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EDUCATION AND CRISES: THE COST OF DELAYED RECOVERY IN LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

Lebanon's education sector has suffered immense disruption over the past six years due to overlapping crises that have undermined its capacity to deliver quality education. The most recent crisis is the escalating Israeli aggressions on the country since October 2023, culminating in war between September and November 2024. These challenges have led to school closures, learning losses and economic repercussions that threaten the future of Lebanon's students and workforce. This report examines the impact this has had based on a series of surveys conducted between May and October 2024 of students, parents and teachers across Lebanon. Moreover, it examines the cumulative impact of the disruptions on Lebanon's educational system. Specifically it focuses on the drastic reduction in school days, the consequent learning poverty and learning losses experienced by students nationwide, and the socioeconomic ramifications of this.

Disclaimer

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CERD	Centre for Education Research and Development
CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
ICT	information communication and technology
LBP	Lebanese pound(s)
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPTP	National Poverty Targeting Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon's education sector has suffered immense disruption over the past six years due to overlapping crises that have undermined its capacity to deliver quality education. The most recent crisis is the escalating Israeli aggressions on the country since October 2023, culminating in war between September and November 2024. These challenges have led to school closures, learning losses and economic repercussions that threaten the future of Lebanon's students and workforce.

This report examines the impact this has had based on a series of surveys conducted between May and October 2024 of students, parents and teachers across Lebanon. Moreover, it examines the cumulative impact of the disruptions on Lebanon's educational system. Specifically it focuses on the drastic reduction in school days, the consequent learning poverty and learning losses experienced by students nationwide, and the socioeconomic ramifications of this.

Educational challenges during the initial phase of the Israeli aggression

Our findings highlight the cumulative impact of the crises in Lebanon on students' educational outcomes and wellbeing in light of the different stages of Israeli aggressions since October 2023. Our first survey conducted in May 2024 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 aggression 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 completely, leading to further accumulation of learning losses.

Educational challenges following the escalation of the Israeli aggression

Following the escalation of the aggression in September 2024, we conducted two additional surveys in October 2024 to assess the readiness of teachers and parents to resume education. The 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 conflict-affected areas 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.

Educational disruption and its educational and economic consequences

The series of crises has led to a devastating decline in the educational standards that Lebanon once took pride in maintaining. This begins with economic collapse and political instability, is further compounded by the global lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, and is intensified by severe Israeli aggression. Our analysis estimates that between academic years 2019—2020 and 2024—2025, Lebanese public school students lost 445 days of education. This is 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 frontline (areas adjacent to the southern borders of Lebanon), the situation was even more severe, with up to 630 days lost, since many were unable to attend school since October 2023 due to displacement and infrastructural destruction. The reductions in teaching days and frequent school disruptions 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, we estimate that Lebanon's learning poverty has increased by approximately 30 percentage points for public school students due to extended school closures. This is defined as the share of 10-year-olds who are either out of school or unable to read and comprehend a simple text. Among students near the frontline, 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 results 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.

Key recommendations

Given the ongoing challenges and the history of crises, this report emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive educational reforms. These reforms should focus on rebuilding and enhancing the educational system's resilience to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of potential future disruptions.

Key recommendations include:

(1) Immediate remedial education programmes to recover lost learning
(2) Targeted support for students and teachers affected by trauma
(3) Reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged schools
(4) Accelerated learning initiatives for students with the most severe learning deficits
(5) Investment in digital education infrastructure to ensure learning continuity during future crises

The findings highlight the critical need for Lebanon to prioritise educational recovery. Without swift action, the compounded learning losses and economic ramifications will have consequences lasting generations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Once renowned for its high standards, Lebanon's education sector has been grappling with prolonged and multifaceted crises, intensified by the latest Israeli aggression. This aggression has drastically affected the education sector, causing extensive infrastructural damage, school closures, loss of life and widespread displacements. Over a million civilians were displaced, with many schools either directly damaged or converted into shelters. This has significantly affected children's readiness[1] for education and disrupted the education of countless students, contributing to a growing accumulation of learning losses.

The loss of learning in Lebanon's education system stems from systemic conditions and deep-seated inequities, which have been critically worsened by a series of compounding crises: the Syrian conflict beginning in 2011, the profound economic collapse starting in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion in 2020.

The 2023—2024 Israeli aggression has not only intensified these crises but also highlighted the urgent need to address the educational disruptions, evidenced by an alarming rate of school dropouts, significant declines in learning quality, and disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups, including refugee populations and students with disabilities.

In this report, we collate the results of several surveys and interview campaigns by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) under the umbrella of crisis monitoring. These results are in the seven months between May and November 2024 – a period marked by war in the country. We focus on the readiness for education during compounded crises, as perceived by parents, teachers and 12-year old students of diverse groups.

Our data analysis is in two key timeframes. The first presents data collected in the months preceding the peak of the conflict (May to September 2024). The second analyses data from the second stage of the war (October to November 2024), when Israeli airstrikes intensified and extended beyond the southern border regions to reach Beirut suburbs and other areas across the country. We thus explore how the convergence of multiple crises has shaped the experience of education in Lebanon. The third and final part estimates the number of school days missed in Lebanon from academic year 2019—2020, beginning with the onset of COVID-19, through to the current academic year 2024—2025.

This analysis contributes to our understanding of the impact of prolonged crisis on education, the extent of learning losses, the rise in learning poverty based on the World Bank's simulation, and the projected economic costs of these losses for Lebanon, as estimated by the World Bank. Our objective is to highlight the urgency of addressing the impact of compounded crises on education and consequent loss of learning, as well as the socioeconomic ramifications. We advocate for strategies that ensure educational recovery for students who have experienced significant learning losses, with a focus on inclusivity amidst persistent challenges.

Chapter 2 of the report presents the study methodology; Chapter 3 introduces the crisis context and understanding of loss of learning; Chapter 4 provides an overview of the readiness for education between May 2024 and September 2024, based on survey findings from students and parents; Chapter 5 examines the impact of the latest escalation of Israeli aggression from 28 September to 24 November 2024 by assessing teachers' and parents' readiness for education; Chapter 6 presents a detailed

[1] Readiness refers to children's capacity and preparedness to engage effectively in education, which encompasses a combination of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical factors necessary for learning.

analysis of the cumulative days of schooling lost from the academic years 2019—2020 to 2024—2025 due to various disruptions.

It estimates the learning poverty in Lebanon using World Bank simulations and based on estimated cumulative days of schooling lost. It also explores the socioeconomic consequences of these educational disruptions on Lebanon's economy and society. Chapter 7 concludes the report and offers recommendations for future action.

The report is part of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)-funded Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme and is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world. Lebanon is one of the countries in focus. The data collection for this report was also supported by the Economic and Social Research Council via the project RELIEF 2 (ES/W007835/1), and the ERICC - British Academy Bilateral Research Chair programme.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods approach with: a series of online surveys (quantitative) to assess the readiness and challenges that teachers, parents and students in Lebanon face amidst ongoing crises and disruptions; qualitative interviews with parents and teachers during the war; and an analysis to determine the number of school days missed in Lebanon between 2019 and 2025.

The study was initially planned as three surveys, with accompanying qualitative interviews with Grade 12 students, parents and teachers on the readiness for education amidst compounded crises, accompanied with an assessment of learning loss. However, as war escalated in the country, the original plan could not be completed, hence two surveys of students and parents conducted between May and August 2024, before the aggressions escalated. A second set of two surveys with parents and teachers, accompanied by qualitative interviews, were conducted during the war in October and November 2024. A desk review on learning poverty was then conducted to support the assessment of learning loss.

The four surveys were designed by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) team. Each survey targeted specific stakeholders and addressed distinct aspects of the educational landscape, including the impact of Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis and the latest Israeli aggression. The study covered both the initial phase of the Israeli aggression which began in October 2023 and was concentrated in the South, Baalbek and Bekaa governorates, as well as the escalation in aggression in September 2024, which affected additional areas across the country.

Recruitment for all surveys took place through social media platforms (Facebook, X and Instagram) and was administered using Survey Monkey. To ensure broad representation, the CLS team also leveraged its network of parents, teachers, NGOs and professional organisations to encourage participation from all eight Lebanese governorates.

The first survey, conducted in May 2024, aimed to evaluate the readiness of Grade 12 students for the 2023—2024 official exams that followed prolonged educational disruptions caused by Lebanon's crises. This included the initial phase of the Israeli aggression, which was limited to southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa governorates at the time. The survey captured the challenges posed by school interruptions and learning losses before and during the Israeli aggression. A total of 406 high school (Grade 12)

students participated, with 48% enrolled in private schools and 52% in public schools. The sample was distributed across all eight Lebanese governorates.

The second survey, conducted in August 2024, focused on understanding the persistent challenges faced by families amid Lebanon's ongoing economic and social crises, compounded by the fifth consecutive year of educational instability and the first phase of the Israeli aggression. This survey gathered insights into the barriers to accessing quality education and the financial burdens on families. A total of 2,075 parents participated (95% Lebanese, 4% Syrians and 1% Palestinians), distributed across all eight Lebanese governorates: Mount Lebanon (41%), followed by the North (15%), Beqaa (13%), Beirut (11%), the South (7%), Akkar (6%), Baalbek-Hermel (4%) and Nabatiyeh (3%). Of these parents, 9% had children in preschool, 47% in primary school, 28% in intermediate school and 16% in secondary school. The majority (88%) had children enrolled in private schools, while 6% were in public schools and 6% in tuition-free private schools.

The third and fourth surveys, conducted during October 2024, assessed the readiness of parents, students and teachers to resume education following the escalation of the Israeli aggression in September 2024. These surveys included 622 parents and 529 teachers, totalling 1,151 participants. The sample covered all eight governorates, with the largest proportion of participants residing in Mount Lebanon (39% of teachers and 25% of parents). Conversely, Nabatiyeh had the lowest representation (2% of teachers and 1% of parents). This was likely to be due to high displacement rates and strict security measures in southern regions, which may have discouraged participation.

Among parent participants, 80% were Lebanese, while the remaining 20% included Syrians (16%), Palestinians (3%) and other nationalities (1%). Most parents reported having children in primary school (49%), followed by preschool (12%), middle school (21%) and secondary school (17%). In terms of school enrolment, 61% of parents had children in private schools, 37% in public schools and 2% in UNRWA schools. Among teachers, 61% worked full-time, 77% were female and 56% were aged between 31 and 50. Additionally, 43% taught in public schools, 58% in private schools and 3% in UNRWA schools, with some teachers working across multiple sectors. Data analysis was conducted using STATA and Excel, with cross-tabulations performed to identify key trends and insights.

Table 1. Overview of surveys

Survey	Stakeholder	Sample	Period	Objective
1	Students	406	9 May — 2 June 2024	To evaluate the readiness of Grade 12 students for the 2023—2024 official exams that followed prolonged educational disruptions caused by Lebanon's crises. This included the initial phase of the Israeli aggression, which was limited to southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa governorates at the time.
2	Parents	2,075	6 — 31 August 2024	To understand the persistent education-related challenges faced by families amid Lebanon's ongoing economic and social crises, compounded by the fifth consecutive year of educational instability and the first phase of the Israeli aggression.

3	Parents	622	16 — 31 October 2024	To assess the readiness of parents and students to resume education following the escalation of the Israeli aggression in September 2024.
4	Teachers	529	16 — 31 October 2024	To assess the readiness of teachers to resume education following the escalation of the Israeli aggression in September 2024.

We conducted qualitative interviews during the war in October—November 2025. For teachers, we conducted three focus groups interviews: one with six teachers in the public sector (from the North, Bekaa and Beirut); one focus group interview with two teachers in the private sector from Beirut and Mount Lebanon; and one online focus group interview with five teachers of students with disabilities teaching in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. We conducted five focus group interviews with parents (three with Lebanese and two with Syrian). In addition, we conducted 32 individual interviews (formal and informal) with parents (26 females, 6 males, of which 21 were residing in shelters) and nine interviews with teachers (of which 6 resided in shelters).

The interviews were carried out by community researchers known to the communities they interviewed. When they visited schools operating as shelters, where they observed living conditions, the interviews took the form of informal conversations with residents so as not attract suspicion. We had oral consent from all interviewees based on information we had prepared before interviewing. Finally, we employed a desk review method to understand the broader consequences of crises on education. We conducted a detailed analysis and synthesised data from multiple sources to determine the number of school days missed in Lebanon from academic year 2019—2020, starting with the onset of COVID-19, to current academic year 2024—2025.

Therefore, the report draws on a variety of data sources, including annual reports from the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), data from the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD), and statistics from international organisations such as the World Bank. The analysis was done to help us understand the extent to which learning losses may have accumulated over the past few years, to estimate the increase in learning poverty in Lebanon based on the World Bank's learning poverty simulation, and to estimate the economic costs associated with these losses, as projected by the World Bank's estimates for Lebanon.

Conducting research in conflict-affected settings is essential to ensure that interventions remain responsive to evolving conditions rather than being based on pre-war assumptions (Goodhand, 2000). Thus, necessarily, the research adhered to ethical standards in educational research and research in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (UKRI & UNICEF, no date). This ensured that all data that was used maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees. The study was conducted with respect to the sensitive nature of the information in conflict-affected areas. All interviews have been anonymised, including not disclosing specific locations. Each survey included online consent, and for student participants both assent and consent forms appropriate for their age group were utilised.

Given the complexities of conducting research during wartime, researchers exercised extra caution to minimise any additional stress on participants. Several protective measures were implemented to safeguard those involved in the study, particularly during the latest stages of the research, recognising the heightened security risks in such contexts. The study adopted a community-based research

approach to enhance trust and safety, which has been recognised as effective in conflict settings and is seen as increasing reliability and contextual relevance (Brun, 2013; De Alwis & Hyndman, 2002; Goodhand, 2000). Similarly, only adult participants were included in the later stages of the study, in line with ethical considerations.

Before engaging in interviews or discussions, participants provided oral informed consent, ensuring their voluntary and informed participation. Furthermore, strict confidentiality protocols were maintained to protect participants' identities. No audio recordings were made and no personally identifiable information, such as names, was collected. In shelters, where maintaining privacy was particularly challenging, researchers conducted informal visits instead of formal interviews to minimise risks and uphold participants' comfort and safety.

The study had ethical approval from the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS).

Limitations

Online methods restricted the ability to reach certain people with certain demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and to reach some geographical locations in a manner that was representative. In particular, those most affected by displacement who did not have access to reliable internet or digital devices were not able to participate. Another drawback of the online method was the inability to represent people with disabilities, the refugee population, and the most vulnerable groups residing in Lebanon. However, the qualitative interviews in the second stage of fieldwork could make up for some of those weaknesses, which we return to below.

III. STATE OF EDUCATION, COMPOUNDED CRISES AND LOSS OF LEARNING: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The context for education in Lebanon is one of compounded crises and disruptions that have led to loss of learning. In this section, we set out the background needed for contextualising the findings in the report.

Context of compounded crises and the education system in Lebanon

Lebanon is a deeply unequal society, and disparities have been further exacerbated by a series of prolonged and overlapping crises in recent years (Baumann, 2019; Brun et al., 2021). When Syrian refugees began arriving in Lebanon in 2011, they entered a country already grappling with a deteriorating economic situation (Brun et al., 2021). The accumulation of crises led the World Bank (2021b: xi) to assert that Lebanon was undergoing one of the most severe economic crises globally, potentially ranking among the top ten, or even the top three, since the mid-nineteenth century. The financial crisis, which began in 2019, was intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion. The financial turmoil stemmed from exceptionally high debt levels managed by the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Lebanon, sustained by running a deficit for the past 25 years (Baumann, 2019).

Lebanon remains heavily dependent on remittances, but these have declined over the past decade (Baumann, 2019) due to austerity measures and a global financial crisis. The country is also heavily

reliant on aid, which is currently on a downward trend (Blominvest Bank, 2024). Consequently, poverty levels among all resident groups – Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese –are surging (LCRP, 2023).

COVID-19 affected learning in several ways: (1) access to education was restricted with large disparities among children in accessing online learning (including challenges faced for students with disabilities); (2) quality of education was affected as teachers faced difficulties adapting to online teaching without sufficient training and resources; (3) MEHE was not prepared for the crisis and was not able to provide comprehensive support and coordinate the emergency response (Hammoud and Shuayb, 2021). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2023), 280 educational institutions had been damaged or destroyed in the Beirut Port blast on 4 August 2020, and these had only just been reconstructed by UNESCO 1.5 years after that event.

In terms of education systems and donor initiatives, what may have had the most impact on the public education system in Lebanon in recent years is the Syrian refugee crisis. The arrival of Syrian refugees and how the refugee crisis was managed has placed pressure on infrastructure, housing prices and livelihoods. Most significantly, the education system was not equipped to cater for the roughly half a million school-aged Syrian children who arrived at that time. The solution was a less comprehensive second shift for Syrian refugees across the country. During the academic year 2020—2021, the number of non-Lebanese students enrolled in public schools (including both morning and afternoon shifts) was nearly equal to that of Lebanese students. In terms of enrolment distribution by nationality and shift, approximately 88% of students attending the first shift in public schools — spanning kindergarten, primary and secondary education – were Lebanese, 9% were Syrian, and the remaining 3% comprised Palestinians and other nationalities (MEHE, 2021: 8).

By December 2023, around 27% of children were out of school, including 7% of Lebanese children. Data from the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) indicates that 15% of children (Lebanese) enrolled in the programme have never attended school, with half of them citing financial difficulties as the primary reason (MEHE 2021). According to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2023, during the academic year 2021—22, more than 430,000 out of an estimated 715,000 displaced Syrian children – around 60% therefore – did not have access to formal education. In academic year 2024—2025, participation in education by Syrian refugees has again dropped from 156,000 to 112,000 in the afternoon shift, due primarily to bureaucratic barriers, most notably the requirement of a valid residency permit in addition to the impact of the recent war and displacement. The improved prospects of returning to Syria may also have played a role.C

Furthermore, according to UNRWA (2022), there has been a sharp rise in demand for enrolment in UNRWA schools among Palestinian refugees, mainly due to Lebanon's financial crisis. This surge has left many Palestinian students unable to secure places in Lebanese public and private schools, putting a strain on the capacity of certain UNRWA schools. Finally, according to LCRP (2023), and based on data gathered from secondary sources, approximately 300,000 children up to the age of 17 are living with disabilities. Among these children, 52.2% are Lebanese, 33.8% are Syrian refugees, 3.2% are Palestinian refugees, and 10.8% belong to other nationalities, including migrants. The fact that only 1% of school-aged children with disabilities are attending regular public schools underscores the extremely limited availability of inclusive education across all segments of the population (El Ahmad, 2023).

The Lebanese public teaching body during the academic year 2022—2023 comprised 35,528 individuals. Approximately 45% of public educators (15,947) hold civil servant status and the remaining 55% (19,581) are contracted teachers, dispersed across 1,228 public schools (CERD, 2023). The increase in contract teachers is a result of a halt to recruitment of civil service teachers since 1998 due to

budgetary constraints, and a freeze on new civil servant contracts since 2018. Contract teachers are not subject to administrative oversight and do not enjoy the minimum level of job security (Al-Asmar, 2023). The distribution of contract teachers and civil servants with permanent positions exhibits a skewed concentration of permanent teachers within higher grade levels.

Notably, the majority of secondary school educators (58%) hold permanent positions, whereas primary schools employ nearly double the number of contract teachers compared with permanent staff. The overwhelming majority of teachers within this are female, accounting for 81.53% of the workforce. In the private sector, approximately 47,045 teachers working in private schools and roughly 6,359 working in semi-private schools, also predominantly female, are employed across 325 schools (CERD, 2023).

There is ample evidence that teachers have gone through extraordinarily difficult times with crisis upon crisis affecting the conditions for learning, accompanied by plummeting salary levels (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020; Khalili, 2023). Thus, there has been an enormous pressure on school teachers in Lebanon over several years. Pre-crises, a primary education teacher's average monthly remuneration was around 2 million Lebanese pounds (LBP), equivalent to approximately $1,330. However, due to the economic downturn, this now translates to roughly $100 at today's market rate, making the journey to work cost more than their salaries. The decline in teacher salaries and purchasing power, compounded by high absenteeism rates (especially in urban public schools), also raises concerns about the impact on performance and quality of education.

Both private and public teacher syndicates along with interest organisations for contract teachers have been actively pressuring MEHE to improve working conditions. Teacher strikes are not a new phenomenon in Lebanon; but since the financial crisis, the strikes have been frequent and come alongside school disruptions due to the pandemic and other crises, significantly affecting the number of school days children in Lebanon had access to. For example, in January 2023, public school teachers initiated an open-ended strike that lasted for more than two months (Maalouf, 2023).

The multiple compounded crises of Lebanon affected the education sector deeply. As we will show below, school closures during the early days of protest amidst the financial crisis in academic year 2019—2020 was followed by school closures during COVID-19 which demonstrated that the system and its infrastructure was not prepared for online learning. The height of the pandemic, the Beirut blast and more recently the Israeli aggressions to which we return below, together led restricted the number of school days for children in the country, and affected the public school system in particular.

Impact of loss of learning on schooling outcomes

There have been limited but a few studies that examine learning loss in Lebanon in recent years. The World Bank (2021a) published a report, 'Foundations for Building Forward Better: An Education Reform Path for Lebanon', highlighting the critical state of the educational environment in Lebanon and pointing out the lack of education quality and declining learning levels. This emphasised that the escalation of crises in Lebanon, including the Syrian refugee crisis and other subsequent events, has exacerbated a decline in the country's education. This situation calls for urgent action to halt these compounding setbacks to education and reduce school dropout rates.

Moreover, in September 2022, the "Qitabi 3 Project", funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), released a study, 'Assessing the Performance of Students in Public Primary Schools in Lebanon'. This evaluated second-, third- and sixth-graders in Arabic, foreign languages and mathematics. The results indicated a significant weakness in skills in all three subjects (QITABI, 2020).

Further studies, including a 'Learning Loss' study by CERD in January 2023, have highlighted the significant impact of learning loss on student outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic (CERD, 2024). This research, covering eight governorates and spanning both public and private schools, assessed third- and sixth-graders as representative of different educational phases. It uncovered substantial deficiencies across key subjects: in Arabic, 75% of third graders scored under 67.6%, and in mathematics scores were similarly low, with the highest score not exceeding 71.9%. The study also noted poor performance in written expression in foreign languages.

To add to this body of work, CLS (Chahine et al., 2024) examined the impact of loss of learning on students' learning outcomes. In November 2023, we conducted an assessment involving 272 Grade 10 students across public schools in five Lebanese governorates: Mount Lebanon, Beirut, North, South and Bekaa. The assessment utilised exams from previous official examinations, ensuring the assessment tools aligned with the educational standards previously set by MEHE. The results revealed significant learning deficits, highlighted by low pass rates in key subjects: only 3% of students passed in mathematics, 8% passed in Arabic, and 13% in English (Chahine et al., 2024).

The study uncovered profound deficiencies in basic competencies, particularly in mathematics and language skills, thus illustrating deep-seated learning losses that threaten students' educational continuity and progression. In mathematics, students showed particular difficulty with algebra and coordinate systems and displayed notable gaps in geometry understanding. In English, considerable weaknesses were observed in text comprehension and grammar, with the most significant challenges in written expression. Similarly, in Arabic, students demonstrated notable deficiencies in grammar and substantial challenges in text comprehension, with severe issues in written expression.

These learning deficits were prevalent across all governorates, affecting students irrespective of gender, nationality or previous grade repetition. The study concluded that these fundamental performance gaps stem from a build-up of unresolved learning losses, further compounded by the economic and social crises that have severely disrupted Lebanon's educational system in recent years.

The available studies, conducted over different time periods and across various educational levels in Lebanon, show how the accumulation of learning deficits since the COVID-19 pandemic has continuously worsened and warn of the long-term impacts of unaddressed learning losses on students' learning outcomes. The situation is likely to deteriorate, as we show in the remainder of this report. The Israeli aggression, which started in October 2023, exacerbated losses for many students, particularly those from frontline areas near the southern border. The consequences of unaddressed learning losses are expected to become even more severe in the coming years.

Educational disruptions amid the Israeli aggression

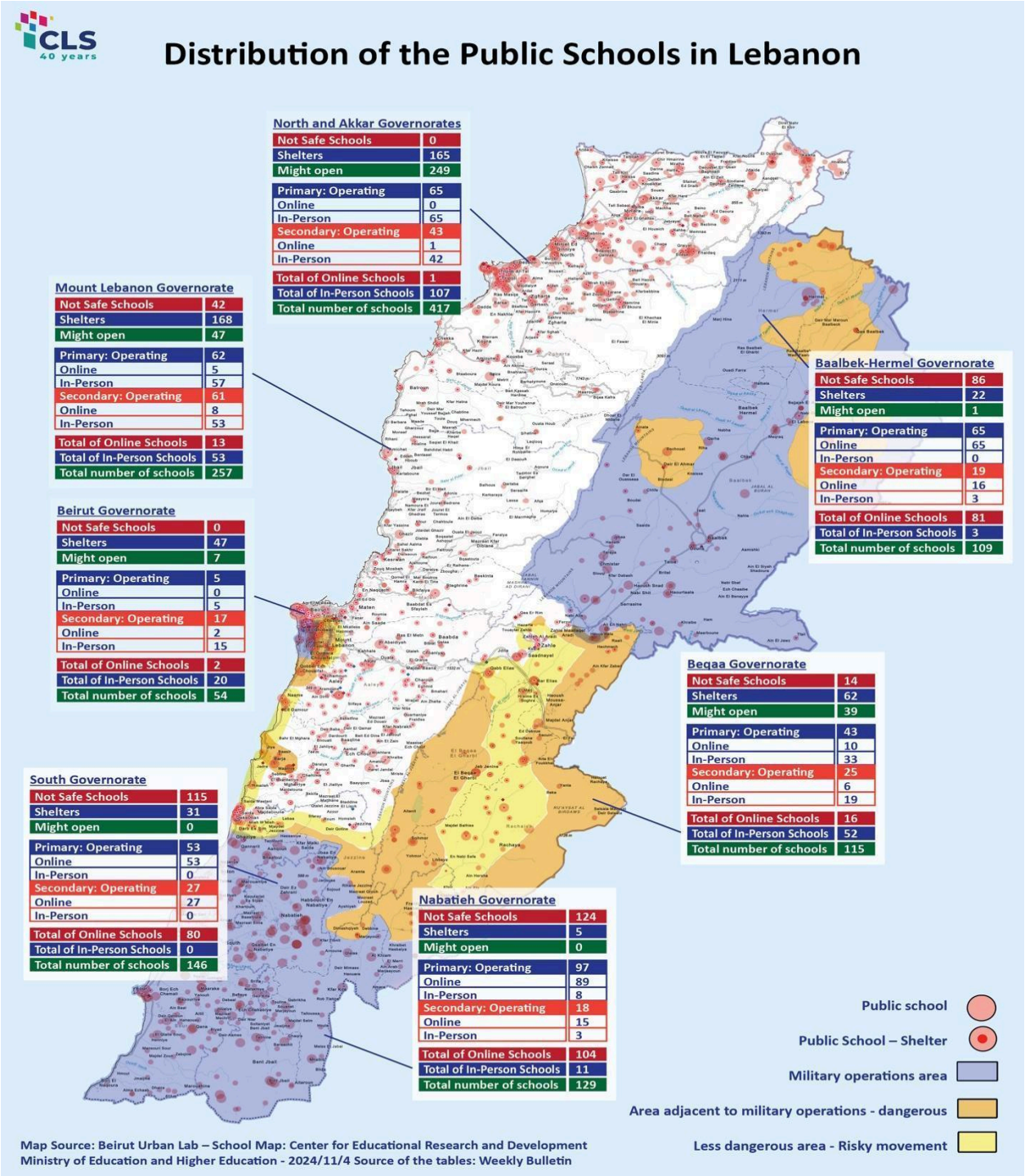
This study spans the time period from May to November 2024 which saw an escalation in the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, particularly from 28 September 2024. The aggressions that had started on October 8 2023 resulted in the displacement of over 1.3 million civilians, the deaths of more than 4,000, and injuries to over 17,000 (OCHA, 2025). The forced displacement severely disrupted the lives of families and teachers, with many facing housing instability, loss of income and rising living costs (Shuayb et al., 2024). In this study, we separate between the data we collected before the escalations into war on 28 September 2024, and the data we collected during the later stages of war in October and November 2024.

Although MEHE allowed private schools to reopen one week after the escalation on 28 September 2024, and announced the reopening of all public schools from 4 November 2024, educational interruptions

persisted for a significant portion of the population, especially those directly affected by the aggression. Many families remained displaced, and numerous schools were repurposed as shelters to host displaced families.

Despite the efforts by MEHE to address the crisis through online learning initiatives, these measures were largely ineffective due to challenges similar to those encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between September and the end of November 2024, education in all its forms was significantly disrupted in four governorates and partially in Mount Lebanon. This left approximately 1.2 million students, predominantly from public schools, as well as a significant number of private school students and those in university and vocational programmes (both public and private), in need of immediate access to quality and inclusive education (UNICEF, 2024).. The impact of closures extended to afternoon shift schools serving refugees, non-formal education centres, and UNRWA schools and institutes.

Figure 1. Distribution of affected public schools



Source: MEHE Factsheet on Education Emergency Response, Reporting Period October 28–November 4, 2024

According to MEHE's weekly bulletin for 7—11 October 2024, the aggression directly impacted approximately 500,000 students, teachers and school staff (MEHE, 2024b). The government's emergency

response fell short of addressing the crisis effectively. It involved using educational facilities as shelters for displaced individuals without an existing strategy to maintain educational activities. Consequently, 638 educational institutions — representing 43% of all schools — were converted into shelters. Furthermore, about 40% of educational institutions were situated in unsafe areas or had hazardous access routes, leading to only 310 educational institutions being operational (MEHE, 2024c).

After the ceasefire was declared in early December 2024, MEHE reported that enrolment figures reached 277,761 students in public schools (MEHE, 2024c). However, 14 schools continued to serve as shelters, 33 were completely destroyed and 349 suffered partial damage. As a result, only 808 schools remained fully operational and unaffected by the aggression (MEHE, 2024d).

Table 2. School assessment on the 'day after'

School assessment on the 'day after' (Preliminary assessment completed by MEHE)				
Region	**Not damaged**	**Damaged partly and cannot fully start teaching**	**Fully damaged and cannot resume teaching**	**Still used as a shelter**
Beirut	27	28	0	0
Mount Lebanon	227	22	2	3
North	345	75	1	0
Baalbek/Hermel	64	43	2	0
Beqaa	89	15	5	7
South	20	114	10	2
Nabatiyeh	36	52	13	2
Total	**808**	**349**	**33**	**14**

Source: MEHE Fact Sheet on Education Emergency Response, Reporting Period November 30–December 9, 2024

During the war, students residing near the frontline and those enrolled in schools that were either damaged or destroyed have mainly been unable to attend classes in person and are continuing their education remotely. Many of these students depend on WhatsApp for their distance learning, compromising the quality of education they receive due to the limited interactive capabilities and

educational resources available through such a platform. Consequently, these students face challenges in accessing comprehensive and engaging educational content.

While the ministry has not released any reports on the current status or specific numbers of these children, previous evaluations conducted by CERD (2020) and various other international and local organisations have highlighted the ineffectiveness of Lebanon's digital education infrastructure. Despite the introduction of a digital platform intended to facilitate online learning during the aggression, numerous challenges persist nationwide. Key issues include the lack of necessary logistical support for digital learning, such as access to tablets, reliable internet connectivity and consistent electricity supply (Shuayb et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a notable deficiency in teacher training and the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation systems, especially in border regions such as South and Nabatiyeh, as well as in refugee shelters.

Syrian students in afternoon shifts began attending school on 7 January 2025. A subsequent decision (Decision No. 1065/M/2024) extended the registration period for non-Lebanese students in afternoon shifts until the end of January 2025. However, in line with a cabinet decision made on 21 November 2024, the Minister of Education issued Memorandum No. 143/M/2024, which mandated that Syrian students without legal residency or UNHCR documentation could not enrol. This policy will significantly affect enrolment figures among refugee students, with the observation coming from key informants in all governorates that Syrian participation in public schools is dramatically reduced: Syrian students have either dropped out, turned to non-formal education options or enrolled in private institutions.

Moreover, for the academic year 2024—2025, MEHE has designated only 93 teaching days for all public schools, with schools operating four days a week and class sessions reduced to 40—45 minutes each. Prior to this adjustment, class sessions typically lasted between 50—55 minutes (Global History Dialogues, 2021). This new schedule does not include strategies to mitigate previous school interruptions, likely exacerbating the accumulated learning losses for all students in Lebanon. This is particularly critical for students residing near the frontline, some of whom have been out of school since October 2023, marking their second academic year without formal education. These conditions continue a pattern of frequent school interruptions and increased learning losses that have been compounding since 2019, a topic we will delve into more deeply in the following chapter.

The war was the last in multiple crises that hit Lebanon and its education system. Thus, the financial crisis, COVID-19, the Beirut blast and war not only became the context, but actively interacted with the conditions of education. As we have shown, the number of students unable to complete education is increasing, there is increased pressure on teachers, and the loss of learning has been dramatic and continued into the year in which we conducted this study. The war has further impacted this downward trend. As the country is beginning its long road to recovery, it is imperative to understand what is the experience and readiness for education to which we now return.

IV. THE READINESS FOR EDUCATION AMIDST COMPOUNDED CRISES — PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' OUTLOOK IN THE INITIAL STAGES OF ISRAELI AGGRESSION

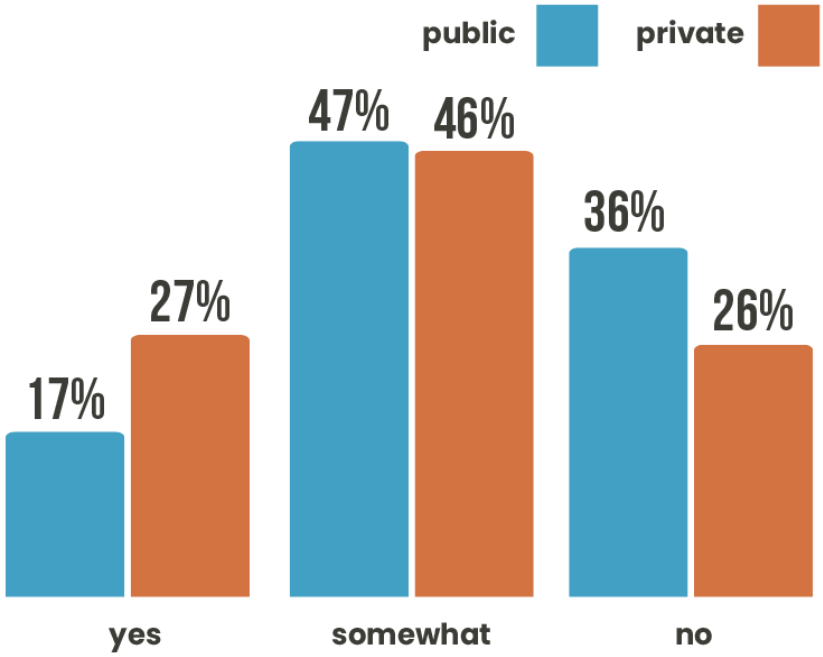
In this chapter, we discuss the results from the initial phase of the aggression, covering insights from the Grade 12 student survey and the parent survey conducted between May and August 2024. These findings shed light on students' readiness for official exams and the broader challenges faced by families during this period.

As shown in Chapter 3, the compounded crises in Lebanon raised significant concerns about the readiness of Grade 12 students to take the 2024 official examinations. This included the ongoing economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Israeli aggression which was limited to southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa in the early months. Given this, we conducted an online survey in May 2024 targeting Grade 12 students across Lebanon. The survey included a sample of 406 high school students, with 48% from private schools and 52% from public schools, distributed across all eight Lebanese governorates, including southern Lebanon, Baalbek and the Bekaa. The findings highlighted the severe challenges faced by students in preparing for their official exams, and the broader implications for their educational future.

Students' readiness for official examinations and future educational stages

Our survey results revealed a concerning lack of readiness among students for the official exams. Only 27% of students in private schools and 17% in public schools reported feeling prepared to take the exams.

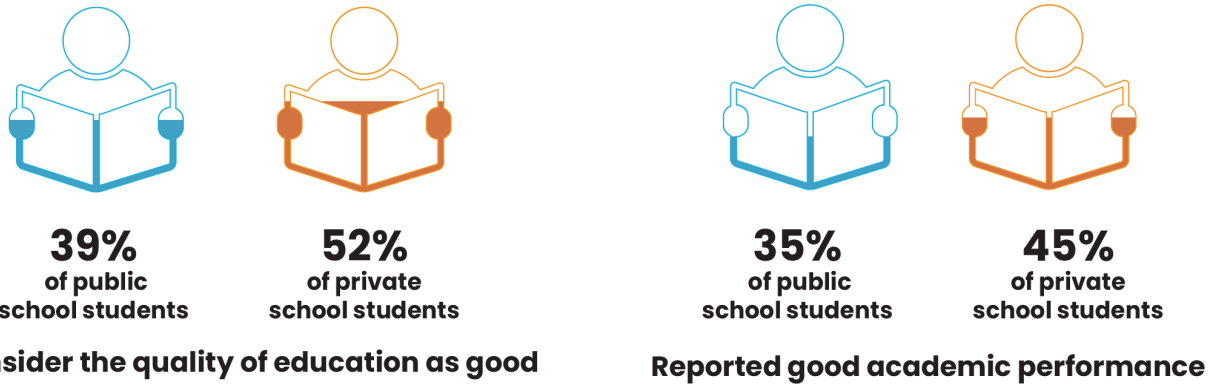
Figure 2. **Percentage of students ready to take the official exam**



This lack of readiness has been attributed to the accumulation of learning losses, as indicated by 73% of students participating in the study. It may also be due to other factors, such as the continuous deterioration in the quality of education in both private and public schools, which in turn negatively affects student performance. For instance, only 39% of public school students and 52% of private school students considered the quality of education in their schools to be good for academic year 2023—2024, compared with 40% and 68%, respectively, in the previous year (Hammoud, 2023a).

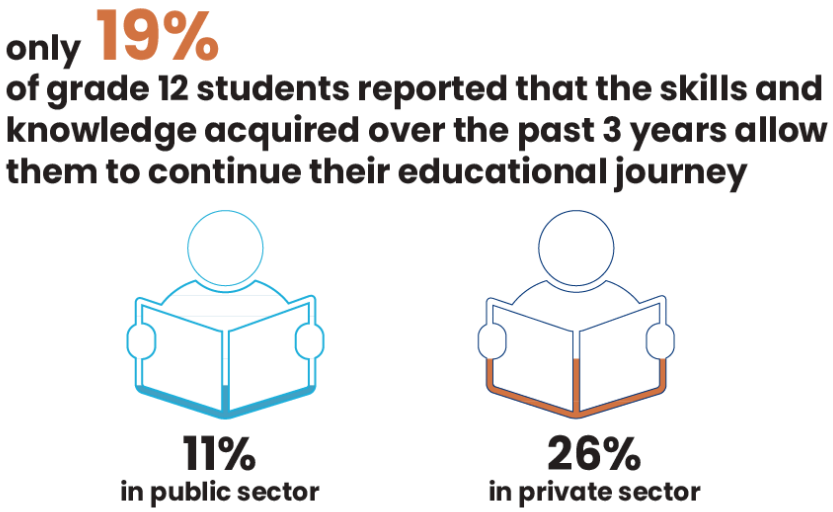
Similarly, academic performance has been affected, with only 35% of public school students reporting good academic performance compared with 45% of private school students. This disparity highlights the growing gap between public and private education in Lebanon. Furthermore, an assessment conducted by CLS (Chahine et al., 2024) involving 272 Grade 10 public school students across five governorates revealed low pass rates in key subjects, whereby only 3% of students passed their mathematics exam, 8% passed in Arabic, and 13% in English.

Figure 3. Quality of education and its impact on academic performance



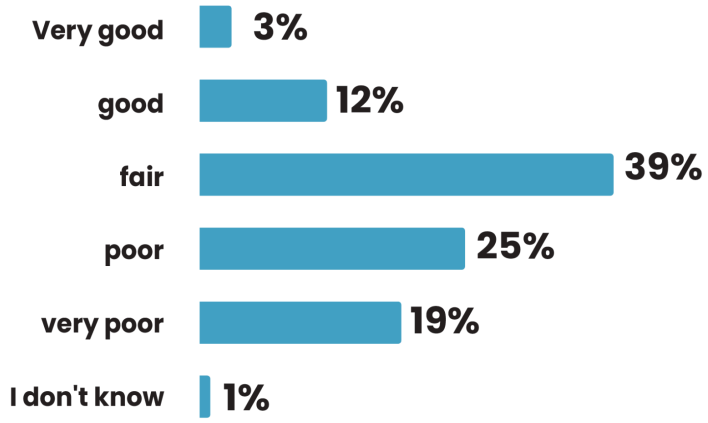
The survey also revealed a decline in students' confidence in their ability to continue their educational journey. Only 19% of Grade 12 students believed that the knowledge and skills they had acquired over the past three years would enable them to pursue further education. This marked a decrease from 21% in the previous year (Hammoud, 2023a), indicating a further decline in the education system's effectiveness in preparing students for future academic stages.

Figure 4. **Impact of the decline in quality of education on future education**



Moreover, the compounded crises have also taken a toll on students' psychological wellbeing. Our survey revealed that 44% of Grade 12 students reported poor psychological wellbeing, with 25% describing it as poor and 19% as very poor.

Figure 5. **Students' psychological wellbeing**



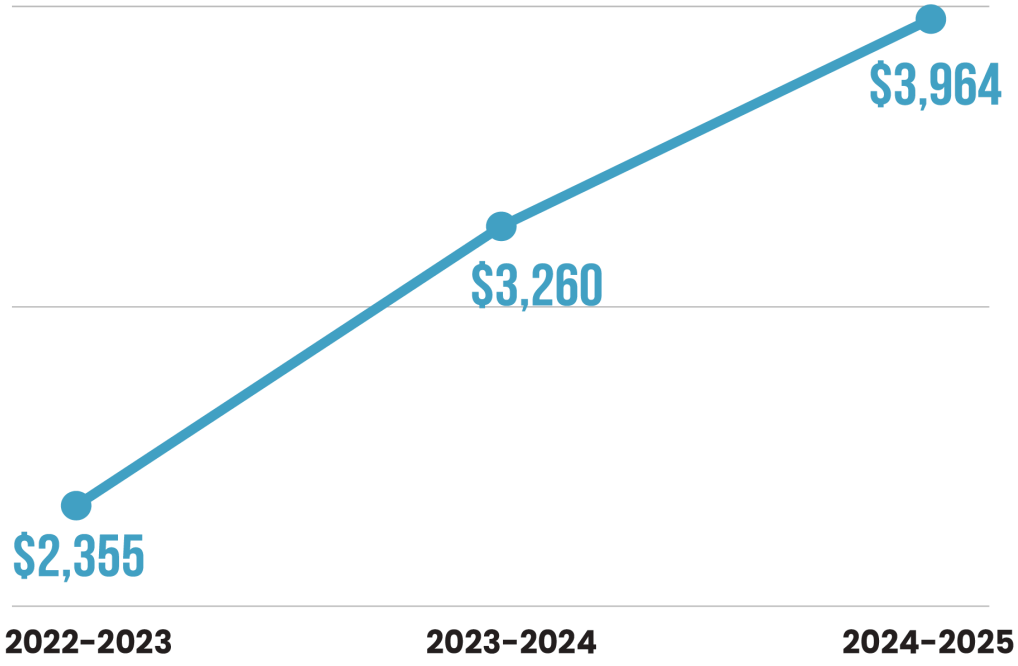
Financial burdens and tuition Increases

Since the onset of the economic crisis, tuition fees have increased significantly every year and academic year 2024—2025 marked the third consecutive year of substantial hikes. We therefore conducted an online survey in August 2024 which engaged 2,075 parents across all eight Lebanese governorates and provided critical insights into the persistent difficulties faced by families amidst ongoing economic and social crises, as well as the impact of the early months of the Israeli aggressions, marking a fifth consecutive year of educational instability in Lebanon.

Parents reported significant increases in private school tuition fees for the third consecutive year, with the average annual tuition fee, including transportation costs, rising to $3,964 per child. This marked an

increase from $3,620 in academic year 2023—2024 (Hammoud, 2023b) and $2,355 in academic year 2022—2023 (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2022).

Figure 6. Average annual tuition and transportation cost for one child in private school

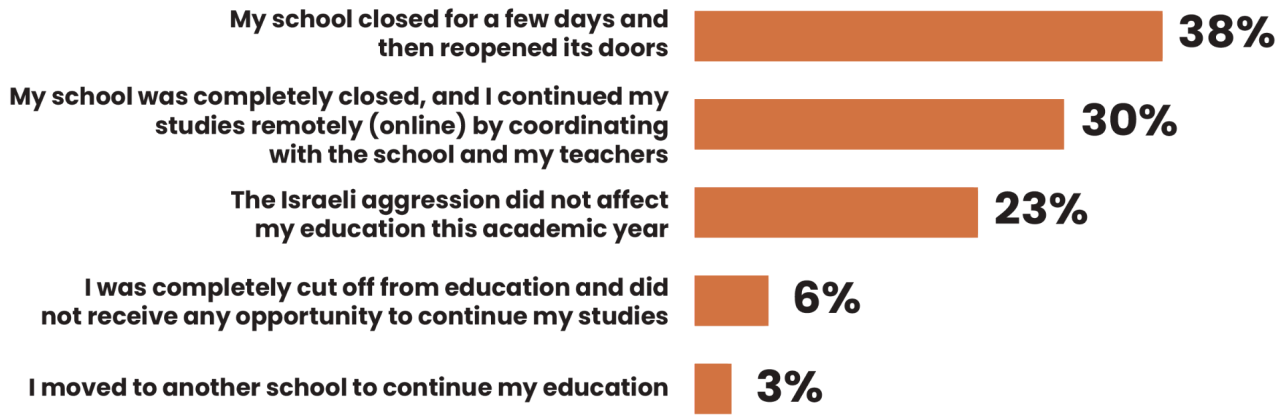


This increase places a heavy financial burden on families, especially when considering that the average monthly household income reported by parents was $855 in 2024. While this represents an improvement from last year's average monthly household income of $463 (Hammoud, 2023b), it remains insufficient to cover the soaring costs of living and education. As a result, 67% of parents reported that they always struggle to pay their bills and 65% admitted to borrowing money to cover household expenses and their children's tuition fees. Moreover, 30% of parents transferred their children from private to public schools, with 84% attributing this move to their inability to afford private tuition fees. This trend of migration from private to public schools due to parents' inability to afford private tuition fees has been ongoing since the onset of the financial crisis (Hammoud et al., 2021; Hammoud & Shuayb, 2022; Hammoud, 2023b).

Impact of the early Israeli aggression on students in the South, Baalbek and Bekaa

Students in southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa faced unprecedented challenges because they were in areas that were among the first to be impacted by the Israeli aggression. Our findings revealed that, among the surveyed students, the aggression displaced 36% of Grade 12 students and disrupted the learning process of 60% of students, either partially or completely. Specifically, 38% of students reported temporary school closures, while 30% resorted to online learning after their schools were completely closed. In addition, 6% of students reported being completely cut off from education, with no opportunity to continue their studies.

Figure 7. **Impact of the Israeli aggression on students in the South and Baalbek**

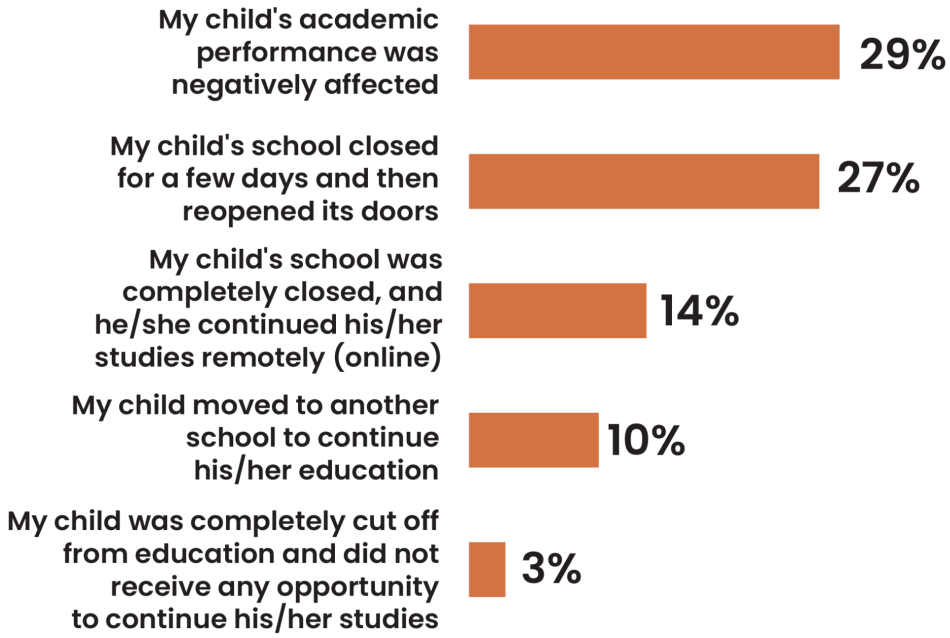


This dire situation worsened significantly for the majority of students across Lebanon after the aggression escalated in September 2024, reaching other regions, including Beirut and its southern suburbs. The broader impact of this escalation will be discussed in detail in later sections of this report.

Impact of the early months of the Israeli aggression on education — parents' perspectives

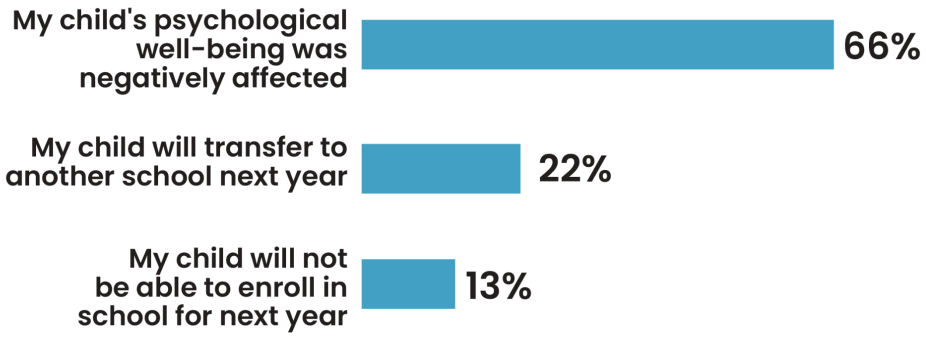
The parent survey shed light on the impact of the early months of the Israeli aggression on education in Lebanon before the September 2024 escalations. In regions affected by the early months of the aggression, 24% of families reported being displaced and 60% of parents stated that the aggression had a negative impact on their children's education. When asked about the previous academic year (2023—2024), 10% of parents said they had to move their children to different schools because of the aggression, while 14% reported that school closures led to online learning. Additionally, 27% of the parents indicated that their child's school briefly closed and then resumed, causing further educational disruptions. Moreover, nearly one-third of parents (29%) believe that the aggression negatively affected their child's academic performance.

Figure 8. Impact of the Israeli aggressions on children's education for the academic year of 2023—2024, as seen by their parents



When asked about the upcoming academic year (2024—2025), 22% of parents reported that they had transferred their children to different schools due to the aggression, and 13% reported that their children will not be enrolling for the upcoming academic year. However, the situation has proven to be far more severe than anticipated, as the escalation of aggression in September 2024 impacted over 1 million students across the country. Many of these students remain displaced and unable to attend school, with those in frontline areas at risk of missing up to two full academic years by the end of academic year 2024—2025.

Figure 9. Impact of the Israeli aggressions on children's education for upcoming academic year 2024—2025, as seen by their parents



Amid these challenges, only 23% of parents expressed confidence that their child will be able to continue their education, while the majority (77%) remained uncertain about their child's educational future. This uncertainty was further compounded by the fact that 10% of parents reported having at least one child under 18 who has dropped out of school, with the majority of these dropouts being males

(66.98%). Furthermore, two-thirds of parents (66%) reported that the early months of aggression had adversely affected their children's psychological wellbeing, highlighting the deep emotional toll of the aggression on students.

Impact of crisis and state of readiness for education amidst compounded crises — before the escalation of war

The surveys conducted with Grade 12 students for their official exams showed profound consequences of unaddressed learning losses among Lebanese students, marked by a notable lack of preparedness for these exams. A significant number of students did not feel prepared to sit for their exams, largely due to substantial learning deficits that had accumulated and remained unaddressed over the previous four years. Additionally, there was a concerning decline in students' confidence in their academic abilities, knowledge and skills, many feeling that the learning they had acquired over the past three years was insufficient to continue their education.

The lack of preparedness poses a significant challenge for these students as they consider advancing to post-secondary education that requires a solid foundation of prior learning and skills. Similarly, parents expressed concerns about the rising costs of education and their inability to secure adequate schooling for their children.

For both parents and students, the early stages of the aggression had significantly disrupted students' education in a situation that was only going to get worse in the ensuing months, to which we now turn.

V. Educational Challenges Following the Escalation of the Israeli Aggression

The previous survey findings focused on a period when the Israeli aggression was primarily limited to southern Lebanon, Baalbek and Bekaa governorates. However, the situation escalated significantly beginning on 28 September 2024 as the aggression expanded to broader geographic areas, including the southern suburbs of Beirut. This escalation led to the displacement of over 1.3 million civilians, more than 4,000 deaths, and over 17,000 injuries (OCHA, 2025). The forced displacement severely disrupted the lives of families and teachers, with many facing housing instability, loss of income, and rising living costs (Shuayb et al., 2024).

In response to this escalation, we conducted two additional online surveys in the time period 15–31 October 2024 targeting teachers and parents to assess how the aggression has impacted them and students, as well as their readiness to resume educational activities. The surveys also aimed to identify which educational modalities were most feasible and preferable in Lebanon amidst the ongoing conflict. During the same time period, as mentioned in Chapter 2, we conducted qualitative interviews and observations with parents and teachers. This chapter presents the main results from this research.

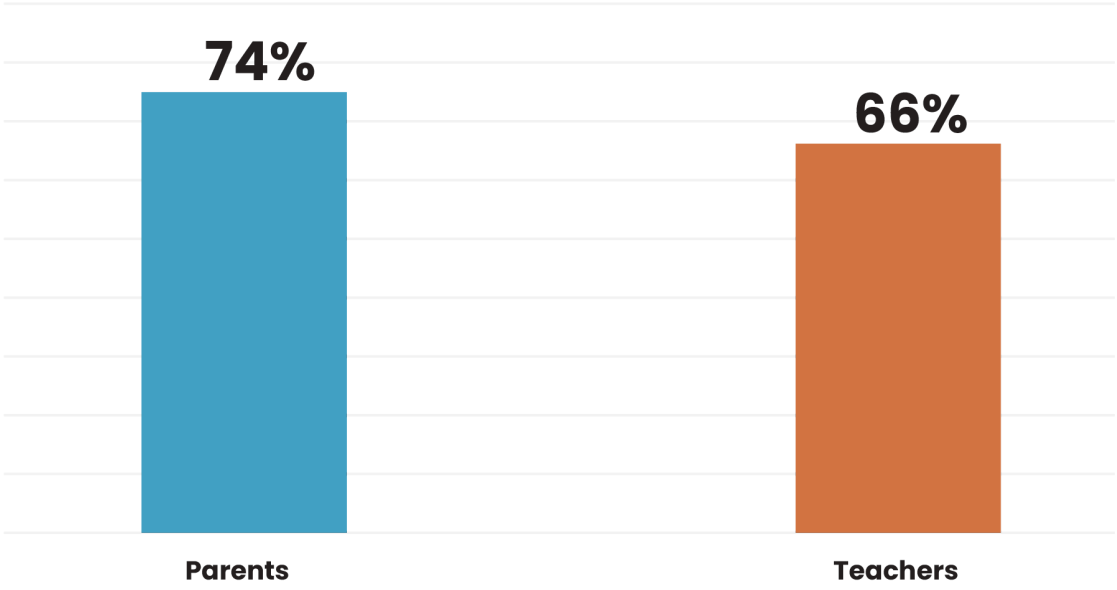
It is important to emphasise that both Syrian and Lebanese families experienced displacement, though the degree of displacement, conditions and coping strategies differed for each. Syrian families often lived in tents or temporary housing with restricted resources, meanwhile Lebanese families had to rely on friends or community connections for housing in crowded or unfamiliar areas. For instance, our parent survey revealed that households that hosted displaced individuals reported an average of 3.6

persons per room. Syrian parents expressed greater concerns than Lebanese parents about safety (within tented settlements), and the instability of housing due to eviction risks.

Income disruptions and increased financial burden for parents and teachers

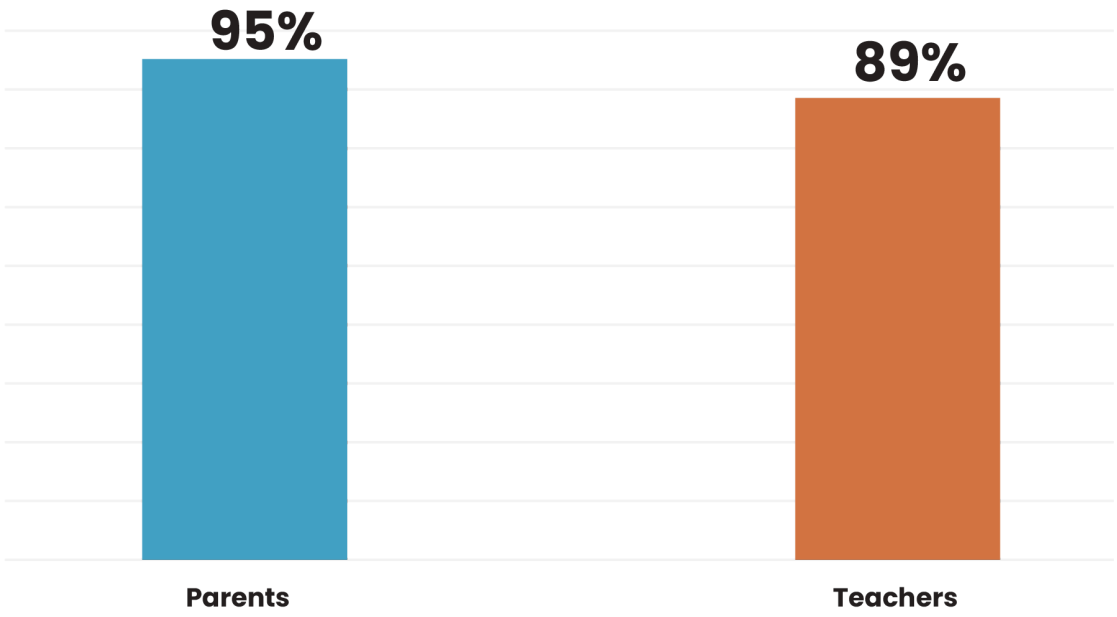
Our survey findings revealed that the Israeli aggression has significantly impacted the financial stability of families and teachers. For instance, 74% of parents and 66% of teachers lost part of their income due to the aggression.

Figure 10. Participants who lost part of their income due to the Israeli aggression



This disruption was particularly severe for parents who were employed or ran businesses in impacted regions and for contracted teachers whose salaries were completely cut off following school closures. Additionally, the cost of living surged dramatically, with 95% of parents and 89% of teachers reporting increased household expenses as a result of displacement. These financial strains were compounded by rising prices for necessities and rent, further aggravating the economic burdens on affected households.

Figure 11. Participants who reported that the cost of living has increased as a result of the Israeli aggression



The qualitative interviews largely confirmed the survey results. Across both Syrian and Lebanese families, the loss of income and increased living expenses were central themes. For Syrians, the loss of work opportunities left families struggling for basic needs, such as food, and they highlighted an urgent need for financial assistance. Lebanese parents, especially public sector employees, faced uncertain employment and challenges in securing basic resources like winter clothing and school supplies. Similarly, across the interviews, teachers expressed significant concern over the war's impact on financial stability due to a reduction in income compounded by a depletion of savings and increased costs for essential needs.

Uncertainty was most pressing among contract teachers who would only be paid for the teaching they were able to do. Hence, postponing the school year and suspending the second shift for Syrian refugees until January 2025 represented a significant loss of income for contract teachers.

Readiness for resuming education

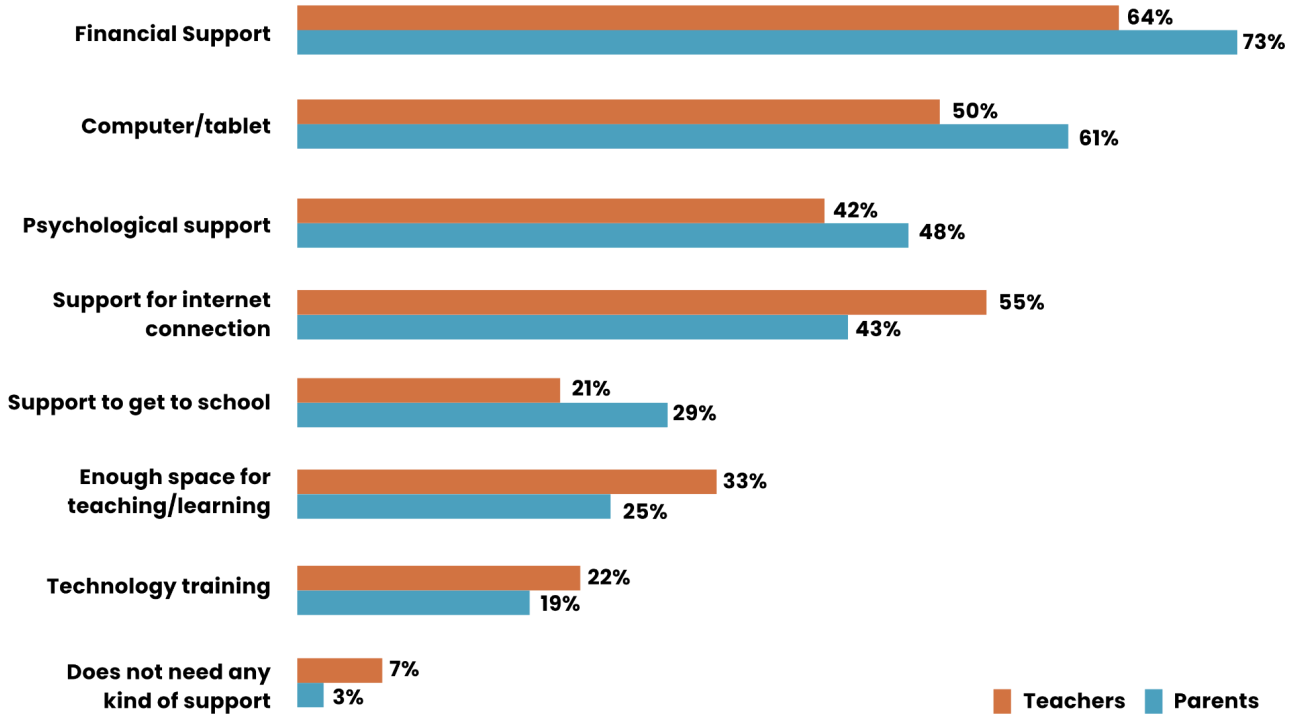
In regions not directly impacted by the Israeli aggression, 43% of parents and 39% of teachers viewed education as a high priority. Among those residing in areas directly affected by the aggression, the proportion of parents who considered education a high priority remained relatively stable at 38%. This showed that parents continued to prioritise their children's education, despite the difficult circumstances. In contrast, the proportion of teachers who viewed education as a high priority dropped to 19%. Similarly, our findings revealed a generally higher immediate readiness for resuming education among parents (66%) and teachers (58%) in areas not directly affected by aggression than those living in directly affected areas (28% for teachers and 41% for parents).

Table 3. **Priority of education**

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

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

Figure 12. **Type of support needed to resume education**



The survey showed significant differences between respondents living in areas directly hit by the Israeli aggression and those outside those areas. In the more fine-grained insights from the qualitative interviews, we also found some important differences in readiness for education among families displaced and living in shelters and those displaced living in rented accommodation or with family and friends. Living in rented accommodation or with family or friends represented a more stable environment with relatively more privacy and more conducive conditions for education.

Families in shelters frequently experienced overcrowding, shared spaces and limited privacy that added strain to families and children. They also lacked basic amenities that made it challenging to attend to education. Generally, they viewed education as secondary to immediate survival needs.

Moreover, they expressed apprehension about school resumption amidst the chaos and felt that children were not ready for structured learning due to the unstable environment.

Teachers were eager to fulfil their professional obligations, but nevertheless expressed scepticism about both in-person and online learning, citing infrastructural challenges such as electricity shortages, limited internet and lack of resources. Thus, teachers indicated a conditional willingness to resume teaching if foundational resources, including fair salaries, safety assurances, and essential teaching tools (e.g., laptops, stable internet) were provided. Without these provisions, they felt unprepared to effectively support students. There was also a sense of powerlessness in teachers' ability to support educational activities due to inadequate resources, highlighting a broader systemic issue of under-resourced public education.

Preferred Educational Modalities During the Aggression

Our survey findings highlighted differences in educational modality preferences between residents of areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression and those in less affected regions. There was a marked shift from a preference for online learning to in-person learning as the severity of the aggression's impact decreased. Specifically, 64% of teachers and 42% of parents from directly affected areas preferred online learning, compared with only 24% of teachers and 15% of parents in areas not directly impacted. Conversely, in-person learning was favoured by 63% of parents and 45% of teachers in areas not directly affected, compared with 32% of parents and 19% of teachers in areas experiencing direct aggression.

Table 4. Preferred form of education during war

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

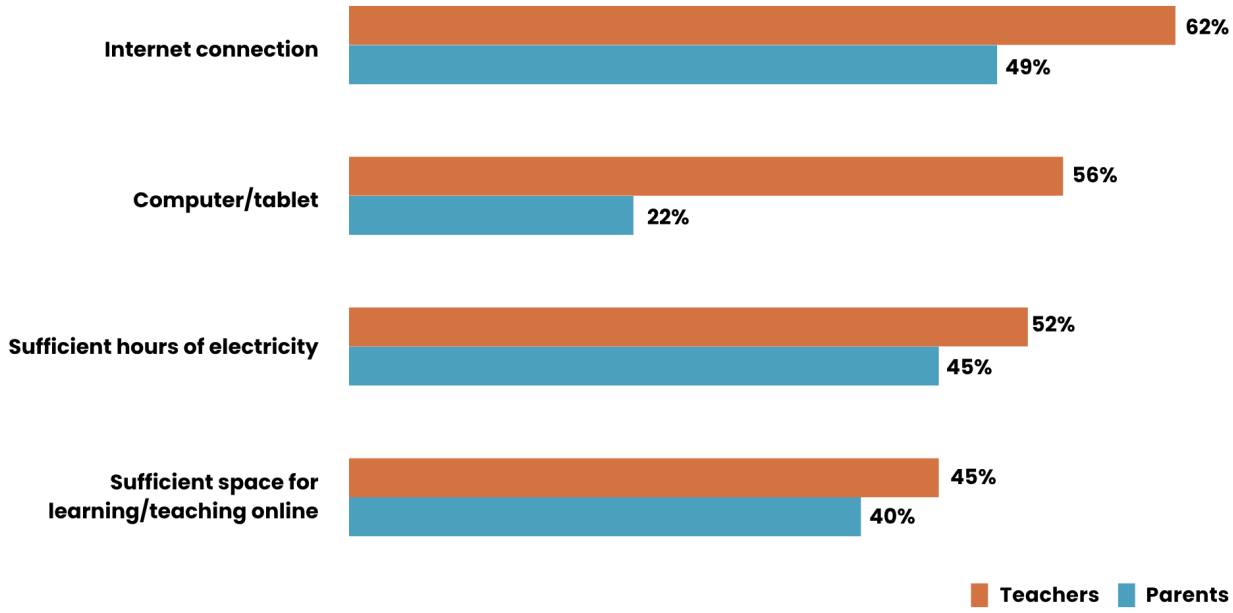
Note: Residents from areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression might or might not be displaced

These preferences were greatly influenced by safety, stability and previous experiences. For instance, parents generally showed a stronger preference for in-person learning than teachers across all regions, possibly due to the perceived social and developmental benefits of traditional schooling environments. and the limitations of previous online learning experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. Conversely, the strong preference for online and hybrid models among residents from areas directly affected by the aggression highlighted the greater need for flexible educational solutions in a context of ongoing security and safety risks. Similarly, the interest in online learning was deemed more positive by parents in rented accommodation than in shelters, due to the resources available to them, such as connectivity and tablets.

Lebanon's significant challenges with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, with several significant obstacles hindering access and meaning a deterioration in the quality of education, remained pertinent and were aggravated during the aggression. For instance, connectivity issues

persisted, with only 62% of teachers and 49% of parents reporting reliable internet access. Additionally, essential devices were scarce, with just 56% of teachers and 22% of parents possessing a computer or tablet. In interviews, teachers were sceptical towards online learning, considering it unfeasible without reliable internet, and noted that local schools were repurposed as shelters, leaving no space for in-person classes.

Figure 13. Availability of means for online learning



Challenges were exacerbated for displaced families who left behind crucial items, further limiting their ability to engage in online learning. Additionally, a significant portion of the population continued to struggle with power availability – only 52% of teachers and 45% of parents reported having sufficient electricity to facilitate online education. Space constraints further complicated the situation, with only 45% of teachers and 40% of parents having adequate room for educational activities, a challenge even more prominent for those living in shelters.

These persistent obstacles in accessing reliable internet and electricity for online learning have not only influenced educational modality preferences but also contributed to educational disruptions during the aggression. This highlights the compounded impact of infrastructure limitations such as energy and ICT, and different crises-related barriers to continuity of learning.

In the following sections, we examine the educational disruptions caused by the recent aggression alongside other interruptions that have affected Lebanon's education system since 2019. This comprehensive analysis will provide a clearer understanding of the cumulative learning losses and the implications for Lebanon's educational future.

Barriers to education amidst war: The need for financial, psychological and professional support

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

Through the qualitative interviews we established that children in rented accommodation and living with families and friends were more likely to have stable routines and some level of developmental engagement – that is, participation in activities supporting their cognitive, emotional or social development – even if limited. Even though there were significant strains on families in these conditions, it was clear that parents were able to maintain stronger emotional connections with their children than parents in shelters.

In shelters, parents reported that children often displayed behavioural and emotional problems due to unstructured routines and frequent disruptions. Children had limited opportunities for social interaction beyond the shelter, leading to heightened stress, aggression, and sometimes regressive behaviours such as hair-pulling and increased dependence on mobile phones. This was instead of participating in activities that would better support their cognitive, emotional, and social development — such as those experienced by children residing in rented accommodation or living with families and friends..

Shelter families consistently voiced a critical need for psychological support, both for children and parents. Many parents in shelters felt emotionally exhausted and expressed difficulty managing their children's behavioral issues, which were exacerbated by crowded living conditions and lack of structured activities. Some parents in rented accommodation or living with family or friends stated that they could sometimes access limited psychosocial support through local networks or non-governmental organisation (NGO) services, even if inconsistently. They were also more likely to focus on their children's mental health and emotional needs, as they had a relatively stable environment.

In qualitative interviews, teachers generally expressed a very low trust towards MEHE and its role in supporting. They emphasised the importance of psychosocial support for students facing trauma from displacement. They suggested incorporating recreational and therapeutic activities into the curriculum to help students cope, indicating a need to address mental health as part of the educational framework in shelters. Some teachers expressed concern for students with learning disabilities, who faced unique challenges in a disrupted educational setting. They highlighted that these students required specialised support but that they could not find this during the war which exacerbated their learning difficulties and isolation.

Many teachers – particularly those living in shelters – found it hard to prioritise teaching responsibilities under current conditions and emphasised the need for more psychosocial and emotional support – for teachers as well as students. Teachers living in rented accommodation or with families and friends were generally more in favour of resuming education and felt that schooling should remain a priority,

even if current demands for salary and stability remained unmet. Their relatively stable settings gave them more confidence in handling teaching responsibilities despite existing challenges

VI. EDUCATIONAL DISRUPTIONS BETWEEN 2019 AND 2025

Over the past decade, Lebanon has witnessed a significant decline in the number of actual school days, severely impacting the quality of education. According to the World Bank, the standard academic year in Lebanon includes 150 school days (Azevedo, 2020), which is relatively close to the global benchmark of 180 school days set by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. However, due to a combination of administrative decisions, financial constraints and recurring crises, the number of school days in Lebanon has drastically decreased.

The reduction in school days began during academic year 2016—2017 when Minister of Education Elias Bou Saab issued a decision to reduce the academic year from 170 to 120 school days (Decision No. 21/M/2016). According to Nada Oweijane, the former Director of CERD, this effectively resulted in a 20%-25% reduction of the curriculum content.[2] This, accompanied by a 30% cut in lessons, knowledge and competencies, was justified as a cost-saving measure amid Lebanon's economic challenges. But it marked the beginning of a downward trend in the education sector. By academic year 2024—2025, the number of actual school days had plummeted to 92 days due to reasons outlined below, representing only 50% of the global average and a significant departure from the 170 days originally specified in the 1997 curriculum.

Between 2019 and 2025, this reduction in school days was exacerbated by a series of overlapping crises, including the 17 October 2019 uprising, which led to widespread protests and instability, disrupting school operations and academic calendars. This was followed by weeks of public school teacher strikes across different academic years, as educators demanded salary adjustments and protested poor working conditions, further destabilising the education system. The COVID-19 lockdown then forced prolonged school closures and a sudden shift to remote learning, exposing significant gaps in infrastructure (i.e. energy and ICT), digital readiness and equitable access to education. The Beirut port explosion in August 2020 compounded these challenges, damaging schools and displacing students and teachers living near the port. Finally, the Israeli aggression, starting in October 2023, has caused additional nationwide disruption.

The cumulative loss of school days since 2017 has profoundly impacted Lebanon's education quality. Public school students now receive at best less than half the instructional time than previous generations. These reductions and interruptions are leading to increased learning losses and a sharp decline in the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills. This trend undermines the country's educational standards and widens the gap between Lebanon and OECD countries, where students benefit from a more stable and consistent academic calendar.

[2] According to Nada Oweijane, former Director of CERD: "Following the development of the 1997 curriculum, it became evident that its implementation required more instructional days than allocated. Additionally, some necessary resources were unavailable in schools. As a result, several sections and units across all subjects were suspended, a practice commonly referred to as 'curriculum reduction'. The implementation of certain procedural subjects was also halted, with decisions on their instruction left to individual schools based on their ability to provide the required resources. Consequently, approximately 20 to 25% of the curriculum content was discontinued at that time." (Decision No. 21/M/2016).

Estimating lost schooling days in Lebanon's public schools

In this section, we estimate the cumulative number of lost schooling days by students between academic years 2019—2020 and 2024—2025 due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing financial crises and recent Israeli aggression. We analysed the number of actual in-person teaching days in these years against the standard 150[3] active schooling days per year, as specified in the 1997 curriculum design. This is crucial since the duration of school closures correlates strongly with the extent of learning loss, significantly affecting student achievement, especially in reading and mathematics (Kennedy & Strietholt, 2023; Maldonado & De Witte, 2021).

Therefore, assessing the cumulative number of lost schooling days provides a reliable indicator of the overall learning losses experienced by public school students in Lebanon in these years.

The World Bank reports indicate that Lebanese public school students faced substantial disruptions over four academic years (2019—2020 to 2022—2023), receiving approximately 270 days of in-person teaching compared with the expected 600 days across a typical four-year period. This results in an estimated 330 lost schooling days.

In academic year 2022—2023, according to MEHE, there were only 92 effective schooling days (4 instructional days per week)[4] out of the 150 days specified in the 1997 curriculum design, meaning students in public schools missed 58 days. Furthermore, during academic year 2022—2023, only 30% of 11,000 students from villages near the frontline were able to find alternative schooling, while the remaining 70% missed all 150 days (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2024).

For academic year 2024—2025, MEHE reported that public schools would operate for only 93 days,[5] out of the 150 days specified in the 1997 curriculum design, meaning a loss of 57 days. Additionally, the escalated aggression in September 2024, coinciding with the start of the academic year, affected a greater number of students residing in southern Lebanon. The expansion of the aggression to more villages north of the border prevented a significant percentage of these students from enrolling in any form of schooling.

Many of these students are still out of school due to displacement and the inability to return to their villages, which were completely destroyed by the Israeli aggression. Potentially, they will miss the entire academic year or the equivalent of 150 effective days of schooling as a result.

To summarise the total number of effective schooling days lost in public schools since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: there were 330 lost schooling days from 2019 to 2023, 58 lost schooling days in academic year 2023—2024, and 57 lost schooling days during academic year 2024—2025. This totals 445 schooling days lost for public school students since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, out of the expected 900 days across a typical six-year period of school, as specified in the 1997 curriculum design. For students residing in directly affected regions, particularly those near the frontline, who are still displaced and unable to return, the total number of lost schooling days could be as high as 630 over the past six academic years.

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[3] Although the 1997 curriculum was reportedly designed around 170 school days per year, the World Bank reports an estimate of 150 days, which aligns more closely with the actively achievable number of days due to public holidays.

[4] For academic year 2021—2022, four in-person teaching days per week were adopted to alleviate the financial burden on students' families and educational staff, particularly regarding transportation costs. In light of the ongoing financial crisis and its escalating impacts, this arrangement has remained necessary and continues to be implemented.

[5] MEHE internal memorandum, specifying instructional days each month from December 2024 to June 2025 as follows: December: 10 days, January: 15 days, February: 15, March: 14 days, April: 14 days, May: 15 days, and June: 10 days, totaling 93 instructional days.

Estimating learning poverty

Learning poverty is defined as the condition where children are either out of school or unable to read and understand a simple, age-appropriate text by the age of 10 (Azevedo, 2020). Therefore, this concept incorporates two deprivations: schooling (whether the child is enrolled in school) and learning (whether the child meets minimum reading proficiency levels). If a child fails to satisfy either criterion, they are classified as being in learning poverty, as presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Contingency table of schooling and learning deprivations and learning poverty classification

		Learning deprivation	
		No	**Yes**
Schooling deprivation	**No**	**Not school-deprived and not learning-deprived = Not learning-poor**	**Not school-deprived and learning-deprived = Learning-poor**
	Yes	**School-deprived and not learning-deprived = Learning-poor**	**School-deprived and learning-deprived = Learning-poor**

Source: Learning Poverty Measures and Simulations, J. Azevedo, World Bank

We used the World Bank's simulations to measure learning poverty during COVID-19 to estimate the rise in learning poverty in Lebanon (Azevedo, 2020). According to these simulations, a seven-month school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic could, in the most pessimistic scenario, increase learning poverty by 10 percentage points in low- and middle-income countries. From this, we extrapolated the potential increase in learning poverty due to the protracted duration of school closures experienced in country in the past six academic years (2019—2020 to 2024—2025).

As indicated earlier, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 330 days between 2019 and 2023, 58 days in academic year 2023—2024 and 57 days in academic year 2024—2025 amount to 445 schooling days lost for public school students. This is equivalent to approximately 20.2 months of school closure between 2019 and 2025. For students residing near conflict zones, particularly those near the frontline, the total number of schooling days lost could be as high as 630 in the last six academic years. This is equivalent to approximately 28.6 months of lost schooling days.

The World Bank simulations estimate a 10-percentage point increase in learning poverty for every seven months of school closure with minimal mitigation and remediation efforts. Based on this therefore, our analysis suggests that the 20.3 months of lost schooling days in the past six years has likely resulted in an approximately 30-percentage point increase in learning poverty for public school students. This increases to 40 percentage points among children residing near the frontline who have lost even more schooling days as a result of the aggression.

Despite using the World Bank's most pessimistic scenario, this estimate remains optimistic for children living in areas directly affected by the aggression, given the severe trauma that children have

experienced, which could significantly affect their cognitive development. Several studies (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Meister, 2019; Frieze, 2015) have documented the negative impact of trauma and malnutrition on student learning and its association with poor cognitive performance, which could further complicate the recovery process.

Moreover, while it is important to acknowledge that the extent of students' struggles with learning loss depends largely on the number of schooling days lost (Kennedy & Strietholt, 2023), we cannot overlook additional factors that significantly shape learning poverty or loss of learning. For example, socioeconomically disadvantaged students and those with limited access to digital resources are likely to be disproportionately affected (Kennedy & Strietholt, 2023; Singh, 2022). The impact is expected to be more severe among elementary school students, where home learning resources are often inadequate (Singh, 2022). Furthermore, school closures will likely deepen educational inequalities within and across schools (Maldonado & De Witte, 2021).

In addition, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are particularly vulnerable to learning poverty due to systemic barriers, including legal restrictions, poverty and discriminatory practices that have increased their school interruptions over time and during crises. For instance, over 70% of Syrian refugees aged 15 and over lack residency permits, which are required to continue their education (EL Daoi, 2017). This can further exacerbate their learning poverty, either by creating barriers to formal education — keeping them out of school — or by causing school interruptions throughout their educational journey.

As a result, Syrian refugee students are at risk of missing more schooling years than their national counterparts. Despite efforts to integrate Syrian children into Lebanon's public education system, enrolment rates remain below 30%, with fewer than 4% progressing to secondary education (Shuayb, 2024). The compounded crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent Israeli aggression, have further marginalised this group, exacerbating their learning losses. Therefore, it is critical to assess the full scale of learning losses and implement tailored remedial support to address the medium- and long-term educational challenges facing different student groups (Zhdanov et al., 2022). This is crucial to avoid the steep social and economic ramifications of school interruptions and learning losses, which will be presented and estimated in the following section.

Socioeconomic ramifications of learning losses

Educational disruptions have profound impacts on a nation's economy and societal wellbeing. Beyond causing learning difficulties, they elevate the risk of dropout. Higher dropout rates often result in greater occurrences of child labour and early marriages. The critical role of education in both personal and societal advancement underscores the urgent need to promptly address learning losses in Lebanon.

Moreover, educational interruptions and the compounding of learning losses can have lasting effects on students' academic and career prospects, as well as on national economic development. For instance, in 2023, the World Bank projected that learning losses from school disruptions would negatively affect the Lebanese economy for many years. The educational setbacks between 2019 and 2023 alone were expected to lead to a 10% decrease in lifetime earnings for impacted students (Kheyfets & Pushparatnam, 2023). This percentage is expected to increase significantly due to the continued accumulation of learning losses in the last two academic years.

Furthermore, the World Bank's most conservative estimate suggests that each additional day of public school closures could result in approximately $3 million in future economic losses for Lebanon (Kheyfets & Pushparatnam, 2023). Using this estimate, we can calculate the future losses to Lebanon's economy based on the 445 days of schooling lost in public schools, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Total loss = 445 days x $3,000,000/day = $1,335,000,000

Therefore, the future losses to Lebanon's economy based on the lost days of schooling in public schools are estimated to be approximately $1,335 billion. These economic losses from school closures far exceed the estimated daily costs of keeping public schools open, a total of $1.6 million per day for academic year 2023-2024.[6] The economic impact of these closures highlights the urgency of investing in educational recovery, given the costs to address learning losses and restore educational systems are considerably smaller than the long-term economic damage caused by continued disruptions.

Global insight for recovery from educational disruptions

Prompt recovery initiatives are essential to alleviate the cumulative impact of crises, as shown in various global recovery efforts following the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, in Mexico, students recovered about 60% of their learning deficits within 21 months of regular school reopening, although they did not return to pre-pandemic levels (Alasino et al., 2024). In India, a government-led remediation programme helped students recover roughly two-thirds of their learning losses within only six months (Singh et al., 2024).

Furthermore, a systematic review found that while a year of school closures resulted in an equivalent of 1.1 years of lost learning, reopening schools reduced this deficit to 0.5 years (Dela Cruz et al., 2024). These various recovery experiences underscore the need for tailored assessments and response in Lebanon, where the interplay of COVID-19 restrictions, socioeconomic turmoil and the latest Israeli aggression complicates both the measurement of learning losses and the design of effective recovery strategies.

Therefore, the longer the resumption of educational activities is delayed, the greater the impact on learning losses will be. Moreover, the trauma experienced by students residing in areas directly affected by the aggression adds another layer of complexity to recovery efforts, potentially hindering the ability of those students to reengage with their education and reach expected competencies (Adubasim & Ugwu, 2019; Meister, 2019; Frieze, 2015).

CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECOVERY

Lebanon's education system has faced an unprecedented crisis over the past six years, marked by overlapping disruptions that have severely impacted learning outcomes. The combined effects of economic collapse, political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified Israeli aggression have led to prolonged school closures, widespread displacement and financial instability, all of which have drastically diminished educational access and quality.

The latest escalation of aggression, which expanded beyond southern Lebanon, Baalbek and the Bekaa after 28 September 2024, has further destabilised an already fragile education system. Widespread displacement – affecting over 1.3 million civilians – has disrupted families and teachers alike, exacerbating financial hardships, housing instability and educational uncertainty. While all affected communities have faced significant challenges, the displacement experiences of Syrian and Lebanese

[6] The Minister of Education and Higher Education stated on 17 August 2023 at the Council of Ministers that the public education sector requires $150 million in order to ensure schools reopen and remain open for the 2023-24 academic year – this equates to approximately $1.6 million per day (based on the 4-day a week, 23-week compressed school year that was proposed) (www.pcm.gov.lb/Arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=23197).

families have differed, with Syrian refugees facing heightened vulnerability due to eviction risks and the lack of stable shelter.

The war has deepened Lebanon's financial crisis, with 77% of parents and 66% of teachers reporting income losses, further compounding economic burdens on already struggling households. Teachers, especially those on contract, suffered salary cuts due to currency devaluation and economic deterioration, and rising living costs have made financial survival a daily struggle for many families. The economic distress has directly impacted education, forcing parents to deprioritise schooling in favour of immediate survival needs.

In addition to the financial aspects, readiness for education resumption has been largely dictated by geography, legal status and displacement conditions. While 43% of parents and 39% of teachers in unaffected areas continued to view education as a priority, only 38% of parents and 19% of teachers in war-affected regions felt the same. Families in more stable accommodations, such as rented housing or living with relatives, displayed a higher level of readiness to resume education, while those in shelters – facing overcrowding, limited privacy and emotional distress – struggled to prioritise learning. Teachers echoed these concerns, emphasising that without fair salaries, safety guarantees and basic digital infrastructure (such as electricity and internet), they felt unprepared to support students effectively.

The war revisited the dilemma over online versus in-person education, first sparked during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools shifted to remote learning. In areas directly affected by aggression, online learning was the preferred option for 64% of teachers and 42% of parents due to safety concerns, despite well-documented digital infrastructural challenges that could prevent access to online learning. Conversely, in safer areas, 63% of parents and 45% of teachers favoured in-person learning, reinforcing the importance of traditional schooling. However, both modalities faced significant barriers: unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity and limited access to digital tools (such as computers and tablets) hindered online learning, while the repurposing of schools as shelters limited the feasibility of in-person instruction.

The war's impact on mental health has been severe, with both students and teachers expressing heightened distress. In shelters, children displayed behavioural and emotional difficulties, including heightened aggression, anxiety and regressive behaviours. Parents in more stable conditions were better positioned to provide emotional support and access limited psychosocial services, but those in shelters reported feeling emotionally exhausted and unable to manage their children's distress. Teachers too voiced concerns about their ability to cope, with 42% expressing a need for psychological support. Many advocated for integrating psychosocial interventions into education, particularly for students experiencing trauma.

Public school students have lost an estimated 445 days of schooling since 2019, with those near the frontline missing up to 630 days. This learning loss has driven a sharp rise in learning poverty, with increases of 30—40 percentage points, particularly affecting the most vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the economic ramifications are severe, with an estimated $1,335 billion in future losses due to reduced lifetime earnings and long-term economic decline.

The magnitude of learning losses from 2019 to 2025 underscores the broader deterioration of Lebanon's education system. The reduction in school days, initially prompted by economic necessity, has significantly undermined the quality of education and greatly limited the ability to provide comprehensive learning that aligns with global standards. This contraction in educational provision, compounded by frequent interruptions due to multiple crises, has been catastrophic, with the number

of school days reduced to nearly half of both the international norm and the standards upheld for previous Lebanese generations. Although the transition to online learning platforms during crises introduced innovative solutions, our surveys revealed that these efforts were severely hampered by digital infrastructural shortcomings and inequities in digital access, further exacerbating educational disparities.

The compounded crises of the past five years have created an urgent need for large-scale educational reform. While Lebanon's education system has faced disruptions before, the cumulative learning losses from the economic collapse, COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflict, require a response that goes beyond short-term crisis management.

Our estimates of learning poverty and educational disruptions emphasise the urgent need for a thorough assessment to accurately determine students' educational levels and competencies in Lebanon following the latest Israeli aggression. Such a nationwide evaluation is essential for devising specialised educational programmes featuring personalised learning plans that cater to the varied educational needs of students, enabling them to recover from educational disruptions.

Additionally, considering children's varied learning experiences over the past six years, including access to distance learning, we anticipate significant discrepancies in academic competencies within the same classroom. This variability calls for a tailored approach to teaching and learning. To effectively manage these disparities, it is vital to launch focused support programmes for literacy and numeracy within schools. This strategy ensures that every student receives the required support to address any emerging educational gaps. Furthermore, non-formal education initiatives such as remedial and catch-up programmes tailored to children's specific needs could be implemented to provide flexible learning opportunities and support students who have fallen behind.

Our recommendations aim not merely to restore what was lost but also to innovate and build on the foundations of Lebanon's educational system to foster resilience against future disruptions.

Moreover, given Lebanon's history of recurring crises, it is imperative to build an education system that is resilient to future shocks. Decisive action is needed to eliminate the risks of future educational interruptions that could further exacerbate educational inequalities and long-term economic decline. The recovery process must prioritise not only regaining lost instructional time but also addressing the structural weaknesses that have left Lebanon's education system vulnerable to crisis.

The following recommendations are targeted at stakeholders involved in Lebanon's recovery efforts, including international aid agencies, local governments and NGOs. The recommendations aim to complement broader humanitarian initiatives addressing the needs of those affected by multiple compounded crises, including the most recent Israeli aggression, and the rebuilding of Lebanon's infrastructure.

(1) Support both students and teachers in overcoming the trauma inflicted by the Israeli aggression.

(2) Offer specialised training for teachers to help them address student trauma and mitigate learning losses.

(3) Organise a range of formal and non-formal educational support programmes tailored to the needs of students, teachers and formal schools, including supplementary sessions to help students catch up on missed lessons.

(4) Prioritise the rapid reconstruction and rehabilitation of destroyed schools to avoid further delays and interruptions in schooling.

(5) Develop immediate housing solutions for families who remain displaced in order to restore a sense of stability and normalcy to their lives. Ensuring access to safe and dignified housing to enable children's return to school, support psychosocial wellbeing, and facilitate community recovery.

Given Lebanon's history of compounding crises, fortifying the education system against future disruptions is crucial to ensure resilience and continuity during unforeseen challenges.

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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 a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

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

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, ODI, Osman Consulting, OTHERwise Research 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.