

WORKING PAPER

MAPPING OF EDUCATION DATA SYSTEMS IN LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

This report undertakes a mapping and analysis of Lebanon's education data systems, focusing on understanding and documenting what data are collected on access, quality and continuity, particularly in contexts of conflict and protracted crisis. Emphasising the pivotal role of data systems in governance and policy decisions, the study utilises a methodology involving a desk review and conversations with primary data sources. The report provides an overview of Lebanon's existing data systems, including key issues such as data types, key stakeholders, data collection frequency, data-sharing and identified data gaps. Our findings highlight gaps in Lebanon's education data systems, particularly concerning data on accessibility and enrolment for students with disabilities, and reveal a lack of coherent numbers distinguishing between refugees and nationals, limited financial and budget information and the need for more comprehensive data on school dropout and loss of learning.

Disclaimer

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ACRONYMS

CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
CERD	Centre for Education Research and Development
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
EU	European Union
IT	information technology
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRL	Palestine refugees in Lebanon
PRS	Palestinian refugees from Syria
QITABI	Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SIMS	School Information Management System
SIMS MEHENSLS	SIMS National Learning System ²
TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
TREF	Transition Resilience Education Fund
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
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
WDI	World Bank Development Indicators
WFP	World Food Programme

² Authors own translation from Arabic

I. INTRODUCTION³

An education data system is a coordinated approach to collecting information for education decision-making. It may have different purposes and functions. It may enable the regular and systemic collection of a sample from the population by a government agency, development partner or humanitarian organisation/non-governmental organisation (NGO). A population-based assessment of such data may feed into the government education information repository for use in policy and practice. Such a system may also involve surveys by development partners and large-scale evaluations for use in tracking or policymaking.

Data systems are crucial to good governance and informed policy decisions. In the context of protracted crises in particular – and crucial for any education system – data are also considered to have a potentially critical role in bridging short-term humanitarian work and longer-term development aims.

This study aims to map and analyse the education data systems of all levels of government (national, regional and local) and all known large-scale research/data initiatives in Lebanon. The purpose is to identify what data are collected, stored and used on the access, quality and continuity of education in settings of conflict and protracted crisis. Although a wealth of disparate data have been collected on education in Lebanon, data on the system itself are lacking: except for a study by Abdul-Hamid and Yassine (2020), which focuses mainly on data produced by the government’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Centre for Education Research and Development (CERD), there has been limited research on data systems and what kind of information can be accessed on education in Lebanon.

This report looks at larger data systems and, to this end, refers to studies conducted by NGOs that use larger systematic studies and in some cases studies conducted more regularly. We exclude research activities such as small-scale needs assessment that are aimed at solving operational problems but not for policymaking and overall practice in education.

As part of this exercise, the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) conducted an extensive literature review, a stakeholder analysis and key informant interviews between December 2023 and March 2024. While we rely on the results of these activities for the data systems analysis presented here, we have also conducted a mapping of data systems using a desk review and by deriving insights from stakeholder interviews, as well as through observation and more informal conversations with key actors in the field to determine the presence of data and identify any existing data gaps.

According to a World Bank report on data systems in Lebanon (World Bank 2017), an effective and well-functioning education data system has four key dimensions:

1. A strong foundation, such as laws, policies, structure, resources and culture, that makes data collection, management, utilisation and access possible;
2. System soundness, to ensure key processes, structures and integration capabilities in an effective system, including an operational system from data collection to processing to utilisation;
3. Quality data that establish the mechanisms required to collect, save, produce and utilise information in an accurate, secure and timely manner; and
4. Effective utilisation in decision-making by all users (policymakers, teachers, students and parents) across the education system.

³ This section draws on the ERICC Data Systems Documentation Protocol and Review Tool_10 Jul 2022.

Ultimately, there should be a data system in place that entails a governance process that ensures data integrity and interoperability, and a shared data architecture across different education departments and learning systems (World Bank 2022).

This report focuses specifically on establishing what data are available in education in Lebanon, and who collects them. The structure of the report is as follows. Section II sets out a brief background to education in Lebanon. Section III then introduces the methodology applied to this study before we present an overview of data systems in education in Lebanon: Section IV describes who collects data on education in Lebanon, Section V analyses what data are available and Section VI looks at issues around data storage, sharing and accessibility. Section VII assesses what data are necessary but unavailable. Section VIII discusses the results and concludes.

II. EDUCATION IN LEBANON IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS AND PROTRACTED CONFLICT

The education system in Lebanon in many ways mirrors the complexity of the society of the country as a whole, affected as it is by sectarianism, colonialism, conflict and crises. The latest sector reforms started in the 1980s, emerging out of the country's history of conflict to respond to the civil war and the Taif Agreement in 1989. They also take account of the Syrian refugee crisis and the ongoing financial crisis, which has deeply affected the education sector in Lebanon.

A. An education system with multiple divides amid compounded crises

Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. An estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees reside in the country, of whom approximately 815,000 are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR nd). In addition, more than 489,000 Palestinian refugees (Palestine Refugees residing in Lebanon – PRL) are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Lebanon, although the number still residing in Lebanon is believed to be less than 200,000 and there are believed to be just under 31,400 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) residing in the country (UNRWA 2023).

Protection of Syrian and Palestinian refugees comprises two different systems, with each refugee group falling under a different legal and UN institutional framework (Abu Moghli et al. 2015). Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are assisted primarily by UNRWA, which provides essential services such as education, healthcare, relief and social services in coordination with the Lebanese government and other international organisations. The Lebanese government also oversees certain aspects of Palestinian refugee affairs, such as residency and work permits, within the country's legal framework. Syrian refugees in Lebanon are assisted primarily by the Lebanese government, specifically through the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Ministry of Public Health, MEHE and Lebanese General Security. UNHCR also plays a significant role in providing assistance and protection to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, in coordination with other international and local organisations.

The education system can be described through a number of divides. First, there is a divide between the public and the private sectors, which traces back to the establishment of education in Lebanon, when it was provided by private schools established by religious missions. Public education was institutionalised in the second half of the 19th century but the public and private sectors, rather than being complementary and running in partnership, were disconnected and not coordinated. In addition to the more 'privileged' private schools are private schools run by non-profit organisations that are largely religious organisations. Then

there is a divide between Palestinian refugees on the one hand and Lebanese nationals and Syrians on the other. Within the public school system, Syrian refugees mainly attend a second shift, operated by 358 schools – about a third of the country's schools (MEHE, 2021), while Lebanese nationals attend the morning shift. There are also non-formal schools run by international and national NGOs for Syrian refugees. Finally, there are separate schools run by UNRWA for Palestinian refugees, especially at the primary level, since they have limited access to public, non-free and subsidised private schools in the country due to their status and socioeconomic level (UNICEF 2012).

Lebanon is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention. Syrians residing in Lebanon are considered displaced rather than refugees, that latter being a category that has become reserved for the Palestinian refugees in the country. Aligned with UNHCR policy and language, however, and based on the situation of Syrians in Lebanon being a refugee-like situation, we nevertheless refer to Syrians in Lebanon as refugees.⁴ The majority of Syrian refugees are without legal residency. Palestinians who arrived in 1948 and 1967 are considered refugees; most have residency but are prevented from fully integrating, with restrictions on employment, property ownership, political participation and the forming of associations. There are also Palestinian refugees from Syria who have marginal status, very few of whom access legal residency.

Lebanon is a profoundly unequal society, and its inequalities have been aggravated by the multiple crises that the country has gone through (Baumann, 2019). When Syrian refugees started arriving from 2011, they came to a country that was already on a downward economic spiral. With deepening crises since then, refugees are often used as scapegoats by political factions, blamed for the economic crisis and for the miseries that people have experienced (Brun et al. 2021).

According to the World Bank (2021a), Lebanon's financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly the top 3, most severe crises globally since the mid-19th century. The country has faced multiple crises, including the influx of refugees, financial crisis, the collapse of governments and political instability, creating a situation of compounded crisis on multiple fronts. The financial crisis, which started in 2019, has been termed a 'deliberate depression'. It is considered 'deliberate' because of the way economic interests are driven, the failure to govern, including inadequate policy response caused by a lack of political consensus over effective policy initiatives (Brun et al. 2021). The financial crisis was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion.

The financial crisis was caused by unprecedented levels of national debt and mismanagement by the finance ministry and central bank, based on running a deficit for the previous 25 years. The country has limited exports, and foreign direct investment is focused on the Gulf Arab states and on real estate. The country's dependency on remittances remains very high although it has slowed in the past 10 years amid austerity and global financial crisis (Baumann 2019). Poverty levels among all groups of residents, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese, are soaring.

The violent conflict in Syria affected and accelerated the downward economic trend throughout the region. The arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon did represent a new shock to the economy but did not cause the initial 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 environment for refugees has become significantly more hostile, and created more tensions between government and international actors in particular. Although the arrival of refugees did not cause the economic downturn, their management has placed pressure on infrastructure, housing prices and livelihoods.

⁴ Despite the semantic difference between displaced persons and refugees maintained by the Lebanese state, UNHCR and most other actors label the Syrians in Lebanon as refugees.

Most significantly, the education system was not prepared or equipped to cater to the new arrivals. The compounded crises have had profound implications for the sector. With the Lebanese currency losing more than 95% of its value, teachers' salaries have become so low they do not even cover teachers' 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 teacher strikes. Children in Lebanese schools 'have experienced four consecutive disrupted 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' (Pushparatnam et al. 2023). Public school students have been much more affected by the crisis: private schools largely resumed regular schooling after the pandemic while public school disruptions continued, especially teacher strikes.⁵

Further to this negative trend, about 383,000 Syrian youth are out-of-school, and MEHE's current Five-Year General Education Plan (2021) suggests it will be necessary to open more school places in second shifts. In the 2020/21 school year, about a third of schools (358) operated a second shift to accommodate displaced Syrian students (MEHE 2021). According to the Education Sector Dashboard, second-shift schools had increased in number to 384 at the end of 2023 (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon 2023a).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2023), 280 educational institutions were damaged or destroyed in the Beirut Port blast on 4 August 2020 and these had been reconstructed by UNESCO 1.5 years after the destruction.

Tensions between the interests of the government and those of the international community have emerged regarding the hosting of Syrian refugees and education strategies. From 2019, changing levels of trust were related to the increasingly hostile environment for Syrian refugees, but also the ways in which economic mismanagement had become more prominent in the discourse, 'with the Minister of Education in 2020 even noting that corruption was endemic in his department on national TV' (USAID 2022a: 13, referring to Chinnery and Akar 2021). The international community currently supports MEHE's work through the 2021 Five-Year General Education Plan, with discussions around the plan focused on vulnerability rather than a student's or teacher's nationality, which attracted unanimous support from actors in the sector (USAID 2022a).

B. The current state of education in Lebanon

This section summarises some of the challenging conditions in the delivery of education in Lebanon using the data that are available from different stakeholders for different groups of students. Data from various sources may overlap, especially those collected by the two major stakeholders: MEHE and CERD. This means we must apply caution in interpreting these statistics. Having multiple data sources allows for a richer, more dimensional understanding of the education sector but also introduces challenges related to data comparability and reliability, especially since any weakness in a dataset will be circulated between stakeholders. Moreover, compounding crises can affect the timeliness of data: political, social and economic turmoil can delay data collection or impact the accuracy of long-term education projections.

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 – are Lebanese; 9% are Syrian and 3% are Palestinian and others (MEHE 2021: 8).⁶ The accuracy of these data is

⁵ Although, following the lifting of some restrictions at the start of the 2022/23 school year, MEHE has reported increased registration at second-shift public schools (mainly serving displaced Syrians).

⁶ Based on the latest data we could establish (SIMS, school year 2020/21), the total of displaced and refugee students is 197,824 students, broken down as follows: 150,632 displaced Syrians enrolled in the second shift and 36,311 Syrians enrolled in the first shift along with 6,240 Palestinians (non-UNRWA schools), 430 Iraqis and 4211 of other nationalities.

predicated on the robustness of enrolment records maintained by public schools, which are generally reliable but may not capture the full scope of unregistered or intermittently attending students. Moreover, as of December 2023, approximately 27% of children are out-of-school, including 7% of Lebanese children and 40% of Syrian children (Government of Lebanon and UN 2023). In the National Poverty Targeting Programme, 15% of children have never enrolled in school, with 50% of them giving financial reasons for this (MEHE 2021).

According to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) (Government of Lebanon and UN 2023), 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 sexes aged 3–17 were the cost of transportation to school (34%) – an increase of 5 percentage points compared with 2021 – and the cost of educational materials (29%). Approximately 30,000 Syrian children, 57% girls, were enrolled in non-formal education initiatives provided by NGOs. However, the demand for such 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 is associated with the lack of a clear national policy and issues of overcrowding in public schools. Meanwhile, despite the clear need for formal education access or transition, bureaucratic obstacles hindered the registration of Syrian refugee children. Some restrictions were eased at the beginning of the 2022/23 school year, resulting in increased enrolment in second-shift public schools primarily catering to displaced Syrians (ibid.).

In 2023, 277,000 Lebanese children were able to enrol in public schools, through support to public schools by partners. In the 2022/23 school year, 128,000 Lebanese boys and girls received additional support through either retention support or summer programmes; 115,000 Lebanese boys and girls received cash for education during the 2022/23 school year or during the summer programmes of 2023 (Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon 2023b).

According to UNRWA (2022), there has been a sharp rise in demand for enrolment in UNRWA schools among Palestinian refugees, mainly because of Lebanon's financial crisis. This surge has left many students unable to secure places in Lebanese public and private schools, putting strain on certain UNRWA schools' capacity. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), especially those who entered Lebanon irregularly after April 2019, face obstacles in registering with MEHE, despite UNRWA facilitating this. While the number of students affected per school is relatively low, this remains a significant barrier to education access for them. Additionally, some students who have passed their Grade 12 exams encounter challenges in obtaining certificates because of residency requirements, which impedes their tertiary education registration.

In 2017, Syrians made up 26% of camp residents, with proportions likely rising since then. Anecdotal reports from UNRWA staff indicate a notable presence of non-Palestinian school-age children in camps, many of whom are not attending school. Finally, UNRWA (2023) shows that unified mid-year exams taken by students in February 2023 showed a decreasing trend in achievement as students move 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 the LCRP (Government of Lebanon and UN 2023), and based on data gathered from secondary sources, approximately 300,000 children aged 0–17 are living with disabilities, where persons with disabilities represent between 10% and 15% of the total population of 7 million, or approximately 910,000 (UNDP nd). 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. However, the fact that only 1% of school-age children with disabilities are attending regular public schools underscores the extremely limited availability of inclusive education across all segments of the population.

C. The importance of data systems for the governance of education in Lebanon

Effective governance is critical to enhance the education system, and its success is closely tied to robust data systems that can be translated into actionable insights (Custer et al. 2018, Abdul-Hamid and Yassine 2020). The interdependence between governance and data systems indicates the importance of transparency in data-sharing and ensuring access to information rights (Piattoeva et al. 2018). These elements are crucial for enhancing governance and gaining insights into the impacts of various interventions within the education system.

In Lebanon, however, a need for more high-quality quantitative research persists, posing challenges to informed decision-making in education. The historical context of attempting to develop consolidated data systems has been marked by limited progress, despite substantial investments in the sector. Despite these challenges, MEHE has outlined a comprehensive strategy in its current five-year plan (2021) and the associated Roadmap to Reform (MEHE 2023a). A notable emphasis in this plan is placed on establishing an integrated Education Management Information System (EMIS). The commitment to developing such a system reflects an ongoing effort to address the existing gaps and challenges in Lebanon's data systems for education. By prioritising the creation of an integrated EMIS, Lebanon aims to enhance its capacity for data-driven decision-making and improve the overall effectiveness of its education governance.

With data from 2018 – and before the latest five-year plan was developed – Abdul-Hamid and Yassine (2020) highlight the requirements for a well-defined policy framework by addressing several key aspects (p. 154):

1. Clarify roles and responsibilities of different units involved in data systems in order to exclude current confusions, redundancies and inefficiencies in data collection and management.
2. Eliminate currently existing duplication and encourage improved collaboration between institutions collecting data.
3. Agree on standardisation, as this is key to ensuring consistency and accuracy in data systems. The policy should establish standard mechanisms for data collection, validation, storage, manipulation, reporting and utilisation. This will contribute to the credibility of the data and facilitates evidence-based decision-making.
4. Use better data systems to create an enabling and supportive environment for reform.

However, despite numerous attempts to establish effective data systems in the field of education, Lebanon faces persistent challenges, as World Bank (2017) and Abdul-Hamid and Yassine (2020) highlight: education data systems in Lebanon persist in their fragmented, incomplete nature with restricted accessibility, presenting substantial barriers to well-informed decision-making.

Abdul-Hamid and Yassine (2020) argue that, despite the substantial investments in terms of time, financial resources and human efforts that have been made in data systems, a critical issue lies in the absence of such a clear policy and framework for information management. This lack of a structured approach has led to fragmentation and divergence in vision and responsibilities across different units within and between MEHE and CERD. While there has been some progress, especially with plans for future alignment and consolidation, the overall advancement in data systems has been slow, hindering the effective monitoring of the quality and performance of the education system.

III. MAPPING OF DATA SYSTEMS IN LEBANON: METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of a data system mapping initiative conducted in Lebanon, where education interventions for emergency and protected crisis situations are ongoing. The primary objective is to evaluate current data management practices employed by relevant stakeholders and to identify the gaps and challenges hindering the effective utilisation of data for decision-making in the context of Lebanon. The key research questions are as follows:

1. Who is responsible for collecting data on education in Lebanon and at what frequency?
2. How (sample, whole population, periodicity, regularity) are data collected, processed, stored and used?
3. What types of data are available to the education system for decision-making on access, quality and continuity and on children's education outcomes in settings of conflict and protracted crisis?
4. What types of data are necessary but unavailable to the education system?

A. Data collection

In addition to activities under the umbrella of a country scan (literature review, stakeholder mapping and interviews), we conducted a data system mapping and engaged in some informal conversations with key stakeholders in order to determine the presence of data and identify any existing data gaps. We initially identified local and international stakeholders involved in collecting data on Lebanon's education sector, with a stronger focus on those who undertook important projects with substantial samples that contributed significantly to filling pre-existing gaps. Following the identification of these major stakeholders, we aimed to access their databases to evaluate the presence or absence of data, particularly related to quality, access and continuity, as well as student, teacher, school and community background data.

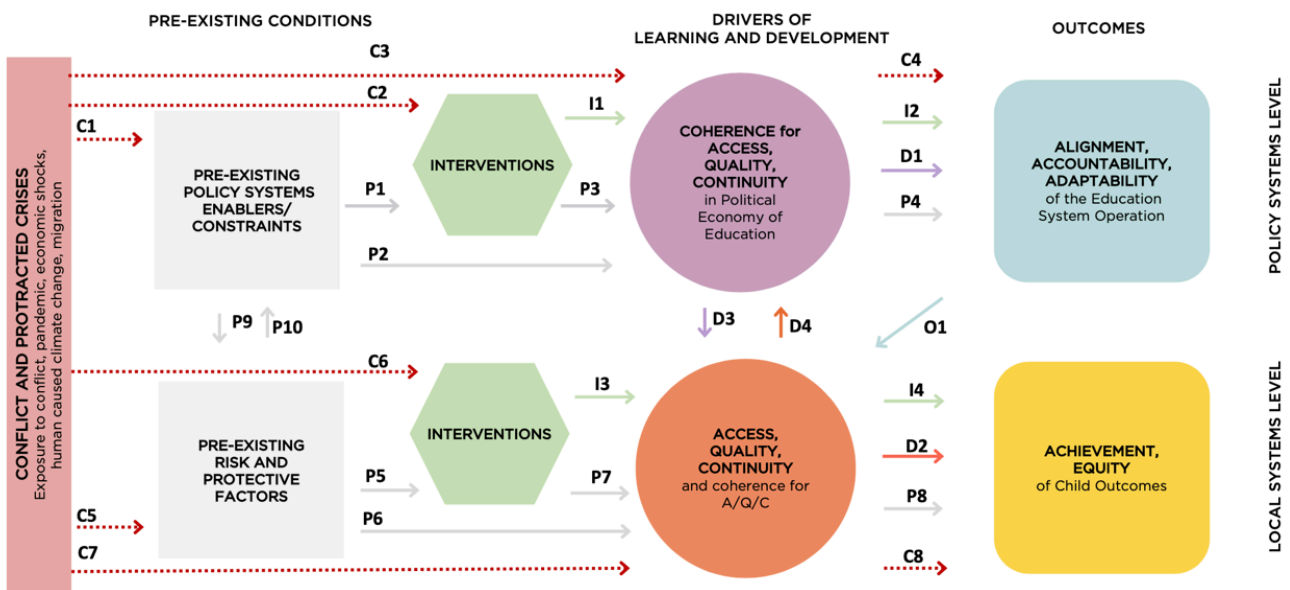
B. Data analysis

The mapping exercise was documented on a spreadsheet with predefined categories focusing on the availability of data related to education variables aligned with ERICC's conceptual framework, emphasising the key drivers of learning: access, quality and continuity. Concerning access-related data, the spreadsheet incorporated categories addressing whether stakeholders documented and monitored students' enrolment and attendance. Regarding quality-related data, the spreadsheet included categories evaluating whether data systems encompassed information on teachers' qualifications, teacher-student ratios and similar factors. In terms of continuity-related outcomes, the spreadsheet aimed to assess whether data systems collected information on students' dropout rates, grade progression and grade repetition. For outcomes, the spreadsheet identified whether the data system included information on academic learning outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy, along with broader learning outcomes, like social-emotional learning, mental health and physical health. Lastly, it sought to determine whether the data system collected information at various levels (student, teacher, school and community) and the types of demographic information available for disaggregating data based on characteristics such as sex, disability and displacement status.

Following the identification and accessing of pertinent data sources related to the education programmes of the 11 stakeholders operating in Lebanon, we systematically mapped the data flow and relationships existing among these sources and stakeholders. Subsequently, the collected data were subjected to analysis, aligned with the research questions. For ease of interpretation, the findings were represented visually, using charts. We also analysed seven key informant interviews, conducted with civil society organisations, donors and government institutions for the ERICC project, and analysed secondary sources identified in the literature review.

The ERICC conceptual framework served as a tool for analysis (Figure 1). Thus, we focused on the three key learning drivers – access, quality and continuity – in order to identify available data. As such, the study organises its findings based on data availability and gaps within access, quality and continuity while also shedding light on data gaps concerning learning outcomes and demographic information. Addressing the frequency of data collection and data-sharing practices, we contextualised the results within the ERICC conceptual framework (Kim et al. 2022), emphasising how these findings apply to Lebanon’s case. The examination covers the learning drivers and their interrelation with data availability and gaps, outlining Lebanon’s data sources, collection frequency and sharing methods.

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



C. Limitations

Our mapping exercise uncovered that in many cases data on education in Lebanon – particularly those from CERD, the principal collector of population data in Lebanon – are recycled among key stakeholders. Consequently, a limitation of the study is that it was challenging to trace the origins of some datasets, especially when the stakeholders did not fully disclose the origin of the data. Therefore, our mapping of certain indicators may overstate the prevalence of data in Lebanon, owing to double-counting. Additionally, our access was, in some cases, restricted to the complete databases of key stakeholders, limiting our mapping of indicators in certain cases to observations derived from publicly released reports rather than the raw data collected. Finally, we frequently came up against the fact that organisations keep their own data. These may be shared with CERD or MEHE informally but are often not publicly available, and it is unclear how systematic these data are. Generally, we found that there was considerable non-transparency and even secrecy around data systems in the education sector in Lebanon, which limited the depth of the analysis in this review. This weakness of the study, is, however, also an indication of some of the major weaknesses of data systems in education in Lebanon.

IV. EDUCATION DATA SYSTEMS IN LEBANON: WHO COLLECTS?

This section answers the first research question: who collects data on education in Lebanon, how and with what frequency?

The mapping identified key stakeholders engaged in either annual or periodic data collection. Official national bodies like CERD and MEHE emerged as the sole entities conducting annual data collection for the entire population. However, we also considered other stakeholders in our analysis, encompassing those with annual surveys of selected populations, such as the Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR); large one-time samples such as Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education (QITABI); and those periodically collecting substantially sized data samples. Table 1 provides an overview of the primary data sources analysed in this report; the section then goes on to discuss each source in detail.

Table 1: Main data sources

Stakeholder	Type of data	Data collection frequency
CAS	Sample and Population	Periodic
UNICEF	Sample	Annual
World Bank	Sample	Periodic
CERD	Sample and Population	Annual
CLS	Sample	Annual
MoSA	Sample	Periodic
MEHE	Population	Annual
UNRWA	Population	Annual
QITABI (USAID)	Sample	Periodic
UNESCO	Sample	Annual
VASyR	Sample	Annual

The **Central Administration of Statistics (CAS)** is a public body under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Its role is to collect, process, produce and disseminate social and economic statistics at the national level and to provide all users with evidence-based information for decision-making. It is also in charge of the technical supervision of statistics produced by other ministries and public administrations as well as improving methods and harmonising statistics.

CAS gathers data from a variety of sources, including ministries, institutions, ports, airports and more. It also generates data on various environmental and socioeconomic topics. Adhering to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the EU Statistics Code of Practice, the institution produces data and indicators in three main areas: (i) social (residents in Lebanon, households, employment rate, education,

etc.); (ii) economic (industrial foreign trade including imports and exports, sea transport: loaded/unloaded cargo, air transport: total landings, public finance: total internal and external value-added tax collection amounts, etc.); and (iii) environmental (water resources, rainfall series, forest fires, etc.). CAS has conducted several national censuses over the years to collect baseline data on buildings and establishments, health and education (Al Sairawan et al. 2010).

Regarding data related to education, we find that the most recent education statistics are from 2022, and show the distribution of residents aged 3–24 years based on current studying status, nationality group, age group, governorate, type of education institution and other factors.⁷ Additionally, CAS, in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), conducted a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in 2009 (CAS and UNICEF 2009).⁸ The objective of this was to support the Government of Lebanon in filling data gaps in monitoring the status of human development generally, with a particular focus on the situation of children and women.

Stakeholders or individuals interested in CAS reports need special authorisation to access them. Some of the data are aggregated and available on the CAS website (Al Sairawan et al. 2010).

In addition to partnering with UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) to issue the VASyR assessments yearly (see below), the **United Nations Children’s Fund** (UNICEF), in partnership with Save the Children, coordinates the education sector under the LCRP led by MEHE. UNICEF’s Child-focused Rapid Assessment looks at the different aspects of children’s lives in Lebanon. Data are collected through a telephone survey carried out twice a year. The latest survey was conducted in April 2023 among 2,090 households with at least 1 child (1,083 Lebanese, 518 Syrian, 489 Palestinian) (UNICEF 2022) and then in November 2023 among 2,153 households with at least 1 child (1,228 Lebanese, 534 Syrian, 391 Palestinian) (UNICEF 2023).

Although UNICEF engages in data collection, it frequently depends heavily on education data collected by national education authorities, including MEHE and CERD, and other local and international organisations. Data are gathered mainly through field assessments, household surveys, key informant interviews, telephone surveys and focus group discussions. UNICEF uses the collected evidence and analysis to create programmes, campaigns and initiatives, especially in partnership with MEHE and with other UN agencies, such as the Transition Resilience Education Fund (TREF) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Lebanon (UNICEF 2022).⁹

The **World Bank** Education Statistics Portal (EdStats) is a platform that allows the public to easily access data on key indicators in education, covering topics such as access, completion, learning outcomes from pre-primary to tertiary, governance expenditure, policy and equity.¹⁰ The World Bank’s page on Lebanon’s education statistics provides an overview of key education indicators and data. This includes metrics on enrolment, literacy, educational attainment, government expenditure and other relevant data points. The page offers visualisations and tables for a detailed understanding of Lebanon’s education landscape until the year 2018, helping assess progress and identify areas needing improvement.¹¹

⁷ www.cas.gov.lb/images/Publications/LFS_2022/2.Education%202022.xlsx

⁸ The MICS encompasses various rounds of surveys, which were conducted in the following years: 1995 (MICS1), 2000 (MICS2), 2005–2007 (MICS3), 2009–2011 (MICS4), 2012–2015 (MICS5) and 2022–2023 (MICS6).

⁹ This aims to provide a framework for inclusive education in Lebanon. It was launched by MEHE in partnership with UNICEF and in collaboration with CERD, financed by the EU and Education Cannot Wait funds.

¹⁰ EdStats is currently being revamped to improve user experience and relevance, so certain indicators may not be up to date. In the meantime, the EdStats dataset and other education datasets remain accessible.

¹¹ <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/country/lebanon>

The World Bank's Development Indicators (WDI) for education in Lebanon cover the following general topics: literacy and illiteracy, school enrolment, government expenditure, teacher statistics, education duration and starting ages, student persistence and repetition, school-age population, international student mobility, vocational vs general education enrolment, gender parity in education, over-age students, private vs public education enrolment, labour force participation and unemployment rates.¹²

The World Bank sources its data primarily from CAS and from international and regional learning assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)¹³ and the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER),¹⁴ as well as the World Bank Projects Database and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (World Bank 2021, 2022).

The **Centre for Education Research and Development** (CERD) is responsible for publishing national statistics on different aspects of the education system, encompassing sectors, levels and types of education. In line with this mission, it issues several publications. This includes a quarterly magazine concerned with teacher affairs, the first issue of which was published in November 1974; it stopped being published in 1993 and was reissued in September 2003. Also, it issues independently, or in collaboration with ministries and UN agencies, research and policies on official examinations by academic year.

CERD also issues annual statistical bulletins encompassing comprehensive statistical data pertaining to a number of variables. The bulletins are organised under the following headings (CERD 2023):

1. Number of students in the various education sectors by grade, level, sex, nationality, foreign language of instruction, age and educational status (freshman, advanced, repeater, failing), and their distribution among the governorates;
2. Number of educational and administrative staff members in the public sector by sex, marital status, age, years of service and educational level, and their distribution among the governorates; in addition, schools as distributed among the governorates according to levels provided, sex of students and primary foreign language used to teach mathematics and science;
3. Number of divisions in the public sector according to primary foreign language, and their distribution across educational levels and governorates;
4. Distribution of students with disabilities according to first foreign language and type of disability (visual, auditory, speech, motor, educational, autism, special needs, intellectual or gifted developmental disability).

The **Centre for Lebanese Studies** (CLS) is an independent academic institution established in 1984 to undertake impartial and balanced research and contribute to Lebanon's development. CLS work on education focuses on the experience of teaching and learning, curriculum development and policy change, in addition to the history of education and knowledge production in the field.¹⁵

Every year, CLS monitors the impact of Lebanon's financial and social crisis on the education sector. Annually online surveys involving students, parents and teachers identify the key challenges they encounter at the beginning of every academic year. The sample encompasses both public and private schools across all

¹² <https://tradingeconomics.com/lebanon/indicators-wb-data.html?g=education>

¹³ TIMSS is an international assessment that examines the knowledge and the skills of fourth and eighth graders and additional factors related to education. It is organised by the Lynch School of Education at Boston College and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

¹⁴ The World Bank's SABER is an evidence-based programme to help countries systematically examine and strengthen the performance of different aspects of their education systems. The student assessment component focuses specifically on benchmarking student assessment policies and systems, to promote stronger assessment systems that contribute to improved education quality and learning for all. For more information see World Bank (2013).

¹⁵ <https://lebanesestudies.com/research/education/>

eight governorates. The studies investigate the financial hardships teachers bear as a result of salary devaluation, as well as the struggles parents undergo to cover their children's schooling expenses. Also, CLS closely monitors trends related to tuition fee increases, migration of students between the public and private sectors, dropout rates and the accumulation of learning losses and their impact on schooling outcomes. Additionally, CLS consistently measuring the gap in quality between private and public schools.

The **Ministry of Social Affairs** (MoSA) is the government entity responsible for the provision of social protection and assistance as well as social safety nets in Lebanon. It does not currently play an active role in collecting educational data. However, education services are encompassed within various policies and programme it administers in conjunction with MEHE. For instance, in terms of formal education, MoSA, through NGOs and specialised institutions, offers education, residential care and welfare for youth in the form of boarding schools, as well as funding for vocational education and training through organisations and social development centres. In addition to leveraging NGOs to work on education, MoSA participates in joint collaborative projects with such actors (MoSA 2016).

The **Ministry of Education and Higher Education** (MEHE) regulates the education sector in Lebanon. MEHE has introduced the School Information Management System (SIMS) to collect data directly from public schools. SIMS is designed to provide the education sector with accurate data on human and physical variables that contribute to improve education outcomes. Data are collected on schools (physical aspects), students, teachers, leaders, indicators of education performance, finance and other key variables. It is our understanding that data on second-shift students (mainly Syrian refugees) are collected primarily on enrolment and attendance.

In October 2023, MEHE released a series of instructional videos on the roles of school managers and principals in all public schools for both morning and second shifts within the context of the data management mechanisms on SIMS and SIMS National Learning System (SIMS MEHENSL). The director, in collaboration with the principal and a mechanisation officer, is responsible for submitting data and reports within the deadlines set by the relevant authority in MEHE. The collected data include mainly workday classification (administrative preparatory work, teaching, weekend, strike, official holiday, exceptional closure), monthly contract hours for contractual teachers, teacher attendance, personal data on teachers and student attendance (MEHE 2023b). However, as Shal (2022) demonstrates, principals have limited capacity to upload and use data. SIMS data are intended to increase the evidence base for decision-making; there is some reference to these data in the current five-year plan (MEHE 2021) but much of the baseline is missing in the plan.

The **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East** (UNRWA) in Lebanon provides education services to 39,144 Palestine refugee students in its 65 schools. The focal points, among UNRWA staff and local organisations in Palestinian refugee camps, or sometimes in collaboration with other UN agencies or NGOs, conduct continuous assessments of different aspects of education services, policies and programmes and of the profiles of PRL and PRS students and teachers operating in UNRWA's schools. Coverage of UNRWA's education statistics is limited to information on UNRWA's own education programmes.¹⁶ Data relate to the majority of PRL and PRS but not all of them, on school enrolment, dropout, psychological support for students, student achievement, quality teaching and learning, and access to vocational training. The primary units of analysis are schools, classes, teachers and students; information is transmitted from schools to field officers and then to headquarters. Publicly available data in the statistical yearbook are highly aggregated, limiting their use for research on refugee education (Endresen and Ovansen 1994).

¹⁶ www.unrwa.org/activity/education-lebanon

Funded by USAID, **Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education** (QITABI) (1 and 2), implemented in collaboration with MEHE, is working to improve facilities, services and teaching as well as to effectively engage communities and school councils to improve learning and increase the chances of youth remaining in the education system. It includes an immediate focus on alleviating the strains to the system resulting from the continuing inflow of Syrian refugee children into Lebanese public schools. It collects data on literacy and numeracy with a representative sample of 278 schools in Lebanon. The main goal is to improve the reading, writing, mathematics, and social and emotional learning skills of more than 300,000 students attending primary public schools in Lebanon. Student performance levels are measured using the Early Grade Reading Assessment and the Early Grade Mathematics Assessment in Grade 2, the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessment in Grade 3 and curriculum-based assessments in reading and maths in Grades 3 and 6. The tools were developed in close collaboration with MEHE and the Centre for Educational Research and Development (Centre de recherche et de développement pédagogique) and piloted in 30 public schools across Lebanon (USAID 2022b).

The **Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** (UIS) is the official and trusted source of internationally comparable data on education, science, culture and communication. For Lebanon, the education indicators available from the UNESCO dataset cover the education system, participation in education, progress and completion, expenditure, illiterate population and literacy rates. These data are sourced directly by UIS or through international organisations and regional assessments such as TIMSS and PISA and from MEHE and CERD where available.

The **Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon** (VASyR) is conducted jointly by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. It is an annual assessment based on socioeconomic criteria, whose latest round took place between 7 June and 7 July 2022. Data are collected from a representative sample of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon to provide a multisectoral update of the situation of this population and to shape the response to refugees' needs. One of the sectors covered is primary and secondary education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The education chapter of the VASyR thus presents school attendance rates for Syrian refugee girls and boys aged 3–24 years old. It also provides the reasons why children and youth were not attending schools or were absent during the school year, and the share of youth not in education, employment or training. The results are based on 2,887 pre-primary schoolchildren (3–5 years of age), 6,517 primary school children (6–14 years) and 1,570 secondary schoolchildren (15–17 years).

V. WHAT DATA ARE AVAILABLE?

This section discusses what data are available. For most indicators, note that MEHE and CERD cover the entire population of students, teachers and schools; other actors generally tend to operate with smaller samples.

A. Data on access

Access to education goes beyond enrolment; it entails a holistic approach to providing children with opportunities for diverse learning and growth. Beyond academic knowledge, it encompasses physical, emotional, social and cognitive development, which are all crucial during times of crisis. Moreover, access involves creating safe and supportive learning environments, promoting awareness and encouraging diverse educational activities. Therefore, comprehensive data on access to education are crucial for informed policy and national decisions.

Our mapping exercise reveals that numerous stakeholders are involved in collecting data on access but there is variation in the types of indicators prioritised. Indicators such as number of schools and enrolment

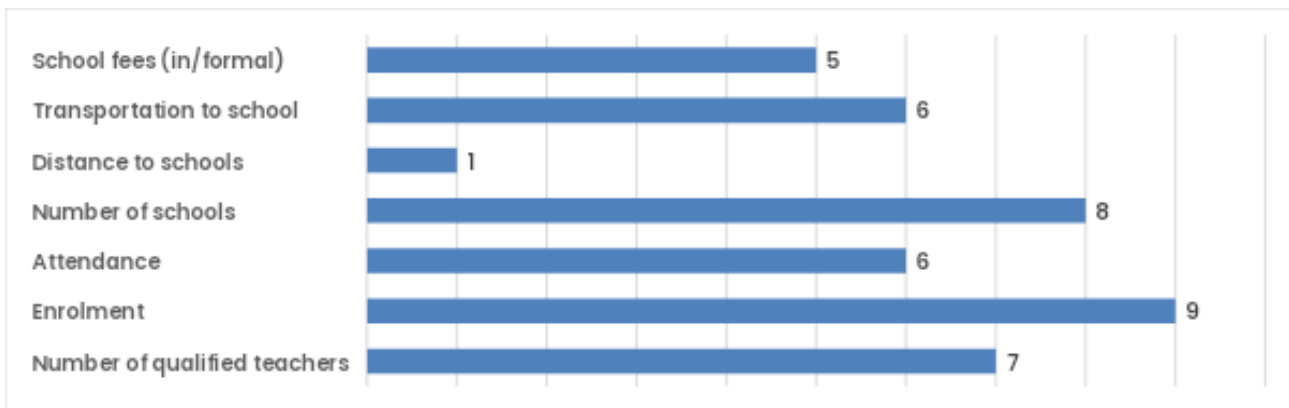
rates are of primary interest to most stakeholders. Notably, CERD serves as the primary source on access data. Often, data are reformulated and integrated into the databases of other stakeholders.

MEHE collects data on Syrian refugees, with enrolment and attendance prioritised, as the international community pays for each refugee child attending public school. UNRWA collects data on Palestinian refugees. Consequently, data on numbers of schools and enrolment rates are available for the entire population and are collected annually.

Gaps in access data are evident, particularly on distance to schools, school fees and transportation. Comprehensive data covering the entire population or spanning multiple time periods for these specific indicators are notably absent. Usually, such indicators are available for a sample in a specific year only.

Furthermore, although certain stakeholders incorporate access data into their published reports or online databases, data on specific indicators, particularly those covering the entire population, are accessible only upon request from official entities such as CERD.

Figure 2: Distribution of stakeholders collecting data on access (out of 11 stakeholders)



B. Data on quality

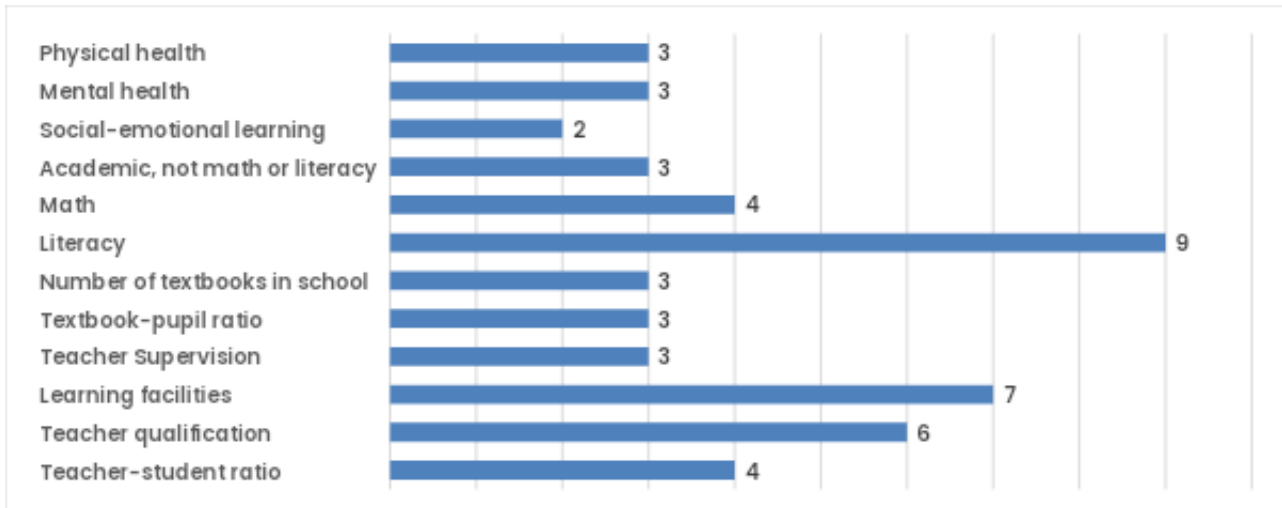
Drawing on the ERICC conceptual framework, we define quality data as information relating to the quality of education children receive, encompassing specific ratios commonly used to evaluate this. Consequently, we conducted a mapping exercise for data and indicators related to teacher skills, textbook-to-pupil ratio, learning facilities and literacy. CERD serves as the primary source for data on quality, particularly for entire populations of teachers and learning facilities; often, these data are reformulated and incorporated into the databases of other stakeholders.

Our findings reveal critical data gaps regarding quality of education in Lebanon, particularly teaching and learning aspects. While many stakeholders collect data on teacher background and qualifications, there is a lack of reliable information on instructional practices, supervision, retention and professional development. Additionally, there is a shortage of data on teaching methods, classroom management practices and student engagement. Despite the increasing interest in literacy and loss of learning in recent years, represented by studies such as QITABI, these studies are often limited to specific grade levels or academic years. Addressing these gaps is crucial to improve education programmes.

In addition, again, data on specific indicators, particularly those covering the entire population, are accessible only on request from official entities such as CERD. Moreover, the methodology and tools used to

measure the same indicator often vary from one stakeholder to another. For instance, while literacy is one of the most collected indicators, its measurement and definition vary between stakeholders. For example, CAS measures literacy using self-reported survey responses for people aged 15 and above who can both read and write. Meanwhile, QITABI measures literacy using an evaluation of student performance.

Figure 3: Distribution of stakeholders collecting data on quality (out of 11 Stakeholders)

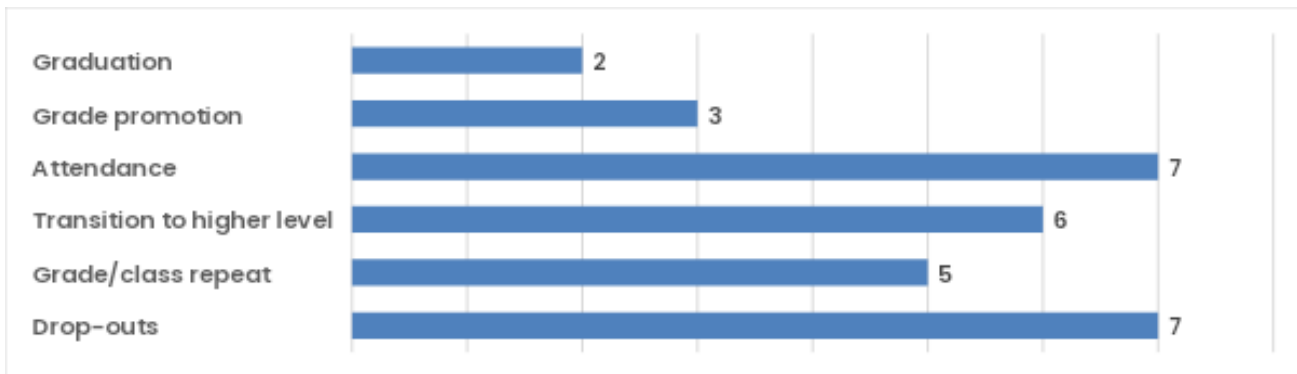


C. Data on continuity

Continuity refers to the sustained exposure to education that facilitates progress on both learning and transitions between grades or schools. It plays a crucial role in addressing challenges associated with frequent disruptions, school closures, attendance issues and grade repetition, as well as school dropout, as currently prominent challenges facing students as a result of Lebanon's ongoing crisis. As for data on access and quality, CERD serves as the primary source for data on continuity; often, other key stakeholders rely on data collected and recorded by CERD and MEHE for their own databases.

Our findings reveal that, despite the existence of some indicators of continuity, data on these are usually limited to only a sample of students in sporadic time periods. In principle, SIMS data are collected from all schools in Lebanon and students are the central unit of analysis, based on a unique identifier. However, while CERD and MEHE monitor the annual progression of students, it is not clear whether data on dropout for the entire population exist. Official data on the student population are present mainly for grade promotion, attendance in public schools and transition to higher levels, with more detailed and annually updated data on official exam success and failure rates for students who transition from Grade 9 to Grade 10 and those who pass or fail Grade 12's official exam. The majority of these figures are reported in CERD's annual statistical report; however, some indicators are available only upon request.

Figure 4: Distribution of stakeholders collecting data on continuity (out of 11 stakeholders)



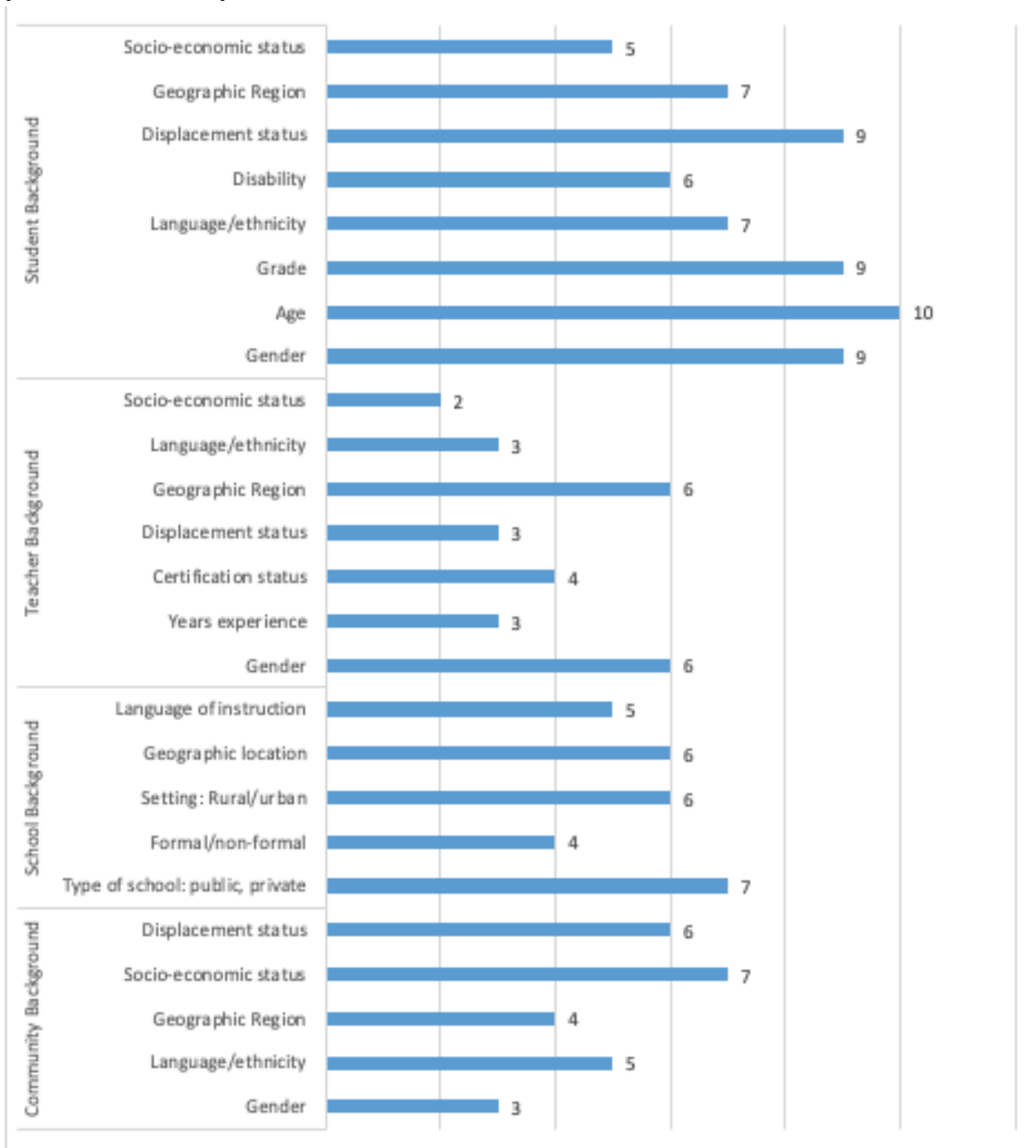
D. Background and demographic data

Lebanon's last official census dates back to 1932, meaning there is a substantial gap in background data related to sex, ethnicity and geographical distribution. However, our mapping reveals that some stakeholders do collect background data on students, teachers, schools and the community. For instance, CERD and MEHE monitor and record numbers of schools, locations (rural vs urban), type (public vs private) and languages of instruction. Additionally, MEHE monitors teachers' years of experience, sex, certification status and geographical location. CERD monitors sex, language, legal status, age, grade level and geographical location annually for the entire student population in the morning shift (meaning mainly Lebanese students) and presents data in its annual statistical report. VASyR presents data on all Syrian refugees, whether formally registered or not. UNRWA presents data on Palestinian refugees.

Crucially, data on the Lebanese population should be available through CAS but are often not up to date, which affects the data collection of MEHE and CERD. Data on the community and socioeconomic status of teachers and students and on disability – for all groups, nationals and refugees – are thus often from small samples and not consistently collected. Such data are vital, especially since the recent currency devaluation and the loss of purchasing power. They are necessary to understand and address challenges related to teacher strikes and student dropout, which are driven mainly by financial struggles.

Moreover, the methodology and tools used to measure indicators vary from one stakeholder to another. For instance, while data on disability reported by VASyR are collected based on the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (UNHCR et al. 2022), UNICEF uses the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and has previously recommended that Lebanon use a unified terminology and classification system for the various types and categories of disabilities to be included in schools, so as to avoid confusion in terminology among different ministry and school stakeholders, and in statistical reporting (UNICEF 2021).

Figure 5: Distribution of stakeholders collecting data on teacher, student and community background (out of 11 stakeholders)



VI. DATA STORAGE, SHARING AND ACCESSIBILITY

It is crucial to understand how data are stored, shared and accessed. This includes the methods used to collect data and, thus, the format in which they are produced, which have impacts on storage and accessibility.

Here, we emphasise in particular the current SIMS data collected by MEHE, as several of our interviewees highlighted challenges with these. In each school, according to interviewees, an IT employee works on SIMS data entry (see also Kassir 2022). Data entry and report generation are manual, and data are generally not published.

Kassir (2022) studied the role of IT employees in SIMS and found they were struggling to use the system and to adapt to continuous changes being made. Particular difficulties were encountered with access to computer equipment; when equipment was available, issues related to suitability, irregular internet access, lack of MEHE guidance and discrepancies between the needs of the school and the MEHE programme. Current pressures in the school system and in individual schools suggest the school system was not ready to use SIMS and that challenges exist with regard to capacity and relevance for all public schools. Another key problem, as identified in Section V, is the potential reproduction of weaknesses in data through widespread sharing of questionable data. Several interviewees questioned data quality (see also Shal 2022).

All interviewees expressed deep frustration about the accessibility and reliability of government data.

There's always a gap [in the data system] and no one really gives you the information you are seeking. You have to deduce it. When I look at CERD, I don't look at the 2022–2023 statistics alone, I go back 10 years, and I make a comparison. For example, I see that in 2012 there were X number of students in schools in Grade X and in 10 years I look at how many students are still in school out of that X number – in private and public schools. This depends on their statistics. Then you compare with CAS and this comparison shows you what the rate of retention is. CAS is the only body that gives precise numbers. We don't have correct and comprehensive studies that detail the conditions. In continuing education, there's nothing (key informant interview January 2023).

The mapping revealed that, while some datasets and indicators are accessible through online databases, where the stakeholder publishes the raw dataset, in other cases the stakeholder publishes only the key findings of a study or a dataset. For instance, CERD publishes an annual statistical report with the main findings of a nationwide survey that covers all schools (private and public), teachers and students in Lebanon. The full dataset is only partially presented and can be obtained only through an email request to CERD, specifying the type of data needed and the intended use. Moreover, according to CERD, major stakeholders often request the data it collects every year, and then reformulate them and incorporate them into their own databases. There thus seems to be some informal sharing of data, although we could not document such processes. It is nevertheless clear there are challenges in accessing reliable data and in obtaining a holistic understanding through the data that are accessible. Some interviewees noted that inaccessibility of data and questionable quality and reliability result in many stakeholders preferring to collect their own data, which some then share with MEHE and CERD.

As CERD and MEHE collect similar data but apply different methods and sources, there are often discrepancies in numbers. The situation is also complicated by the many different actors involved in producing data, and there is currently no central hub for storing and making available all the different data produced. Consequently, fragmentation and misalignment are prevalent:

CERD should be under the umbrella of the ministry... but is mainly seen as a separate entity, having its own president and systems and staff and everything... So there is no communication or coordination between the staff at the ministry who are supposed to be at the school level... and the staff of CERD. The training agenda is set by CERD because they're responsible for the training and they're responsible for the curriculum and they have the trainers (key informant interview February 2023).

Finally, it seems more data are collected than are published, which indicates that there may also be a challenge with capacity in processing data. This again leads to frustration regarding accessibility but also questions regarding quality, given what is understood as limited transparency. Added to this were indications in the interviews that data-sharing takes place both formally and informally. As one interviewee stated, 'MEHE are sharing numbers, but I don't think that they shared official numbers' (key informant interview January 2023).

A note on the current five-year plan and ambitions to rectify current problems

The tensions described above in the relationship between the different institutions and arms of the government regarding how data are collected, processed, shared and used have been brought up in multiple plans and reports, leading to countless aid projects and donor initiatives (such as Reaching All Children with Education 1 and 2). The current Five-Year General Education Plan (MEHE 2021) also highlights alignment of data systems towards a unified EMIS as a core theme, with the goal of a unified system in place by 2025.

Over the years, international donors have shown significant interest in providing technical support to enhance data and information systems. A notable initiative in this regard is the Transition Resilience Education Fund (TREF), which operates in collaboration with UNICEF and key partners such as the EU and Germany's Development Bank. The primary objective of TREF is to reinforce governance, transparency and efficiency within Lebanon's education sector, with a focus on improving learning outcomes for children, especially those currently out-of-school. TREF aims to streamline aid for basic education, giving special emphasis to inclusive governance that enhances data collection and facilitates information-sharing among various stakeholders.

The Five-Year General Education Plan was formulated with heavy donor influence (USAID 2022a) and represents the first stage in the development of a sector-wide education plan (a Higher Education Plan was launched in 2023, with a technical and vocational education and training plan to follow). The five-year plan focuses primarily on the public education sector while aiming to collaborate with the private school sector, identifying opportunities for synergies to enhance access and learning outcomes. It also lays out a framework for public-private initiatives to introduce innovative approaches to education delivery. However, the success of the strategy relies heavily on active engagement from communities, parents and students; whether this will emerge remains to be seen.

The plan can serve as an overarching framework encompassing various education-related initiatives, ranging from emergency access programmes like the LCRP to targeted efforts such as the Multi-Year Resilience Plan and bilateral programmes with donors, as well as direct funding activities with partner governments and national and international NGOs. Additionally, it involves preparations for a new curriculum emphasising subject matter, teaching methodologies and skills pertinent to the 21st century.

Central to the plan – and its accompanying reform roadmap (MEHE 2023a) – are data systems for more efficient governance, including the preparation and endorsement by the minister and MEHE stakeholders of an information management strategy and a unified data framework. Aligned with the aim of fostering transparency and facilitating open data access, the strategy seeks to ensure data availability in a user-friendly format for both internal and external purposes, enabling analysis and utilisation.

The ultimate goal is to empower MEHE to make evidence-based decisions; enhance policy formulation; and improve planning, monitoring and resource optimisation by enhancing access and utilisation of information systems across all levels. The plan emphasises capacity-building efforts in order to target various stages of the policy cycle, encompassing policy identification, formulation (including planning, analysis and design), legitimisation (decision-making), implementation, evaluation and eventual policy modification.

However, as the plan acknowledges, changes will be needed at both legal and institutional levels to see this reform through. Despite the plan's aims, and in spite of anecdotal evidence among some interviewees of some progress in achieving a unified data system, other interviewees expressed deep concerns and a lack of faith in the plan. As one interviewee stated, *'In the five-year plan there are lots of attempts to align the data and most of these are pushed by the donors, making the process very difficult, since it's not coming from within'* (key informant interview February 2023). Finally, as set out above, there needs to be a focus on involving schools in the process of developing a well-functioning system, as well as sufficient support to under-resourced schools.

VII. WHAT DATA ARE NECESSARY BUT UNAVAILABLE?

Several data gaps impact decision-making related to enhancing access, quality and continuity in education for students in Lebanon. These gaps encompass information on dropout rates, loss of learning and both parents' and teachers' socioeconomic status. The need to understand the challenges for diverse learner and educator groups, especially amid the ongoing economic and social crisis, means addressing these data gaps is a significant task to ensure informed decision-making. Data are generally available where funding requires them, such as for enrolment and attendance of students in second shifts. However, there is much to be done to cover the numerous gaps in the system.

A. Gaps and differences in the data

There are several notable gaps and tensions or inconsistencies in Lebanon's education data systems. For instance, data related to accessibility and enrolment for students with disabilities in Lebanon are scarce, almost non-existent, even though many institutions we mapped collect some scattered data on disability. Additionally, a distinction exists between refugees and nationals, aligning with trends identified in the literature review. As we have shown, data on morning shifts in schools, which predominantly concern nationals, are wider-ranging in terms of access, quality and demography. Data on second shifts and Syrian refugees concentrate mainly on enrolment and attendance, as per requirements for international funding by student. The focus on access to education for refugees is rooted in the humanitarian discourse, leading to separate approaches to evidence for nationals and refugees, indicating the marginalisation of refugees within the current education system. Research on refugees tends to concentrate on immediate needs, overlooking long-term outcomes such as continuity and quality.

Regarding quality and continuity in education, we identified a lack of reliable information on instructional practices, supervision, retention, learning outcomes and professional development. There is also a shortage of data on teaching methods, classroom management and student engagement. Significantly, where data exist, they may not be covering the whole student population; even those for nationals frequently cover only some years or academic grade levels. Furthermore, while CERD may have data on dropout, these have not been made available, as far as we could establish. We also did not find data on completion and out-of-school rates.

At systems level, there is also a lack of financial and budget information by all actors mapped here. Another notable gap in current data systems is the absence of information on non-formal education. However, MEHE

aims to address this by establishing a non-formal education database by 2025. According to the Five-Year General Education Plan:

The strategies will be partially informed by the findings of the UNICEF-contracted study of Non-Formal Education in Lebanon 2019/2020. The program seeks to devise methods for improved identification of students not enrolled in the formal education system, enabling effective follow-up. Finally, a consolidated data system integrating existing individual databases will be developed to enhance the quality of data available for planning and implementation.

There is a growing discussion on how to measure quality of education in Lebanon based on the downward trends seen in quality education, and what kind of measurements to apply. Significantly, national exam results are at a lower level than in previous years; this means that using national exams as an indicator for quality is problematic. This concern was shared by many interviewees, and has been confirmed in a donor report (USAID 2022b):

Students completed the assessments under difficult conditions. First, there were long periods of disruptions to their schooling, including the teacher strikes prior to the start of the baseline. Second, there were several winter storms and very cold temperatures in many parts of the country during data collection. The lack of electricity and heating left schools ill-equipped during cold days. Third, the worsening socio-economic conditions made access to food and health services difficult for many children. These factors could have negatively influenced student performance during the assessments.

While significant data are missing, another important dimension of data systems in Lebanon is the limited access to the data that do exist. Partly, this seems to relate to a lack of capacity to process data, but there is also a challenge in requesting permission to access data.

B. The need for additional data

Amid compounding crises, starting with Covid-19 and including the recent financial crisis, Lebanon's education sector has faced severe repercussions. Students, teachers and parents are struggling with escalating challenges that require immediate attention. To support efforts to address this, gaps in data that need to be addressed fall into three categories: general education data on access, quality and continuity; data that capture the impact of the crisis on students, families and schools; and data on interventions, finance and budgeting.

First, on **general education data**, the lack of census data and of a unified and comprehensive data system in education shows that the challenge for data systems in Lebanon is deep-rooted. There is a pressing need for additional data to comprehend trends related to accessing education, quality, loss of learning, school dropout and financial struggles for all groups, including refugees. There is also a need for data on indicators such as distance to schools, school fees and transportation. As mentioned above regarding quality, there is a need for more data on teaching methods and classroom management of teachers as well as data from student observations in the classroom. Again, it seems there are profound issues with access to data once collected.

Second, considering **data on crisis-related impacts** in the education sector, to enable the formulation of well-informed reforms, comprehensive data covering the entire population across all governance levels are required, to make it possible to investigate frequently overlooked challenges, such as commuting costs for both students and teachers. Additionally, it is crucial to evaluate the cost of living and determine the minimum financial support required to bring an end to teacher strikes in the public sector and prevent

further disruptions. Furthermore, more data are needed, to make it possible to effectively assess and address the issue of loss of learning, which has been accumulating since 2020, placing many children at risk of dropping out. Moreover, additional data on parents' income and financial struggles can help ensure that education is financially accessible for everyone. Data on teaching practices, curricula and the effectiveness of current teaching methods is necessary to efforts to implement proper reforms that address quality-related issues and enhance the current education system.

Third, there is limited systematic **data on financing and budgeting** in the education sector as well as the impact of interventions in the sector. There have been significant donor investments in education in Lebanon over the decades, and particularly since the Syrian refugee crisis started in 2011. More data are needed on the extent of these efforts, to be able to measure their impact and efficiency.

Finally, and as a crosscutting theme, limited value is attached to qualitative data: more emphasis given to larger-scale qualitative studies could bring a richness to insights on the state of the education system that could make up for current weaknesses in the data systems in the country.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The education sector in Lebanon has struggled for decades to develop better data systems, with considerable donor efforts invested. However, the challenges prevail and, overall, the task of analysing data systems in Lebanon proved challenging, given inaccessibility issues, secrecy around data and limited discussion and research on data and data systems. To some extent, the challenge is at systemic level, and requires systemic change in order to be fixed.

Our analysis of data systems in education in Lebanon shows that the government, through MEHE and CERD in particular, collects and holds the most comprehensive data and data that are collected annually. Despite plans to put in place an EMIS in MEHE, there will be a need to further institutionalise data systems and formulate clear policies defining the roles and responsibilities of different units in data collection, validation, management and utilisation (see also World Bank 2017). This effort could improve consistency and ensure data practices are effectively integrated and maintained. The institutionalisation of data systems will also entail enhancing mechanisms for data-sharing and public access, to make datasets available to the public without prior official request. This would increase transparency and allow for greater public engagement, contributing to improved educational research and policymaking.

Our review shows that other organisations collect data but more sporadically, and with limited access to some spaces, such as schools (as Table 1 shows). Meanwhile, there is still a lack of coordination of data within government departments and institutions, and access to data is variable and limited. Data produced by the government are often incorporated into other institutions' datasets, and the recycling of data is thus an important part of the circulation of knowledge in Lebanon; any weaknesses in the data are also circulated. At the same time, gaps in government data for refugees and other groups of learners are not made up for.

In terms of **what data are available to the education system for decision-making**, we have found the following. Regarding data on **access**, there are numerous stakeholders involved in collecting data. However, different studies use different indicators, although number of schools and enrolment are the two most used indicators. Regarding **quality**, many stakeholders collect data on teacher background and qualifications but teacher practices are less prominent in the data. Despite the presence of some indicators of **continuity**, such data are usually limited to a sample of students at sporadic time periods. While CERD and MEHE monitor the annual progression of students, it is not clear whether data on dropout for the entire population

exist. Official data on the student population is present mainly for grade promotion, attendance in public schools and transition to higher levels, with more detailed and annually updated data on official exam success and failure rates for students who transition from Grade 9 to Grade 10 and those who pass or fail Grade 12's official exam.

Many stakeholders map **background or demographic data** but less systematically. For instance, CERD and MEHE monitor and record data such as numbers of schools, locations (rural vs urban), type (public vs private) and languages of instruction. Additionally, MEHE monitors data on teachers' years of experience, sex, certification status and geographical location. CERD monitors the entire student population for sex, language, legal status, age, grade level and geographical location annually and presents the data in its annual statistical report. However, data on the community and socioeconomic status of teachers and students are often from small samples and are not consistently collected. Furthermore, data about Lebanese nationals and Syrian and Palestinian refugees are not aligned, as different departments and institutions collect the data and they are not integrated in a unified database. Finally, there is lack of data on the **financing of education**, and particularly the role of international aid in the education system. This limited transparency on financing and investment in education renders it difficult to examine the value for money of current educational policies and programmes.

Regarding **who is responsible for data collection**, MEHE and CERD are instrumental in this context, together with UNRWA for data on Palestinian refugees attending UNRWA schools. While other organisations involved in education do collect data, this effort is less systematic and involves less access to schools and the total population of pupils. Financing of studies is thus often tied to the individual institutions that collect data. Foreign funding to unify the data systems at national level continues to be instrumental.

How data are collected again depends on the institutions collecting the data. For MEHE and CERD, it is done through their network of schools. For other institutions, mainly NGOs, data are collected based on the network of teachers and pupils they work with rather than taking place more systematically at school level. Often, these data are collected for the purpose of a specific intervention. Hence, most studies conducted outside the government and UNRWA are not on an annual basis, but more ad hoc according to project timelines. In recent years, we have seen some exceptions to this, such as VASyR and also studies such as that of CLS annually monitoring the impact of the crisis on the education sector.

Crucially, while data exist, access to data is a major obstacle in creating an efficient data system in the education sector. CERD produces a statistical report with the main findings from its national survey, which is available only on demand. NGOs collecting their own data may share them with CERD and MEHE but these data are not unified or coordinated with other NGOs and not always shared publicly. The mapping revealed that, while some datasets and indicators are accessible through online databases where the stakeholder publishes the raw dataset, in other cases the stakeholder publishes only key findings.

Our analysis points to critical data gaps in existing data. On access and equity, there is a need for indicators such as distance to schools, school fees and transportation. Comprehensive data covering the entire population or spanning multiple time periods for these specific indicators are notably absent. On quality, there is a lack of reliable information on instructional practices, supervision, retention and professional development. Additionally, there is a shortage of data on teaching methods, classroom management practices and student engagement. Despite the increasing interest in literacy and loss of learning in recent years, these studies are often limited to specific grade levels or academic years. On continuity, there is a need for further data on teachers' and students' socioeconomic status, especially since the recent currency devaluation and the loss of purchasing power. Such data will help in addressing challenges related to teacher strikes and student dropout, which are driven mainly by financial struggles.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that, while more data are needed, there is also a need for more work to understand how existing data on education in Lebanon can be used more efficiently in influencing policy and governance. To this end, we cannot judge the validity and reliability of the existing data, and we have not been able to establish whether – and how – data have been validated. Our findings point to a variation in sources, and the potential for data overlap and recycling means we should take a cautious approach to interpreting the data available. Having multiple data sources collected using different tools and methods may allow for a richer, more multidimensional understanding of the education sector but it also introduces challenges in ensuring data comparability and reliability, since any weakness in a dataset will be circulated among stakeholders.

A number of general recommendations emerged from the analysis for consideration:

1. **Develop robust frameworks:** Establish more robust frameworks within MEHE and CERD to enhance the effectiveness and integration of data practices.
2. **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities involved in data collection, validation, management and utilisation to improve consistency and reliability.
3. **Enhance data-sharing and accessibility:** Formulate policies to make educational datasets available to the public without prior official requests, promoting transparency and public engagement.
4. **Strengthen general education data collection:** Establish a unified and comprehensive data system to gather consistent data on school access, quality and continuity. This system should include other metrics that fill current data gaps, alongside traditional indicators.
5. **Collect crisis impact data:** Systematically collect data that capture the direct and indirect impacts of crises on students, families and educational institutions.

Finally, the report also points to some more focused recommendations:

- a) **Enhance data collection on disabilities:** Prioritise the collection and analysis of data on students with disabilities to address the significant gaps in accessibility and enrolment information.
- b) **Bridge data gaps between nationals and refugees:** Standardise data collection across both national and refugee student populations to ensure comprehensive coverage of access, quality and demographic information. Address the marginalisation of refugees in data practices by integrating their long-term educational needs.
- c) **Improve quality and continuity measures:** Develop reliable metrics for instructional practices, supervision, retention and learning outcomes. Expand data on teaching methods, classroom management and student engagement to cover all student populations uniformly.
- d) **Systematic financial and budget reporting:** Address the lack of financial and budget data by ensuring transparency and regular updates from all educational actors.
- e) **Establish a non-formal education database:** Accelerate the development of a non-formal education database as planned to better track and support students outside the formal education system.

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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 Partner University College London (UCL), 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.