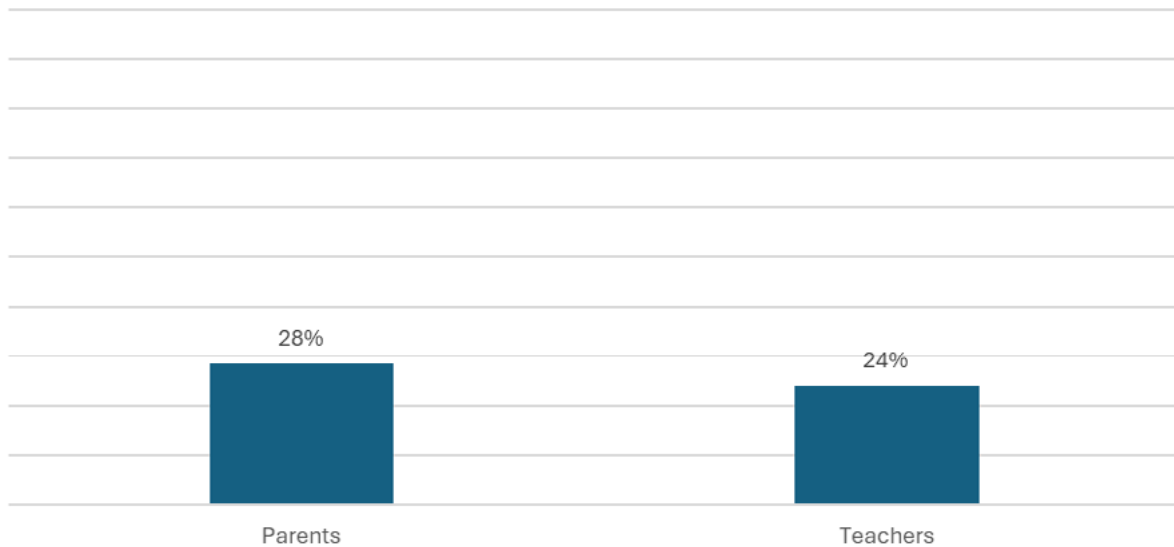

Figure 7. Participants who received displaced people in their homes

For instance, the average number of persons per room has reached 2.7 for teachers and 3.6 for parents who have received displaced individuals, indicating that many homes are now overcrowded. This overcrowding can severely limit the available space for daily activities, particularly for online teaching and learning, complicating the educational process for both students and teachers as one teacher suggested:

> *"The situation is more complicated than it seems. I am living in a three-room setup, moving around constantly to find a reliable internet connection, all while sharing the space with others." (FGD, PuS, Teachers, LB)*
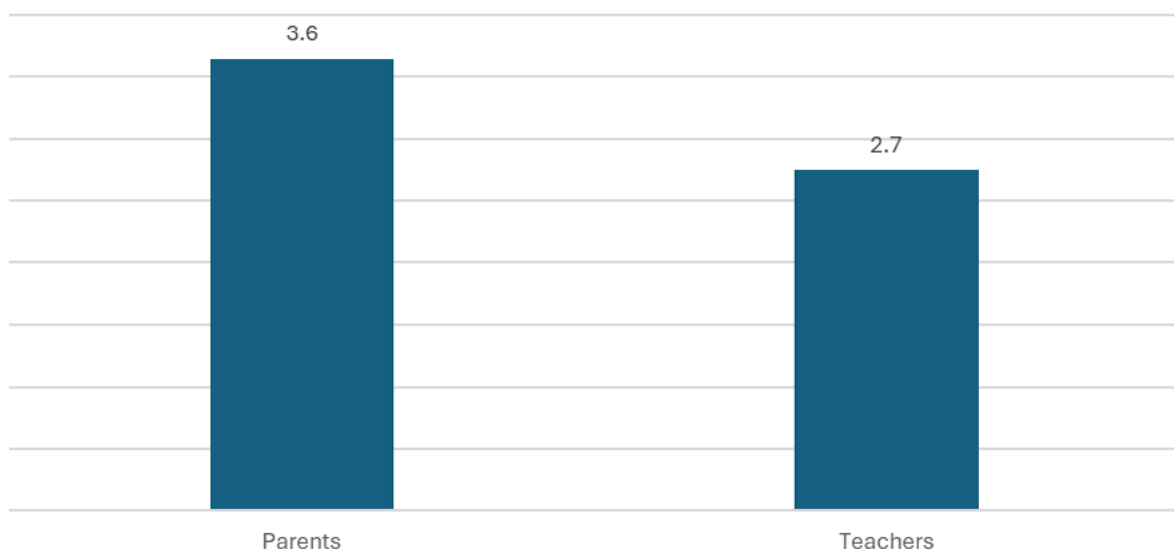

Figure 8. Average person per room in the homes of those who received IDPs

Income disruptions and increased financial burden

The cumulative effect of disrupted income and increased financial burden was a common struggle among parents, teachers, and refugee families, many of whom became unemployed because of the aggression. Parents who ran businesses in the impacted regions lost their income and, at the same time, they reported facing rising living expenses due to displacement:

> *"From the first day of the war, I lost my job. My husband did too. This has had a very negative impact on our economic situation." (Mother, LB, Bekaa, Household)*

The survey findings also revealed that 77% of parents had lost part of their income due to aggression, similarly, 66% of teachers reported the same.
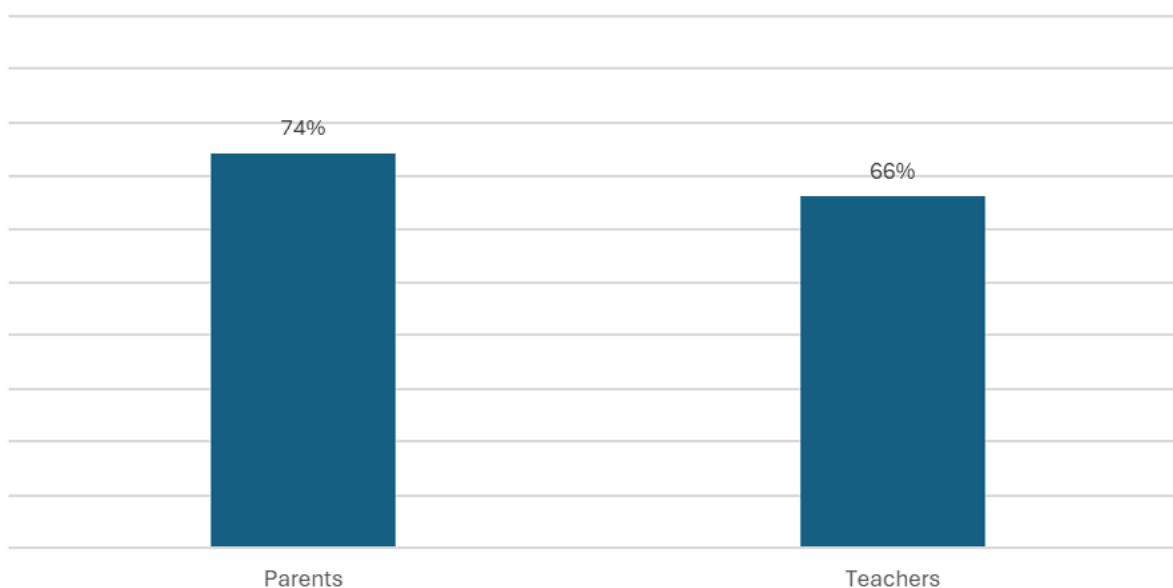

74%

66%

Parents   Teachers

Figure 9. Participants who lost part of their income due to the Israeli aggression

As indicated by interviews, the aggression has significantly exacerbated the financial strain on Lebanese households by driving up the costs of necessities and rent and incurring additional expenses related to displacement. As mentioned above, amid sudden airstrikes, many families were forced to flee their homes quickly, leaving behind personal belongings and valuables. Consequently, a majority of those affected – 95% of parents and 89% of teachers – have reported a marked increase in their household's cost of living since the onset of the aggression.
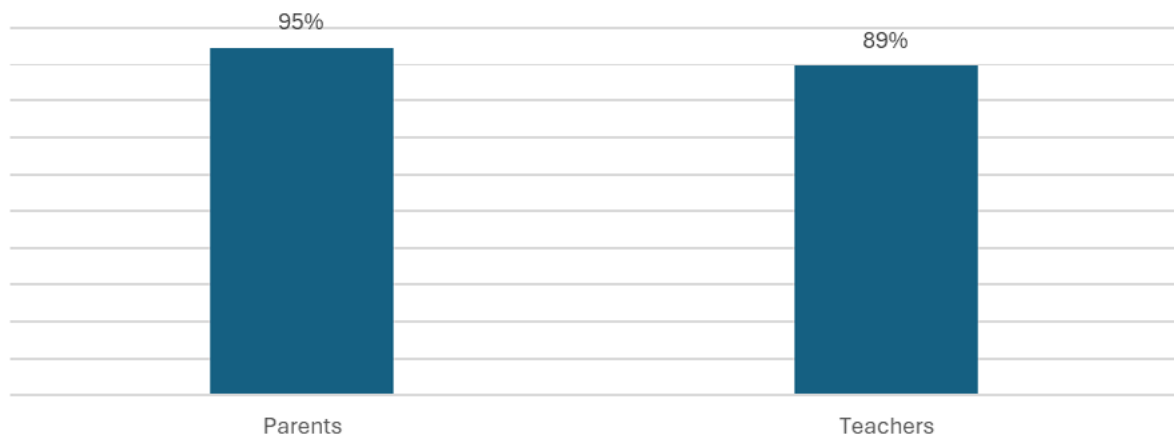
Figure 10. Participants who reported that the cost of living has increased as a result of the Israeli aggression

Notably, the financial challenges impacted teachers differently based on their employment status. Contracted teachers experienced complete income disruption, with their salaries cut off entirely due to the school closure. In contrast, tenured teachers continued to receive their salaries, yet this income proved insufficient to cover the added expenses brought on by displacement and higher living costs.

Chapter 5: Educational priorities and readiness amid the ongoing aggression

> **"Education is definitely a priority, especially during the crucial formative years of my children, who are between 1 and 8 years old. I am happy that they will resume their education. These children will have a difficult time finding a job without an education."** *(Mother, LB, Mount-Lebanon).*

This section delves into the variances in educational priorities, readiness, and preferences among teachers and parents residing in areas impacted by the Israeli aggression. We will explore how aggression has influenced educational attitudes and readiness to resume educational activities. These insights help to illustrate the diverse educational landscapes shaped by differing impacts of aggression and the necessity for adaptive educational policies tailored to these unique environments.

Education as a priority

While some interviewed parents regard education as a top priority regardless of their displacement situation, others view it as a less urgent matter, leading to a divided perspective among the interviewees and exposing some of the profound dilemmas that parents and teachers had to deal with:

> *"People need their basic needs met before they can think about education...Education is a priority, but not under these extreme circumstances." (Mother, LB, Tripoli)*

Yet, most parents were concerned about the long-term consequences of missed schooling, including the risk of repeating a school year and the further accumulation of learning loss.

> *"Education is a priority, especially after all the interruptions we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic". (Mother-CHWD, LB, Mount-Lebanon)*

The same is illustrated in Table 10, which presents the perceptions of education priority among surveyed teachers and parents who are residents of areas directly affected and not directly affected by the Israeli aggression. Among those from areas that have directly experienced aggression, parents are more inclined to view education as a priority compared to teachers. However, despite their moral responsibility and dedication to the education system, many teachers think education has lower priority which reflects the immediate survival and security concerns in directly affected areas, as indicated in the interviews. On the other hand, in areas not directly affected, education is more consistently viewed as a high or medium priority among both teachers and parents who expressed a stronger focus on education than their counterparts in directly affected areas, likely because they face fewer disruptions and can concentrate more on maintaining educational continuity.

Table 10. Priority of education

		High priority	Medium priority	Low priority
Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	19%	24%	57%
	Parents	38%	30%	32%
Residents from areas not directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	39%	35%	26%
	Parents	43%	35%	22%

Note: Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression might or might not be displaced

Readiness

"Education is a priority. However, I don't feel ready for online teaching because I am not mentally comfortable." (Contracted teacher, Mount Lebanon)

While the qualitative interviews showed a strong commitment to supporting the education sector, several teachers did not feel ready to start teaching on 4 November. The interviews showed that teachers would prefer postponement of the school year while extending the school year into the summer break, as this would allow MEHE to better assess the situation and develop a concrete plan. Additionally, teachers indicated that postponing the academic year would provide more time to secure essential resources for both online and in-person learning. It would also ensure that teachers, particularly contracted teachers, have their basic needs met, enabling them to focus on teaching and learning.

Some teachers expressed their reluctance and frustration with the authorities' decisions to resume learning, criticizing claims that previous school years were successful and pointing out that education has been inconsistent and disrupted since 2019.

"The authorities claim that the school year has been launched successfully, but this isn't reflective of reality—it feels more like a drive for revenue than a genuine commitment to education." (FGD, PuS, Teachers, LB)

On the other hand, parents expressed a strong readiness to resume education, believing that education should remain a top priority even under challenging circumstances. Many parents reported that their children were prepared and eager to return to their studies, underscoring the commitment to continuity in learning despite the disruptions. However, half of these parents, especially those living in shelters, noted that their children's readiness for school depends on the mode of instruction and the availability of essential resources, which they deemed crucial for resuming education, all of which will be further discussed in the following sections.

"Children are ready to resume their studies but only in person." (Father-CHWD, LB, Tripoli, Shelter)

Table 11 shows the readiness for resuming education among surveyed teachers and parents from areas both directly and indirectly affected by the Israeli aggression. The data reflects a generally higher immediate readiness for resuming education among all groups

from areas not directly affected by conflict than those in directly affected areas. However, across both areas, parents consistently showed a higher readiness for their children to resume education than teachers. This might reflect differing priorities or pressures, with parents possibly more concerned about their children's educational continuity.

The significant percentage of teachers and children not ready to resume education from areas affected by the aggression indicates a need for comprehensive support measures to facilitate educational continuity.

Table 11. Readiness for resuming education

		Yes, ready now	Will be ready in a month	I won't be ready under the current situation
Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	28%	21%	51%
	Parents	41%	16%	43%
Residents from areas not directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	58%	18%	23%
	Parents	66%	13%	21%

Note: Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression might or might not be displaced

When asked about the type of support needed to resume education, the majority of teachers (64%) and parents (73%) identified financial assistance as their primary need. This was followed closely by the need for computers or tablets for online learning, noted by 50% of teachers and 61% of parents, along with internet access, reported by 55% of teachers and 43% of parents. Additionally, there was a significant demand for adequate space for teaching and learning and further technological support. Furthermore, 42% of teachers expressed a need for psychological support for themselves, and 48% noted that their children required the same. For in-person learning scenarios, 21% of teachers and 29% of parents indicated a need for transportation support to facilitate school attendance.
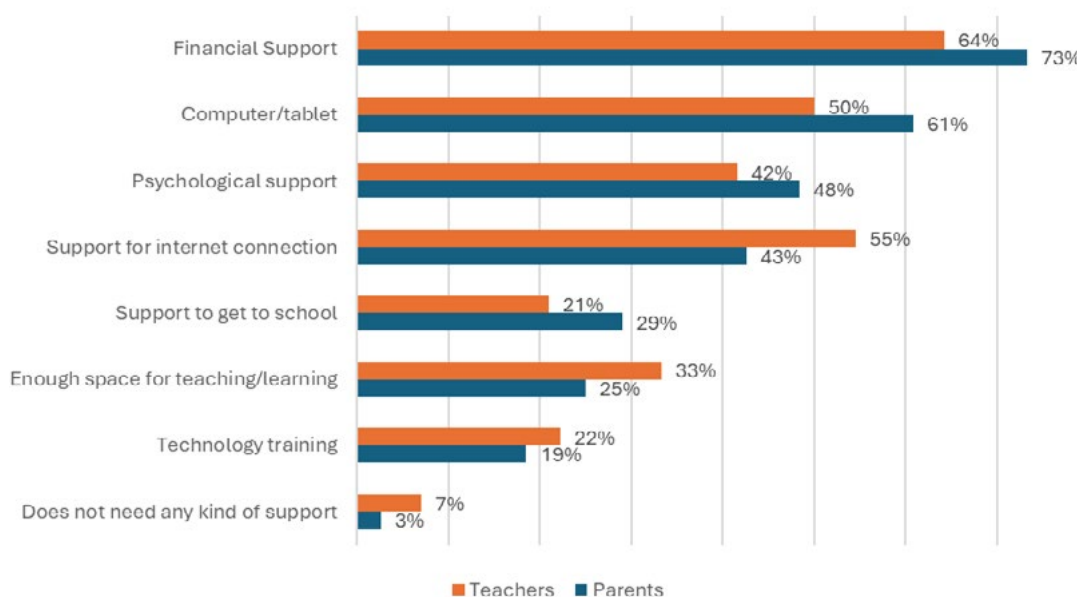

Figure 11. Type of support needed to resume education

Similarly, our interviews reveal that resuming education amidst the ongoing displacement and aggression requires comprehensive support. Financial stability for teachers and families also emerged as a top priority, with teachers needing consistent and increased salaries to cope with the higher living costs and parents requesting financial assistance to cover living and school-related expenses. The economic strain on both groups highlights the need for financial support to ensure that teachers can continue teaching and that students can access necessary supplies.

Equally important is the psychological and emotional support for students, parents, and teachers who are facing trauma due to displacement and aggression. Teachers emphasised that psychological support programmes should be led by qualified professionals to address children's fears and emotional challenges. Recreational activities were also recommended as a supplement to traditional academics, particularly in shelters where children have limited outlets for creativity and expression, as will be revealed in the section below.

Moreover, parents indicated that educational resources and infrastructure are essential for both remote and in-person learning. Access to textbooks, stationery, digital devices, stable internet, and electricity is critical, especially for shelter students. Additionally, teachers expressed the need for training in digital platforms to enhance their effectiveness in remote teaching. Finally, ensuring physical security in learning environments is a necessary requirement, especially in shelters. Parents and teachers alike stressed the importance of a safe and stable environment for in-person education, highlighting that the school year might need to be delayed if security cannot be assured.

Preferred form and content of education

Responses to preferred forms of education showed the dilemmas that parents and teachers face regarding education. Parents and teachers, mainly in shelters, expressed a preference for online learning due to safety concerns, practical challenges, and uncertainty about the future. In their opinion, online learning offers a safer and more flexible approach to education, allowing students to learn remotely and at their own pace.

> *"Perhaps distance learning is the only feasible option at the moment." (Tenured Teacher, Beirut, Shelter)*

Similarly, a mother pointed out that moving to a new schooling environment would put her child under additional emotional pressure, noting that the difficulty in adapting to new surroundings could impede her child's ability to focus and learn effectively.

It should be noted that parents and teachers only viewed online learning as a temporary and safer alternative to in-person learning during the ongoing conflict, despite their reservations about its effectiveness as a primary educational method.

> *"While online learning can be a temporary solution, it fails to address specific therapeutic needs, which are typically integrated with the curriculum in school settings." (FGD, Parents-CHWD, LB)*

Conversely, some parents opposed online learning due to a shortage of necessary resources such as internet connectivity, electricity, and devices. Other parents noted that the trauma and stress stemming from displacement are adversely affecting their

children's mental health and concentration, a situation that could worsen with online learning, as one mother mentioned. Moreover, inadequate teacher support and guidance pose significant challenges for online education. Teachers themselves also reported the limited effectiveness of online learning and their need for further training.

> "Engaging students in remote learning is a significant challenge. Our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the difficulties of online education. Many displaced families lack the devices and essential materials required for remote learning." (Tenured Teacher, Tripoli, Shelter)

Table 12 shows the preferences for the form of education among surveyed teachers and parents who are residents from areas directly and not directly affected by Israeli aggression. Teachers who have been directly impacted by the war prefer online line to in person compared to those who have not been affected directly. Those who have been displaced or are living in unsafe zones, are less safe and secure to attend in person schooling. In contrast, parents show a stronger preference for in-person learning across both types of areas compared to teachers, possibly due to their previous negative experience of online learning during COVID-19 and the social and developmental benefits of in-person.

Table 12. The preferred form of education in the current situation

		In-person Learning	Online Learning	Hybrid Learning
Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	19%	64%	17%
	Parents	32%	42%	26%
Residents from areas not directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	45%	24%	31%
	Parents	63%	15%	22%

Note: Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression might or might not be displaced

Given the high rates of preference for online and hybrid models and the possibility of a protracted war, especially among residents from areas directly affected, investments in digital infrastructure and training for both teachers and students are necessary to support more effective education under such conditions. Investing in digital infrastructure and training both teachers and students is critical since Lebanon's previous experience with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenged by several significant obstacles that hindered access and deteriorated the quality of education, issues that remain pertinent today (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2021), as revealed by our survey findings. For instance, as shown in Figure 12, connectivity issues are prevalent, with only 62% of teachers and 49% of parents having an internet connection. Similarly, the availability of essential devices is limited; only 56% of teachers and 22% of parents possess a computer or tablet. These challenges, already evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to worsen, particularly for displaced families who have left behind crucial items such as computers.

> "Who has reliable internet access all day, every day?...Who can afford online learning with no reliable internet? It's simply not feasible." (Mother, LB, Tripoli)

Additionally, a significant portion of the residents in Lebanon continue to struggle with power availability – only 52% of teachers and 45% of parents report having enough electricity to facilitate online education.
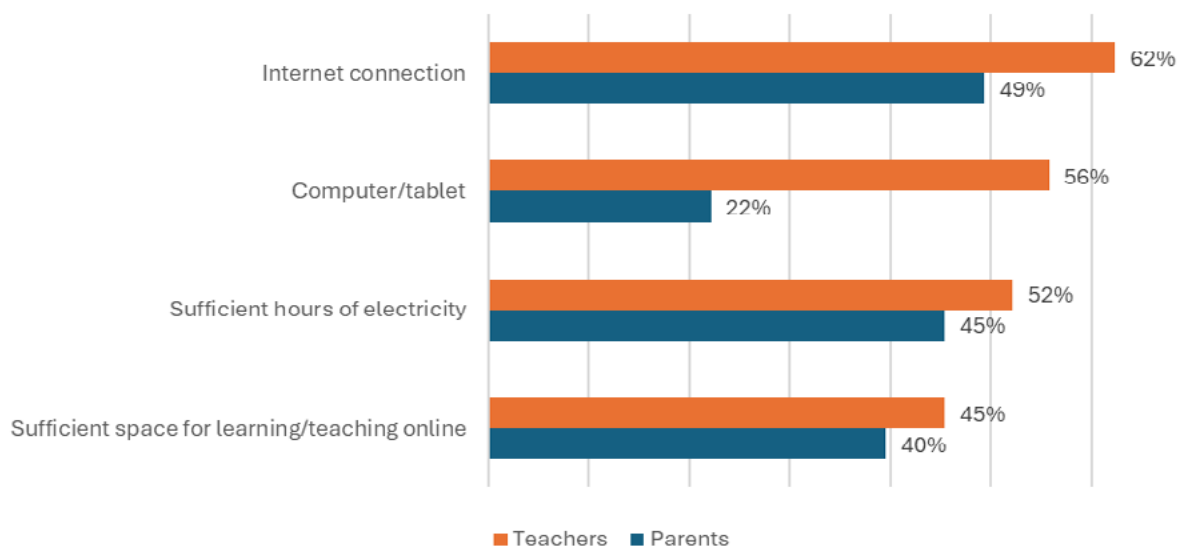

Figure 12. Availability of means for online learning

As previously mentioned, space constraints further complicate this situation, with only 45% of teachers and 40% of parents having adequate room for educational activities, a challenge that is even more acute for those in shelters. This reinforces the need for innovative solutions to accommodate educational needs within limited spaces.

Table 13 shows the preferences for educational focus among teachers and parents who are residents from areas both directly and not directly affected by Israeli aggression. Most parents and teachers from both areas expressed their preference for a mixture of academic and recreational learning focus.

Table 13. The preferred focus of education in the current situation

		Academic focus only	Academic and recreational	Recreational only
Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	37%	55%	8%
	Parents	23%	69%	8%
Residents from areas not directly affected by the Israeli aggression	Teachers	28%	69%	3%
	Parents	19%	77%	3%

Note: Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression might or might not be displaced

This shows a common goal to maintain educational integrity while also showing openness to recreational content, which could play a significant role during the aggression by engaging students and providing emotional balance.

Children with disabilities

The aggression has exacerbated existing challenges and introduced new difficulties for children with disabilities and their families, as observed by teachers and parents. Our survey reveals that 8% of parents have a child with a disability, highlighting the significant educational challenges these families face and the importance of accommodating the specific needs of these children to ensure their continued learning and development under difficult circumstances.
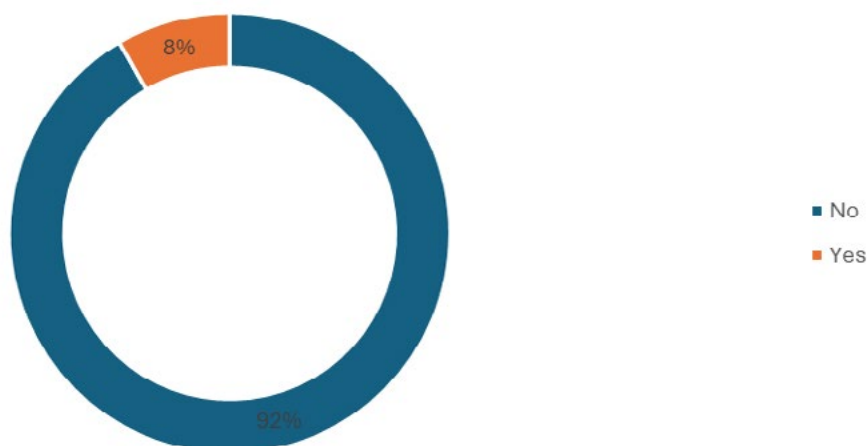

Figure 13. Parents who reported having a child with disability

Amid the ongoing aggression, significant complexities mark the educational experience for children with disabilities, as 17% of them experience have an intellectual disability. This significant proportion underscores the urgent need for specialised accommodations to support their learning, particularly during times of instability.
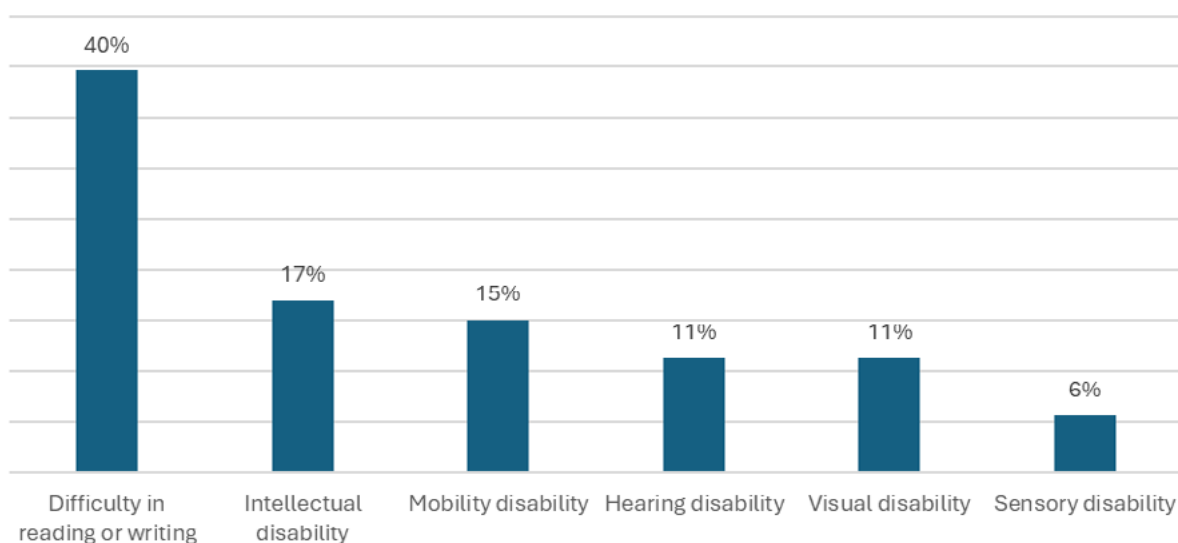

Figure 14. Type of disability

The pace of learning has notably slowed for these children due to war and displacement, compounded by a shortage of tailored support – a concern repeatedly voiced by parents. One parent emphasised the importance of consistent, regular assessments to track progress and prevent regression, especially when in-person sessions are disrupted:

> *"Missing multiple sessions could lead to regression. We need clarity on how these sessions will be conducted online to prevent children from losing valuable progress."*
> *(FGD, Parents-CHWD LB, Household)*

The disruptions extend beyond education, impacting physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. A mother from South Lebanon described her son's struggles stemming from oxygen deficiency at birth, which manifested in slow writing, social anxiety, and low self-confidence. Before the crisis, an inclusive private school provided the support needed to manage these issues. However, the current war has halted his therapy and schooling, exacerbating his behavioural and psychological challenges.

Amid these challenging adjustments to daily life, the value of education remains a key focus for both parents and teachers of children with disabilities. The value of education is understood to serve academic purposes as well as provide children with disabilities with a sense of normalcy and stability and to offer a supportive environment that encourages both learning and personal development. Consequently, parents are concerned about the long-term impacts of missed schooling, including the risk of repeating a school year and further learning loss.

However, the variation in learning modalities and the absence of a standardised educational approach have led to feelings of unfairness and frustration among some parents of children with disabilities. Consequently, only 25% of these parents believe their child with a disability is ready to resume education, as presented in Figure 15.
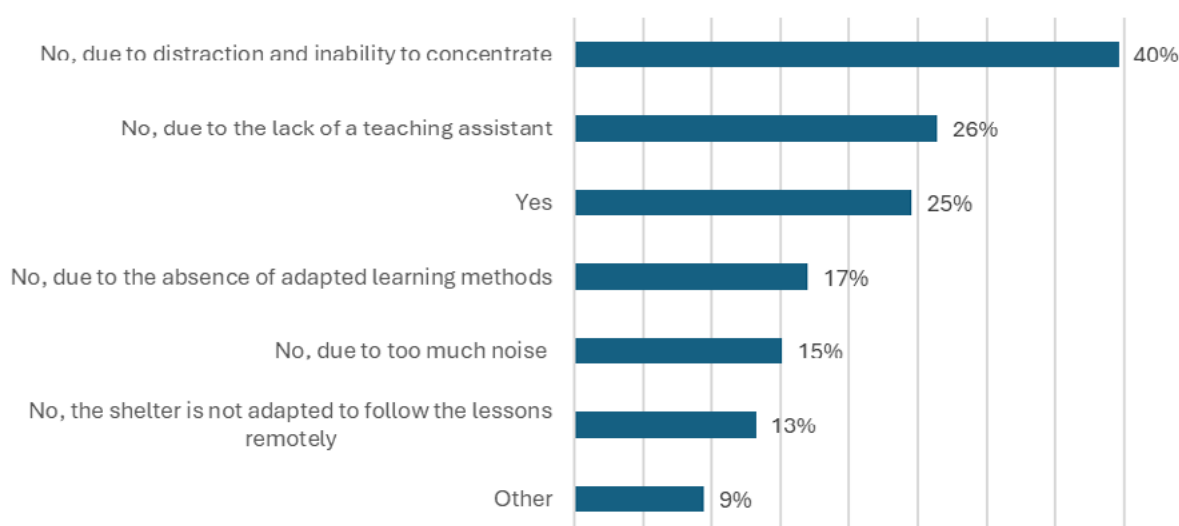
Figure 15. The possibility of returning to school for children with disabilities

This relatively low percentage highlights the substantial barriers and specific needs that must be addressed to facilitate a more inclusive and accessible educational environment for these children. The most significant barrier reported is related to distractions and the inability to concentrate, affecting 40% of the children. This suggests that the current

learning environments, especially in shelters or overcrowded households, may be unsuitable for children with certain disabilities who require a more controlled setting to focus effectively. Similarly, the absence of teaching assistants or specialised support is a major concern for 26% of parents, since teaching assistants often play a crucial role in helping children with disabilities by providing personalised attention and facilitating their participation in learning activities. Additionally, other factors that may prevent children with disabilities from accessing education during ongoing conflicts include the lack of adapted learning methods, excessive noise, and shelters that are not equipped for remote learning, as indicated by parents.

These challenges resonate with the insights shared by teachers and parents of children with disabilities during interviews, who highlighted similar obstacles when discussing the difficulties of resuming education, whether online or in-person. Beyond these, specific challenges with online learning were raised by interviewed parents. Technical issues, such as unstable internet connections disrupt virtual classes and making it difficult for children to stay engaged. Moreover, essential services like therapy sessions remain inaccessible under current circumstances as they are not feasible through online platforms. One parent noted that while online learning might serve as a temporary solution, it fails to meet the therapeutic needs integrated into school curricula:

> *"Therapy provided within the school context supports students' overall development. Seeking external support is not as effective, particularly for children who rely on consistent, specialised support embedded in their daily routine." (FGD, Parents-CHWD, LB)*

While many interviewed parents expressed concerns about the safety of their children in schools, particularly in areas directly affected by the aggression, nearly half of them preferred delaying the school year to avoid these risks. Despite recognising the limitations of online education, they emphasised that prioritising the child's safety is paramount and called for improvements to make virtual learning more effective and less burdensome.

> *"Missing a year of education is better than risking her life, so online learning is preferable for now." (FGD, Parents-CHWD, LB)*

Moreover, teachers who have students with disabilities in their classes show a significant disparity in their preparedness for remote teaching: 54% of teachers report feeling prepared, while 46% feel unprepared.
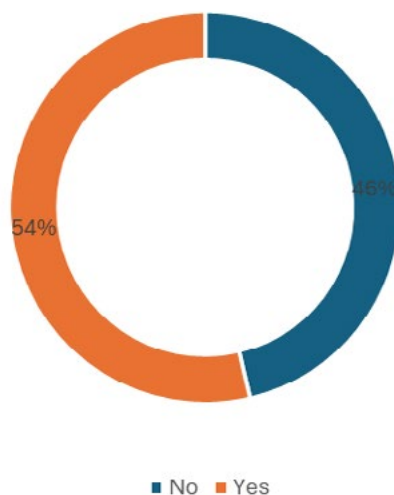
Figure 16. Teachers' readiness for teaching students with disabilities remotely

This uneven readiness can be attributed not only to insufficient training and a lack of specialised teaching methods designed to meet the unique requirements of students with disabilities in remote learning environments but also to the personal and professional challenges that teachers themselves are facing. As outlined in this report, these include issues such as limited access to technology, insufficient electricity, overcrowded living conditions, and the general stress of working in affected areas. All these factors contribute to the difficulties in providing effective remote education.

Teachers of students with disabilities raised concerns about the inclusiveness of MEHE's recent response in a focus group discussion, pointing out that current measures lack commitment to equitable support for all students, especially those with disabilities. They called for the Minister of Education to implement parallel and inclusive decisions rather than relying solely on the personal initiatives of schools and organisations (FGD, Teachers-SWD, LB, Beirut). Additionally, these teachers highlighted discriminatory pay practices, noting that their salaries remain the lowest compared to other teachers, and recent raises have excluded them. This has led to high staff turnover and recruitment challenges, further impacting the support available to students with disabilities.

Syrian refugee children

Syrian refugees in Lebanon face compounded challenges, dealing with prolonged displacement, housing instability, and ongoing insecurity. Many families are constrained by limited housing options and constant uncertainty, with some returning to Syria while others stay in Lebanon due to others remaining in Lebanon due to blocked roads. Overcrowding is common as many Syrian families are sharing limited space with others, and some also face the persistent threat of eviction by security forces or property owners. Additionally, the loss of income and increased living expenses were central themes among Syrian parents. The loss of work opportunities left families struggling for basic needs, such as food and shelter, therefore, participants highlighted the urgent need for financial assistance.

The qualitative analysis revealed a marked difference in community support between Lebanese and Syrian families, which appears to influence their readiness for school. Despite these challenges, 52% of surveyed Syrian parents indicated that education is a high priority in the current circumstances, and 78% indicated that their child is ready to resume education.

The preferences of Syrian parents for their children's education reveal a strong inclination towards in-person learning, with 55% favouring this mode due to its perceived effectiveness in providing structure and stability. In comparison, only 15% opted for online learning, likely reflecting concerns over limited access to technology and internet stability. Meanwhile, 30% of parents, such as the interviewed parents in Bekaa, preferred a hybrid model, combining both online and in-person approaches, as an alternative to relying solely on online education during the war. These preferences highlight the diverse needs and considerations of parents in the context of ongoing conflicts and displacement.

Figure 17. The form of education preferred by Syrian parents

Moreover, Syrian refugee parents in Bekaa expressed satisfaction with informal learning, such as *Jusoor's WhatsApp-based learning*, which has provided a vital educational link for their children.

Building on this positive experience, Syrian parents also highlighted the need for a holistic approach to education. Beyond the psychological support needed to resume schooling, they emphasised the importance of incorporating "recreational activities" into their children's education, complementing academic learning, especially after all they have experienced since the pandemic and now during the aggression, which had deeply affected their ability to concentrate on purely academic content.

On a different note, Syrian parents raised concerns about the exclusion of Syrian children from the minister's plan, fearing that their children might be left behind educationally due to such discriminatory policies or lack of resources and spaces.

> We are worried that MEHE won't have a plan for Syrian children and that they will not get an education." (FGD, SR-Parents, Bekaa)

Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon

There is limited data and reports available on the impact of the war on Palestinian children. UNRWA is the main provider of schooling for Palestinian refugee children. Due to permission restrictions, it was not possible to include UNRWA in this study. However,

we were able to interview a key Palestinian education informant who described the impact of the war on this sector of society. The current war in Lebanon has had a severe impact on the education of Palestinian children, exacerbating pre-existing challenges within the education system. The conflict has led to widespread displacement, with many families seeking shelter in schools, mosques, and other public spaces, further disrupting educational activities. Palestinian children, particularly those living in refugee camps, are facing immense barriers to accessing education, including overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching hours, and a lack of dedicated learning spaces. Many school facilities in the camps are now occupied by displaced families, rendering them unusable for educational purposes. This displacement has left children without a stable environment for learning, while families struggle with basic survival, making education a secondary concern. Additionally, many schools are unable to offer online learning due to unreliable internet, electricity shortages, and the inability of families to afford necessary technology. This crisis has left children without the opportunity to continue their education, with some schools operating on a hybrid model that is not fully accessible to all.

Psychosocial challenges are also a significant concern, with children in the camps particularly vulnerable to the psychological impacts of the ongoing war. The lack of psychosocial support and recreational activities has left many children exposed to extremist ideologies, which are increasingly promoted by radical groups taking advantage of the difficult circumstances. These ideologies, including martyrdom and violence, are fed to children in the absence of proper education and social support, leading to a concerning rise in radicalization. Furthermore, the increased presence of religious groups in the camps has exacerbated these problems, as these groups exploit the social and economic hardships of displaced families to push their own agendas, which often conflict with the principles of education and wellbeing.

Looking at the pre-war challenges, Palestinian education in Lebanon had already been plagued by a number of long-standing issues. One of the most significant was the outdated curriculum, which had not been updated since the late 1990s. This stagnant curriculum did not account for technological advancements or modern educational practices, leaving students ill-prepared for the rapidly changing world. The educational system in Palestinian camps had remained largely static for decades, with little to no changes in teaching methods or materials. As a result, students were taught using outdated textbooks and methods that were disconnected from global educational trends.

Moreover, Palestinian children in Lebanon faced significant barriers in terms of infrastructure and resources. Many schools in the camps operated with overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to students. Teaching hours were severely limited, with some schools operating for fewer than 100 days per year, which further impacted the quality of education. The lack of basic resources, such as textbooks, modern learning materials, and technology, compounded these issues, leaving Palestinian students at a disadvantage compared to their peers in other parts of Lebanon.

In addition to the structural issues within the education system, Palestinian children also faced significant social and economic challenges. The poverty in the camps had a direct impact on children's ability to access education, as many families could not afford school supplies, or the costs associated with attending school. The difficult living conditions in the camps also created a disruptive environment for learning, with many children

experiencing trauma, neglect, and a lack of support at home. This often resulted in poor academic performance and high dropout rates, with many children failing to progress beyond primary school.

In summary, the current war has exacerbated the already dire educational situation for Palestinian children in Lebanon. The displacement of families, lack of resources, and inadequate infrastructure have all contributed to a breakdown in education. The ongoing war has deepened the psychosocial challenges faced by children, leading to a rise in radicalisation and the spread of extremist ideologies. Pre-existing issues, such as the outdated curriculum, overcrowded classrooms, and poor resources, had already placed significant obstacles in the way of Palestinian children's education, and the war has only intensified these challenges. Addressing these issues requires urgent action to provide both educational and psychosocial support to Palestinian children, as well as efforts to update the curriculum and improve infrastructure to ensure that all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to quality education. Finally, there is a need for further research into the conditions of Palestinian Youth in Lebanon particularly amid the challenges and restrictions imposed on them particularly in terms of employment.

Conclusion

"Support is crucial… Education should be holistic, incorporating both academic and emotional support. It's important for children to feel supported by others". A parent (Mother-CHWD, LB, Tripoli).

The escalating Israeli aggression in Lebanon has significantly deepened the already fragile state of the country's education system, creating a host of multifaceted challenges for teachers, students, and families alike. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), already grappling with the devaluation of teacher salaries and the added responsibility of expanding educational provisions for Syrian refugee children, now faces yet another overwhelming crisis. The outcome of this current situation remains uncertain, and the potential for further deterioration is high. In response, MEHE must prepare for two distinct scenarios: the first, the worst-case scenario, involves a prolonged and intensified Israeli aggression that would exacerbate the displacement crisis and render in-person schooling virtually impossible for the vast majority of the population. MEHE has had a major shortcoming in pre-planning for potential crises. Hence, in this final chapter will explore these two potential scenarios—either the continuation of the conflict or its cessation—and the implications of each for the future of education in Lebanon. Based on these scenario and potential risks, we will also provide concluding reflections and recommendations to address the profound challenges currently facing the sector.

Scenario 1: Protracted war

Should the conflict persist, the education system will face severe and escalating challenges. A prolonged war increases the risk of extended school closures, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations – children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children with disabilities, and refugee children. The war might expand to new areas resulting in further displacement which might turn more schools into shelters in order to accommodate the newly displaced. This is likely to push more students into online learning.

While online learning has served as a temporary measure, its quality remains uncertain, especially considering the varying levels of readiness among both teachers and families. Many teachers and families are facing mounting socio-economic pressures, and lack the resources needed for online learning. The Ministry needs to prioritise the strengthening of the online learning platforms and resources. Moreover, it needs to support teachers in teaching online.

With the risk of a protracted war, it is difficult to provide education for a population constantly on the move. As highlighted in the survey, many families are uncertain about their long-term living arrangements with frequent displacements complicating access to consistent schooling. Displaced families living in temporary accommodation face additional barriers to education, including the uncertainty of where they will settle next, which may lead to interruptions in school enrolment and continuity. Teachers, already overwhelmed by the emotional toll of the crisis, are ill-prepared to address these challenges, particularly without the necessary training or support structures in place.

Moreover, there is an urgent need for a more detailed understanding of current staffing levels in schools. Displacement has caused significant imbalances in teacher distribution, with some schools lacking teachers in certain subjects while others have an oversupply. Addressing these staffing gaps is essential to ensuring that all subjects are adequately covered. The study also reveals a lack of trust between teachers and the education governance system. Building trust is critical for developing inclusive, locally-driven solutions to the ongoing crisis. Teachers feel a deep moral obligation to keep education alive during these challenging times, yet they also face the urgent need to support their own families. Building trust through tangible support – such as reliable salary disbursements, psychosocial assistance, and comprehensive professional development for both in-person and online teaching – will be essential for maintaining teacher morale and ensuring educational continuity if the war extends for a longer period. To this end, the extra burden on teachers is a strong testament to the need for more support to this group.

Enhanced monitoring mechanisms are also crucial, and these should be decentralised, with educational centers in each district working to identify and respond to localised needs. A flexible return to schooling is necessary, but the quality of both in-person and online education must be a central consideration. According to our study, the current levels of preparedness among families and teachers fall short of what is required for effective learning. By building a more inclusive, transparent approach to governance, Lebanon's education system can better navigate this ongoing crisis and work toward a more resilient and equitable future for all students.

Finally, the civil society in Lebanon is an extremely vibrant and reactive one. MEHE's partnership and coordination with this sector particular in terms of recreational and psycho-social activities is valuable. Universities can also play a critical role in supporting MEHE's effort in monitoring the impact of the war and supporting teacher training in online learning.

Scenario 2: Post-war recovery and the immediate need for strategic education planning

In case of a ceasefire, the Lebanese education system would enter a complex and multifaceted recovery phase. While the cessation of hostilities would provide a necessary foundation for rebuilding, significant challenges will remain, including displacement, infrastructure damage, and the accumulation of learning losses. The following outlines the key issues and immediate considerations for educational recovery post-war:

Even with a ceasefire, many displaced families may remain in temporary shelters due to extensive damage to their homes. The return of displaced populations will be a gradual process, complicated by seasonal constraints such as the onset of winter. In areas where schools have been repurposed as shelters, the reopening of these institutions may be delayed as displaced families will need to be relocated first. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, will need to reassess shelter arrangements and identify alternative accommodations for displaced families to allow schools to resume normal operations. Prior to the war, public schools in the South and Beirut had low enrolment rates (UNICEF, 2013) and thus might have the capacity to absorb the number of displaced students. However, suitable housing as well as transport arrangements must be put in place to reduce the financial burden on the

displaced population. Without a clear government strategy for transitioning families out of shelters and providing them with schooling, further delays in reopening schools are inevitable.

The destruction of infrastructure, particularly in southern Lebanon, is another significant barrier to recovery. Over 37 villages in the region have been almost entirely destroyed, meaning the return of displaced families and the restoration of educational services in these areas will require substantial time and resources. A comprehensive mapping of the affected population is necessary to develop a targeted educational plan, which may include establishing temporary learning spaces. This could involve refurbishing existing schools or setting up transitional shelters that can also serve as educational spaces.

Many children in Lebanon, particularly those in the southern border areas, have already suffered significant disruptions to their education. These children are at high risk of long-term academic setbacks unless prioritised catch up programmes and learning recovery initiatives are put in place. The immediate focus should be on addressing these learning losses to ensure that these children do not fall further behind.

The need for trauma-informed approaches cannot be overstated. Both children and teachers who have been affected by violence and displacement will require extensive psychosocial interventions to address the trauma they have experienced. Without these interventions, the learning process will be severely hindered, and the overall recovery of the education system could be delayed. Additionally, a differentiated response is required to address the specific needs of different groups. For example, families who have lost homes or loved ones will require different forms of support compared to other displaced populations. A nuanced, context-specific strategy is essential to meet the diverse needs of affected communities.

Concluding reflections and recommendations

This report has examined the varied and severe impacts of the aggression across different regions and stakeholders, particularly highlighting the deepening educational inequalities and the compounded struggles faced by vulnerable populations, including children with disabilities and Syrian refugee children. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this rapid study combines quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups. The surveys were administered to a sample of teachers and parents from various governorates of Lebanon. Complementing this, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to capture personal experiences and the broader effects of the aggression. The study sample and methodology prompt several limitations for generalising the results of the study. Moreover, the situation on the ground is changing rapidly making it difficult to represent and capture the newly arising needs.

Our study revealed that Israeli aggression on Lebanon has caused a range of disruptions, including widespread displacement and significant economic distress characterised by job losses and escalated living expenses, as well as trauma that manifested in psychological stress and emotional challenges among parents, students, and teachers. These factors collectively undermined the stability required for effective educational engagement and continuity. Despite these considerable challenges, many parents and teachers continued to prioritise education, emphasising the critical need to prevent further learning losses and highlighting the advantages of their children's return to school.

Despite having one year to plan an anticipated escalation in the war between Lebanon and Israel, since the genocide in Gaza and the spillover to Lebanon, the Lebanese government and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's emergency plan fell short of accommodating the influx of a large number of displaced people which happened in an extremely short period of time. The lack of comprehensive, up-to-date data on students and teachers as well as on schools further complicates efforts to assess the full impact on the educational system. As shown in the report, while MEHE's weekly updates offer some insight into the scope of the damage, they cover less than 20% of Lebanon's student population and fail to address critical sectors such as private education, which serves the majority of students. This gap in data is a significant barrier to effective crisis response, underlining the urgent need for more robust monitoring systems that enable MEHE to track, assess, and respond to the evolving crisis.

In relation to the possibility of resuming the academic year, our study reveals a stark contrast in readiness to return to school, influenced largely by the immediate difficult circumstances of displaced families and those in overcrowded conditions. Families facing trauma or struggling to meet basic survival needs find it difficult to prioritise education, while those in less affected areas show a greater willingness to return to school. This variance in readiness emphasises the importance of tailored interventions that address the specific needs of different communities.

The study further highlights the polarised views on the mode of education. While some advocate for online learning due to its perceived safety and flexibility, others, disillusioned by the inefficiencies of past online efforts, prefer in-person instruction. This division reflects broader resource disparities, with many lacking the necessary infrastructure—such as reliable electricity, internet access, and adequate devices—to fully engage with online learning. Meanwhile, areas directly impacted by the conflict express strong opposition to in-person schooling due to safety concerns.

Children with disabilities and Syrian and Palestinian refugee students remain among the most vulnerable groups in this crisis. So far these groups of children are not even mentioned or included in MEHE's plans. Only recently, a memo was issued by MEHE regarding Syrian refugees. These children face unique barriers in accessing education, with compounded risks of exclusion from both ongoing educational plans and past crisis responses. There is an urgent need for targeted, inclusive strategies that address the specific needs of these students and prevent further setbacks in their educational journeys.

MEHE's response, though well-intentioned, has been insufficient in addressing the full scope of the crisis. Despite efforts to reopen schools, the focus has largely been on resuming schooling, with little attention paid to the quality of learning that is taking place, particularly in terms of the adequacy of online and in-person instruction. Monitoring learning loss and providing support to both teachers and students are essential to mitigate the long-term consequences of the aggression on education.

Furthermore, MEHE's approach to flexibility – alternating between in-person and online schooling depending on the security situation – has proven crucial in ensuring continuity in education, but this alone is not enough. The absence of a holistic response that includes psychosocial support and financial assistance for families, students, and teachers exacerbates the challenges faced by the education system.

To effectively address these issues, a coordinated, multi-agency approach is necessary.

Government bodies, educational institutions, and international partners must collaborate to develop policies that are not only inclusive and equitable but also adaptable to the ongoing crisis. By focusing on key areas such as data collection, resource allocation, and psychosocial support, Lebanon's education system can begin to recover, ensuring support for various groups and preventing further learning losses.

As the crisis persists, MEHE must anticipate various scenarios, including the potential for prolonged conflict and further displacement, and plan accordingly. Only through comprehensive, proactive planning can Lebanon's education system emerge from this crisis stronger and more resilient, providing all children with the quality education they deserve. In the following section, we highlight the challenges that each scenario raises and the challenges that MEHE needs to address.

Recommendations

1. **Inclusive response plan**: Education is a right to all groups. MEHE needs to ensure that the response plan addresses the needs of all groups of children, including Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, and children with disabilities, gender, socio-economic status and displacement status. This will require an intersectional approach to enable tailored strategies for different groups. While this increases the complexity of the challenge, it also requires coordinated efforts among all stakeholders involved in the education and support of these groups.

2. **Develop a medium-term response plan**: Create a medium-term response plan that accounts for both the current and worst-case scenarios. This plan should prioritise actions to minimise disruptions to schooling, ensuring educational continuity even in the most challenging circumstances.

3. **Enhanced collaboration and coordination**: The immense challenges posed by the war demand full coordination among all actors. This includes collaboration across government agencies, teacher and parent associations, local and international organisations, and the donor community. Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined to implement the medium-term response plan effectively and ensure comprehensive support for the education system.

4. **Strengthening partnerships with civil society**: Collaboration with civil society organisations can significantly alleviate the burden on MEHE. NGOs specialising in non-formal education, universities offering teacher training, and organisations focused on disability support can all contribute valuable resources to assist teachers and students. These partnerships can help address gaps in the education system and provide much-needed support during the crisis.

5. **Investing in online learning infrastructure and human resources**: Strengthening online learning infrastructure and developing the capacity of educators to effectively engage in digital teaching is crucial, especially for regions like the southern border where many villages have been destroyed as well as for poorer households. Expanding teacher training in online education will be essential for ensuring educational continuity during prolonged periods of conflict.

6. **Restoring trust and respect for the teaching workforce**: Teachers in Lebanon have faced immense challenges over the past four years, with financial instability

severely damaging their relationship with MEHE. In these difficult times, rebuilding respect for the teaching profession and restoring trust between teachers and MEHE is critical. Offering teachers a decent salary and adequate compensation will be vital to retaining their commitment and ensuring the success of any educational recovery or resistance plan.

7. **Improving data collection and monitoring**: Lebanon has historically lacked comprehensive data to assess educational needs and measure the effectiveness of interventions. Strengthening data collection and monitoring systems will be crucial for understanding the impact of the ongoing crisis on students and teachers, and for informing the development of appropriate responses.

8. **Flexible and responsive planning**: MEHE's ability to adapt its plans in response to the evolving nature of the war and its effects is essential. Flexible, responsive planning will allow MEHE to adjust to changing circumstances and address the challenges of providing education during an ongoing crisis.

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