

WORKING PAPER

EDUCATION RESEARCH IN CONFLICT AND PROTRACTED CRISES: EVIDENCE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA FOR LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

Based on an evidence review, the Centre for Lebanese Studies formulated a research agenda for education in the context of conflict and protracted crises in Lebanon. The research agenda is summarised in this working paper as part of the Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme. Based on a review of existing evidence and knowledge as well as consultations with stakeholders in the education sector, the paper focuses on micro and macro levels of educational processes by engaging with pre-existing conditions, drivers of learning and development, and outcomes. The paper first introduces the context of education in conflict and protracted crises in Lebanon and describes the process of formulating a general research agenda with a particular emphasis on identification of research gaps and the participatory approach used for national-level consultations. The paper then introduces and describes the eight themes of the research agenda: Governance and financial management; Teachers; Crisis monitoring; Private Sector; Non-formal education; Vocational education; Knowledge production; Crisis in Southern Lebanon. The research projects will broadly focus on Governance, Teachers, and Crisis Monitoring.

Disclaimer

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ACRONYMS

ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
CERD	Centre for Educational Research and Development
CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
CTP	Continuous Training Programme
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
ICT	information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	information technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LAYS	learning-adjusted years of schooling
LBP	Lebanese pounds
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LDP	Leadership Development Programme
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NFE	non-formal education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPTP	National Poverty Targeting Programme
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PITB	CERD's Pre- and In-service Training Bureau
PRL	Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon
PRS	Palestinian refugees from Syria
QITABI	Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education
RACE	Reaching All Children with Education
SIPP	School Improvement Planning Programme
TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UN OCHA	United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees

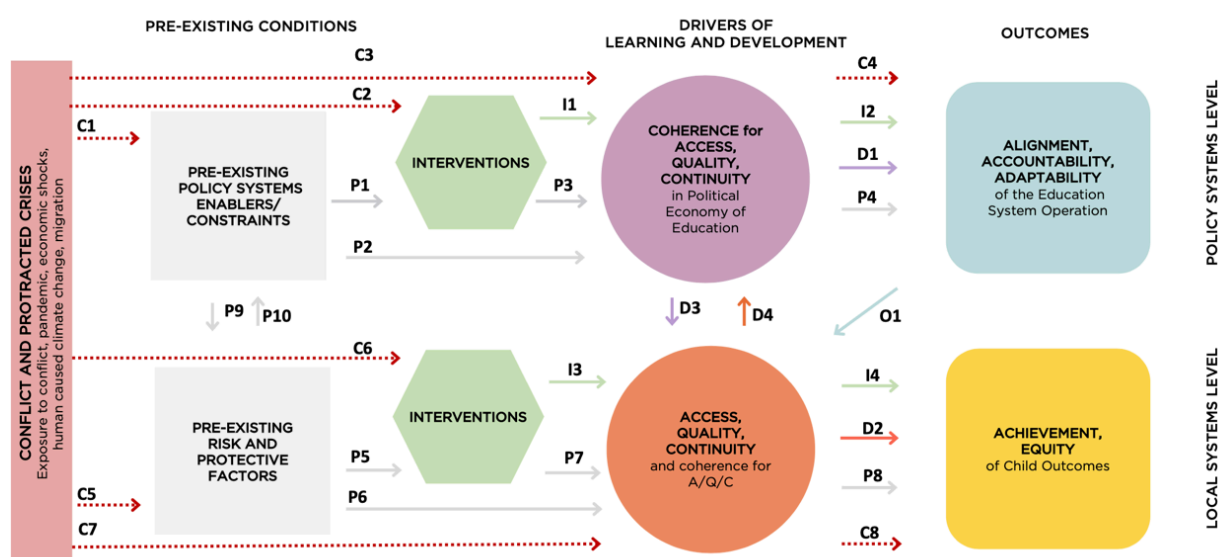
I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme is a large-scale, multi-country UK Aid-funded research project planned from 2021 and 2024. ERICC is a global research and learning partnership that aims to transform education policy and practice in the context of conflict and protracted crisis. The programme aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge, at local, national, regional and global levels, through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships. The ERICC Research Programme Consortium is implementing educational research in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts of Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Syria.

The Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) led the process for developing a research agenda for education in the context of conflict and protracted crises in Lebanon. The work summarised in this document is part of the ERICC programme and is based on a review of existing evidence and knowledge as well as consultations with stakeholders in the education sector in Lebanon. We summarise the outcome of our work by presenting a general research agenda and a tentative plan for the first stage of the research, which will take place from April to December 2024, focusing on Governance, Teachers, and Crisis Monitoring.

In Lebanon, we will conduct research in collaboration with the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD). In this document, we set out a general research agenda, which we consider a roadmap for research on education in Lebanon. We aim to set out the main themes for planning new research as well as a detailed plan of the first stages of this research. Before we come to this, we describe the methodology we have adopted. To conclude this introduction, we briefly introduce the ERICC conceptual framework, as it sets the framing for our work.

Figure 1: ERICC conceptual framework (Source Kim et al. 2022: 8)



The conceptual framework was developed to be a tool to “identify and explain education systems and processes that affect children’s outcomes in conflict and protracted crisis settings, where the state’s function is disrupted and has become unsustainable to maintain and operate existing education systems” (Kim et al. 2022: 4).

Deriving from a set of interrelated meta theories such as the “coherence for learning framework (Pritchett 2015), systems framework for understanding social settings (Tseng and Seidman 2007), dynamic systems theory (Thelen 1996), developmental contextualism (Cicchetti and Aber 1998, Lerner 1996), and bioecological developmental theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998, 2007)” (Kim et al. 2022: 5, and references therein), the framework is composed of the following main domains and organised according to micro-level (individual, school, and community) and macro-level (national and global). In developing and formulating the research agenda, we used the framework as an organising tool to develop the themes and document existing knowledge and evidence. In this work, we identified the need to nuance the divisions between the micro and macro levels with intricate relations between the two and the need to unpack the scales between micro and macro, such as school inspectors and other ‘mediator’ functions between the national/macro and micro levels. We thus also refer to meso levels in our discussions below.

The first domain of the framework is the **pre-existing conditions of policy systems that enable or constrain** effective policy decision-making processes and implementation, such as available resources and infrastructure, the landscape of the political economy, and accountability and data systems (Kim et al. 2022). According to the framework, the second domain,, the **drivers of learning – access, quality, continuity and coherence** – affect education at both micro level and macro level:

- **Access:** the awareness of and capacity to participate in educational opportunities.
- **Quality:** the quality of the resources, relationships, norms, practices, and interactions.
- **Continuity:** the sustained exposure to education that allows progression in both learning and schooling.
- **Coherence:** the alignment and coherence in goals, processes, resource arrangements, and incentives for achieving access, quality, and continuity, within and across stakeholders and systems.

We understand the framework as a pathway through learning in the context of conflict and protracted crises, from pre-existing conditions to current conditions, that could help to understand interventions, particularly those targeting drivers of learning, and at both local and policy system level. Thus, the third domain, the **outcomes** should also be understood as being at both those levels.

The conceptual framework is formulated at an abstract and general level and, as Kim et al. (2022) suggest, there is a need for more research on how particular linkages within the framework can be operationalised. Consequently, we consider the framework to be more of an organising tool for understanding pathways of learning rather than an analytical framework, which will have to be developed for each planned study.

With the discussion of the ERICC conceptual framework as a starting point, we introduce the context and provide a presentation of gaps in evidence in relation to the current provision of education in Lebanon (Section II); describe the process of developing a research agenda on education in Lebanon (Section III); present a research agenda for Lebanon, resting on the conceptual framework (Section IV); and finally introduce how we will prioritise research and the plan for the first stage of research from April to December 2024. This paper is complemented by a second paper reviewing the data systems for education in Lebanon (Brun et al. 2024).

II. THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN LEBANON

During the Ottoman Empire, education in Lebanon was predominantly managed by religious and sectarian institutions, with little oversight from the state. This allowed various religious communities to establish their own schools, leading to a fragmented educational landscape (Shuayb et al. 2024). The entry of Western Christian missionaries, facilitated by agreements between Western powers and the Ottoman authorities, further diversified this landscape. Education institutions in Lebanon today are thus historically shaped socio-political spaces, deeply embedded in politically driven and often religiously affiliated school networks (Zakharia 2010). The Ministry of Education has found its role increasingly complicated by the distribution of educational responsibilities across multiple ministries and government entities (Shuayb et al. 2024). This dispersion of authority has led to inefficiencies and inconsistencies, hindering the development of a cohesive educational policy. Many of the stakeholders we have consulted in our work on this report consider the education system in Lebanon to be a Western construct, caught up in its colonial and missionary history, influenced by international aid, and blended with more recent socio-political and sectarian movements and interests (Zakharia 2010). The education system reflects the complexities of wider Lebanese society, resulting in fragmented planning and policy-making in the sector. For example, there has not been a new curriculum in the country since 1997 despite the dire need for reform. The history of education in Lebanon is thus one of continuous struggle, with teachers and civil society actors playing a central role in pushing for reforms and improvements despite the many obstacles they face.

Adding to the complexity of the education system is the number of refugees in need of education in the country. Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, with the government estimating that 1.5 million Syrian refugees reside in the country, of which approximately 815,000 are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2024). In addition, more than 479,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Lebanon, although the number residing in Lebanon is believed to be fewer than 200,000 and there are estimates of around 20,000 Palestinian Syrians residing in the country (UNRWA 2021). Protection of Syrian and Palestinian refugees represents largely two different systems. The education system is also divided between Palestinian refugees on the one hand and Lebanese nationals and Syrians on the other. Other divisions in the education system exist between public and private schools, different types of private schools (such as fee and non-fee schools), as well as between the morning and afternoon shift in the public school system for nationals and Syrian refugees, respectively.

Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and Syrians are considered displaced people rather than refugees, the latter being a category that has become reserved for Palestinian refugees in the country. Aligned with UNHCR policy and language, however, and based on the Syrians in Lebanon being in a refugee-like situation, we nevertheless refer to Syrians in Lebanon as refugees in this project. The majority of Syrian refugees are without legal residency.¹ Palestinians who arrived in 1948 and 1967 are considered refugees and most have residency. However, they are prevented from fully integrating into Lebanese society, with restrictions on employment, property ownership, political participation, and forming of associations. There are also Palestinian refugees from Syria who have a marginal status, with very few accessing legal residency.

¹ Despite this semantic difference between displaced and refugees maintained by the Lebanese state, the UNHCR and most other actors label the Syrians in Lebanon as refugees.

A. Context of compounded crises

Lebanon is a profoundly unequal society and its inequalities have been aggravated and deepened by a series of multiple and sustained crises in recent years (Baumann 2019, Brun et al. 2021). When Syrian refugees started arriving in Lebanon from 2011, they came to a country that was already on a downward economic spiral (Brun et al. 2021). The country's compounded crises caused the World Bank (2021: xi) to state that the country is experiencing what is likely to rank among the top ten, possibly the top three, most severe economic crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century. A financial crisis, which started in 2019, was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion. The financial crisis was caused by unprecedented levels of debt managed by the finance ministry and central bank, based on running a deficit for the last 25 years (Baumann 2019). With limited exports, foreign direct investments have been focused on the Gulf Arab states and on real estate. The country's dependency on remittances remains very high but remittances have slowed down in the last ten years (Baumann in 2019) amid austerity and a global financial crisis. Within Lebanon, poverty levels among all groups of residents – Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese – are soaring (LCRP 2023a).

The Syrian conflict affected and amplified the downward economic trend throughout the region (Brun et al. 2021). However, although the arrival of substantial numbers of Syrian refugees to Lebanon may have created a shock to the economy, it did not cause its downturn. In the short term, the international aid that accompanied the arrival of Syrian refugees may even have delayed the financial crisis (Brun et al. 2021). Nevertheless, since the 2019 crisis, the hostile environment for refugees has increased significantly and created significant tensions between government institutions and international actors. The arrival of refugees and the way the refugee crisis was managed have placed pressure on infrastructure, housing prices, and livelihoods. Most significantly, the education system was not equipped to cater for the new arrivals.

When Syrian refugees arrived in Lebanon, the roughly half a million school-aged children among them came to an unprepared education system. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) allowed them to register in public schools, introducing several education policy initiatives for Syrian refugees. The Ministry had not yet comprehended the scale of the crisis, claiming that the United Nations' estimated increased demand on public schools was exaggerated (UNICEF 2013). In 2013, the enrolment rate of Syrian school-age children in Lebanon was estimated at just 31%. Refugees resided predominantly in some of the most deprived areas in Lebanon, where demands by the local community on public schools were generally higher than in other areas. This period witnessed substantial involvement by humanitarian organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in responding to the education crisis, including an adaptation of the Education in Emergencies standards framework to Lebanon. This adaptation involved representatives of the Lebanese government, international NGOs (INGOs), UNRWA, and local Lebanese NGOs. However, Syrian NGOs and representatives from the refugee community were almost entirely absent, indicating the general exclusion of those actors from influencing the education system.

B. Education policies in Lebanon as a response to the Syrian crisis

The education policy in place in Lebanon before the Syrian crisis and when Syrian refugees started arriving was the Education Strategy Development Plan from 2010. The plan provided general recommendations and priority areas, but lacked detail on how to carry out the strategies. There were ten priority areas, including developing retention and achievement, developing infrastructure, and professionalising the teaching force.

Following the arrival of the Syrian refugees, a major policy for enabling access for the newly arrived refugees, and one which came to have a stark effect on access and enrolment, was the introduction of the two-shift system in 2012–2013. MEHE introduced afternoon shifts reserved strictly for non-Lebanese students and requested funding from UN agencies to run the shifts in order to cater for a larger number of children in education. Several policy initiatives were launched during this period to provide education and support for refugees, such as “No Lost Generation”,² advocating for the priorities of children and youth. In 2013, the Lebanese Council of Ministers issued Decree 62 and memos 2 and 192 that allowed Syrian students and Palestinian students from Syria to sit the official exams in grades 9 and 12, provided they submitted legal status documents of registration with UNHCR along with previous school records. The move resulted in some international organisations stepping back from their involvement in the sector. Restrictions on education for refugees without residency and their right to sit exams, violating the right to education for many Syrian children, have been an ongoing discussion since. Throughout the whole first stage of the Syria response, the ongoing monitoring of the education sector conducted by CLS (see, for example Shuayb et al. 2014, Brun and Shuayb 2020) established that access (over quality) was the main emphasis in the response.

A significant development in the response to the arrival of learners from Syria was the new education plan, Reaching All Children in Education I (RACE I), in 2014 (MEHE 2014). The plan marked a shift in the relationship between stakeholders and the Lebanese government, with MEHE leading the education response from 2014 with support from the international community, and UNICEF in particular. Under the new plan, MEHE froze most work done by NGOs in the public sector and the work by the Regional Education Working Group, and most non-formal education programmes were also suspended. RACE I was accompanied by a three-year, US\$6 million programme aimed at the 413,000 school-aged children (3–18 years) affected by the Syrian crisis. The initiative aimed to (1) ensure equitable access to educational opportunities; (2) improve the quality of learning and teaching; and (3) strengthen national policies, the educational system, and monitoring and evaluation (Government of Lebanon and UN 2014, MEHE 2014, 2016).³ MEHE’S emphasis at the time on formal education strongly influenced the focus on formal education in the humanitarian response for refugee children. However, there were limitations to this approach and it had limited success in enrolling all children in school, meaning that thousands of children were out-of-school. If RACE I was to have achieved its goal of enrolling 200,000 Syrian school-aged children in formal education, MEHE would have needed to have at least tripled its capacity, and that was not possible.

Interviews with UNHCR and UNICEF officials between 2012 and 2020 reflected their frustrations with the restrictions that MEHE placed on them, especially on partnerships with the private sector and NGOs to increase access to education (Brun and Shuayb 2020). The longer children spent out-of-school, the harder and more expensive it became to enrol them again. The humanitarian model that RACE I was built on assumed that repatriation would occur, and so any idea of investing in the future through education was absent. Instead, emphasis was placed on enrolment in basic education and multiple barriers to access persisted, such as lack of curriculum adaptation, required legal documentation, inadequate language and remedial support, segregation, transport problems, the prohibitive cost of post-basic education, official exams policy, and limited access to secondary and higher education (both of which were scarcely referenced in RACE I). While some of these issues

²<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/no-lost-generation-nlg-initiative-mena#:~:text=Initiated%20in%202013%20in%20support,Child%20Protection%20and%20Adolescents%2026%20Youth>.

³ The second shifts offered for Syrian refugee children were four hours of learning from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Children learned maths, science, Arabic, and English, in addition to social studies, with a very short break in between. Students did not learn any other subjects, such as physical education or art. MEHE received \$300 from the international donor community for every Syrian child attending the morning public school shift and \$600 for the afternoon shift.

fall within the remit of the work of MEHE, others, such as legal documentation, are part of a larger political debate that rests with the government.

RACE I was an emergency plan rather than a general education plan. In 2016, RACE II was developed (MEHE 2016), a five-year sequel to RACE I which envisaged a more strategic approach to education and greater emphasis on “development” and “stabilisation” (MEHE 2016). This was partly prompted by the duration of the conflict and the pressure on the local community, which made the need for more long-term development more pertinent. In RACE II, MEHE had a central role in improving education for all vulnerable children – Lebanese or Syrian – and implementing the plan, while the donors’ role was confined to funding and building the capacity of MEHE. In defining the shift from a humanitarian model to development, RACE II states, “[w]hile maintaining the humanitarian dimension of the Syria crisis response, strategic shifts need to occur towards longer-term approaches that cater for the protracted nature of the crisis. This requires the strengthening of the Lebanese public education system” (MEHE 2016: 11). RACE II suggested a revision of the national curriculum, which had not been revised since 1997. This reform would apply to all children attending schools, particularly public schools. To date, the new curriculum has yet to be finalised. As we suggested in an analysis of the plan in 2020 (Brun and Shuayb 2020: 26):

“Compared to RACE I, RACE II focuses more on retention and the quality of education in both shifts. However, similar to RACE I, RACE II approaches nationals and refugee populations as two distinct groups. Sustainable development such as curriculum reform and vocational education seemed to target the Lebanese population, while the focus on refugees was on improving enrolment and retention. In other words, development was for the Lebanese while a humanitarian response was the focus of refugee-targeted interventions.”

Up to 2018, there was an increase in the number of Syrian students participating in education. To some extent, the Syrian refugee crisis helped to bring more resources into the public school system. Nevertheless, the system did not have the capacity to withstand the shocks to come, and in the final period of RACE II, from 2019, the country was plunging into a deep economic crisis, as described above. This had profound implications for the education sector. With the currency losing more than 95% of its value, teachers’ salaries became so low that they did not even cover their transport to work. International funding has also been on a downward trend. Thus, an already weak education system has been on the brink of collapse, with working and pay conditions in the sector leading to strikes by teachers. Public school students have been much more affected by the crisis than private school students. For example, while private schools largely resumed regular schooling after the pandemic, public school disruptions persisted as teachers continued to strike due to their devalued salaries.

After 2019, the dynamics of the relationship between the government and NGOs began to change. Levels of trust went down in response to the increasingly hostile environment in the country for Syrian refugees, but also due to economic mismanagement becoming more prominent in the discourse, with “the Minister of Education in 2020 even noting that corruption was endemic in his department on national TV (Chinnery and Akar 2021)” (USAID 2022a: 13, and references therein). Following the end of the RACE II policy in 2021, a new Education Policy was launched in the same year. Despite increasing tensions between donors and the government, the international community supported the Ministry’s work with a new five-year plan to replace RACE II. The discussions around the plan focused on vulnerable categories of students rather than on student or teacher nationality (USAID 2022a), which, according to the USAID report, attracted unanimous support from actors in the education sector. The plan identifies four primary obstacles hindering efforts to address the current crisis in the sector: the capacity of educational administration at all levels; available funding;

coordination among various stakeholders; and uncertainties inherent in the current context. The aim of the plan is formulated as follows:

"All children living in Lebanon will have access to equitable and quality basic education, secondary education, TVET, and higher education. The public education system will be of higher quality, so that learning outcomes improve and that students leave with employable competencies and skills. The system will strengthen its resilience, so that crisis situations are effectively managed. The system will build responsible citizens and contribute to stronger human capital and the achievement of lifelong learners." (MEHE 2021: 6)

C. The state of the education system in Lebanon in 2024⁴

In this section, we summarise some of the main conditions of education in Lebanon using the data that are available for different groups of students.

In 2020/21 there were nearly as many non-Lebanese as Lebanese students enrolled in public schools (morning and afternoon shifts combined). Looking at the distribution of enrolment by nationality and by shift, some 88% of all pupils enrolled in the first shift of public schools – kindergarten, primary and secondary schools – were Lebanese, 9% were Syrian, and the remaining 3% were Palestinian and others (MEHE 2021: 8).⁵ As of December 2023, approximately 27% of children were out-of-school, including 7% of Lebanese children and 40% of Syrian children (LCRP 2023b, end of year). The National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) shows that 15% of children in the programme have never enrolled in school, with 50% of them citing financial reasons for not doing so (MEHE 2021).

According to LCRP (2023a), during the 2021–22 academic year, more than 430,000 out of an estimated 715,000 displaced Syrian children, constituting around 60%, did not have access to formal education. The most commonly reported reasons for not attending school for children of both genders aged 3 to 17 were the cost of transportation to school (34%, an increase of 5 percentage points compared to 2021), and the cost of educational materials (29%) (LCRP 2023a: 11). Approximately 30,000 Syrian children, with girls comprising 57%, were enrolled in non-formal education (NFE) initiatives provided by NGOs. However, the demand for NFE programmes exceeds their availability and they face challenges such as inconsistent teaching standards, limited options for specific age groups, and a low transition rate to formal education. This difficulty in transitioning into mainstream education system is associated with the lack of a clear national policy and issues of overcrowding in public schools. Despite the evident need for access or transition to formal education, bureaucratic obstacles have continued to hinder the registration of Syrian refugee children. Some restrictions were eased at the beginning of the 2022–23 school year, however, resulting in increased enrollment in second-shift public schools primarily catering to displaced Syrians (LCRP 2023a).

According to the LCRP End of Year Update of 2023 (LCRP 2023b), 277,000 Lebanese children were able to enroll in public schools, through support by the partners of the Lebanon Crisis Plan. In the 2022–2023 school year, for example, 128,000 Lebanese boys and girls received additional assistance through either retention support or summer school programmes, and 115,000 received cash for education during the 2022–23 school year or during the summer school programmes of 2023. The cash transfers were made directly in US dollars to eligible children to facilitate their educational expenses (UNICEF 2023a). Eligible children each received monthly cash assistance of \$20, covering

⁴ This section is taken in full from CLS' mapping of data systems in Lebanon (Brun et al. under revision)

the months of March to June 2023 and during summer school in 2023 (UNICEF 2023b). However, reports show that much of the funding was not used for children's education but for household costs and covering debt (World Vision 2024).

According to UNRWA (2022), there has been a sharp rise in demand for enrollment in UNRWA schools among Palestinian refugees, mainly due to Lebanon's financial crisis. This surge has left many students unable to secure places in Lebanese public and private schools, putting a strain on the capacity of certain UNRWA schools. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), especially those who entered Lebanon irregularly after April 2019, face obstacles in registering with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, despite UNRWA facilitating their school-level registration. While the number of affected students per school is relatively low, this remains a significant barrier to their accessing education. Additionally, some students who passed grade 12 exams encounter challenges in obtaining certificates due to residency requirements, impeding their registration for tertiary education. Moreover, although UNRWA is witnessing an increase in Palestinian refugee students this year, it cannot accommodate all children residing in refugee camps. In 2017, Syrians made up 26% of camp residents, and this proportion is likely to have risen since then. Anecdotal reports from UNRWA staff indicate a notable presence of non-Palestinian school-aged children in the camps, many of whom are not attending school. Finally, UNRWA (2023) reveals that unified mid-year exams taken by students in February 2023 showed a decreasing trend in student achievement as they progress through the primary and preparatory education cycles, reaching a nadir at Grade 9, where only 38% of students appeared on track to succeed in the national Brevet exams.

According to LCRP (2023a), and based on data gathered from secondary sources, approximately 300,000 children up to the age of 17 are living with disabilities. Among these children, 52.2% are Lebanese, 33.8% are Syrian refugees, 3.2% are Palestinian refugees, and 10.8% belong to other nationalities, including migrants. The fact that only 1% of school-aged children with disabilities are attending regular public schools underscores the extremely limited availability of inclusive education across all segments of the population.

III. THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A RESEARCH AGENDA ON EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND PROTRACTED CRISES IN LEBANON

Research and education has a long tradition in Lebanon and there are some ties between university research, particularly the Lebanese University, and the education sector. However, the academic discourse primarily takes place in relation to teacher training and more technically oriented research to strengthen the practice of teaching and learning. With the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis and the influx of humanitarian actors, there has been an increasing trend in additional data collection for the purposes of humanitarian interventions. This has involved a larger body of international research and a substantial amount of data collection by humanitarian and development actors. Additionally, the refugee crisis attracted more international researchers to Lebanon to conduct research on education for refugees. These researchers have often brought with them more extractive practices that created new power dynamics with locally based researchers (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019, Shuayb and Brun 2021).

A. Country scan: Review of existing evidence

In the first stage of our work from October 2023 to February 2024, we conducted a 'country scan' to enable an overview of existing evidence and knowledge on education in Lebanon. Using the ERICC conceptual framework as our starting point, we conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise, including an overview of the main aid projects for education in Lebanon. We also systematised existing evidence and knowledge on education in Lebanon by using four existing studies conducted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies,⁵ which included substantial literature reviews of academic and grey literature. We also conducted a new original search on education for refugees in Lebanon in academic and grey literature, in both English and French. Finally, we conducted new stakeholder interviews and consolidated insights from previous interviews with (i) civil society organisations in a study of civic engagement in the education sector in Lebanon; and (ii) government servants and aid actors in a study on integrity in the education sector.

Using the analytical framework formulated in the ERICC project, we organised the evidence review under four headings:

For *pre-existing conditions*, at the macro level we focused on available data systems, governance of education, financing of the education sector, and a more systematic effort to understand the relationship between private and public education. At the micro level, we focused specifically on the role of parents and children's backgrounds (i.e., social positions).

In terms of *drivers* of education, we focused on identifying existing evidence and further evidence required to understand the factors affecting the educational pathways of children and young people who remain in education, those who discontinue education (temporarily or permanently), and those who remain out-of-school. Regarding quality, and focusing on children *in* school, we also looked into the need to better understand loss of learning, as well as discussions around the curriculum and language policies. The work also led us to review existing evidence and areas of further research in relation to teachers.

For *interventions*, we gathered information on what interventions have been taking place at both policy system and local levels. Given that most interventions beyond running the school systems in Lebanon are funded by international aid, we were particularly looking into different large-scale, donor-funded programmes in the country.

Finally, in terms of *outcomes*, we emphasised understanding what knowledge exists on the impact of identified educational interventions following the Syrian crises and subsequent crises since then. To this end, we also looked into recent policy initiatives as well as specific programmes, such as the focus on teacher training.

The themes and the literature we reviewed are discussed in more detail in the presentation of the final research agenda themes below.

⁵ Human Rights Based and Equity-Focused Analysis of Education for Children and Adolescents in Lebanon (Shuayb 2012); The Cost of Education in Lebanon. Treasure and Community Expenditure (Nehme et al. 2023); Accountability and integrity in the Lebanese Educational System (funded by the Open Society Foundation 2020 – 2023); Decolonising Refugee Education Research: A Review of the Political Economy of Knowledge Production (Saab et al. in press, funded by British Academy and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) 2022 – 2024).

Table 1: Themes covered in the ERICC Lebanon evidence review

Themes			
1. Pre-existing and persistent challenges	2. Drivers (access, quality and continuity)	3. Interventions	4. Outcomes at policy and local systems level
Pre-/Post-2011	Access and continuity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation by level - Regional inequality - Gender inequalities - Children living with disability - Palestinian refugees - Syrian refugees - Language 	Interventions at policy Level	Adaptability
Compounded crises			Accountability
Language policies			Alignment
Curriculum			
Finance, budgets and costs of education	Factors and conditions for quality education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School building and facilities - Classroom crowding - Teaching faculty - Teaching days - Social and emotional learning 	Evaluations and analyses of interventions at local systems level	Academic
			Social and emotional learning
			Physical (infrastructure)

In the context of Lebanon's perpetual crisis in education due to historical conflicts, the review explored available evidence and knowledge and sought to identify gaps that need to be addressed to foster positive, sustainable change in the education sector. The mapping of current knowledge and evidence on education in Lebanon was aligned with the first iteration of ERICC's conceptual framework, and extracted some key areas for further research. We present a brief summary of the findings here, while a discussion of relevant literature is included in the final research agenda below:

Data systems and gaps in data between groups (refugees and nationals)

The review of academic and grey literature as well as research evidence on education during crises and conflict in Lebanon unveiled several crucial trends and gaps in research. Firstly, it highlights a notable focus on access to education and that research on refugee children appears to be rooted in humanitarian discourse. At the same time, the evidence and research appears to approach nationals and refugees separately. Research on refugees appears to focus on their immediate needs and neglects long-term outcomes such as employment and quality education. Moreover, there is limited engagement with policy-making and programme assessment, signifying a gap in designing solutions that are sensitive to community needs. The literature and research predominantly delves into access and educational outcomes, often through quantitative observations and descriptive studies. While there has been a recent shift towards qualitative methods, this largely centres on academic outcomes and lacks intersectional exploration of refugee

experiences. Finally, as noted above, research methods are generally not participatory and do not involve stakeholders in the field much in the development of research agendas or in the analysis of results. The dominance of humanitarian perspectives and limited participatory research indicate a need for nuanced community engagement in policy-making for education.

A main finding of the review of evidence is a lack of data beyond the descriptive data the CERD provides on its platform. In the review, we relied mainly on reports that attempt to bring together different sources of evidence and data in the existing documentation work of CLS as set out in the methodology section. There is still a lack of access to coherent numbers between refugees and nationals, and financial and budget information is also very hard to access.

Data disaggregated by disability are also limited and require further strengthening. Additionally, CERD data do not cover refugee students enrolled in the second shift, but focus solely on refugees in the morning session. Therefore, for this study we relied on alternative resources to comprehend the state of education for refugee children.

Governance of education

Research dimensions within governance encompass understanding the broader influence of aid on sustainable capacity building of human resources and systems. Another critical aspect within governance studies involves comprehending the deeper impact of aid in either reinforcing or undermining governance structures, emphasising the necessity for sustainable capacity building. Additionally, transparency in data sharing and access to information rights are pivotal for governance enhancement and discerning the effects of diverse interventions. Linked to governance are the process of policy formation in Lebanon and the roles of the different actors, including donors, MEHE, and civil society organisations.

Further studies are necessary to strengthen accountability mechanisms and monitor governance practices. Investigations into the efficacy of educational inspectors and their ability to execute recommendations are currently absent. The role of the education Parliamentary Committee in enhancing monitoring and accountability also remains unexplored. This underscores the crucial need for research aimed at enhancing accountability structures and overseeing good governance practices.

The impact of large-scale programmes supported by the international community and the relationship between those programmes

There have been several large-scale programmes to improve access to, continuity, and quality of education. However, there has been no overall evaluation of the process of implementation of these programmes, the impact, and the relationships between them.

Dropouts, continuity of education, and out-of-school children

Research focusing on identifying the causes of school dropouts and effective programmes to reduce dropout rates among Lebanese nationals, Palestinians, and Syrian children is necessary.

It is essential to have more knowledge of out-of-school children, through studying and tracking them. Understanding why these children were unable to join schools is critical. Moreover, while there has been one published study on the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), there is a paucity of

research on the effectiveness of summer school programmes and various remedial and accelerated learning programmes.

Finally, it is vital to assess the impact of the economic crisis on the teaching workforce to comprehend the extra burden on teachers in supporting children in school and the experience of teaching losses, especially in specific subjects and regions.

Curriculum and language

While considerable effort has been invested into bringing about a new curriculum in Lebanon, both the process of developing the curriculum and the importance of developing a consensus around it. Research to identify innovative methods of developing curricula, and more participatory methods in curriculum research overall, would be useful.

Research on language policy, both foreign and Arabic, is essential for understanding the impact on students' learning and retention.

The role of children's background and parents in education

Limited studies exist on the role of parents (both nationals and refugees) in supporting children's learning. In particular, research on the role of refugee parents is needed as this can be a major factor in reducing dropout rates and increasing retention.

Research gaps and inequality between the public and private sector

Educational inequalities between the public and private sector are growing with the current economic crisis. The public sector has very limited power over the private sector, which widens these inequalities. Teachers' rights and access to information are greatly undermined by the private sector, and limited information on the finances of private schools is available.

Based on an analysis of gaps in existing knowledge and evidence, we extracted the following themes as a starting point for a discussion with stakeholders in Lebanon on a research agenda:

Table 2: Research gaps derived from the evidence review

Pre-existing conditions	Drivers of learning	Outcomes
Data systems	Children who stop attending school , continuity and out-of-school	Impact of large scale programmes
Governance	Curriculum and language	Loss of learning

Public vs private	Teachers' conditions	
Family background		

B. National consultations

As part of the process to formulate a research agenda, and after having assessed the gaps in evidence, we invited stakeholders in the country to national consultations. The consultations took place between mid-February and the beginning of March 2024, and involved a total of 37 participants (see list in Appendix 1). The participants represented national and international civil society actors and unions, politicians, international organisations and donors, experts, and government representatives. We initially organised three consultations with different groups and then brought everyone together a fourth time, when we presented the outcomes of the consultations. It is those outcomes that we present and substantiate here.

With the ongoing and continuous hostilities by Israel in various parts of Lebanon, uncertainty surrounding the situation led to the decision to hold the consultations online, which also saved time for all the participants to travel to the meeting. The meetings were recorded for note taking purposes only.

In the consultations, we presented the work from the country scan and invited the participants to provide advice on the main themes that should go into a research agenda. The consultations represented a rich discussion on the themes we presented and beyond. Most crucially, they helped us to formulate the direction of study in these fields. All participants were generous in sharing their insights and their positions.

As many of the participants pointed out, it is imperative to take the already rich body of evidence and data in Lebanon into account. We aim to ensure that we build on available data and compliment rather than duplicate existing research. While data exist, as mentioned above, gaining a clear overview of what data are available and how to access them is challenging (see also Brun et al. 2024). While data are collected, there seems to be limits to the extent to which they are processed and used. Finally, there are several actors collecting data on the same theme but sometimes using different methods and different outcomes, resulting in challenges with data alignment.

Another important point that was raised several times during the consultations was that generally the need for knowledge may be less at the practical level. It was also emphasised that data often do not connect at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and that going forward it is crucial to ensure better connectivity of different levels in analysis in order to provide a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges for education and to generate actionable knowledge. It was emphasised that there are areas where research is needed to generate more technical or practically oriented knowledge, such on teaching performance in a specific field. However, there was a view that knowledge production should not stop at the practical level, and finding ways to link practical knowledge to the meso and macro levels (and thus its wider context) was considered important.

Another crucial point made is that in the context of protracted crises in Lebanon, there is a need to work on ideas of both crisis and development at the same time (short-term relief and long-term

change). The challenge for us is to find practical ways of connecting research across the so-called humanitarian–development nexus. It was also considered important by those consulted to investigate a limited number of topics in depth rather than going too wide and only generating surface-level knowledge about many aspects of education. Thus, more holistic and in-depth studies with multiple methodologies should be an important focus of the research.

The consultations also brought out reflections on the need to consider likely trends for the education sector in Lebanon, particularly with a potential further reduction to aid in mind, rather than taking the current situation as our starting point for research.

Given the current availability and quality of data, there was also a discussion around the need for further explorations of methodology. What methods are helpful for measuring what? How can different types of studies and methodologies be consolidated? And what innovations in current established methodologies might be needed?

Finally, a clear request was that research should aim for realistic and concrete outcomes. To this end, further discussions on how to encourage the ongoing involvement of the group that participated in the consultations will be essential.

Following the consultations, we transcribed the recordings and analysed the discussions to understand how to revise the initial list of themes we had identified towards a research agenda. In the next section, we present the revised list and introduce the different themes.

IV. A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND PROTRACTED CRISES IN LEBANON

In this section we describe, as briefly as we can, the main themes we propose that should be included in a research agenda for Education in Conflict and Protracted Crises in Lebanon. The list of themes emerged out of the country scan and the consultations. In addition, we reflect on some of the themes that did not make it onto the list and some cross-cutting issues that we bring with us.

Table 3: ERICC research agenda for Lebanon

Overall research theme	Details/breakdown of theme
Governance and financial management	Structure of governance and the roles of different actors; Transparency and accountability; Governance at different levels and relationship between levels; Financing of education, role of large-scale aid programmes; Data systems, Curriculum development and reform
Teachers	Knowledge/Capacity building; Welfare; Work conditions (including salaries); Mapping of workforce
Crisis monitoring	Access; Loss of Learning; Children who stop attending school; Continuity; Out-of-school children; Learning poverty

Private sector	Governance and finance of private sector; Teachers' conditions and potential for organising; Teachers' welfare; Teachers' knowledge
Non-formal education	Transition from non-formal to formal; Social and emotional learning; Connection to labour market
Vocational education	Current state of formal vocational training; Relationship between public vocational training and the diversity of other providers; Vocational training and relevance for labour market
Knowledge production	Who commissions and funds studies (whose interests shape the research agenda)? Who conducts the research? How is knowledge used today? What are weaknesses in the current knowledge system on education in Lebanon?
Ongoing crisis in Southern Lebanon	What are the current needs for education responding to the crisis on Lebanon's southern border? (to be discussed with the helpdesk)

A. Governance and financial management

Enhancing the educational system hinges on effective governance. Good governance is also key for strong data systems. In the Lebanon country scan, we identified several areas where more research is needed on governance and financial management in Lebanon. In many ways, this theme was the largest and most discussed across the consultations we organised.

By "governance" we refer to the process of governing that takes place through an entangled network of state and non-state actors consisting of government institutions at different scales (local, regional and national), politicians, civil society actors and unions, the international community and donors, international humanitarian and development actors, as well as business and financial actors (see, for example, Sending and Neumann 2006). This network-based understanding of governance, often reflective of Foucauldian 'governmentality', helps us to identify studies that can seek a deeper conversation about governance in the education sector.

With this definition in mind, a critical aspect of requisite studies related to governance for Lebanon involves building a deeper comprehension of the **impact of aid on governance structures**, whether this is reinforcing or undermining those structures. In 2020, the World Bank published a seminal study of the political economy in the education sector, *A Political Economy of Education in Lebanon* (Abdul-Hamid and Yassine 2020), with data collected up until 2018. However, so much in Lebanon has changed since 2018 due to the compounded crises described earlier. While there are some important continuities from before 2018, such as the relationship between different government departments, the failure to establish unifying data systems and continued challenges in curriculum reform, it is important to update the insights from the World Bank study.

For example, since the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, there have been several large-scale programmes to improve access to, continuity, and quality of education, put in place to address the new challenges of the financial and governance crisis since 2019, COVID-19, and the Port of Beirut explosion in 2020. These programmes have largely been funded by international aid. However, despite the amount of aid that has entered the education sector in the last nearly 13 years, there has

been **no overall evaluation of the process of implementation of the programmes, their impact and the relationships between them.**

Within these larger programmes of aid, we found that there is a need for more research that explores **sustainable capacity building of human resources and systems**. Such research would enable a deeper understanding of the needs for sustainable capacity building in the governance system in Lebanon. Our analyses and discussions so far have identified a demand for more research into the financing of the education sector, the cost of education, and the returns to education. This need is associated with the substantial aid given, the need to reduce aid dependency, and the unclear prospects for future aid in coming years. Here, an understanding of the cost-effectiveness of current initiatives and general governance and running of the sector is necessary. We have found that very little work, either nationally or globally, on returns to educational investment incorporates the experiences and perspectives of refugees (unpublished literature review by Hammoud 2024), a finding which attests to the need for research on the cost efficiency of current education programmes in the country.

Linked to governance, research on **the process of policy formation** in Lebanon and the role of the different actors, including donors, MEHE and civil society organisations, is also needed (Akkary 2014, Brun and Shuayb 2020, El Amine 2005, Shuayb 2019). A key area identified in the national consultations was the need to focus on the process of formulating and implementing the current five-year plan and the associated road map to reform. This would enable a deeper understanding of how policy processes take place in Lebanon and what needs to be done to translate policy into practice.

During the consultations, there was also some emphasis on **the need to conduct an institutional audit** of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which led to a discussion of the need to understand all the different actors in the education system. Here, we found that one theme that is currently absent from the body of knowledge in Lebanon relates to investigations into the efficacy of educational inspectors and their ability to execute recommendations. The role of the education Parliamentary Committee in enhancing monitoring and accountability also remains unexplored. These areas underscore the crucial need for research aimed at enhancing accountability structures and overseeing good governance practices in education.

Through work on the country scan, we have demonstrated the **lack of transparency in data sharing and access to information**, which are pivotal for governance enhancement and discerning the effects of diverse interventions. From the country scan and consultations, it emerged that there is still a demand for better understanding of the data systems and available data in the country (Brun et al. under revision). The country scan unveiled several crucial trends and gaps in data and evidence. First, it highlighted a notable focus on access to education and that research on refugee children appears to be rooted in humanitarian discourse. Second, the evidence and research appear to approach nationals and refugees separately. Emerging from the humanitarian approach, research focusing on refugees appears to focus on their immediate needs and neglects long-term outcomes like employment and quality education. Moreover, there is limited research linking the evidence at individual level with policy-making and programme assessment, signifying a gap in designing solutions that are sensitive to community needs.

A main finding from the country scan was that there is a lack of data beyond the descriptive data that CERD provides on its platform. This perhaps reflects an issue of access to existing data, as we relied mainly on reports that are publicly available. Based on the analysis of available data, there is still a lack of access to coherent educational data in relation to refugees and nationals and also a lack of financial and budget information, which we found to be very hard to access. Data

disaggregated by disability is also limited and requires further strengthening. Additionally, CERD data do not cover refugee students enrolled in the second shift, instead focusing solely on refugees in the morning session. Therefore, researchers and practitioners tend to rely on alternative resources to comprehend the state of education for refugee children. Furthermore, there are insufficient data available to assess accurately how many children within a specific cohort discontinue their education, including a breakdown of these numbers according to education governance structures and by gender.

The final area that we will address here concerns the discussion around **curriculum reform and language of instruction policy**. The current curriculum is from 1997 and was a result of the Taif Agreement, a peace agreement after the Lebanese Civil War in 1989. While considerable efforts were invested in bringing about a new curriculum in Lebanon, and a new framework for the curriculum was agreed upon in 2022, the process of developing it and building consensus continues to drag on. In the previously mentioned current five-year plan for education, there is an ambition to formulate a new curriculum reform (MEHE 2021). Research into innovative methods of developing curricula and more participatory methods in curriculum research overall would help ensure relevant curriculum design. Further to this, study of language policy – both foreign and Arabic – is essential for understanding the impact on students' learning and retention. In the current school system, English and French are the main languages of instruction as opposed to Arabic, which is the mother tongue for the majority of children. Research studies often mention the language of instruction as a problem. Analyses of the policy of language and more systematic studies of how it creates obstacles to children's learning (see, for example, Younes et al. 2023) indicate that the current language policy further disadvantages the most economically vulnerable groups, whose parents are not fluent in a foreign language. Language plays a crucial role in the formulation of policies related to access, inclusion, and consideration of other intersecting inequalities affecting access, quality, continuity, and coherence of education.

B. Teachers, school staff, and principals

The Lebanese public teaching body during the 2022–23 academic year comprised 35,528 individuals. Approximately 45% of public educators (15,947) hold civil servant status and the remaining 55% (19,581) are contracted teachers, dispersed across 1,228 public schools (CERD 2023). Contract teachers are not subject to administrative oversight and do not enjoy the minimum level of job security (Al-Asmar 2023). The distribution of contract teachers and civil servants with permanent positions exhibits a skewed concentration of permanent teachers within higher grade levels. Notably, the majority of secondary school educators (58%) hold permanent positions, whereas primary schools employ nearly double the number of contract teachers compared to permanent staff. The overwhelming majority of teachers within this landscape are female, accounting for 81.53% of the workforce. In the private sector, approximately 47,045 teachers working in private schools and roughly 6,359 working in semi-private schools, also predominantly female, are employed across 325 schools (CERD 2023). It is thus important to emphasise that 'teachers' is a broad research theme in itself with many entry points within the ERICC conceptual framework (such as related to pre-existing conditions, quality, and interventions). There is also extensive overlap between teachers and many of the other eight themes that we have chosen to discuss in this research agenda. Nevertheless, we suggest that it is pertinent to concentrate on teachers as a separate research area and we will discuss some main themes here.

There is ample evidence that teachers have gone through extraordinarily difficult times with crisis upon crisis affecting the conditions for learning, accompanied by plummeting salary levels (Abu Moghli and Shuayb 2020, Khalili 2023). Thus, there has been an enormous pressure on school teachers in Lebanon over several years. Pre-crises, a primary education teacher's average monthly

remuneration was around 2 million Lebanese pounds (LBP), equivalent to approximately US\$1,330. However, due to the economic downturn, this now translates to roughly \$100 at today's market rate. Notably, during the TIMSS Survey in 2011, teachers in private schools exhibited higher job satisfaction levels compared to their counterparts in public schools, irrespective of their place of residence. Moreover, absenteeism rates were notably elevated in public urban schools, surpassing those in private schools located in suburban areas but below those in smaller cities and towns. A key priority is evaluating the impact of the substantial decline in real terms of teachers' salaries on absenteeism and subsequent performance. The decline in teacher salaries' purchasing power, compounded by high absenteeism rates (especially in urban public schools), raises concerns about the impact on performance and quality of education. A comprehensive assessment of this decline and its repercussions on teacher motivation and student outcomes is imperative. In addition, research into the impact on the welfare of teachers in both public and private schools of the compounded crises and the plummeting working conditions requires more attention, not just as a one off-study but to understand how the situation develops over time due to the protractedness of the crisis. Overall, analysis of **the impact of the compounded crises on all spheres of teachers' work and wider wellbeing is imperative.**

Teachers' conditions as well as initial teacher training programmes and continuous professional development constitute pivotal aspects for achieving high-quality education. Prior to commencing their teaching tenure, newly appointed permanent teachers must enroll in pre-service teacher training. This training, managed by the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University, is exclusively tailored for secondary education; preschool and basic education training is overseen by the PITB office in CERD. The duration of pre-service training spans from three to 18 months, contingent upon the qualifications and educational stream of the teachers (Yamak and Chaaban 2021). However, since 2017, budgetary constraints have halted the recruitment of civil service teachers. Consequently, contract teachers with diverse qualifications are employed, with 54% lacking a postgraduate degree and only 4% possessing a specialised degree. These contract teachers receive lower salaries, primarily funded by MEHE, municipalities, or donors, in contrast to permanent staff (MEHE 2021).

Both permanent and contracted public educators have the opportunity to enrol in the Continuous Training Programme (CTP) conducted by CERD. This programme, led by experienced public school trainers, provides face-to-face and online training sessions covering subject matter, pedagogical training, and specialised IT literacy and ICT in education. Although certificates of completion are issued, financial incentives are not provided. At this stage, and amidst the compounded crises that have affected the education sector profoundly, **there is a need to evaluate CERD's current programme for continuous professional development.**

School principals are typically civil servant teachers elevated to managerial roles who oversee school operations without a change in their pay scale but with a potential 15% salary increment. Supervised by the Regional Education Office, these principals – 1,237 for first shift schools – often manage both morning and sometimes afternoon shifts. They are tasked not only with instructional leadership but also with effective school management, community engagement, and resource optimisation to enhance student success. However, the process for appointing principals has faced challenges due to halted training initiatives, resulting in nominations without formal appointments. Training initiatives like the Leadership Development Programme (LDP) and the School Improvement Planning Programme (SIPP), backed by the World Bank, aimed to introduce principals to school assessment culture and aid in self-evaluation for crafting school improvement plans. SIPP, involving 450 principals in its early phase, was paused for a national evaluation by MEHE. Other organisations, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), was also – at the time of the research in spring 2024, involved in rolling out a school improvement planning programme. The absence of

formal training impacts the skills and competencies of school principals. Furthermore, the inability to conduct comprehensive training since 2014 poses a significant challenge to the quality of leadership within schools, potentially impacting overall educational outcomes. The interrupted progress of programmes like SIPP highlights the need for consistent and comprehensive training for school principals to ensure effective school management and continuous improvement in education quality. During the consultations and through key informant interviews, we have identified multiple ongoing programmes for principals, school leadership, and school improvement, some of which do not seem to be related or coordinated. The evidence review suggests that **there is a need for further research into different initiatives and approaches to these programmes, the resources that are involved, and how schools, principals and teachers as well as communities are involved in them**. To this end, an analysis of good practice could also be an aim.

Some work has recently been conducted in Lebanon on promoting an inclusive education framework (see Tilawi et al. 2023, Crul et al. 2019, Kelsey and Chatila 2020). Inclusive education goes well beyond the responsibility of individual teachers, but it is important to emphasise the relationship between teachers and policies of inclusion. First and foremost, the intersecting identities that shape the specific needs for inclusion in teaching practices are related to nationals' and refugees' gender, religion/sect, disability, age, and socioeconomic background (Kiwan 2021). Specific competencies and tools are required ensure inclusive practices in the classroom. By contrast, there exist many exclusionary practices within the divided education system, as already shown. Most Syrian refugee students who attend school are taught in second shifts. These are generally taught by contract teachers, whose experience and qualifications vary enormously and, in many cases, are inadequate. This may undermine the quality of education (LCRP 2018, Shuayb et al. 2014, Shuayb et al. 2023). Khansa and Bahous (2021) report that teachers working in second shift provision generally describe a lack of professional development in attending to the particular challenges of teaching the Syrian student body, such as integration and the effects of trauma from war and displacement. Similarly, the materials they have to teach with reflects the Lebanese national curriculum and are not adapted to the experiences and needs of refugee learners. Refugees cannot work as teachers in Lebanon, and hence Syrian refugees are mainly working as volunteers (Shuayb et al. 2023). While there is some research on teachers and inclusivity in terms of reaching equity in education, more emphasis on teachers' roles in promoting inclusivity is needed.

In conclusion, regarding teacher preparedness and support, we have identified a need to study the challenges faced by educators in addressing learning loss, including their professional development needs, work load, and strategies for adapting instruction to meet diverse student needs. It is vital to assess the impact of the economic crisis on the teaching workforce and to comprehend the learning losses experienced, especially in specific subjects and regions. Most importantly, understanding the impact of current programmes to support teachers is instrumental to suggesting more efficient support mechanisms for teachers.

C. Crisis monitoring, loss of learning, continuity, children who stop attending school, and out-of-school children

The crisis in Lebanon has had catastrophic impacts on the education sector. One indicator of these impacts is the number of schooling days lost. As reported by Pushparatnam et al. (2023), “[c]hildren in Lebanese public schools have experienced four consecutive disrupted academic years (2019–20 to 2022–23), receiving approximately 270 days of in-person teaching compared with the 600 days they should have received across four typical academic years.” The World Bank has also shown that the impact of the crisis on learning loss (also based on PISA results) varies between the public and private sector as well as across socioeconomic groups (Pushparatnam et al. 2023). The World Bank, adopting a general (i.e., not specific to Lebanon) learning loss simulation model, estimated that

private and public school students in Lebanon lost between 1.0 and 1.2 learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) due to COVID-19-related school closures, with further learning loss taking place in the following years due to the compounded crises in the country.

Several studies have focused on loss of learning and associated issues of literacy and children dropping out-of-school (including by the World Bank, Qitabi, World Learning, CERD and the Centre for Lebanese Studies). These studies have adopted different methodologies and approaches and focused on different cohorts of students. Thus, the findings on loss of learning also vary across the studies. With the continuously evolving crises and protracted displacement of refugee learners, it is **important to continue to monitor the impact of the crisis on learning and the education sector as a whole as well as to understand how to measure quality of learning within the ongoing crises.**

There is an identified desire to know more about issues that are deeply connected with many of the themes on this research agenda such as learning regression and its causes, including examining the regression in academic skills and knowledge among students due to school interruptions and the compounding crises. There was much mention by those participating in consultations of the need to delve deeper into assessment and methodologies for assessing and measuring learning loss – including testing, assessments, and diagnostic tools – as well as challenges and limitations associated with these approaches. Participants also emphasised the need to focus on parent and teacher involvement, and to better understand the role of parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in supporting students' learning continuity and recovery.

In the context of crises, there is also a need to focus more on out-of-school children and the many youths that have dropped out-of-school. UNICEF (2022), for example, reported that three out of ten young people in Lebanon have stopped their education. The non-formal education initiatives that we discuss below play an important role here.

The impact of crises on the education sector should be seen within the wider context of education and development. Within a humanitarian–development nexus, however, the meaning of development is seldom discussed (Brun 2023). There is thus scope for better understanding what development may mean in the crisis-ridden education sector and for different groups. **Within research on crises, there should be more scope for understanding, conceptualising, and documenting the potential for long-term strategies and structural change.** One dimension is the relationship between education and employment. The national consultations identified a need for more research on technical and vocational training (TVET), to which we turn below. Another dimension is the impact of the crises on families and the interaction between families' socioeconomic position and access, quality, continuity, and coherence of learning. The main reason for many children (refugees and nationals) not attending school is the inability of their families to bear the costs of education, such as transport to school and fees (LCRP 2023a).

D. Gaps and inequality between the public and private sector, with more focus on the private sector

Lebanon's Constitution of 1926 emphasised the rights of communities to establish their own private schools. According to UNESCO (2021), "[m]any groups have used this Article to establish private schools to preserve their cultures, identities and value systems. The amended 1950 Circular No. 1436 on opening private schools states that the provider can be an individual person (natural person) or an entity such as an organisation (known as a legal person). In accordance with the 1926 Constitution (Art. 10), religious communities can also establish their own schools, provided that they comply with governmental regulations. Finally, the 1956 Law on the Organisation of the Educational Body in Private Institutes (Art. 2) stipulates that a private education institution is any

non-governmental institution, which further encompasses many different types, associations, individuals, and religious or civil organisations.”

The private sector is the main provider of education in Lebanon, responsible for between 60% and 70% of educational provision (before the financial crisis). Among private schools, 41% are religiously affiliated and the rest are secular. It is common to separate fee-paying and non-fee-paying private schools: free non-state schools receive support from the government. There is thus a huge variety of different types of schools in the private sector. There is limited research and evidence on private schools, on understanding the huge variety within the sector, and on the working conditions of private school teachers. However, many of the current studies and initiatives such as school implementation programmes and social and emotional learning (SEL), to which we return below, do seem to incorporate non-paying private schools in their work (information from interviews, see also Tubbs Dolan et al. 2022, Kim et al. 2023,).

Education inequalities between the public and private sector are growing with the current economic crisis. Teachers’ rights and access to information are greatly undermined by the private sector. There is also limited information about the finances of private schools. Although we did not focus much on the private sector in our review of evidence, during the consultations the need to know more about the private sector was addressed repeatedly. From the consultations and as the result of an explorative review of evidence since the consultations, we find that **there is a need for more knowledge on the diversity of the private sector regarding governance; on quality, continuity, equity and inclusion; and on school leadership and the conditions for teachers in the sector in terms of salaries, welfare, training and access to information.** Additionally, there is a significant gap in transparency and accountability within the private sector, a concern voiced by parents and teachers’ associations in private schools.

E. Non-formal education

Non-formal education refers to programmes that are established for out-of-school children to transition into formal education. The programmes are mainly run by civil society organisations and offered to both Syrian refugees and Lebanese children. They are focused on developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with the aim of assisting children to stay in and complete their education. According to HAQQI for Education (2022: 5), MEHE has prioritised the following dimensions of non-formal education:

1. Preparatory Early Childhood Education (Prep-ECE for ages 5 to 7)
2. Community-Based Early Childhood Education (CB-ECE for ages 3 to 5)
3. Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN for ages 10 – 24)
4. The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP for ages 7 to 24)
5. Technical and Vocational Training (TVE/TVT for ages 15 to 24+)

Initially, we did not include non-formal education as a separate research theme in our proposed research agenda, as we saw it as a dimension of the crisis monitoring theme above. During the country scan, we identified some initiatives around data collection for non-formal education (see, for example, HAQQI for Education 2022, MEHE no date). There is a plan to have a data base of non-formal education by 2025 (MEHE 2021), and through the inter-agency LCRP Education Sector Monthly Dashboard, there are good overviews of the number of non-formal education initiatives.⁶ However, there is limited evidence on this area of work.

It is important to emphasise that there was a shift in the operation of non-formal education in Lebanon with the RACE I policy (Brun and Shuayb 2020). At the onset of the Syrian crisis, a wide

⁶<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaWU2N2Y2ODAtOTA0Zi00ZWVjLWwMmQtdmBINTZmNTY1MDA0IiwidCI6jc3NDEwMTkILTE0ZTEtNGZiOC05MDRlLWFmMTg5MjAyZ2NyIsImMiOj9h9.>

variety of non-formal education was run by civil society actors. But with the new plan and the government taking a more prominent role in managing education for Syrian refugees, most non-formal education programmes were frozen by MEHE, and NGOs were denied access to public schools. MEHE became almost the sole provider of formal education for refugees. Participants in the consultations emphasised the need for more in depth knowledge on **the non-formal education and social and emotional learning** and the **transition to formal education and employment**.

F. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

The ILO (2022a) states that roughly 50,000 youths enter Lebanon's labour market each year. However, many youths are not able to get a job with local institutions and businesses, and youth employment in Lebanon is high among all groups of Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians (VASYR 2023, ILO 2022b, UNRWA 2018). As suggested by ILO (2022a: 4), "[y]outh are also facing structural barriers (decreasing job opportunities and ill-equipped education systems to compete for increasingly scarce jobs, lacking skills and labour market experience and professional networks) and personal barriers (lack of money and limited professional networks). These factors keep them out of the labour market; adding to that crisis which is forcing youth from all backgrounds to take on responsibilities beyond their ages, with detrimental impacts on their mental health and on access to opportunities." Young people are thus increasingly engaged in low-paid, irregular, and informal work. Consequently, the youth employment gap of 60% is expected to rise.

We initially did not suggest including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in our country scan and research agenda. However, with the context of increasing youth employment and out-of-school population as well as the emphasis on vocational and skills development in the non-formal system (transitioning to public schools), there were several suggestions for including TVET in our research agenda during the consultations and interviews. Our exploratory literature review shows that there is very limited research and evidence on vocational training.

The state of the sector is discussed in some key publications by the ILO (2022a, 2022b, 2023), UNESCO (2012, 2019, 2022), and the European Training Foundation (2023). However, academic research in the last five years has been almost non-existent. Generally, the formal part of TVET is underfunded, suffers from poor training, and is more theoretical than practical due to the limited funding. According to ILO (2023), teachers and instructors are often under-qualified and not up-to-date with the latest trends in their profession. There are donor-funded initiatives to strengthen the TVET sector, both in terms of curriculum and accreditation.

There is a formal, a non-formal, and an informal TVET system in the country. The formal system is divided into two basic fields: vocational (rehabilitation) education and technical education (UNESCO 2012). In the formal education system, vocational training may start at lower secondary level or be considered after Brevet.

It is unclear how many students are in TVET in Lebanon. There were 62,600 students enrolled in public and private TVET schools and institutes in 2018 (UNESCO 2022). UNESCO (2019) showed that 5.3% of 15–24 year olds participate in vocational training, but only a very low percentage of those were Syrian or Palestinian. Access to governmental vocational training and universities for Palestinians is limited by a quota system, as Palestine refugees are considered foreigners (UNRWA 2018). To address this, UNRWA runs a vocational training centre and three out of four Palestinians enrolled in TVET attend the UNRWA Siblin Training Centre (El Ghali et al. 2019). For the same reasons, access to the formal system is also restricted for Syrian refugees. There are other initiatives for

refugees, such as the ANERA initiative.⁷ Generally, NGO non-formal and informal initiatives are of significant for refugees to access vocational training due to the restrictions in access to formal alternatives; these training initiatives are also accessible to Lebanese nationals. However, **there is little information on the relevance and effectiveness of these programmes**. There is also **limited information on the relationship between formal, non-formal, and informal types of vocational training**. In terms of a research agenda for education, there is first and foremost a need to consolidate the current evidence on vocational training and to understand the role of different vocational training providers across formal, non-formal, and informal aspects of TVET.

G. Knowledge production

During the consultations, one key question raised by participants was: what is the nature of knowledge production on education in Lebanon? Further questions related to **who produces the knowledge, who funds the research, who makes use of which knowledge, and what methods dominate and are needed to develop rigorous knowledge on education**.

As we have found in our literature reviews, research predominantly delves into access and educational outcomes, often through quantitative observations and descriptive studies. We have found limited evidence on, or analyses of, the production and use of knowledge and evidence. It seems from our consultations that there is an understanding that much of the evidence on education used by the humanitarian sector is produced by the humanitarian sector itself or by consultants hired and paid by the humanitarian sector and its donors. More studies are needed to understand whether this is a correct impression, in other words, to ask **who funds, produces, and uses the knowledge and evidence on education in Lebanon**. There is also an understanding that in a country like Lebanon where national funding for research is minimal, a donor-driven research agenda might influence what kind of knowledge is prioritised, what kind of questions are left out, and what kind of methodologies are applied. There is **a need to analyse the methods currently used for monitoring and evaluation in the education sector in Lebanon in order to understand how to ensure contextually appropriate learning processes** for different groups of actors in the sector.

During the review of evidence in Lebanon, we established that there has been a recent shift towards qualitative methods in education research, with fewer large-scale quantitative studies. While qualitative research methods can often be the most appropriate for finding answers to the questions asked, the research conducted to date is rather narrow in scope and approach, largely centring on academic outcomes and lacking intersectional exploration of experiences and perspectives across different groups. We also found that research methods are generally not participatory and do not involve stakeholders in the field much in the development of research agendas or in the analysis of results. The dominance of humanitarian perspectives and limited participatory research indicates **a need for nuanced community engagement in research design that aims to influence policy-making in education**.

H. Ongoing crisis in southern Lebanon

Amidst the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the associated hostilities on Lebanon's southern border, as of 5 March 2024, the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)'s flash update indicated that 90,859 individuals have been displaced (UN OCHA 2024). Further, UN OCHA reports that 306 people (of which at least 51 were civilians) have been killed and 820 people wounded. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has expressed concern

⁷ <https://www.anera.org>.

over the expansion and intensification of the crossfire, which since the beginning of March has spread far into Lebanon and reached the northeastern areas of the country in the Bekaa Valley. Significant damage to homes, relief centres, and public infrastructure has taken place. It is believed that around 60,000 people remain in conflict-affected areas in the south, and with the hostilities escalating and expanding, the number of people affected is increasing dramatically.

UN OCHA reports that due to operational and security challenges, around 50 public schools, including technical and vocational education schools, have been closed, affecting 10,000 enrolled children. Additionally, 22 private schools are also closed, impacting another 10,000 children. Most of the affected students are receiving nutritious snacks at designated hub schools. Partners are offering cash incentives for education to promote attendance and training teachers in digital teaching methodologies. Education partners are also ensuring referrals to child protection services and providing education to displaced children through non-formal education. In some locations, schools are being used as shelters. Participants in the consultations emphasised the need to understanding the current education response in the south of Lebanon, the extent of needs, and what more should be done.

We may develop research on this issue under the ERICC helpdesk initiative, where on-demand research can take place amidst the changing and volatile situation. A study needs to be carried out to assess the access to and quality of schooling for children displaced from the south of Lebanon in both public and private schools. The amount of learning loss also needs to be evaluated.

I. A note on the themes that were not included in the research agenda

The research agenda discussed here is not an all-encompassing one; core themes in education have been left out. One such important theme is foundational skills such as social and emotional learning, literacy, and numeracy. Mental health was also mentioned in consultations as a significant theme, highlighting the need for more research across children, teachers, and parents (see also Shuyab and Ahmad 2021). While we are not excluding these themes completely from our work and we suggest they will be part of the crisis monitoring described above and below, other organisations have already established solid research practices in this field in close collaboration with MEHE and CERD. One such example is the QITABI project, which published a baseline report in 2022 and is furthering, with its partner, a research agenda including more emphasis on social and emotional learning in QITABI 3 (see also the Framework for Social and Emotional Learning that was launched under QITABI 2 (Aziz et al. 2020, Caires et al. 2022, USAID 2022b, Tubbs Dolan et al. 2022)).

QITABI 2 and 3 also focus on teachers and school leadership. Rather than duplicating their work, we would seek to complement this work.

There is other research and initiatives ongoing relating to school principals, school improvement plans, and so on. We are determined to continue building the overview of knowledge producers in the sector in order to ensure complementarity and effective use of limited resources.

J. Cross-cutting themes for education research in conflict and protracted crises

In our literature review we found that few studies exist on the role of parents (both nationals and refugees) in supporting children's learning. The limited research we did find emphasised the importance of parents' roles in relation to education attainment and outcome (Shuayb et al. 2021). In particular, we found that refugee parents can play a major role in reducing dropout rates and increasing retention.

We found that beyond a focus on *some* social identities and positions such as gender and disability, very little research adopts an intersectional lens to explore how social differences may cause

inequality in education outcomes and attainment. Equity and inclusion are not dimensions that are focused on sufficiently in existing research in Lebanon. More emphasis is also needed on the role of the wider community, children's residential location, and the environment as fundamental contextual factors that help to prevent or promote equity in education.

Similarly, it is essential to situate research within the broader contexts at all levels, highlighting how these contexts actively interact with the theme being studied. This should be a central dimension of the research, rather than merely background information.

V. THE WAY FORWARD: PRIORITISING RESEARCH

While not an exhaustive list, the research agenda was formulated to act as a roadmap for ERICC research. The research agenda demonstrates the need for research and evidence on multiple areas of the education system. A key question in our work is what to do with this list of research themes and the challenges the participants in the consultations provided us with. How can we ensure that the research takes place, and how can we make the list a living document that can be used widely and developed with input from the wider community of education scholars?

Prioritising of themes was determined through the consultations with stakeholders and analysing the discussions with them. We considered advice that hinted at (1) priority topics/focus of research (2) identified gaps in current knowledge and evidence; (3) feasibility of research between April and December 2024 given budget constraints; and (4) alignment with ERICC's conceptual framework.

We were planning to do a Zoom poll during the consultations to establish what participants understood to be the three main priorities. However, based on the consultations, the priorities were relatively clear and we believed that a poll would go against the convivial atmosphere developed through the discussions, so we decided not to use the one we had prepared.

Regarding priority topics for research, the overwhelming problems in the education sector in Lebanon are tied to the overall situation of the country. It was clear from our context analysis, interviews, and consultations that there is a need to look at the 'bigger questions' for an education sector and country in crisis. The need to focus on long-term development as well as the crisis (and humanitarian assistance) came out clearly (see Diwan and Sayed 2024). Based on the considerations of gaps in knowledge and evidence combined with Lebanon's priorities and needs, the most frequently mentioned themes in the consultations were related to *governance*, *teachers* and various aspects of *crisis monitoring*, as discussed above. With these broad themes in mind, we are now embarking on the work of narrowing them down and conceptualising research that can build a foundation for further study.

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APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN CONSULTATIONS

1. Halima Kaakour (Partially) – MP
2. Suha Tutunji – Jusoor NGO
3. Marie Claude Sayyed – Alpha NGO
4. Yamine Al Hili – IRC
5. Dr. Wafaa Kotob – World Learning
6. Dr. Adnan El Amine – Lebanese University
7. Nisrine Chahine – Teachers’ Union
8. Mohammad Al Bekaai – Mawared NGO
9. Sarah Helou – Expert
10. Fahed Jamaledine – Nafda NGO
11. Dr. Samar Zeitoun – Lebanese University
12. Dr. Amine Elias – Lebanese Association for History
13. Simona Rinaldi – European Training Foundation
14. Manisha Bath – FCDO Lebanon
15. Dr. Hana El Ghali – World Bank
16. Adelle Pushparatnam – World Bank
17. Maxence Daublain – EU
18. Dr. Assem Abi Ali – UNESCO
19. Loubna Abi Khalil – AFD
20. Rouba Mansour – AFD
21. Freya Perry – FCDO UK
22. Dr. Raymond Abou Nader – CERD
23. Rania Ghoussoub – CERD
24. Erin Wall – Save the Children
25. Agatha Abi Aad – UNHCR
26. Mohammad Hammoud – CLS
27. Haneen Sayed – Expert
28. Dr. Fadi Hajj – Universite Saint Joseph
29. Dr. Rima Bahous – Lebanese American University
30. Dr. Suzanne Abou Rjeili – Expert
31. Dr. Kamal Abou Chedid – LAES
32. Zeina Helou – Jica
33. Georgia Hachem – Ministry of Education and Higher Education
34. Hanadi El Shafi – Amel NGO
35. Lama Tawil – Parents’ Committee
36. Sana Abou Haydar – Expert; Previous Union President
37. Loyal Mansour – Al Mabarrat NGO

ABOUT ERICC

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge – at local, national, regional and global levels – through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, Forcier Consulting, ODI, Osman Consulting, Oxford Policy Management and Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC's inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

