

## **POLICY BRIEF:**

# **Beyond recovery: A comprehensive approach for educational transformation in Lebanon**

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*During the last year, the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) with support from the FCDO-funded ERICC programme has continued its monitoring of Lebanon's education crisis. This policy brief summarises main findings and actionable strategies aimed at simultaneously addressing immediate recovery needs and long-term educational goals. By emphasising systems strengthening, sustainable development and inclusive practices, Lebanon can ensure an educational environment that not only recovers from current crises but also is well equipped to withstand future shocks.*

## 1. Introduction and background

In the wake of prolonged conflict and systemic crises, Lebanon's education sector stands at a pivotal juncture. Since 2011, a confluence of factors has further devastated the educational infrastructure and eroded access to learning. These are the Syria crisis, economic collapse, political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and, most recently, the intensification of Israeli aggression marked by airstrikes targeting densely populated civilian areas. The impact has been profound in what is already a deeply divided educational system: around 30% of students are enrolled in public schools that are notoriously deprived, while 70% of students attend private, fee and non-fee paying schools.

Against this backdrop, CLS initiated multi-phase research to systematically document and analyse the evolving effects of overlapping crises on students, families and educators across Lebanon. The study was motivated by a critical gap in both policy and academic evidence of how repeated shocks have influenced education. In particular, how they have affected educational access, learning outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing among diverse population groups, including refugees and other vulnerable communities.

This policy brief draws on data from this multi-phase research. It utilises quantitative survey data collected from students (n=406), parents (n=2,075 and n=622 from two separate surveys) and teachers (n=529) between May 2024 and November 2025; as well as five focus group interviews each, with teachers and parents, and 32 individual interviews with parents during October and November 2024. The full report can be found [here](#) (Hammoud and Brun, 2025).

This policy brief makes the case for moving beyond recovery alone and the immediate response to the crises, to a comprehensive, adaptive and inclusive approach to rebuilding education as a public good and stabilising force in the lives of children, families and communities.

The study was conducted in the context of the Israeli aggressions on Lebanon that gradually escalated from October 2023 into war between September and November 2024. The war displaced more than 1.3 million individuals, converted schools into emergency shelters, postponed the start of the academic year, and left over 650,000 students, including Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian children, without access to education (OCHA, 2025)). Lebanon is beginning to emerge from the conflict under a precarious ceasefire, however, students and their families continue to deal with the impact of war on their lives with about 100,000 displaced still unable to return home (IOM 2025).

A humanitarian model has dominated funding for education in a context of continuous and compounded crises. In Lebanon, this model has largely manifested as short-term, unpredictable and inflexible financing streams, frequently channelled through international agencies and non-state actors rather than sustained investment in the national education system.

Over the last 15 years, substantial assistance to education could not prevent the education system from continuing on a downward spiral (Nehme 2023). The research on which this brief is based suggests that there is an immediate need to prioritise educational recovery and to undertake comprehensive systemic reform in order to secure quality education for children residing in Lebanon.

## 2. Impact of compounded crises and war

### Long-term impact of compounded crises

Our data collected across the two stages of Israeli aggression from May 2024 and November 2025 highlight the cumulative impact of crisis on students' education outcomes and wellbeing. Our first survey conducted in May 2024 with 406 Grade 12 students revealed that only 27% of students in private schools and 17% in public schools felt prepared for their official Grade 12 exams, primarily due to prolonged school interruptions and declining education quality.

Additionally, 44% of students reported poor psychological wellbeing, further exacerbating the challenges to learning. The situation was particularly severe for students in southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa, where the early months of the Israeli aggression led to displacement, school closures and a shift to online learning – often under suboptimal conditions due to poor internet access, lack of digital devices, and electricity shortages.

A subsequent survey in August 2024 assessed the financial burdens on families, revealing that private school tuition fees had risen for the third consecutive year, reaching an average of \$3,964 per child. This increase placed significant strain on households, with 67% of parents reporting difficulty paying bills and 65% relying on loans to cover educational expenses.

The aggressions further worsened this situation, with 24% of families reporting displacement and 60% of parents stating that their children's education had been negatively affected. Many families were forced to transfer their children to different schools in safer regions or withdraw them entirely, leading to further accumulation of learning losses.

### Education under fire

Following the escalation of the aggression in September 2024, we explored the readiness of teachers and parents to resume education. The survey findings revealed that income disruptions affected 77% of parents and 66% of teachers, while rising costs of living and displacement placed further strain on households. In regions directly impacted by the aggression, only 38% of parents and 19% of teachers considered education a high priority, compared with 43% of parents and 39% of teachers in less affected areas. Preference for online and hybrid learning was higher in areas facing direct violence due to safety concerns, despite major infrastructure challenges. Only 52% of teachers and 45% of parents surveyed had sufficient electricity for online education, and space constraints further hindered learning, especially for those in shelters.

By the end of November 2024, over 1.3 million civilians were displaced (UNHCR, 2024) and educational facilities across several regions were either severely damaged or repurposed into emergency shelters. This led to school closures and disrupted the education of more than 1 million students, with those residing near the southern border experiencing more severe effects due to the prolonged duration and intensity of the war.

The Israeli aggression intensified pre-existing challenges and learning losses, particularly for vulnerable groups already struggling to access education. Moreover, the aggression caused psychological distress among students, compromised the ability of families to meet basic and educational expenses, and exacerbated existing inequities between regions and between private and public education sectors (Shuayb et al., 2024). Therefore, the combined impact of the ongoing aggression and pre-existing challenges risks triggering a protracted and profound educational crisis – one that could severely undermine the educational prospects of an entire generation and hinder long-term economic recovery.

### **Educational disruptions and their educational and economic consequences**

The compounded crises in Lebanon led to a devastating decline in the educational standards that Lebanon once took pride in maintaining. Based on a desk review and primary data from CLS (Chahine et al. 2023), we estimate that between academic years 2019–2020 and 2024–2025, Lebanese public-school students lost 445 days of education. This represents nearly half of the instructional time they were supposed to receive over this period, as per the 1997 curriculum guidance. For students residing near the front line (areas adjacent to the southern borders of Lebanon), the situation was even more severe, with up to 630 days lost, since many have been unable to attend school since October 2023 due to displacement and infrastructural destruction.

The reductions in teaching days and frequent school disruptions have significantly hindered the delivery of education and exacerbated educational disparities, especially impacting vulnerable groups such as refugees and students in regions directly affected by crises. For students residing near the front line, the situation is even more severe, with up to 630 days lost, as many have been unable to attend school since October 2023 due to displacement and infrastructural destruction. The reductions in teaching days and frequent school disruptions have significantly hindered the delivery of education and exacerbated educational disparities, especially impacting vulnerable groups such as refugees and students in regions directly affected by crises.

Using World Bank simulations (Azevedo, 2020), we estimate that Lebanon’s learning poverty, defined as the share of 10-year-olds who are either out of school or unable to read and comprehend a simple text, has increased by approximately 30 percentage points for public school students due to extended school closures. Among students near the front line, where school interruptions have been most prolonged, learning poverty is likely to have risen by up to 40 percentage points, exacerbating educational disparities between regions and among vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the long-term economic cost of these educational disruptions is substantial. Based on World Bank estimates, each lost school day in Lebanon will result in \$3 million in future economic losses. Therefore, Lebanon’s 445 lost school days could translate to approximately \$1,335 billion in projected economic losses.

The cumulative effect of these interruptions has been profoundly detrimental, leading to an unprecedented accumulation of learning losses. Since the pandemic began in 2020, students in public schools have lost an estimated total of 445 days out of the expected 900 days for a typical six-year period, according to the 1997 curriculum design (Hammoud & Brun, 2025). For students in regions directly affected by conflict, particularly those near the frontline who remain displaced, the total number of lost days could be as high as 630 days over the past six academic years. Additionally, other studies indicate that between 2016 and 2023, Lebanese public school students missed approximately 765 teaching days, showing a chronic disruption to the continuity of their education (Nehme, 2023).

### 3. Shift from humanitarian to development approaches

Lebanon's latest compounding crises disrupted education and exposed and exacerbated long-standing structural injustices and systemic failures. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic collapse, Lebanon's public education system was under severe strain. The COVID-19 crisis did not create these vulnerabilities; rather, it amplified and exposed existing deficiencies such as poor digital infrastructure, inconsistent teacher compensation, and the education sector's chronic dependence on external aid. Crisis upon crisis contributed to an education system in survival mode, with limited attempts at reform.

Our research showed that students, their families and teachers are profoundly affected by financial constraints, displacement and loss. An education system on a downward spiral could not cater for the needs of struggling families and could not support teachers and strengthen their capacities to ensure quality education. Humanitarian aid has been and continues to be crucial for immediate crisis response but fails to provide lasting solutions or structural improvements that can contribute to moving out of crisis.

Consequently, there is a growing need to shift Lebanon's recovery plans towards comprehensive development initiatives that address systemic challenges and tackle the root causes of educational inequities. This shift would require strategic funding reallocation, greater government involvement, and the creation of policies that not only restore but enhance and future-proof Lebanon's educational infrastructure.

By adopting policies centred on reform, transparency and evidence-based decision-making, the government can more effectively integrate its structures into the recovery planning and execution process. This is through a clear commitment to accountability, inclusivity and effective public sector leadership. Such an approach would not only capitalise on the current leadership's strengths but also create a durable framework for future administrations, facilitating coordinated and coherent collaboration among international organisations (NGOs), civil society actors and educational institutions.

Yet, such reforms face multiple barriers, including entrenched political clientelism, frequent changes in leadership, and declining donor trust in governmental systems due to past inefficiencies and transparency issues. While these obstacles are deeply rooted in Lebanon's political and administrative landscape, there are nevertheless emerging opportunities for change. Ongoing public demand for accountability, heightened attention from international donors, and the acute crisis in the education sector have intensified recognition of the urgent need for reform.

To overcome these barriers, one possible way would be to emphasise reforms that are anchored in mechanisms that promote shared accountability, such as joint planning platforms, sector-wide funding arrangements and participation of a broader set of actors in decision making. Strengthening governance in this way would not only enhance MEHE's ability to lead recovery and development processes, but also reduce dependency on parallel, externally managed delivery systems.

### 4. Recovery alongside systems strengthening: Policy recommendations

In order for change to take place, recovery must move beyond restoring the pre-crisis status quo to instead focus on transforming the education system to address persistent structural weaknesses..

Based on CLS's crisis monitoring and the challenges identified, the following policy recommendations can be a starting point.

- **Develop a future-oriented education recovery plan**
  - Design a comprehensive, forward-looking recovery strategy that not only addresses immediate learning loss but also strengthens systemic resilience against future shocks.
  - Integrate resilience-building measures into recovery planning, including infrastructure, digital systems and crisis-prepared pedagogy.
- **Raise the benchmark: reform don't just restore**
  - Set ambitious new benchmarks for learning quality, equity and inclusivity rather than returning to pre-crisis standards.
  - Focus on systemic equity by investing in underserved communities, marginalised groups and displaced learners – especially Syrian refugees – by expanding conditional cash transfers for vulnerable families and directing targeted school grants to the most affected public schools.
  - Actively reduce public-private disparities by prioritising strategic investment in public education.
- **Revitalise public education as a pillar of national development**
  - Launch a national public school revitalisation programme with targeted investments in infrastructure, teacher recruitment and instructional materials, especially in under-resourced areas.
  - Guarantee equitable, stable funding for public schools, aligned with transparent governance and anti-corruption safeguards, which could be monitored when mechanisms for local oversight and reporting are in place.
- **Professionalise and protect the teaching workforce**
  - Reinstate merit-based recruitment and end politicised hiring practices in the public education sector utilising digitised and anonymised processes.
  - Introduce structured, continuous professional development focused on digital skills, inclusive teaching, crisis-sensitive pedagogy, and mental health awareness.
  - Implement a fair and stable salary structure, indexed to inflation, especially for contractual teachers, through annual review committees ensuring wage parity and reducing attrition.
- **Implement inclusive and relevant curriculum reform**
  - Overhaul the national curriculum to embed:
    - 21st-century skills (e.g., creativity, digital literacy, critical thinking).
    - Inclusive content and pedagogies, responsive to the needs of refugees, students with disabilities and diverse linguistic groups.
  - Ensure participatory curriculum design, involving educators, students, parents and community stakeholders.
- **Strengthen educational leadership and governance**
  - Enhance ministerial capacity for strategic planning, cross-sector coordination and evidence-based policy-making.
  - Empower school leaders with greater administrative autonomy and provide specialised training in school management and instructional leadership.
- **Improve data systems for evidence-based policy**
  - Invest in a unified and transparent Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track learning outcomes, resource allocation and equity indicators.
  - Promote inter-agency data-sharing and collaboration with civil society, academia and international partners to inform targeted and inclusive reforms.

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