WORKING PAPER

LEBANON'S EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDER COMPOUNDED CRISES: ESCALATING INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION OF MARGINALISED GROUPS

March 2026

Mohammad Hammoud (CLS), Cathrine Brun (CLS), Maha Shuayb, Rachel Saliba, Ghada Jouny, Itab Shuayb, Nehme Nehme[1]

ABSTRACT

Lebanon's education system has entered a phase in which crisis is no longer an episodic interruption, but a sustained condition shaping schooling continuity, learning outcomes, and stakeholder wellbeing. Drawing on the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) education crisis monitoring programme, which was launched in 2019 following the eruption of the Lebanese uprising and the collapse of the banking sector, this report synthesises the most recent evidence gathered from three online surveys with Grade 12 students (511 respondents), parents (1,089), and teachers (828), carried out by CLS between May 2025 and March 2026. In addition, and in order to cover experiences that are often underrepresented or not fully visible in large-scale survey data, three case studies with more focused and flexible methodologies were carried out with out-of-school children, Syrian refugees, and children with disabilities. Findings indicate deepening exam unreadiness, persistent learning disruption, and heightened psychological strain for young people, alongside widening pressures on households and the teaching workforce, leading to persistent inequality and exclusion. Students' worsening readiness for official examinations was closely linked to psychological distress, incomplete curriculum coverage, and conflict-related disruptions. Household affordability constraints remain decisive, as the annual cost of educating one child in private school, including transportation, absorbs over one-third of average reported annual income and continues to drive transfers from private to public schooling. Teachers' salaries remain misaligned with living costs, with essential monthly expenditures exceeding earnings, reinforcing workforce instability. The report demonstrates that despite substantial efforts by the government and international community to improve the conditions for learning in education, the efforts have not translated into sustained improvements. The report highlights that refugee education must shift from emergency response to comprehensive inclusion and diversified pathways. Scale alone is insufficient and sustainability depends on equity, adaptability, and meaningful outcomes. The report concludes that learning recovery, psychosocial support, tuition regulation, teacher retention measures, and strengthened governance for continuity planning are urgent priorities for structural intervention.

[1] A special thanks to Maria Maalouf, Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS), for support in completing the report.

Disclaimer

This material has been funded with UK International Development from the UK government. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed here are entirely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the ERICC Programme, the authors' respective organisations, or the UK government's official policies. Copyright lies with the author of a paper; however, as per ERICC contracts, the authors have granted permission for the non-commercial use of the intellectual property to ERICC Research Programme Consortium, and by extension to the funder.

Suggested citation

Use and reproduction of material from ERICC publications are encouraged, as long as they are not for commercial purposes, and as long as there is due attribution. Suggested citation: Hammoud, M., Brun, C., Shuayb, M., Saliba, R., Jouny, G.,Shuayb, I., Nehme, N. (March 2026). Lebanon's Education System under compounded crises: Escalating inequality and exclusion of marginalised groups. ERICC Working paper. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33169733

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ACRONYMS

CLS	Centre for Lebanese Studies
CRDP	Center for Educational Research and Development
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon's education system continues to operate under compounding crisis conditions that have shifted disruption from an episodic shock to a sustained feature of the schooling system. Building on the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) crisis monitoring programme, this report synthesises the findings from three surveys administered in 2025 to capture how prolonged instability is experienced across the education system from the perspectives of Grade 12 students, parents, and teachers. The analysis is situated within a wider context of overlapping pressures, including economic collapse, repeated interruptions to schooling, and the longer-term effects of insecurity and displacement linked to the Israeli aggression and its aftermath.

The study asks: What has been the cumulative impact of compounded crises on access to and quality of education, continuity of schooling, and learning conditions? What are the educational experiences of groups most adversely affected or excluded? How have students, parents, and teachers navigated the education system under sustained crisis conditions?

The report draws on three online surveys administered via SurveyMonkey in 2025: (i) a Grade 12 student survey (511 respondents, conducted from 3 to 19 June 2025), (ii) a parent survey (1,089 respondents, conducted from 29 August to 19 September 2025), and (iii) a teacher survey (828 respondents, conducted from 29 September to 24 October 2025). In addition, the study employed three case studies to provide deeper insight into some of the groups that risk exclusion – or are already excluded: out-of-school children, Syrian children, and children with disabilities. The methods of the case studies varied according to group and included secondary data analysis, surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions.

Summary of findings

Educational exclusion is increasingly becoming a visible manifestation of wider systemic pressures, including unresolved learning loss, declining affordability, repeated disruption, and weakened institutional capacity that progressively push vulnerable learners from precarious participation into permanent exclusion. The report findings point to the education system's failure to retain learners, the limits of parallel systems, but also the limits to inclusion within the system itself. Taken together, the findings in this report suggest that resilience cannot be achieved solely through expanding access. Rather, system transformation requires a stronger focus on equity, inclusion, learning quality, and the capacity of the education system to sustain learning during periods of crisis and uncertainty.

1. Learner level: Access, wellbeing, and learning continuity

The findings highlight a significant deterioration in students' learning continuity, wellbeing, and readiness to progress through the education system. Examination readiness reached critically low levels in 2025, with only 10% of private school students and 6% of public school students reporting that they felt prepared for official Grade 12 examinations. Students attributed this primarily to psychological distress compounded by repeated disruptions to schooling caused by insecurity, incomplete curriculum coverage, irregular attendance, and accumulated learning loss. Mental health concerns were widespread, with only one in ten students reporting good mental health. Uncertainty surrounding examination arrangements further intensified stress.

Educational continuity has also been undermined by ongoing displacement and insecurity. More than half of surveyed students reported living in areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression, where displacement and interruptions to schooling were common. Parents and teachers similarly described

disruptions to educational participation, including periods of disconnection from learning and limited access to remote education.

These challenges are reflected in broader patterns of educational exclusion. Evidence from the out-of-school children case study suggests that school participation is becoming increasingly fragile, and an estimated one in five school-aged children is projected to be out of school by 2026. The Syrian refugee education case study highlights the fragility of learning continuity among crisis-affected learners, with fewer than 30% of Syrian refugee children currently enrolled in formal education. The case study on children with disabilities further illustrates the extreme fragility of learning continuity among the most marginalised learners. Their access to education is often interrupted or entirely dependent on family resources, NGO support, and external funding. Crises such as COVID-19 and displacement have resulted in prolonged exclusion, learning regression, and loss of access to essential therapeutic and educational services.

Together, the findings underscore the need for interventions that protect learning continuity, address learning loss, remove barriers to access, and strengthen psychosocial support for learners.

2. School level: Teaching, workforce stability, and learning environment

The findings point to mounting challenges at the school level that undermine the capacity of schools to provide quality education and support learning recovery. Curriculum implementation remains incomplete, with only 24% of private school students and 12% of public school students reporting full curriculum coverage. Students frequently perceived recent policy responses – including curriculum reductions, the cancellation of optional examination subjects, and extensions to the academic year – as insufficient or poorly aligned with their needs.

At the same time, teacher wellbeing and workforce stability remain major concerns. Teachers' average monthly income reached 700 US dollars in 2025, while average essential expenditures were estimated at 1,174 US dollars, leaving a substantial gap between earnings and living costs. Teachers reported that a sustainable standard of living would require approximately 1,722 US dollars per month. Consequently, only around one-third expressed a desire to remain in the profession, while most reported continuing primarily because they lacked alternative employment opportunities.

The introduction of a four-day public school week further illustrates tensions between immediate operational constraints and longer-term educational objectives. While some teachers and parents welcomed reductions in transportation costs and workload pressures, many expressed concerns about reduced instructional time, diminished opportunities for learning recovery, and adverse implications for contractual teachers whose earnings depend on teaching hours. Across stakeholder groups, psychological strain and declining motivation among teachers further suggest the need for trauma-informed and supportive school environments.

Reduced instructional time, unresolved learning loss, and limited recovery capacity are contributing to a gradual weakening of schools' ability to retain and support learners, particularly those already at risk of educational disengagement, as suggested by the case study on out-of-school children. Similarly, the Syrian refugee case study highlights how educational quality and continuity are shaped by the learning environment itself, as afternoon shifts continue to operate with fewer instructional hours, greater reliance on contractual teachers, and more limited resources, contributing to persistent concerns regarding learning quality and progression.

The case study on children with disabilities highlights that schools remain structurally ill-equipped to

support inclusive education, with limited teacher training, inadequate accessibility infrastructure, and high reliance on under-resourced specialised or NGO-led provision, resulting in a system where inclusion depends more on external actors than on school-level capacity.

3. System level: Governance, financing, and resilience

Several findings reveal systemic pressures that challenge the sustainability and resilience of Lebanon's education system. Household affordability has emerged as a major determinant of educational participation and school choice. Although average reported household income increased in 2025, the annual cost of educating one child in private school reached 4,417 US dollars, consuming more than one-third of average household income. Most families continued to report difficulties covering basic expenses, while borrowing to meet both household and education costs remained widespread.

These financial pressures are reshaping enrolment patterns across the education system. Movement from private to public schools has accelerated,[2] with nearly half of surveyed public school parents reporting that they had transferred a child from private to public education for the 2025–2026 academic year. The overwhelming majority cited unaffordable school fees as the primary reason. By contrast, movement in the opposite direction was minimal. These trends suggest growing pressure on the public education sector and reinforce the importance of sustainable financing, stronger regulation of education costs, and policies that reduce disparities between public and private provision.

The adoption of the four-day public school week further reflects broader governance and financing challenges. The policy emerged largely as a response to funding constraints and the inability to sustainably finance teacher salaries and operational costs, highlighting the need for more predictable and resilient education financing mechanisms.

These pressures are occurring within a wider context of declining enrolment and growing educational exclusion. National projections indicate that nearly 20% of school-aged children may be out of school by 2026, suggesting that current financing and governance arrangements are increasingly struggling to sustain participation across the system.

The case studies further demonstrate the vulnerability of education provision that depends heavily on external funding and parallel delivery structures. Declining donor support and growing political pressure on refugee education have exposed the fragility of a system in which access for tens of thousands of learners remains dependent on donors continuing to fund afternoon shifts. Similarly, education provision for children with disabilities is vulnerable to funding volatility, programme suspension, and weak coordination between ministries, donors, and service providers, limiting the development of sustainable, system-wide inclusion capacity.

4. Cross-cutting findings: Equality, inclusion, and system transformation

Across all findings, structural inequalities continue to shape educational experiences and outcomes. Differences between public and private school students are evident in curriculum coverage, examination readiness, perceptions of policy responses, and exposure to educational disruption. Affordability pressures are increasingly determining educational opportunities, with many families transferring children to public schools regardless of their preferences around educational quality.

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[2] Lebanon's education system is characterised by a historically high level of private provision. In 2023, approximately 71% of Lebanese students were enrolled in private schools (CERD, 2025).

Displacement, insecurity, and economic vulnerability are also producing unequal educational experiences across geographic and social groups. Students living in conflict-affected areas reported greater disruption to learning, while teachers and parents described uneven access to educational continuity during periods of displacement. At the same time, widespread psychological distress among students and teachers demonstrates that educational challenges extend beyond access alone and increasingly involve issues of wellbeing, quality, and continuity.

Across the surveys and case studies, the report suggests that exclusion is unequally distributed among groups. It further highlights that educational exclusion extends beyond lost learning, increasing exposure to child labour, early marriage, exploitation, and other protection risks. The Syrian refugee education case study demonstrates how exclusion remains deeply structured by legal status, documentation requirements, affordability constraints, and unequal access to formal schooling. The case study on children with disabilities underscores how exclusion is structurally embedded within the education system and shaped by intersecting barriers related to disability, poverty, displacement, stigma, and infrastructure. Together, these findings demonstrate that current inclusion policies remain largely symbolic without the institutional, financial, and pedagogical transformation required to guarantee equitable access, participation, and dignity in education.

Table 1. Summary of recommendations for different stakeholders

Stakeholder	Protect – in the short term	Develop/improve – in the longer term
Communities and learners' supporters (parents, caregivers, community groups, youth)	- Help identify and follow up with children at risk of dropping out, including those already out of school. - Support children's continued participation in schooling and learning despite economic pressure, and encourage use of available safety nets.	- Co-create community-based youth and extra-curricular activities that provide safe spaces, and opportunities for social interaction and skills development. - Work with schools and NGOs to make alternative and non-formal pathways visible and trusted, and feed local knowledge into mapping of out-of-school children and learners with disabilities.
School leaders and teachers	- Use available flexibility to avoid excluding learners because they are over-age or have been absent, and maintain contact with those at risk of dropping out. - Protect basic working conditions and seek/offer peer and psychosocial support so teachers can continue teaching under crisis conditions.	- Lead learning recovery by using diagnostic assessment, grouping learners by level, and planning remedial or accelerated support. - Strengthen inclusive practices in classrooms and schools, especially for learners with disabilities and those with large learning gaps. - Engage in structured dialogue with authorities and unions on reforms, including emergency preparedness and blended/online learning.
Government and public authorities (Ministry of Education and Higher Education/MEHE at the central and decentralised levels, and municipalities)	- Reform or flexibly apply age, re-entry, documentation and certification rules that block learners' return, especially for refugees and learners with disabilities. - Protect and adapt public provision for those most at risk of exclusion, and integrate inclusive and special-needs education into crisis and recovery plans and budgets.	- Invest in MEHE and decentralised capacity (staffing, data, crisis response) so public institutions can coordinate learning recovery and inclusion. - Enhance implementation of the national framework for non-formal and second-chance pathways and coordinate providers under it. - Strengthen data and evaluation on access, learning and wellbeing, and use evidence to adjust policy and targeting over time.
Donors and international partners	- Use funding to protect core public provision (teacher presence, basic school operations, safety nets), avoiding parallel systems that deepen inequalities.	- Align support with MEHE priorities, reduce project fragmentation, and provide predictable multi-year funding that bridges humanitarian and development aims. - Invest directly in state capacity (central and local MEHE, data and evaluation) and require robust, transparent reporting on who is reached and what changes in access, learning, wellbeing and equity are achieved.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Seven years into Lebanon's cascading crises – economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, political stagnation, the port explosion, and escalating conflict – the education system has demonstrated remarkable resilience. Until 2 March 2026, on the eve of the seventh Israeli invasion of Lebanon, schools were open, teachers continued to teach, and families continued to seek ways to keep children enrolled. This endurance, however, is increasingly fragile and costly. Educational institutions and communities continue to function, but they do so through coping strategies that gradually erode quality, equity, and long-term viability. Rather than recovering, there is increasing evidence that the system is experiencing a prolonged downward adjustment – stabilising at lower levels of access, quality, and protection with each successive year of compounded crises.

1.1 Crisis monitoring in the context of compounded crises

The Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) began annual monitoring of the education sector in 2020 to assess how COVID-19 affected children's education in Lebanon. As the pandemic intersected with economic collapse, political instability, and conflict, education outcomes were increasingly shaped by overlapping crises, which required ongoing and adaptive data collection. Monitoring the impact of crises on education in Lebanon has thus become an annual task of CLS since 2020: regular data collection ensures continuity of monitoring while allowing data-collection tools to evolve with shifting conditions and emerging findings.

This year's report explores the impact of seven years of compounded crises in Lebanon on students, their families, and teachers up to February 2026, before the latest Israeli attacks on Lebanon. Thus, the report aims first to *take stock of the cumulative impact of compounding crises on access to and the quality of education*, and second *to highlight the situation of groups who are on the margins or largely excluded from the system.* More specifically, the report aims to answer the following questions:

- What has been the cumulative impact of compounded crises on access to and quality of education, continuity of schooling, and learning conditions?
- What are the educational experiences of groups most adversely affected or excluded?
- How have students, parents, and teachers navigated the education system under sustained crisis conditions?

In addressing these questions, the report also examines the extent to which education responses have mitigated – or, conversely, reinforced – existing inequalities within the system. It critically assesses whether policies and interventions have expanded equitable access and improved learning conditions, or, whether they have reproduced and in some cases deepened disparities across regions and socioeconomic groups and between Lebanese and non-Lebanese populations. Particular attention is given to how crisis-driven, short-term responses have shaped patterns of inclusion and exclusion over time, and to the ways structural inequalities have persisted or intensified under compounded crises.

The report draws on survey data, secondary data, previous monitoring, and three in-depth case studies to provide both a system-level overview and grounded insights into the current educational landscape in Lebanon. This year's report is produced under the Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis

(ERICC) programme[3].

In this report, we focus on access, quality, and continuity at the household, classroom, and community levels, taking a holistic view of outcomes that encompasses academic learning, mental and physical wellbeing, and social and emotional learning.

The report demonstrates that local educational experiences depend on household, school, and community conditions including human capacities (such as parents' attitudes and teachers' skills and attitudes), resources available to each group (i.e., materials, income, budget), and arrangements (placement, grouping), while children's characteristics, histories, capacities, and relationships may either create barriers to learning or serve as protective assets for educational access and quality.

In this context, we rely on the conceptualisations of the overall ERICC project (Kim et al., 2024) and suggest that 'access' refers not only to enrolment but to the ability of all learners to enter and remain in education without facing financial, administrative, physical, or social barriers. The report emphasises equitable participation, particularly for marginalised groups, and recognises that access is shaped by broader structural conditions such as poverty, displacement, and policy environments. The report understands 'quality' as going beyond curriculum delivery to include meaningful learning outcomes, adequate instructional time, teacher capacity, and supportive learning environments. It also incorporates relevance, inclusivity, and the extent to which education responds to learners' academic and psychosocial needs under crisis conditions, while 'continuity' captures the system's ability to sustain learning over time despite disruption (Kim et al., 2024). This includes maintaining regular schooling, minimising interruptions, and ensuring that learners can progress without repeated breaks, regressions, or forced exits from the system.

We write this introduction in March 2026, in the context of the seventh Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The current escalation in Lebanon is part of a longer history of unresolved hostilities, occupation, displacement, and recurrent Israeli military operations in Lebanon and the wider region. Since 1948, Lebanon has repeatedly been subjected to incursions, bombardments, and periods of occupation that have primarily affected its territory, civilian population and infrastructure, including schools and other educational facilities, through major invasions (1978, 1982, 1993, 1996, 2006 and since 2024–25) and thousands of air raids and cross-border attacks, particularly in the south and Beirut (Armstrong, 2024; Deeb et al., 2025). These actions are consistently framed by the Israeli state as "targeted" operations against organisations it designates as terrorist – previously the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the leftist Lebanese National Movement – and currently Hezbollah (Deeb et al., 2025). This has long been disputed. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Lebanon after the 2006 war documented that Israeli military operations repeatedly extended beyond armed actors to encompass Lebanon's civilian population, public infrastructure, medical and educational facilities, economic assets and the environment (Omidzamani, 2008; UN Human Rights Council, 2006). Similarly, post-2024 assessments indicate that Israeli military operations have affected civilians and civilian infrastructure far beyond armed actors, including homes, public services, health and education facilities, and conditions for safe return (National Council for Scientific Research-Lebanon, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024; 2025). This pattern raises serious concerns under international humanitarian law, particularly with respect to

[3] ERICC produces accessible, actionable knowledge on what works — and why, for whom, and at what cost — and aims to improve access, quality, and continuity of education conflict- and crisis-affected contexts across the world. The ERICC approach is rooted in co-constructed research and collaborative partnerships from the local to the global level, to strengthen evidence-based decision making across research, policy and practice. ERICC focuses on 8 countries including Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Iraq, and Syria.

proportionality, precautions in attack, and the protection of civilian objects and medical services (ICRC Customary IHL database[4]). The recent Israeli war on Lebanon in 2026 should be understood within a wider regional history shaped by mass displacement, the continuing occupation of Lebanese territories, and the recurrent use of force, rather than as an isolated security confrontation detached from the historical conditions of Israeli state formation and regional power. In line with international humanitarian law, which requires the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and prohibits attacks that are indiscriminate or disproportionate, our analysis focuses on the impact of Israeli operations on Lebanon's education system and how it has further shaped compounded crises in the country.

During data collection in 2025, Lebanon appeared to be entering a potentially new phase. With the formation of a new government in February 2025 and shifts in aid modalities, there were signals of possible stabilisation and hope for positive change. The country was at a crossroads between renewed emergency and tentative development. At the time of writing, however, at the end of March 2026, 1.2 million people have fled the areas affected by Israeli aggressions, approximately 1,024 schools have been closed, and 642 education facilities, including 550 public schools, are being used as shelters for people who are forcibly displaced.

1.2 Structure of this report

This introduction next sets out the background and context to the report and the methodology. The findings are then presented in two chapters. Chapter 2 presents findings from three online surveys conducted between June and October 2025 with Grade 12 students, parents, and teachers, as well as qualitative interviews with students, teachers, principals, and parents in war-affected areas. The findings identify system-wide trends and inequalities, particularly those affecting children in war-affected areas, and are complemented by selected qualitative interviews that highlight lived experiences. Certain groups are underrepresented in this dataset – most notably out-of-school children, Syrian refugees, and children with disabilities. To address this gap, Chapter 3 provides a targeted deep dive into these marginalised groups, drawing on CLS's annual crisis monitoring data alongside additional data sources, including an online survey of Syrian refugee parents (with children enrolled in second-shift schools), qualitative interviews, and secondary data from government and international aid actors. Chapter 4 synthesises findings across the surveys and case studies and sets out high-level recommendations.

1.3 Background on the Lebanese education system

Lebanon's education system is shaped by longstanding structural inequalities rooted in sectarian governance, colonial legacies, and a highly privatised model. Private schools enrolled 71% of Lebanese students in 2023 (CERD, 2025) and public spending on education remained as low as 1.8% of GDP (CAS & UNICEF, 2023). Even before 2011, Lebanon's education system was characterised by fragmented governance, regional disparities, and inequities linked to socioeconomic status and language policies (e.g., instruction in French or English that disadvantaged poorer students). While early childhood enrolment had reached 66.5% in 2022 (World Bank, 2022) and secondary enrolment 64.7% in 2023 (The Global Economy, 2023), these averages masked deep structural inequalities. Over time, and particularly in the context of subsequent crises, these disparities have widened significantly. Recent estimates suggest that approximately 27% of children are out of school, rising to 58% among Syrian refugees and 19% among Palestinian children, with UNICEF estimating that one in three children in Lebanon is either

[4] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) International Humanitarian Law Databases: https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1

out of school or not learning (UNICEF, 2025). Learning outcomes are also critically low, with Lebanon scoring far below OECD averages in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 and fewer than half of students reaching minimum proficiency levels.

Since 2011, a succession of overlapping crises has compounded these structural weaknesses. The influx of nearly 600,000 school-aged Syrian refugees placed unprecedented pressure on an already fragile system, leading to the introduction of double-shift schooling that expanded access but institutionalised inequality through reduced instructional time and segregated provision (UNHCR, 2025a). These challenges were further exacerbated by the economic collapse from 2019, which devalued teacher salaries by over 90%, triggered prolonged strikes, and pushed families into poverty, with annual private school fees reaching up to 4,400 US dollars per child – equivalent to as much as 65% of household income. As a result, students in public schools lost an estimated 765 instructional days between 2016 and 2023, and by 2023, only 25% of the curriculum was completed in public schools compared to 67% in private institutions (Abu Moghli et al., 2020; Hammoud & Shuayb, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic deepened these inequalities, as remote learning remained inaccessible to many due to a lack of devices, connectivity, and electricity, disproportionately excluding refugee and low-income students (Abu Moghli et al., 2020; Hammoud & Shuayb, 2024).

More recently, the 2023–2024 Israeli aggression further disrupted the system. More than one million civilians (approximately 20% of the population) were displaced, and around 500,000 students, teachers, and school staff were directly affected (MEHE, 2024a). Government emergency measures relied heavily on converting educational facilities into shelters, with 638 institutions, equivalent to 43% of all schools, repurposed in this way. A further 40% of educational institutions were located in unsafe areas or along hazardous access routes, leaving only 310 public schools (out of 1,227) operational during this period (MEHE, 2024b; Shuayb et al., 2024). Education infrastructure was hard hit, and by December 2024, 808 schools were operational nationwide, 349 were partially damaged, and 33 were destroyed (MEHE, 2024a). However, even after a ceasefire was reached, Israel continued to target civilians and villages, killing more than 370 Lebanese people and preventing many others from returning to and rebuilding their homes (MSF, 2026).

These developments particularly affected students living near the southern border and in areas directly targeted by the aggression, including the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Beqaa, and Baalbek. As we demonstrate below, many were unable to attend classes in person and instead relied on low-interaction remote modalities such as WhatsApp messages. For a considerable number of students in the most affected regions, repeated closures since October 2023 have resulted in the loss of two consecutive academic years, deepening learning losses and undermining academic progression.

Despite significant donor investment – amounting to over 2.5 billion US dollars between 2011 and 2021 (Nehme, 2023) – the education system has struggled to translate funding into equitable or sustainable outcomes. Instead, compounded crises have produced cumulative and reinforcing effects: widening inequalities between public and private sectors, between Lebanese and non-Lebanese students, and across regions; declining enrolment and completion rates; and severe learning losses. The system today reflects not a single crisis but a prolonged process of erosion, in which repeated shocks have weakened institutional capacity, deepened exclusion, and left an increasing number of children without meaningful access to education.

1.4 Why this moment matters

Lebanon is not unique in relying on households to absorb the financial burden of education in crisis settings (Homonchuk et al., 2025). However, the current moment is particularly critical. If Lebanon moves towards stabilisation, any educational planning and reform efforts must be grounded in a clear understanding of the cumulative learning losses, the adaptive strategies adopted by families and schools, and the exclusions these have produced. Conversely, if the country enters a prolonged phase of war and displacement, preparedness efforts must recognise the extent to which households, educators, and institutions are already overstretched, and how the crisis response in education during the war risks further entrenching inequalities. For example, the ongoing war with Israel is likely to further undermine the educational prospects of thousands of children, particularly those who have been forcibly displaced.

This moment is further shaped by shifting regional and political dynamics, including the fall of the Assad regime in Syria and increasing calls for the return of Syrian refugees from Lebanon. These developments are occurring alongside declining international funding, placing additional pressure on an already strained education system. In this context, proposals to phase out second-shift schooling for Syrian refugees raise serious concerns. For over a decade, second shifts – predominantly funded by international aid (MEHE, 2016) – have constituted the primary pathway to formal education for more than 600,000 Syrian refugee children. Despite political pressure and increased cross-border movement of Syrian refugees from Lebanon to Syria due to war, voluntary returns to Syria have remained limited, suggesting that large numbers of children will continue to rely on Lebanon's education system.

At the same time, longstanding blind spots in education responses are becoming increasingly evident. Persons with disabilities and out-of-school children have been historically marginalised within both policy responses and research, with limited data, targeted interventions, or sustained inclusion strategies focusing on these populations. Under compounded crises, this exclusion has deepened, with many children with disabilities effectively disappearing from the system altogether, while the number of out-of-school children is rising. This study examines how compounded crises affect schooling for all children in Lebanon, with a particular focus on the disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, out-of-school children, and Syrian refugee children.

1.5 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to provide both system-level and in-depth insights. We draw on nationwide surveys of Grade 12 students, parents, and teachers conducted in 2025; a targeted survey of Syrian refugee parents conducted in early 2026; 41 qualitative interviews with representatives of civil society organisations, parents, teachers, principals, and children in war-affected areas; four focus group discussions with parents and teachers; and extensive secondary data analysis. The study received ethics approval from the Centre for Lebanese Studies.

Crisis monitoring data collection

The crisis monitoring data collection consists of a series of surveys conducted in 2025 and qualitative fieldwork in the war-affected southern areas, examining the impact of compounded crises on students, parents, and teachers in Lebanon.

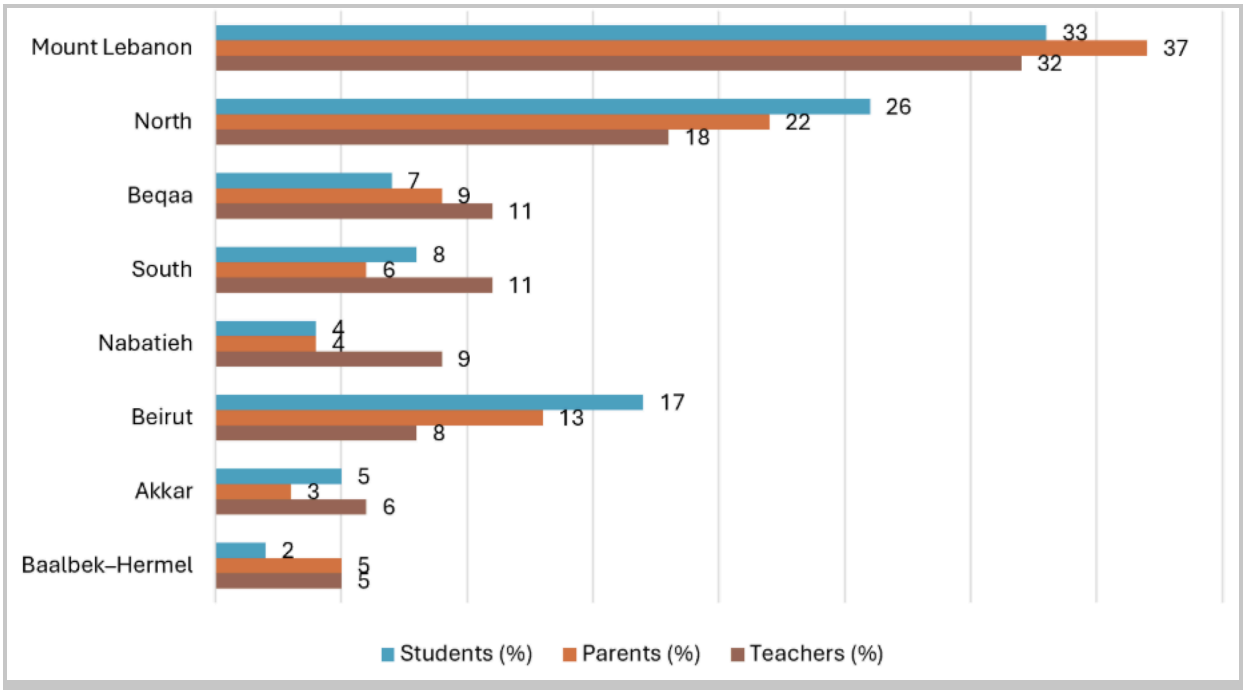
Surveys of parents, teachers, and students in 2025

The online surveys targeted Grade 12 students, parents of school-aged children, and teachers. Questions focused on distinct but interrelated dimensions of the educational landscape, including school continuity and readiness, household financial situations, and teachers' working conditions. Across the three instruments, the surveys were composed primarily of closed-ended questions

designed to support descriptive comparison across groups and over time. These included single-choice categorical questions, multiple-response items for selecting more than one reason or experience, and a set of ordinal rating questions. In the student survey, for example, respondents were asked to assess their academic performance, education quality, and psychological condition using ordered response scales, alongside questions on curriculum coverage, exam readiness, and the effects of conflict-related disruption. In the parent and teacher surveys, respondents were similarly asked to report on school transfers, affordability pressures, displacement, and educational disruption through structured response options, while some questions invited multiple answers to capture overlapping motivations or constraints. All three surveys were administered online using SurveyMonkey. Recruitment took place primarily through social media platforms (Facebook, X, and Instagram). To broaden participation and encourage responses from all eight Lebanese governorates, the CLS team also relied on its networks of parents, teachers, school administrators, NGOs, and professional associations. These partners disseminated the survey links and encouraged participation within their constituencies, particularly among groups directly affected by school closures, displacement, and economic strain.

After data collection, responses to all surveys were exported from SurveyMonkey and underwent a standardised cleaning process. This included removing duplicates, checking for internal inconsistencies, recoding variables, and preparing the datasets for analysis. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were generated using STATA and Excel, with particular attention to differences across school sectors, governorates, and populations living in areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression. Where relevant, the 2025 findings are compared with earlier survey waves to track changes in crucial indicators over time.

Figure 1. Sample distribution by governorate



The student survey focused on Grade 12 students who were preparing to sit the official examinations in the 2024–2025 academic year. Data collection took place between 3 and 19 June 2025. The aim was to

document students' readiness for the official exams, as well as their perceptions of educational performance, educational quality, and psychological wellbeing over time. A total of 511 students completed the online survey. The sample included participants from all Lebanese governorates and from different school sectors. In terms of nationality, 79% of respondents identified as Lebanese, 15% as Syrian, and 6% as Palestinian or from other nationalities. Around 68% of students were enrolled in private schools, 28% in public schools, and 4% in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) schools.[5] Most respondents (85%) were aged 17 to 18 years. The gender distribution was 61% female and 39% male. Notably, 57% of participants reported residing in areas directly affected by the Israeli aggression. This information is used throughout the analysis to differentiate the experiences of students in high-impact regions from those in other parts of the country, particularly in relation to school interruption and displacement.

The parent survey, conducted between 29 August 2025 and 19 September 2025, aimed to capture the continuing pressures that families face in keeping their children in school, including the cost of education, sectoral mobility between public and private schools, and the educational and psychological consequences of repeated disruptions. The survey also documented changes in income and parents' expectations regarding their children's educational futures. In total, 1,089 parents from all eight governorates completed the questionnaire. The sample was predominantly Lebanese, with 95% of respondents holding Lebanese nationality. Parents reported on children enrolled across all levels of schooling. Eight per cent had at least one child in pre-school, 47% in primary education, 29% in intermediate education, and 17% in secondary education. With respect to the school sector, 86% of participating parents had children enrolled in private schools, compared with 8% in public schools and 6% in tuition-free private schools. In addition, 4% of respondents indicated that at least one of their children has a disability.

The teacher survey, conducted between 29 September and 24 October 2025, examined teachers' working and living conditions, perceptions of changes in educational quality, and the effects of Lebanon's overlapping crises on their motivation, psychological wellbeing, and professional trajectories. The survey also explored how policy decisions, including reductions in teaching days in public schools, interact with existing financial and institutional pressures. A total of 828 teachers completed the 2025 survey. Respondents came from all eight Lebanese governorates and represented a range of age groups and employment arrangements. Female respondents made up 75% of the sample. Regarding the sector, 59% of teachers reported working in private schools and 46% in public schools. Since some teachers work across sectors, these percentages are not mutually exclusive. Within the public school group, 56% reported having permanent full-time contracts, while 44% were employed on a contractual basis. This distinction is important, since contractual teachers, who are often paid according to teaching hours, are particularly affected by interruptions in school opening and changes in the number of instructional days.

Qualitative interviews in war-affected areas

Survey findings indicated a pronounced and disproportionate impact of the war on education in the most affected regions – southern Lebanon, the Bekaa/Baalbek, and the southern suburbs of Beirut. To further explore these dynamics, qualitative data were collected through fieldwork conducted in February 2026 in southern border areas that have experienced sustained disruption since October 2023.

[5] The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) offers primary and secondary education to Palestine refugee students in Lebanon including Palestine refugee students from Syria.

The fieldwork draws on data from three public schools located in these areas: two that were partially or fully damaged during the conflict, and one that was repurposed as a shelter for displaced populations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at each school, including the principal, two teachers, and three students (from Grades 8 and 9 and the secondary level), along with a focus group discussion with four to six parents.

Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes and were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes.

Case studies

In addition to the regular crisis monitoring data collection, the study employed three case studies to provide deeper insight into some of the groups that risk exclusion – or are already excluded: out-of-school children, Syrian children, and children with disabilities. The methods of the case studies varied according to group and included secondary data analysis, surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. This section provides an overview of these methodological approaches.

Out-of-school children

In the case of out-of-school children, we relied largely on secondary and official datasets, including data from the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), UNICEF's (2025) *Sub-National Lebanon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2023 Statistical Snapshots*, the Lebanon Response Plan (OCHA et al., 2026), and Save the Children's (2025) Protection and Education Needs Assessment, alongside survey findings presented in Chapter 2 of this report.

Rather than producing a single national estimate, this case study adopted an analytical approach that triangulated these sources to identify patterns of exclusion, key drivers of out-of-schooling, and the broader implications of school exclusion under conditions of compounded crises.

Syrian refugees

In February 2026, we conducted an online survey with 103 Syrian parents of children attending afternoon shifts on how they anticipated the closure of the afternoon shifts would affect their children, what their main concerns are, and which options they believe they would pursue. We used convenience sampling and distributed the survey via Syrian-led organisations and groups, as well as Lebanese NGOs that work with Syrian children. Respondents were distributed across governorates, with the largest share residing in Beirut (24%), followed by the Bekaa (23%) and Mount Lebanon (15%). Fewer respondents came from the remaining governorates, ranging from North Lebanon at 10% to South Lebanon at 8%, Nabatieh at 6%, and Akkar and Baalbek at 7% each. Most respondents were female (64%), reflecting that mothers were the primary respondents to this survey. Most respondents reported having lived in Lebanon for more than ten years (60%) and, when asked about their financial situation, described themselves as either struggling to cover basic needs (58%) or being unable to cover basic needs (34%). Children were primarily in the early grades, with 85% of respondents reporting that their children were currently studying at the primary level, compared to 34% at the intermediate level and 8% at the secondary level. We also relied on data from the Center for Educational Research and Development (CRDP), statistical bulletins, and the Lebanon Education Sector Dashboard to analyse enrolment patterns across morning and afternoon shifts in both public and private sectors.

Education of children with disabilities

Children with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in official education data and policy discourse. To address this gap, this case study draws on multiple qualitative data sources. These

include CLS survey data, a focus group discussion with parents of children with disabilities conducted in October 2024 (see Shuayb et al., 2024), and 21 in-depth interviews with parents carried out in spring 2025, examining the impact of conflict on access to and continuity of education.

In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives from two civil society organisations in February and March 2026 to provide institutional perspectives on service provision, inclusion, and systemic barriers for children with disabilities. This triangulation of sources allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences and exclusionary dynamics affecting children with disabilities in contexts of compounded crisis.

Limitations

The use of online surveys imposed constraints on sample composition. Participation required access to a digital device and a stable internet connection, as well as sufficient digital literacy to complete the survey. As a result, individuals and households facing the most severe forms of deprivation, displacement, or insecurity were less likely to be reached and were therefore underrepresented. For the parent survey, this limitation is reflected in the underrepresentation of families residing in the South, families whose children attend public schools, Syrian or Palestinian parents, and parents of children with disabilities. These groups are often among those most affected by economic hardship and the direct consequences of the Israeli aggression, yet they are less visible in our online sample. For the teacher survey, online methods may have missed the teachers in the most precarious positions, especially those with unstable or no internet access, limited access to digital devices, or who were displaced at the time of data collection. Their absence may result in an underestimation of the severity of income insecurity and psychological strain within the teaching workforce. The student survey was subject to similar constraints. Those with no internet access or limited access to a digital device, as well as individuals who have been repeatedly displaced, are less likely to appear in the dataset. Similarly, because very few Syrian students and students with disabilities are represented in Grade 12, their perspectives are not captured. Young people who have been forced out of education are also excluded from the survey. Consequently, the findings do not represent the situation of young people who are at the highest risk of educational exclusion.

Taken together, these limitations indicate that the three surveys should not be considered statistically representative of all students, parents, and teachers in Lebanon. Rather, they offer evidence on broad patterns and trajectories among those who could be reached through online channels over the past five years. Thus, the survey data should be interpreted with caution. To address some of the weaknesses, we supplemented the survey data with qualitative data on the situation in the South and developed case studies to provide more substantive data and insights into the groups that have been largely underrepresented, namely Syrian refugees, children with disabilities, and out-of-school children.

While the qualitative component provides in-depth insights into lived experiences, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the purposive and relatively small sample sizes limit the generalisability of the findings, particularly given the heterogeneity of experiences across regions and population groups in Lebanon. Second, access constraints – especially in conflict-affected areas – may have shaped the selection of participants and sites, potentially introducing bias towards more accessible or safer locations rather than the border villages which were more challenging to access. Third, certain groups, notably children with disabilities and out-of-school children, remained underrepresented due to lack of data on these groups. Despite these limitations, the triangulation of multiple qualitative and secondary data sources enhances the credibility and analytical depth of the findings.

CHAPTER 2. WHAT DO TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS TELL US ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE COMPOUNDING CRISIS? FINDINGS FROM THE EDUCATION MONITOR SURVEY

This chapter brings together data from the three online surveys (Grade 12 students, parents, and teachers) conducted between May and October 2025. We complement this with qualitative interview data from war-affected areas on Lebanon's southern border in February 2026. Where comparable measures exist from previous crisis monitoring surveys conducted by CLS between 2021 and 2024 (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2021a; Hammoud, 2023; Hammoud & Brun, 2025), the analysis situates 2025 findings alongside these earlier waves to highlight continuity, deterioration, or partial improvement in key indicators. This cross-sectional longitudinal approach is critical: it enables longitudinal analysis of trends at population level, while single-year snapshots risk obscuring the cumulative nature of disruption. Read in isolation, any given year may suggest partial recovery or stability; however, when examined over time, these same data reveal a steady erosion of access, learning, and wellbeing. Earlier CLS reporting shows that successive crises do not simply interrupt education but compound their effects, deepening learning loss and widening disparities across regions and groups (Hammoud & Brun, 2025). We build on that diagnosis by showing how students, parents, and teachers experience these dynamics through decisions about enrolment and mobility, perceptions of readiness and quality, and the social and psychological costs borne by households and educators.

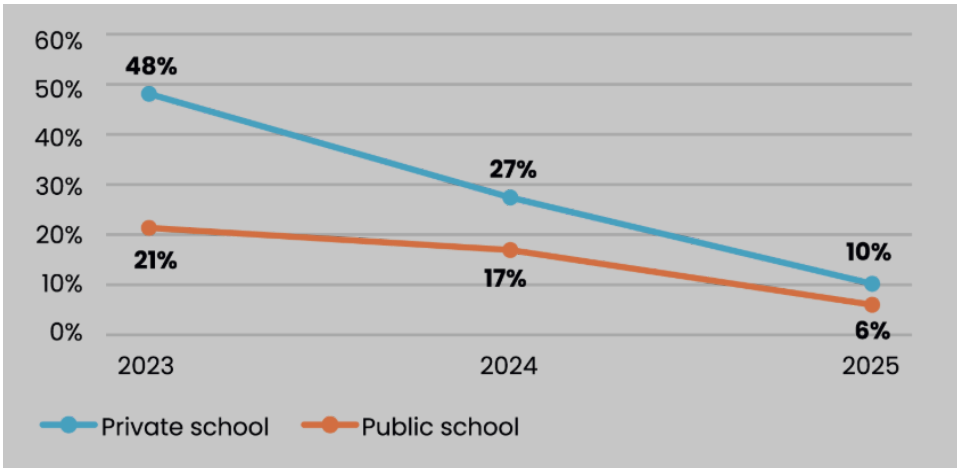
2.1. Students' experiences: Studying amid continued crises

This section presents the main findings of the 2025 Grade 12 student survey, which examined exam preparedness, educational performance and quality, psychological wellbeing, and the impact of the latest Israeli aggression on schooling. This is part of the third wave of surveys targeting students preparing for official examinations that CLS has conducted since 2020. The data are complemented with qualitative data from the southern border areas of the country.

Readiness for official examinations

Readiness for the official Grade 12 examinations reached an alarmingly low level in 2025. Only 10% of private school students and 6% of public school students reported feeling ready to sit the exams.

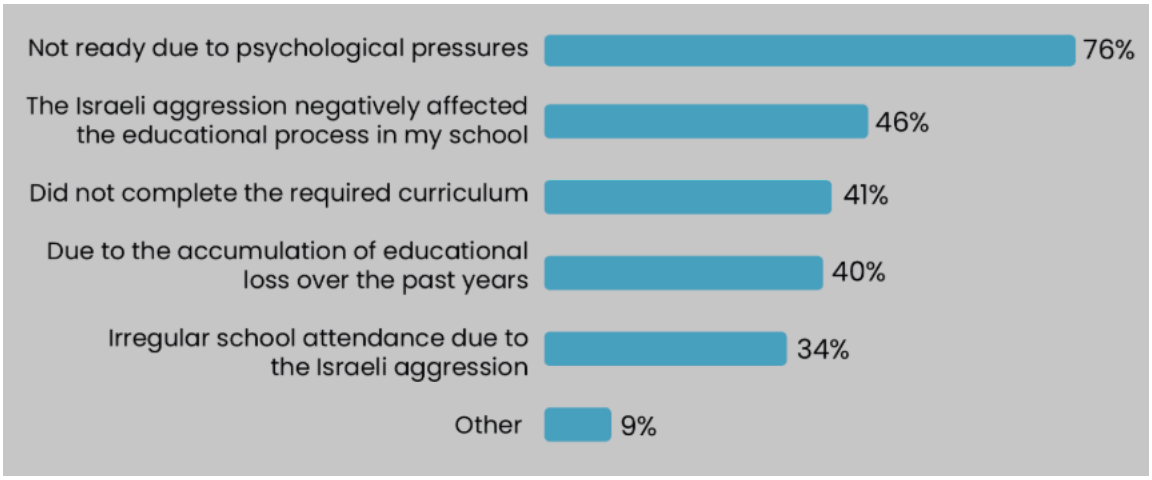
Figure 2. **Percentage of Grade 12 students who reported that they are ready for official exams**



These figures represent a sharp decline compared with previous years. In 2024, 27% of private school students and 17% of public school students considered themselves ready, while in 2023 the corresponding proportions were 48% and 21%. The trend thus shows a continuous deterioration over three consecutive cohorts.

When students were asked to explain why they did not feel ready, psychological pressures emerged as the dominant factor. Seventy-six per cent attributed their lack of readiness primarily to psychological distress. Other frequently cited reasons were the perceived negative impact of the Israeli aggression on the educational process in their school (46%), failure to complete the required curriculum (41%), the accumulation of learning losses over previous years (40%), and irregular school attendance due to the aggression (34%). A further 9% selected other reasons.

Figure 3. **Reasons for students' lack of readiness for official exams**

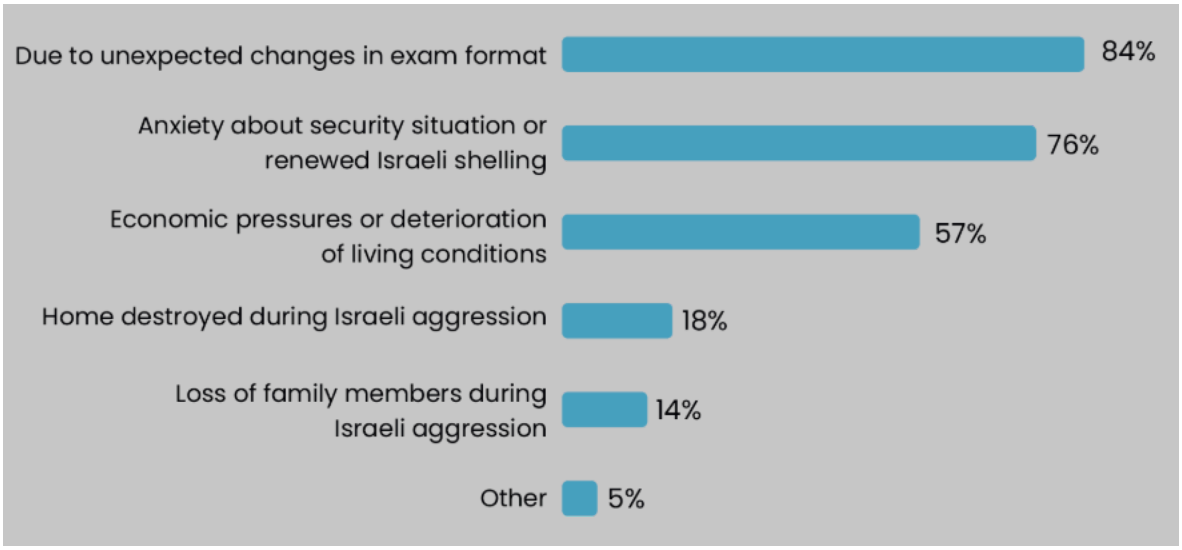


Together, these responses highlight that exam unreadiness in 2025 cannot be reduced to gaps in curriculum coverage alone. It is shaped by an interaction between pervasive psychological strain, direct exposure to violence and displacement, and the long tail of cumulative learning loss generated by earlier crises.

Psychological wellbeing

The survey results point to a critical deterioration in students' psychological wellbeing. Only 10% of respondents described their mental health as good. A large majority identified multiple sources of stress directly related to the examination context and the broader security and economic situation.

Figure 4. Factors causing psychological stress among students



The most frequently cited source of stress was unexpected changes to the exam format or procedures, reported by 84% of students. This finding underscores that uncertainty and last-minute adjustments to examination arrangements were a central anxiety driver. Seventy-six per cent of students expressed heightened anxiety about the security situation and the possibility of renewed Israeli shelling in their areas of residence. Students from southern border areas, interviewed in February 2026, emphasised this reality. They reported that when they returned to their schools in September 2025 after two years away, they found damaged school buildings and makeshift classrooms. The students also reported witnessing ceasefire breaches by Israel on a daily basis, with the persistent buzz of drones over their heads and bombs around them. Together, these conditions made anxiety about the security situation a constant feature of their learning environment.

However, the war situation also affected students' financial situation and added to already stretched family budgets. Fifty-seven per cent of students reported economic pressures or the deterioration of living conditions as a major stress factor. For a significant minority, the consequences of the aggression were even more tangible: 18% cited the destruction of their homes during the aggression as a cause of stress, while 14% reported the loss of family members. Five per cent identified other sources of psychological pressure.

These findings suggest that the mental health burden borne by Grade 12 students is both exam-related and directly shaped by the experience of conflict, displacement, and worsening household economic conditions. The low proportion reporting good mental health raises serious questions about the adequacy of existing psychosocial support mechanisms within the education system.

Curriculum coverage and policy responses

In addition to psychological strain, students' readiness was undermined by incomplete coverage of the curriculum and repeated school interruptions. Only 24% of private school students reported that their school had managed to cover the entire curriculum, compared with just 12% of students in public schools. This indicates that even in the better-resourced private sector, most students approached the official examinations without having covered all of the material.

Although teacher strikes during the 2024/2025 academic year were relatively short, they still contributed to the pattern of schooling disruption, particularly in public schools, where 63% of students reported that these strikes had affected their readiness for the official examinations.

Students were also asked about the policy measures adopted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) during the Israeli aggressions, namely the reopening of schools either online or in person, depending on the safety conditions in each location. Their responses reveal a pronounced disconnect between policy intentions and students' perceptions. An overwhelming 91% of respondents opposed the cancellation of optional subjects from the official examinations. This policy change removed a mechanism that had previously allowed students to distribute their efforts strategically across subjects, thereby reducing the overall burden of exam preparation. Its removal appears to have intensified feelings of pressure and dissatisfaction.

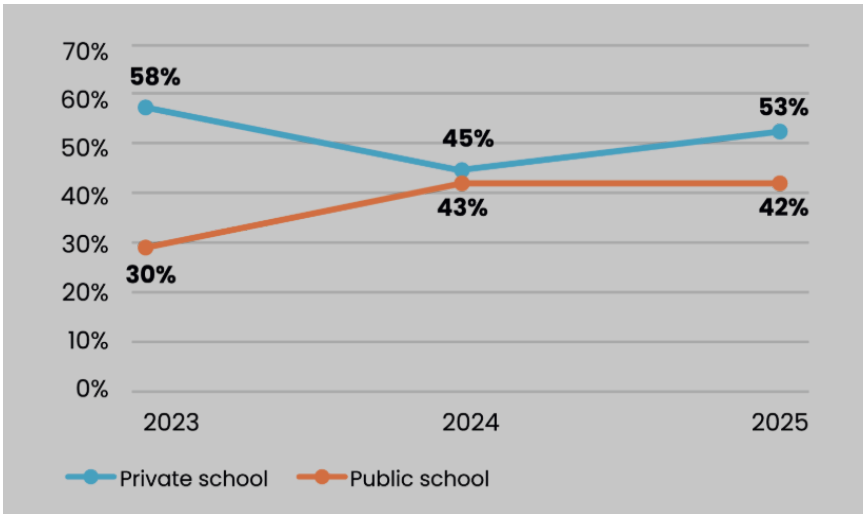
Moreover, the Ministry's decision to reduce the curriculum by 40% received more mixed reactions. Fifty-eight per cent of students expressed approval, suggesting that many recognised the need to rationalise expectations in light of lost instructional time. Nevertheless, this level of support remains modest, indicating that the measure did not fully address students' concerns.

Finally, the extension of the academic year, which was extended for a few additional teaching days, was widely regarded as insufficient. Only 6% of private school students and 1% of public school students believed that the extension was adequate to ensure full curriculum coverage. Taken together, these findings suggest the policy measures were perceived as partial, reactive, and inadequate in response to the scale of disruption experienced by students.

Perceived academic performance and educational quality

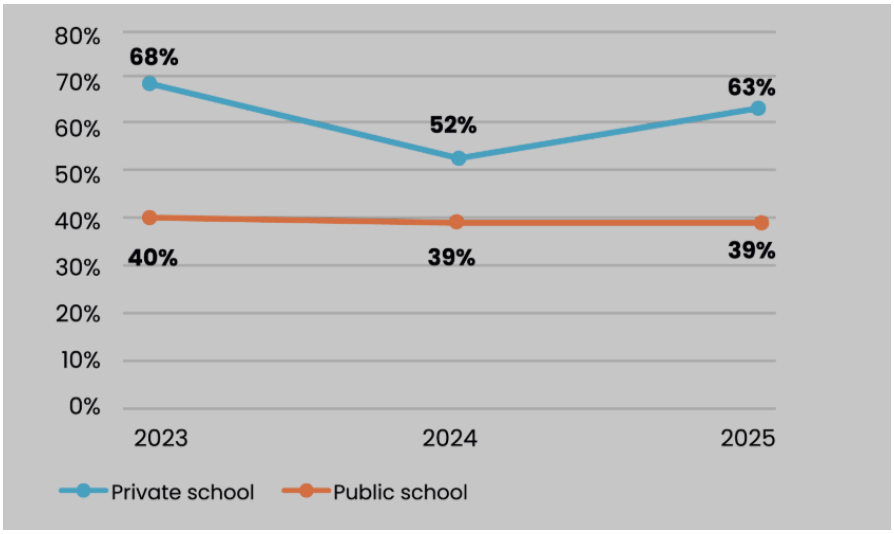
The survey reveals persistent disparities between private and public school students in self-reported academic performance and perceived educational quality across the last three years, though outcomes in both sectors remain unsatisfactory.

Figure 5. Percentage of Grade 12 students who reported good academic performance



With respect to academic performance, private school students consistently reported higher rates of good performance than their public school peers. In private schools, the share of students reporting good academic performance fell from 58% in 2023 to 45% in 2024, before rising again to 53% in 2025. Among public school students, the proportion reporting good performance increased from 30% in 2023 to 43% in 2024, then stabilised at 42% in 2025.

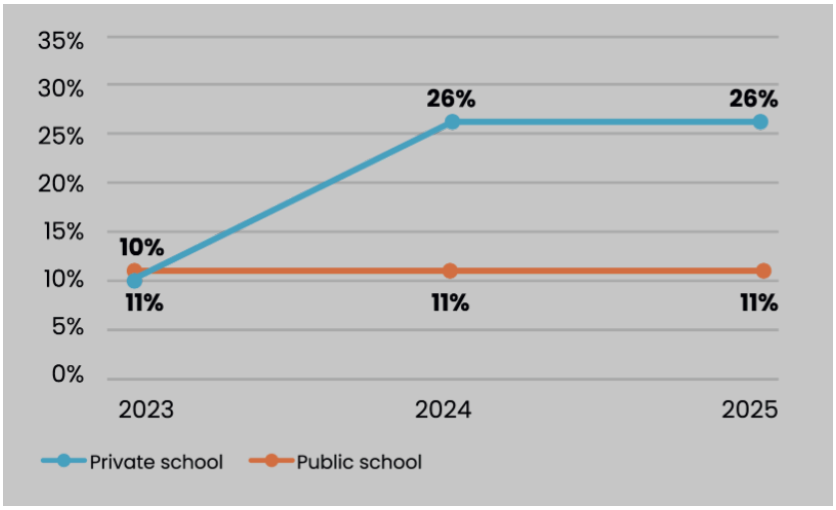
Figure 6. Percentage of Grade 12 students who reported good education quality



Perceptions of educational quality followed a similar pattern. In private schools, 68% of students rated the quality of their education as good in 2023. This proportion dropped to 52% in 2024, before increasing to 63% in 2025. In public schools, perceptions of good educational quality remained low and almost unchanged, at around 40% across all three years. These trends highlight two important points. First, private school students continue to report higher levels of academic performance and educational quality than their public school peers, reflecting the enduring inter-sectoral divide and the continued institutional fragility characterising public schooling. Second, despite this gap, the levels recorded in both sectors are far from satisfactory, indicating systemic challenges affecting students across the

entire education system.

Figure 7. Percentage of Grade 12 students who reported sufficient skills and knowledge for continued education



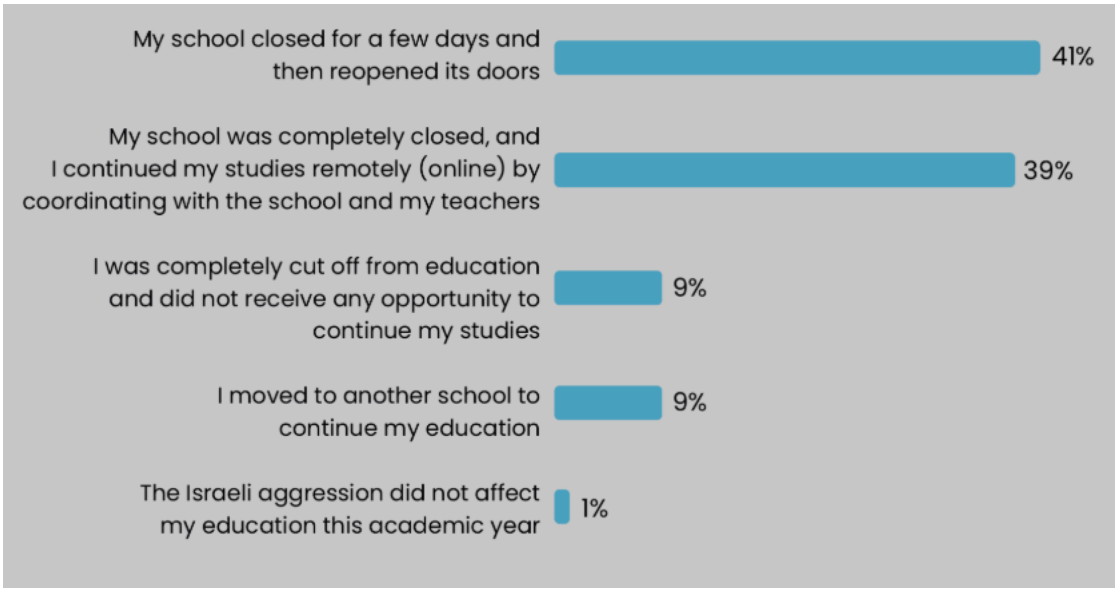
The survey also explored students' perceptions of their preparedness for further education. When asked whether the skills and knowledge they had acquired over the previous three years of schooling were sufficient to continue their education, 26% of private school students responded positively in both 2024 and 2025, up from 10% in 2023. This suggests some improvement in private schools' ability to equip students for educational progression, although the overall proportion remains relatively modest. In contrast, public school students' confidence in their preparedness for further study remained persistently low and unchanged. Only 11% of public school respondents in each of the three years felt that their schooling had provided them with sufficient skills and knowledge to continue their education. This enduring gap highlights the particular difficulties faced by students in the public system and signals a serious risk of cumulative disadvantage as they transition beyond secondary education.

Impact of the Israeli aggression

"*I moved to six different houses, and studied in different schools. I was one of the top students in my school, and today I'm average*" (Student from a border village, interview, February 2026)

Given the high share of respondents (57%) residing in areas directly affected by the aggression, the survey allowed a more detailed examination of its educational consequences. Among students living in these highly affected regions, 86% reported that they had been forcibly displaced during the 2024–2025 academic year, and 96% experienced some form of disruption to their schooling.

Figure 8. The impact of the Israeli aggression on students residing in directly affected areas



The forms of disruption varied. Forty-one per cent of affected students reported that their school closed for a few days and then reopened. Thirty-nine per cent indicated that their school was completely closed and that they continued their studies remotely through online platforms in coordination with their school and teachers. Nine per cent reported being completely cut off from education, with no opportunity to continue their studies during the period of displacement and closure. Another 9% had to move to a different school to continue their education. Only 1% stated that the aggression had no impact on their education in the current academic year.

For students in southern border areas, access to learning has been limited since October 2023 – amounting to two full school years. For many students, online learning has provided their only access to education since October 2023. For the students in the three schools where we conducted fieldwork, teachers suggested that two years of online learning had resulted in a catastrophic decline in educational gains. The teachers and principals suggested that the decline went beyond the concept of "learning loss" to what the principal of one school we visited described as "educational poverty", meaning the absence of minimum basic skills. A female student in secondary school stated: "In online we had one phone and no atmosphere for studying. We moved to more than one place, but I failed because I couldn't adapt to the new atmosphere. Today I'm too tired to make up for what I lost."

Although these insights highlight the severity of disruption in directly affected areas, the psychological impact of the aggression extended well beyond the frontlines. Students across Lebanon reported heightened anxiety about the possibility of renewed airstrikes, especially since many experienced the trauma of losing family members, the destruction of their homes, or the loss of their family's main source of income.

These experiences, layered on top of prior crises and disruptions, have compounded existing learning losses and further weakened students' academic readiness and overall wellbeing throughout the country.

2.2 How parents experience the impact of crises on children's education: Results from the parent survey

This section presents the main findings of the 2025 parent survey, which examined how families are coping with the financial, educational, and psychological pressures affecting their children amid Lebanon's prolonged crises and the compounded effects of the latest Israeli aggression. The 2025 wave is directly comparable to three earlier rounds of parent surveys conducted between 2022 and 2024, allowing trends in household finances, schooling patterns, and perceived impacts on children's learning and wellbeing to be tracked over a four-year period.

Household income, schooling costs, and affordability

The survey tracked changes in average annual household income and the combined tuition and transportation costs for one child to attend private school over four academic years. Our findings revealed that between 2024 and 2025, the reported average annual household income increased from 10,260 to 12,216 US dollars. Over the same period, the average annual private school tuition and transportation cost for one child rose from 3,964 to 4,417 US dollars.

Figure 9. Average annual household income and average annual tuition and transportation cost for one child in private school

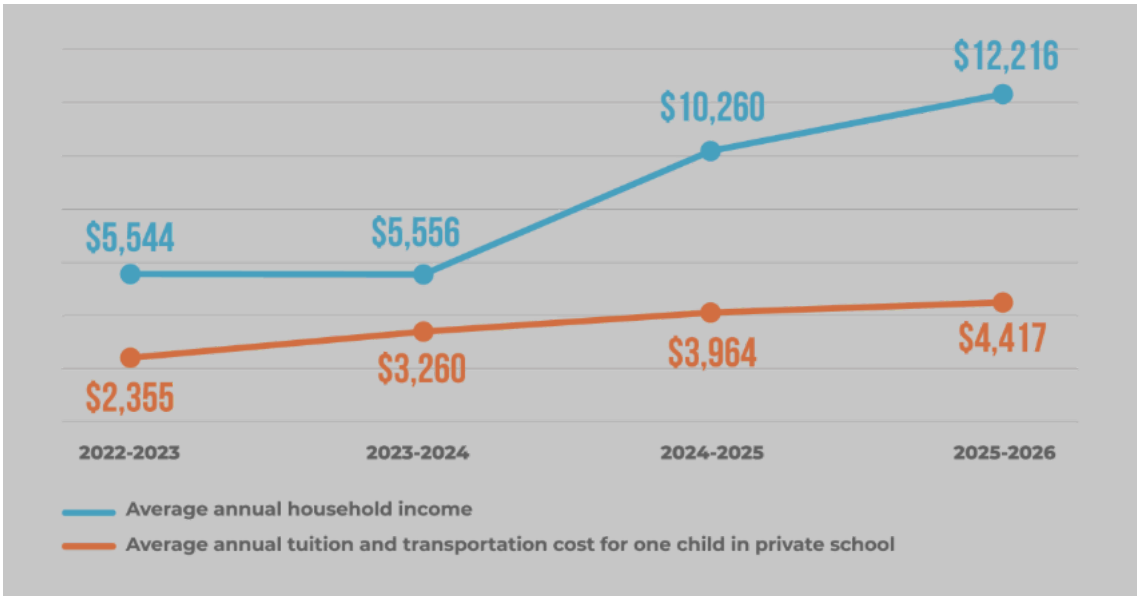


Figure 9 on household income and schooling costs shows that both indicators rose steadily from 2022–2023 to 2025–2026. Average annual household income increased from 5,544 US dollars in 2022–2023 to 5,556 in 2023–2024, then jumped to 10,260 in 2024–2025 and 12,216 in 2025–2026. Over the same period, the average annual tuition and transportation cost for one child in private school increased from 2,355 to 3,260, then to 3,964 and 4,417 US dollars. Overall, household income more than doubled between 2022 and 2025, rising by 120%, while private school costs grew by 88%.

Despite these income gains, affordability remained a central challenge. In 2025, the cost of educating one child in a private school, including transportation, was still equivalent to more than four times the average monthly household income and absorbed over one-third of annual earnings. This represented a notable improvement compared with 2023, when the cost of private schooling for one child

consumed almost two-thirds of average annual incomes, yet the burden remains unsustainable for many families. Around two-thirds of families reported that they always struggled to pay household bills, and a similar proportion indicated that they had borrowed money to cover both household expenses and education costs.

In this context, rising incomes did not close the affordability gap but simply slowed its widening. Families were still compelled to cut essential expenditure, incur debt, or withdraw children from private schools, which is consistent with the high rate of transfers into the public sector described below.

Sectoral migration between public and private schools

This year's survey provides important evidence on changes in school-sector enrolment for the 2025–2026 academic year, particularly movements between public and private schools. These shifts occurred within a context of rising private school fees, increased household financial strain, and persistent concerns about educational quality.

Among the sample of parents who currently have a child enrolled in private schools, only 3% reported transferring their child from a public to a private school for the 2025–2026 academic year. Within this small group, half cited declining quality of public education as the main reason for the move. Therefore, migration into the private sector remained rare and was motivated primarily by the perceived lower quality of public schools.

In contrast, among the sample of parents who currently have a child enrolled in public schools, 46% reported transferring their child from a private school to a public school for 2025–2026. Financial pressure was the dominant factor shaping these decisions, with 90% of these parents stating that they could no longer afford private school tuition.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that sectoral migration is driven much more by affordability than educational preference. Concerns about the quality of public education are clearly present and were acknowledged by some parents, yet they were not sufficient to offset the broader cost dynamics that continued to push families out of private schools and into the public system.

Parental views on reduced instructional days in public schools

In 2025, MEHE introduced a policy reducing instructional days in public schools to four days per week; this was met with a divided response, according to our survey findings. Almost half of parents (49%) supported the reduction in school days. Among supporters, 48% pointed to lower transport costs as a key benefit, and 66% believed that the change reduced lesson pressure on children. However, 40% of parents opposed the decision. Their concerns focused on the educational consequences. For instance, 64% were worried about reduced learning time, and 53% emphasised that the shorter week would make it more difficult to address accumulated learning losses.

These contrasting views highlight a significant policy trade-off. Measures that alleviate immediate financial pressures on the public sector and on households, and that may reduce daily stress for students, can nevertheless deepen existing learning deficits and widen gaps between students in different sectors if not accompanied by robust catch-up programmes and effective pedagogical strategies.

Impact of the Israeli aggression on schooling trajectories

The Israeli aggression added a further layer of disruption to an already strained system. Nearly three in

ten parents in the sample reported living in areas directly affected by the aggression. Among these families, displacement was extensive, with 86% stating that they had been forced to leave their homes.

Of those who were displaced, a large majority (83%) eventually returned home. However, among the children of families who remained displaced, 75% were able to re-enrol in the same school, 9% did not enrol in school at any point during the current academic year, and 16% transferred to a different school. For those who changed schools, economic factors played a critical role. Three-quarters of parents in this group cited financial reasons, such as the inability to afford the fees of their previous school, as the main driver of the transfer. In addition, 21% reported changing schools because their home had been destroyed during the aggression, and 16% attributed the move to ongoing security concerns. Parents we interviewed in the south described how they were forced to transfer their children between several schools due to continuous displacement.

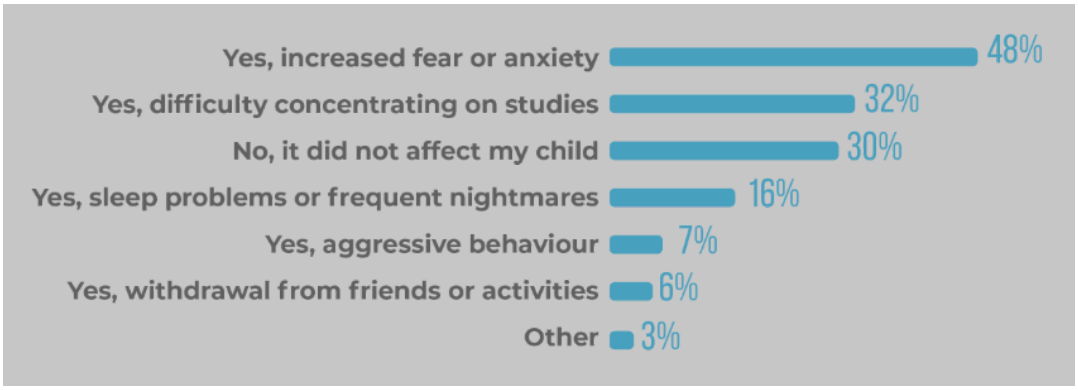
The survey also investigated interruptions to in-person schooling among children living in directly affected areas. Over the past two academic years, 27% of these children experienced school closures linked to the aggression. In most cases, closures lasted between one and three months (65%), but for some children they extended to a full academic year (4%) or even two consecutive years (1%).

During these periods of closure, learning continuity was highly uneven. Only 18% of parents reported that their children received regular online education. A larger group, 41%, reported irregular online provision, and an equal share, 41%, indicated that their children received no educational support at all while schools were closed. These findings echo earlier survey waves and point to persistent weaknesses in schools' capacity to sustain instruction during emergencies (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2021a; b; Shuayb et al., 2024). During our interviews, parents in the south were highly sceptical of online learning and described the struggle in ensuring their children could follow online education due to a lack of devices, internet, and electricity, in addition to a lack of supervision in online education. One parent stated, "Online education requires supplies and an atmosphere for studying that is not available". When parents were asked about the possibility of returning to remote education in the event of a new war – a reality they are living at the time of writing in March 2026 – the answer was decisive: they would not accept online education if they have to go through a new war and displacement. One parent from a border area said, "If we flee we don't want online education. Their dreams died and they constantly think of death."

Children's psychological wellbeing, future prospects, and dropout

The survey confirms that the impact of the aggression and ongoing crises was not limited to disruptions in attendance and learning difficulties. Across the entire sample, parents reported significant psychological effects on their children.

Figure 10. The impact of the Israeli aggression on children's psychological wellbeing



As Figure 10 shows, 48% of parents observed increased fear or anxiety among their children, 32% noted difficulty concentrating on studies, and 16% reported sleep problems or frequent nightmares. Furthermore, 7% of parents reported more aggressive behaviour, 6% noted withdrawal from friends or activities, and 3% mentioned other types of psychological distress. Only 30% of parents stated that the aggression had not affected their child's psychological wellbeing.

Amid these pressures, only one-quarter of parents expressed confidence that their child would be able to continue their education, while the remaining 75% were uncertain about their child's educational trajectory. In addition, 9% of respondents reported having at least one child under the age of 18 who had dropped out of school. As observed in previous survey waves (Hammoud & Brun, 2025), these cases disproportionately involved boys, with parents indicating that roughly two-thirds of those no longer attending school were male. Although the survey does not trace individual pathways, the intersection of rising educational costs, recurrent disruptions to schooling, and labour market incentives for boys continues to constitute a significant risk factor for early school departure.

2.3 Teaching in the context of continued crisis: Results from the teacher survey

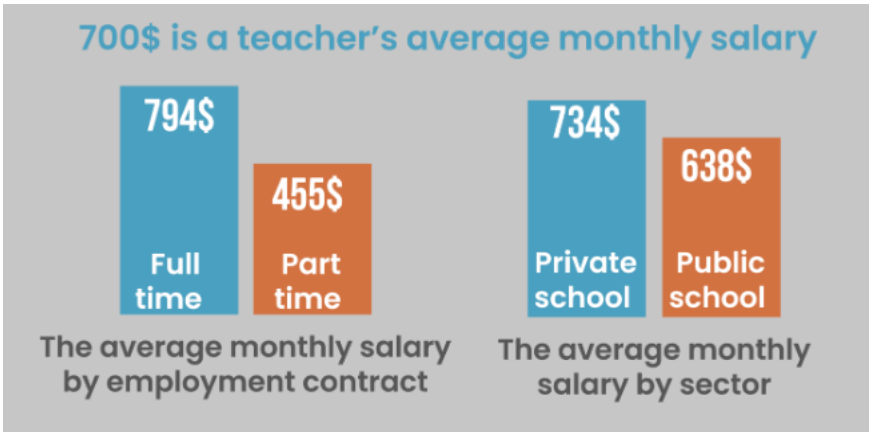
This section presents the main findings of the 2025 teacher survey, which examined how teachers are coping with the cumulative effects of Lebanon's overlapping economic and social crises, compounded by Israeli aggressions. It explores how these conditions have reshaped teachers' working and living circumstances, their motivation and psychological wellbeing, and their perceptions of educational quality, while also documenting the strategies teachers adopt to sustain their livelihoods and remain in the profession. The 2025 wave is the fourth consecutive annual survey of teachers, following surveys conducted in 2022, 2023, and 2024 (Hammoud & Shuayb, 2021a; Hammoud, 2023; Hammoud & Brun, 2025), and allows trends in salaries, essential household expenditures, professional stability, and the broader impacts of the crisis on the education system's workforce to be traced over time.

Teacher salaries and essential household expenditures

This year's survey revealed that the effects of Lebanon's prolonged economic and financial crisis remain clearly visible in teacher salaries, which continue to fall well below the pre-crisis level of around 1,300 US dollars per month (Cedar Gate Fund, 2023). According to the 2025 findings, the average monthly income from teaching reached 700 US dollars, compared with 159 US dollars recorded in the 2022–2023 survey. Although this increase appears substantial in nominal terms, these figures must be

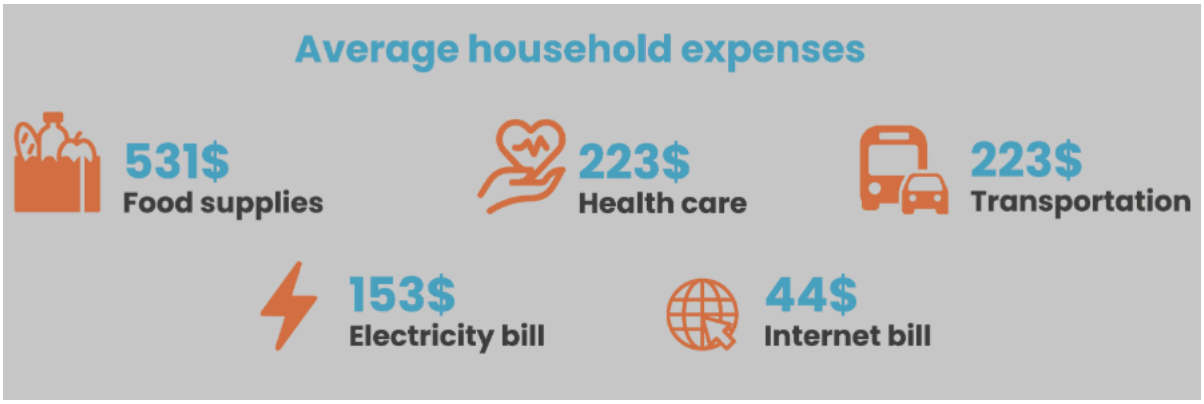
interpreted in the context of high inflation and rising living costs, which have significantly eroded the purchasing power of teachers' earnings.

Figure 11. Average monthly teacher salaries by employment type and school sector



Disaggregated figures reveal marked differences by contract type and sector, as shown in Figure 11. For instance, full-time teachers reported an average monthly salary of 794 US dollars, whereas part-time teachers earned 455 US dollars on average. When broken down by sector, teachers in private schools reported average earnings of 734 US dollars per month, compared with 638 US dollars for teachers working in public schools. These differences reveal the particular vulnerability of part-time teachers, whose income is more directly affected by interruptions in the school calendar.

Figure 12. Breakdown of teachers' average monthly essential household expenses



The survey also captured teachers' essential household expenditures, covering internet, electricity, transportation, food, and medical care. In 2025, these basic expenses reached an average of 1,174 US dollars per month, up from 827 US dollars in the 2022–2023 wave. As illustrated in Figure 12, food represented the largest share of expenditure at 531 US dollars, followed by health care and transportation at 223 US dollars each, electricity at 153 US dollars, and internet at 44 US dollars. Taken together, these figures show that essential monthly expenses amounted to nearly 167% of teachers' average monthly income. It is worth noting that these estimates exclude housing costs, heating, education for teachers' own children, and other personal consumption, which means that the real gap between income and total expenditure is even wider than these figures suggest.

Minimum living wage expectations and intentions to remain in the profession

To assess how teachers themselves evaluate the adequacy of their salaries, the survey asked respondents to estimate the minimum monthly wage required to ensure a dignified and sustainable standard of living in the 2025–2026 academic year. On average, teachers reported that they would need 1,722 US dollars per month to achieve such a standard, compared with 1,203 US dollars in the 2023–2024 survey.

Figure 13. Teachers' average minimum salary expectations by age group for a decent and sustainable standard of living

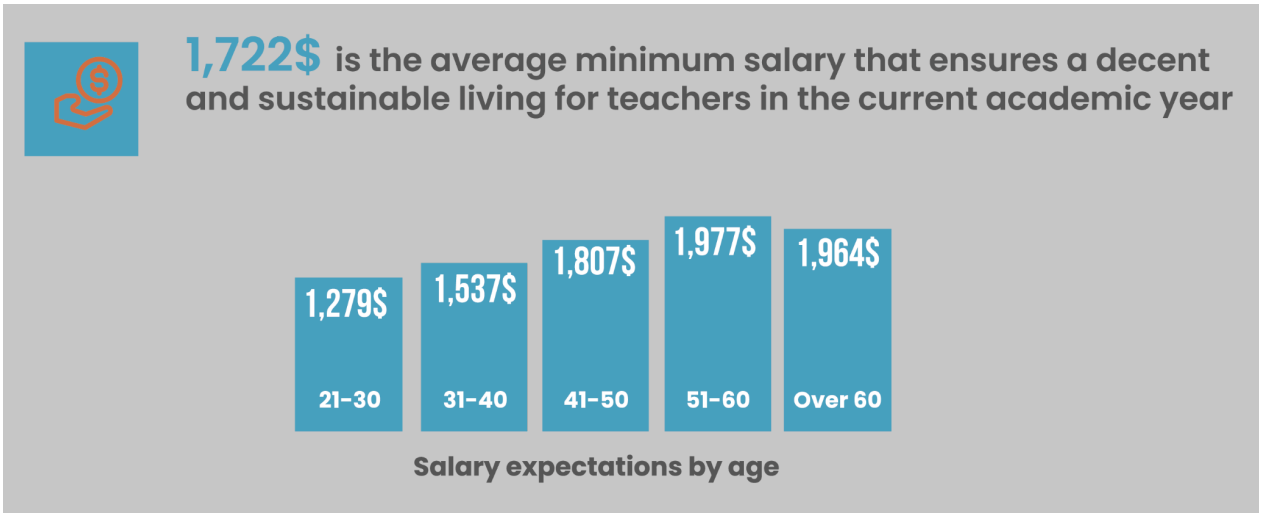


Figure 13 shows that these expectations varied by age group, with teachers aged 21–30 years estimating a minimum of 1,279 US dollars, rising to 1,537 US dollars among 31–40-year olds, 1,807 US dollars among 41–50-year olds, and 1,977 US dollars among 51–60-year olds, with teachers over 60 years old estimating 1,964 US dollars. The substantial gap between teachers' estimated minimum living wage and the actual average income of 700 US dollars highlights the depth of economic hardship experienced across the profession and has translated into profound uncertainty about the future of the teaching workforce.

For instance, when asked whether they wished to continue working in the education sector, only around one-third of teachers expressed a desire to remain in teaching. By contrast, 12% stated that they did not wish to continue in the profession, while the majority (56%) reported that they were continuing solely because they had no alternative employment options. These findings signal a serious risk of attrition from the teaching profession if teachers' economic conditions do not improve, posing a direct threat to the stability and continuity of the education system.

Impact of the Israeli aggression on displacement and school mobility

Beyond economic pressures, the survey explored how the latest Israeli aggression has affected teachers' living conditions and employment trajectories. Nearly three in ten teachers reported residing in areas directly affected by the aggression. Among this group, 77% indicated that they had been forced to leave their homes. Of those who were displaced, 76% eventually returned to their original homes, while the remainder (24%) remained displaced due to the destruction of their homes or ongoing security concerns.

Despite this disruption, a sizeable majority of teachers who remain displaced (84%) were able to return to teaching in the same school during the 2025–2026 academic year. However, 16% reported that they had transferred to another school. Among those who changed schools, around 40% cited financial reasons, including inadequate salaries and high transportation costs, as the main driver of the move. Twelve per cent reported relocating because their homes had been destroyed, while another 12% attributed their move to continued security concerns in their original areas of residence. These findings illustrate how displacement resulting from the Israeli aggression interacted with pre-existing economic pressures and generated further instability in teachers' employment.

The perceived impact of compounded crises on teachers and the education system

To capture the broader consequences of Lebanon's protracted crises, the survey asked teachers to assess how the compounded crises have affected their teaching performance, psychological wellbeing, and perceptions of educational quality in both public and private schools. The results, summarised in Table 2, point to a profession operating under sustained pressure.

Table 2. The perceived impact of compounded crises on teachers and the education system

Impact of compounded crises on	Positive	Negative	No Impact	I do not know
Your motivation to work	7%	78%	9%	6%
Your psychological wellbeing	10%	72%	8%	9%
Your relationship with students	59%	6%	32%	3%
Your performance in teaching	39%	20%	34%	7%
Students' academic performance	28%	48%	15%	8%
Quality of education in public schools	18%	40%	10%	33%
Quality of education in private schools	36%	25%	18%	22%

With respect to motivation to work, 78% of teachers reported that they perceived a negative impact, compared with only 7% who reported that they perceived a positive impact and 9% who reported no impact. A similar pattern emerged for psychological wellbeing: 72% reported that their mental health had been negatively affected, 10% perceived a positive effect, and 8% saw no change. The close alignment between low motivation and poor psychological wellbeing highlights the emotional toll of collapsing real wages, continuous economic uncertainty, and exposure to crisis conditions. The small but visible share of positive responses could be interpreted as evidence of differentiated crisis experiences rather than as an indication that the crises were beneficial. These responses may reflect employment security, professional commitment, adaptation to disruption, stronger teacher–student relationships, or more supportive school environments among some teachers.

It was clear from the interviews carried out with teachers, parents, and principals in schools in the south of Lebanon still affected by Israeli attacks that there is low trust in MEHE. In the aftermath of the 66-day war, MEHE demonstrated limited institutional readiness to manage the educational crisis at a national scale. In the absence of a coordinated crisis response plan, schools and educators were left to navigate the disruption independently. This gap in leadership disproportionately impacted public schools, which lacked the resources and flexibility to adapt (Maalouf & Brun, 2025). The lack of structured psychosocial support further compounded challenges, and teachers – like students and parents – reported high

levels of emotional distress. Yet there was no national framework for mental health support, and teachers received no training in responding to post-crisis emotional needs (Maalouf & Brun, 2025).

Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students were more positive: 59% reported that this had improved, 32% perceived no change, and only 6% felt that it had deteriorated. This finding suggests that, despite institutional fragility and personal hardship, many teachers have continued to play a central role in supporting and motivating students and in maintaining relational stability within classrooms.

Assessments of teachers' perceptions of their own performance were mixed; 39% believed that this had improved, 34% reported no perceived impact, and 20% reported a perceived decline. The positive responses may reflect teachers' sense that they had adapted to repeated disruptions by developing new pedagogical strategies, improving communication with students, and becoming more responsive to learners' academic and emotional needs. In contrast, perceptions of students' academic performance were considerably less optimistic. Almost half of teachers (48%) reported they perceived a negative impact on students' performance, 28% perceived a positive effect, and 15% perceived no change. This divergence between teachers' efforts and their perceptions of student outcomes reflects the cumulative effects of repeated school interruptions and compounded learning losses over recent years.

When asked about the quality of education, teachers perceived public schools to be more adversely affected than private schools. Forty per cent reported perceptions of a negative impact on the quality of education in public schools, compared with 18% who reported perceptions of a positive impact, and 10% who saw no change. For private schools, 36% reported perceiving a positive impact on quality, 25% perceived a negative impact, and 18% perceived no impact. These responses point to a persistent gap between public and private schooling, with crisis-related pressures continuing to affect the two sectors unevenly, reinforcing structural inequalities within the education system.

Teachers interviewed in the southern regions described the loss of learning among students who had been displaced for more than two years as dramatic. As one teacher stated:

> "*When students returned to in-person education, we felt that online education was as if it never happened to them. A fourth-grade student was at first or second primary level*" (Teacher from a school in a border area).

Teachers' perspectives on the four-day public school week

Against this backdrop, MEHE's decision to reduce the school week in public schools to four days prompted mixed reactions among teachers. Among public school teachers, 65% supported the policy. Their support was primarily grounded in the possibility of reducing transportation costs, cited by 59% of supporters, and in the opportunity to take on additional work during the school year, as mentioned by 44% of teachers.

However, 27% of public school teachers opposed the reduction in school days, citing concerns about both its implications for students' learning and its financial consequences for teachers' salaries, particularly among contractual staff whose pay is directly tied to teaching hours. For instance, 57% of teachers were concerned that the new policy would reduce actual teaching hours, 55% believed that it would make the recovery of learning losses more difficult, and 18% feared that it would lead to reductions in their salaries, particularly for contractual teachers whose pay is calculated on an hourly basis.

Taken together, these findings point to a difficult policy trade-off. Measures introduced to alleviate immediate financial pressures on the public sector may nonetheless deepen existing learning deficits and widen inequalities between students in public and private schools if they are not accompanied by robust catch-up programmes and more effective use of classroom time. At the same time, such measures risk intensifying financial insecurity among the teachers in the most precarious positions, particularly those whose income is directly linked to teaching hours, such as contract teachers.

CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDIES

The analysis presented in Chapter 2, based on three online surveys of students, parents, and teachers, demonstrates that inequality translates into exclusion at multiple levels. However, it also highlights important limitations in reaching groups most at risk of being excluded from education. To address this gap, this chapter presents three case studies focusing on populations underrepresented in the survey data: Lebanese children who have been forced out of school, Syrian refugee children, and children and young people with disabilities. While analytically distinct, these groups often experience overlapping forms of marginalisation, as financial hardship, displacement, and disability intersect. The case studies, therefore, provide a more detailed examination of how cumulative crises, rising costs, and limited institutional support contribute to exclusion, particularly for those requiring additional or specialised forms of educational provision.

3.1 Children forced out of school

Chapter 2 showed that, since 2019, the number of out-of-school children has continued to rise. This section provides a deeper analysis of the available data on out-of-school children. We bring together data from the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) and UNICEF (2025) report, *Sub-National Lebanon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2023 Statistical Snapshots*, with the results from Chapter 2 of this study, the Lebanon Response Plan (OCHA et al., 2026), and the Save the Children (2025) Protection and Education Needs Assessment. Rather than estimating national prevalence directly, the section adopts an analytical approach that uses these sources together to identify patterns of exclusion, the drivers of out-of-schooling, and the broader implications of school exclusion under conditions of compounded crisis.

The scale of the problem

According to the Lebanon Response Plan 2026, overall school enrolment declined by more than 10% from 1.3 million in 2022–2023 to 1.15 million in 2024–2025. Public schools, which serve many of the most vulnerable children, recorded a 15% overall reduction, including a 50% drop in the afternoon shift that primarily serves non-Lebanese learners. UNRWA schools also saw a 4% decline in enrolments compared to the previous year. The same source projects that out-of-school children will account for nearly 20% of the school-aged population by 2026, with displaced Syrian children expected to be the most affected group, with around 60% remaining out of school (MEHE & Lebanon Education Sector, 2026).

Findings from the CAS and UNICEF (2025) report demonstrate that the number of out-of-school children in Lebanon is both substantial and unevenly distributed across populations and educational stages, reflecting an education system under significant strain. The data indicate that exclusion is particularly acute among displaced Syrian children, for whom it reaches crisis levels, with as many as 86% of children missing early childhood education, 64% excluded at the primary level, and 81% at the intermediate level. These figures demonstrate that, for this group, being out of school is the norm rather than the exception. While the scale is less severe among Lebanese populations, it remains considerable, especially outside Beirut. In regions such as Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, Akkar, and the Bekaa, between roughly one-quarter and two-fifths of children are out of school at key stages, with peaks of 37% in primary education and 41% in intermediate education in Mount Lebanon. Even in Beirut, which performs comparatively better, notable shares of children remain excluded, indicating that the issue is nationwide rather than localised. Palestinian refugee camps also exhibit a significant scale of exclusion, though generally lower than that of displaced Syrians.

Across all groups, the largest proportions of out-of-school children are concentrated in the foundational stages of education, while the share of children at risk of dropout is markedly smaller, suggesting that the primary challenge lies in ensuring access to schooling in the first place. The same source shows that while adjusted primary attendance remains relatively high in some locations, gaps widen markedly at the intermediate level and become widest at the secondary level, with the sharpest drop-offs occurring during the transitions into intermediary and secondary schooling. It also finds that Lebanese children attend and complete more than non-Lebanese children at every level, and that girls are more likely than boys to be in school (CAS & UNICEF, 2025). It is worth noting that these figures precede the two most recent Israeli aggressions (in 2024 and 2026), displacement, and school disruption, which suggests that the current situation may be even worse. UNICEF's study demonstrates that out-of-school status is part of a wider continuum that includes weak early participation, attrition at key transition points, and high dropout risk among children who remain formally enrolled but are already over-age for their respective grade level. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) are therefore useful not only because they identify who is out of school, but because they show that vulnerability to exclusion accumulates over time and intensifies as children progress through the system (CAS & UNICEF, 2025).

Chapter 2, which presents findings from surveyed parents about their children's access to school, concurs with the findings of the CAS and UNICEF (2025) study, as it shows that the dropout rates are also increasing. According to the 2025 survey of 1,089 parents, 9% reported having at least one child under 18 who had dropped out of school, and roughly two-thirds of these dropouts were boys. Although the online survey is not nationally representative and likely under-captures the most marginalised households, this remains an important warning sign. This is especially so when read alongside the wider evidence on affordability pressures, declining learning conditions, repeated school interruption, and parental uncertainty around whether children will be able to continue their education. In fact, only one-quarter of parents expressed confidence that their child would be able to, while the rest were uncertain about their child's future educational trajectory.

The significance of rising out-of-school rates extends well beyond the loss of learning. Save the Children Lebanon's 2025 Protection and Education Needs Assessment reveals that exclusion from education is closely linked with a broader set of protection risks, including child labour, street-connected work, early marriage, exploitation, harassment, and abuse. The assessment finds that limited access to education increases children's exposure to harmful coping mechanisms, particularly among adolescents, and that child labour is closely intertwined with school dropout, unsafe environments, and psychosocial stress. For girls, early marriage remains a major driver of school exclusion and is associated with early pregnancy, domestic instability, and psychological distress (Save the Children , 2025). Therefore, school is not only a site of learning, but also a critical protective space.

Drivers contributing to rising numbers of out-of-school children

The rise in out-of-school children in Lebanon is best understood not as the result of a singular disruption, but as the cumulative outcome of overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises. Since 2019, children and their families have contended with economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged educational interruptions, political instability, teacher strikes, declining public service provision, and renewed conflict coupled with displacement. As demonstrated by consecutive education monitoring reports from the Centre for Lebanese Studies (2019–2025), presented earlier in this document, these compounding crises have progressively eroded both the education system and children's access to quality schooling. This broader trend is further reflected in the Lebanon Response Plan 2026, which notes that approximately one-third of school-aged children and youth across all nationalities experienced

learning disruption in 2025, while conflict, displacement, and delayed school reopenings have further undermined educational continuity (OCHA et al., 2026).

A primary mechanism underlying this deterioration is the accumulation of learning loss, which has not been addressed sufficiently. According to Chahine et al. (2024), students in Lebanese public schools have experienced substantial learning losses across core subjects, with only 3% of tenth-grade students passing the mathematics exam and an average score of 1.78 out of 10, 8% passing Arabic with an average score of 2.33 out of 10, and 13% passing English with an average score of 2.79 out of 10, attributable to the loss of approximately 700 to 765 teaching days over the past six academic years due to successive crises. Similar results are reflected in a 2024 diagnostic study by Lebanon's Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), which assessed learning loss among Grades 3 and 6 students across 153 public, private, and UNRWA schools, confirming significant learning disruptions nationwide (CERD, 2024).

Rather than prioritising instructional quality or the duration of the academic year, MEHE's crisis response has centred on reopening schools, often normalising reduced instructional time as the only option, instead of actively addressing learning deficits. Currently, the school week has been reduced to four days of schooling instead of five. Survey results cited earlier indicate that measures such as curriculum compression and the shortening of the public school week have become institutionalised as a normal practice in the absence of robust recovery strategies. This orientation has shifted the system toward managing scarcity rather than restoring capacity, continuity, and quality. For children already at heightened risk of falling behind in their learning, particularly those in areas directly affected by Israeli aggression, recurrent disruptions due to displacement, school closures, and unequal access to remote learning have deepened cumulative learning losses and widened achievement gaps, rendering educational progression increasingly precarious.

Furthermore, rising tuition costs have imposed severe financial pressures on households. The 2025 parent survey, presented in Chapter 2, reveals that public schools are receiving growing numbers of children transitioning from private institutions due to persistently rising private school fees – yet public schools themselves operate under severe constraints in instructional time, recovery capacity, and perceived quality. Under these conditions, migration into public schooling may, for some children, constitute a shift from one form of precarious participation to another, accompanied by an elevated risk of eventually dropping out of school. Recent evidence underscores the consequences of stretched household coping capacities: financial strain and child labour are closely associated with dropout, with nearly one-third of respondents identifying boys as more likely to leave school for these reasons. Qualitative findings further suggest that some children attempt to balance work with schooling before ultimately dropping out entirely (Save the Children, 2025).

Coping strategies and interventions

Despite sustained and multidimensional strain, many families continue to invest substantially in their children's schooling, resorting to borrowing, curtailing essential expenditures, accepting diminished provision, transferring children across school sectors, as suggested above, and striving to preserve educational continuity amid recurrent uncertainty. Teachers, for their part, persist in delivering support and stability despite enduring acute financial strain and psychological distress.

Yet these coping strategies are increasingly untenable. They sustain participation only temporarily and at considerable social and financial cost. A child may remain enrolled while experiencing diminished learning, irregular attendance, or progression through school with eroded academic skills and

confidence. This broader dynamic is reinforced by MICS data, which show that vulnerability to exclusion extends beyond children already out of school to include those who remain enrolled but are over-age for their grade, a population at heightened risk of dropout at later stages (CAS & UNICEF, 2025).

To address rising learning loss among children, MEHE implemented a series of interventions. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, MEHE introduced summer schools targeting both Lebanese and Syrian children; however, enrolment remained low, particularly among Lebanese students. The current Minister of Education, Karami, subsequently shifted the approach from optional summer schooling to a mandatory six-week intensive catch-up and remedial programme preceding the start of the academic year. A total of 254,000 children participated in the remedial and catch-up classes – 177,000 with support from UNICEF and 77,000 through public schools (afternoon shift) – of whom 44 per cent were Lebanese (MEHE & Lebanon Education Sector, 2026). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these interventions remains to be determined.

Conclusion

The rise in out-of-school children in Lebanon reflects the progressive weakening of an education system that has managed successive crises through reactive measures while relying heavily on households, teachers, and schools to absorb the costs of disruption. Out-of-schooling is therefore a visible manifestation of a wider systemic deterioration, in which reduced instructional time, unresolved learning loss, declining affordability, and uneven public school capacity have made continued participation increasingly fragile. Exclusion cannot be understood solely as the outcome of individual choices or household circumstances. Rather, it emerges from the cumulative effects of structural constraints that progressively narrow children's opportunities to remain enrolled and engaged, thus forcing them out of school.

The consequences extend beyond educational exclusion. When children lose access to schooling, they also lose a critical protective space, increasing their exposure to child labour, street-based risks, early marriage, exploitation, and violence (Save the Children, 2025). Without stronger safeguards against affordability shocks, more effective learning recovery, and sustained improvements in the quality and continuity of public schooling, more children are likely to move from precarious enrolment to permanent exclusion, with long-term implications for protection, equity, and social cohesion.

3.2 Syrian children's schooling continuity in Lebanon

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, Lebanon has hosted the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with the refugee population reaching over 1.5 million. Early in the crisis, around 500,000 Syrian children needed schooling, far exceeding the public system's capacity of under 200,000 (Brun & Shuayb, 2020). Today, Lebanon hosts about 610,000 registered Syrian refugee children and youth aged three to 24 (UNHCR, 2025a). Lebanon's response relied on enrolling Syrian refugee children in public schools through partnerships between donors, the humanitarian sector, and the government, often seen as a success (Brun & Shuayb, 2020).

Initially, small numbers joined morning shifts with Lebanese students (Shuayb et al., 2014). As numbers grew, a double-shift system was introduced: Lebanese students attend in the morning, Syrian students in the afternoon. While this measure expanded educational access, it created inequalities. Afternoon shifts offer fewer hours, depend on lower-paid contract teachers with limited training, and have fewer resources. This approach had longer-term costs: by channelling resources into state-certified second shifts, donors and the government marginalised community-based and refugee-led initiatives that offered more flexible, locally relevant alternatives, reducing Syrian agency and educational

diversity. However, because they operated largely outside MEHE's formal accreditation and examination structures, they rarely offered a reliable pathway to recognised certification and were therefore a limited route into the official system (Al-Hroub et al., 2019; Shuayb et al., 2014). Afternoon shifts also raise safety concerns, especially in winter when students – particularly girls – return home after dark.

Research by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) showed that the already under-resourced second-shift system, with reduced hours and contractual teachers, has been highly vulnerable to disruptions resulting from the compounded crises since 2019 (Abu Moghli et al., 2020). Refugee students were disproportionately affected, as afternoon shifts were often the first to be suspended during disruptions. Nevertheless, the afternoon shift is often the only pathway to formal education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Afternoon shifts are predominantly funded by international aid (MEHE, 2016). Increased pressure on Syrian refugees to return to Syria and the changing funding landscape continue to place the future of afternoon shifts in question. While the closure of afternoon-shift schooling for Syrian refugees is not an active policy proposal, it has been periodically raised in discussions among stakeholders. Given the potentially significant implications for refugee children and families, it is important to understand how those most directly affected perceive the value of the current system and what consequences they anticipate from any future changes. The study responds to requests from partners (including refugee-led organisations in Lebanon) to ensure that refugee perspectives are included in the evidence base, while also supporting responsible planning and preparedness. By generating evidence on both the value of the existing model and the potential impacts of alternative scenarios, the research aims to inform future discussions with a stronger understanding of community priorities and concerns. In this section, we present secondary data on the enrolment trends of Syrian refugees alongside findings from an online survey of 103 Syrian parents in Lebanon in February 2026. The survey asked parents how they anticipate the closure of the afternoon shift would affect their children, what their main concerns are, and which options they believe they would pursue.

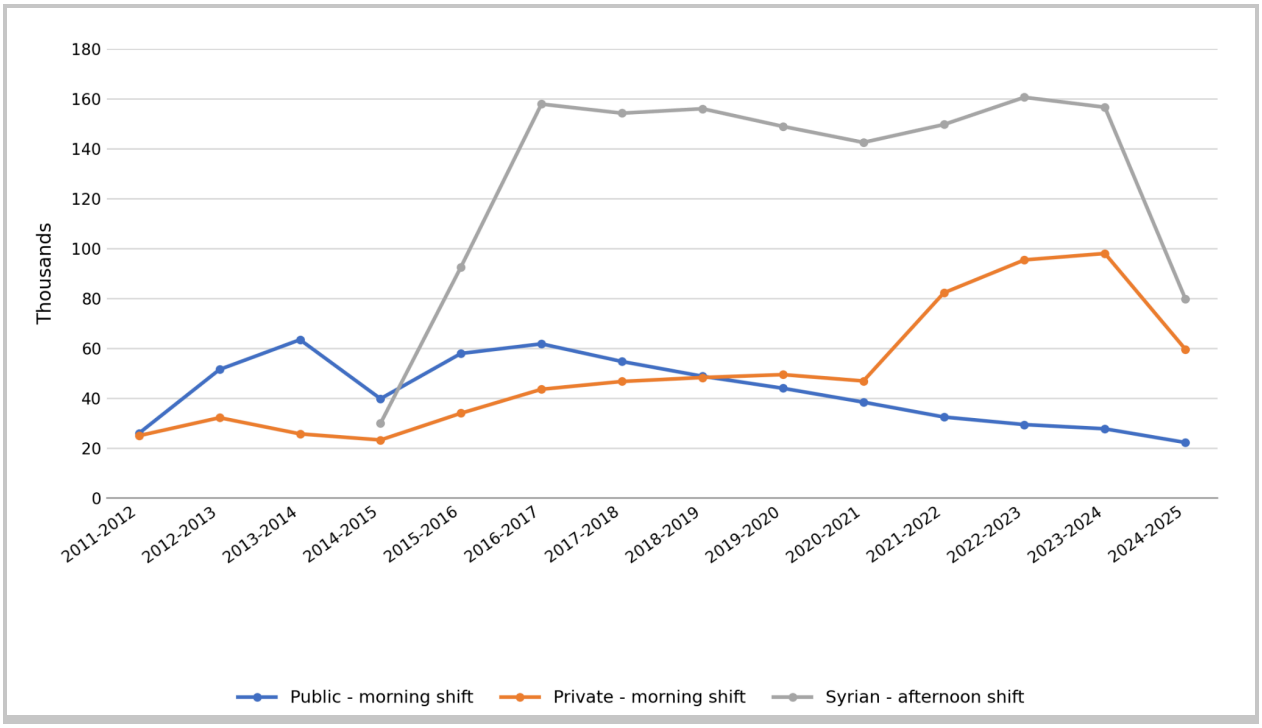
The results, while not representative of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon, reveal that most respondents expect a severe impact on their children's educational future, and many anticipate that barriers to accessing the morning shift would push some families towards non-formal alternatives, temporary interruption, or withdrawal from schooling altogether.

Enrolment patterns

Enrolment of Syrian refugee students in Lebanon has undergone significant shifts over time, reflecting changes in policy, funding, and system capacity. In the early years of the crisis (2011–2014), enrolment in public morning shifts increased rapidly, peaking at over 60,000 students, as access to existing public schools expanded. However, this model quickly reached its limits.

From 2015 onwards, the introduction and scaling up of afternoon (second) shifts marked a major shift in provision. Enrolment in afternoon shifts rose sharply, reaching approximately 150,000–160,000 students between 2017 and 2023, becoming the primary modality for Syrian refugee education. This expansion enabled a significant increase in overall access but also institutionalised a parallel system within public schools.

Figure 14. Syrian refugee attendance in formal education, Lebanon



Sources: Extracted from CRDP annual statistical bulletin; 2021–2025 data extracted from Lebanon Education Sector Dashboard (based on MEHE data).

The overall trend shows a shift from initial public school integration toward a segregated second-shift system, now in contraction, raising serious concerns about access and retention for Syrian refugee students. Public morning shift enrolment steadily declined to around 22,000 by 2024–2025, signalling reduced integration into mainstream schooling due to the inability of Syrian refugees to provide the requested legal documents (as for afternoon shifts), financial reasons, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war on Lebanon as well as some refugee returns. Private school enrolment remained limited, peaking near 98,000 after 2021 before falling. Most strikingly, afternoon shift enrolment dropped below 80,000 in 2024–2025, with declines across all provision types – reflecting growing pressures from Lebanon's compounded crises, funding constraints, and weakening retention. A significant policy move across public morning and afternoon shifts was the Parliamentary Decision no 2 dated 17 September 2024[6] restricting school registration for non-Lebanese students who lack formal documentation and legal residency. While the waiver that had been in place since around 2015 (UNHCR, 2015) came back into place for the 2025 exam season, the restrictions had already effectively excluded many children from school.

Retention and attainment remain critically low. Though primary enrolment approached 70% in 2018–2019, fewer than 4% of Syrian students progressed to secondary education. By 2024, less than 30% of Syrian refugee children were in formal education. The crises since 2019 have accelerated dropout – over 40% of second-shift students dropped out during the pandemic and economic collapse. For those

[6] Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Lebanon) (2024) *2024 أيلول 17 جلسة* [Session of 17 September 2024]. Available at: http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=24597

who remain, attainment is undermined by high repetition, learning loss, and limited pathways to certification. These outcomes reflect both socio-economic hardship and systemic failures: reduced instructional time, second-shift dependency, and poor alignment between access, quality, and long-term educational trajectories.

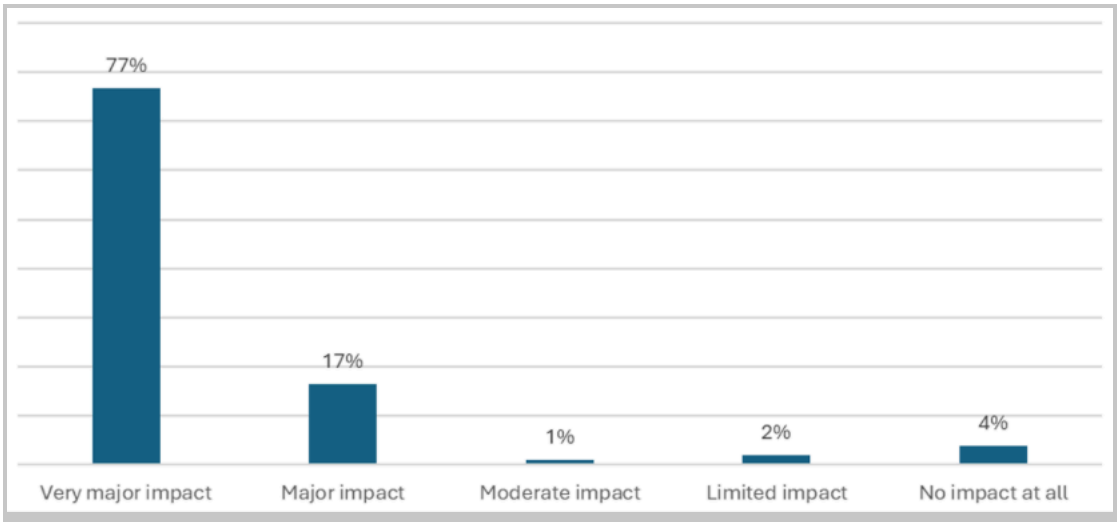
Refugee education governance in Lebanon has been shaped by tensions between national authorities and international actors. UN agencies, donors, and NGOs have invested billions over the past decade, supporting access and system strengthening through national strategies like RACE I and II (Nehme, 2023). However, Lebanon's economic crisis, banking collapse, and teacher strikes eroded institutional trust, while declining aid led to budget cuts.

Following the fall of the Assad regime in 2024, pressure for Syrian refugees to return has intensified alongside major aid reductions. Yet fewer than 25% have returned, and over 120,000 Syrians were newly displaced after December 2024 (UNHCR, n.d.). Political actors are now pushing to exclude students without residency – over 80% of Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2025b) – from schools, including second shifts, threatening a model that has been the primary educational option for 14 years.

Anticipated effects of the afternoon shift closing down

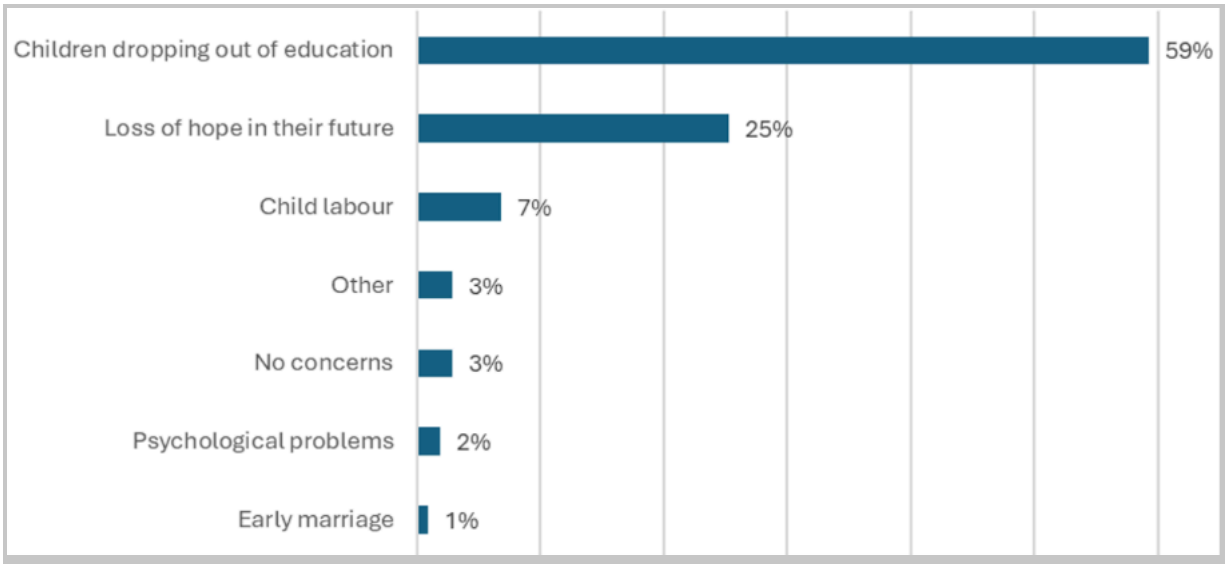
The survey results indicate that parents did not view the afternoon shift as an optional arrangement that could be replaced easily. Instead, they saw it as a key condition for sustaining children's access to formal schooling and avoiding further educational disruption. Thus, when asked how a closure of the afternoon shift could potentially affect their children's educational future, their responses showed a strong expectation of negative consequences. Most parents expected a very major negative impact (77%), while a further 17% expected a major impact. Only small shares anticipated a moderate impact (1%), a limited impact (3%), or no impact at all (4%).

Figure 15. Parents' expectations of the impact of closing the afternoon shift on their children's educational future



When asked about their biggest concerns if the afternoon shift closes, parents most frequently selected children dropping out of education (60%). This was followed by loss of hope in their children's future (25%), child labour (6%), and then concerns related to psychological and child protection risks.

Figure 16. Parents' biggest concerns for their children in the event of afternoon shift closure

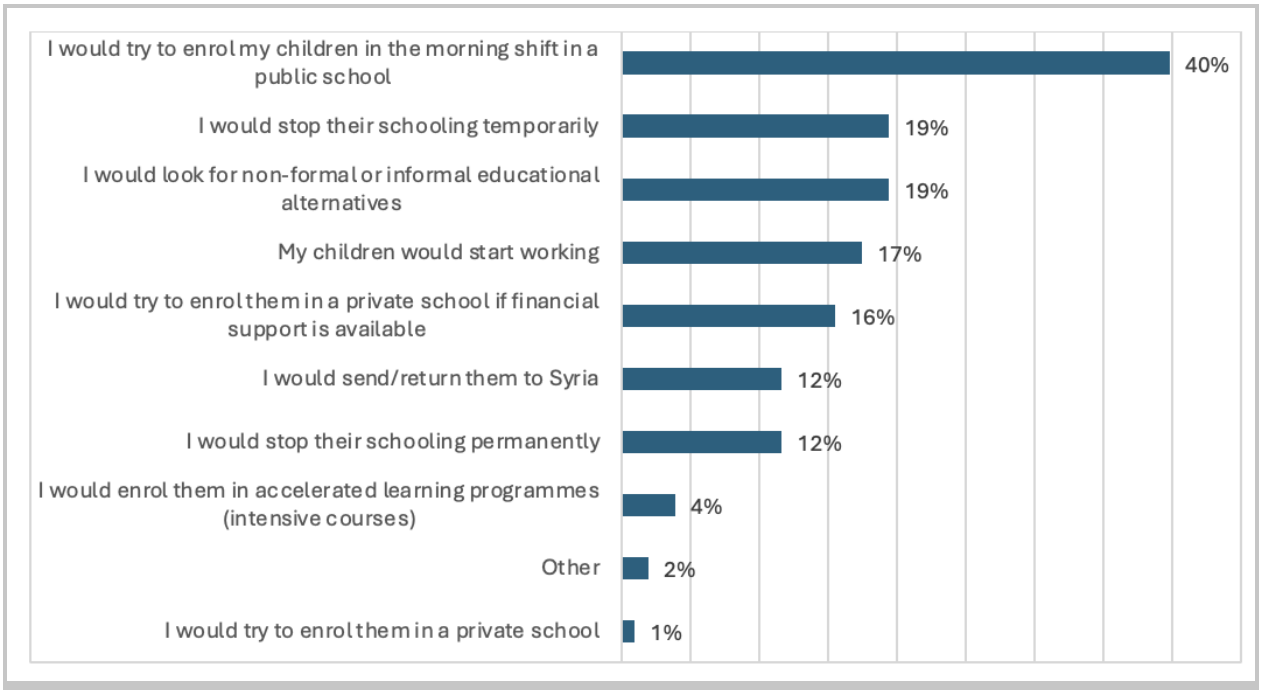


For many families, the risk of dropout is not only a loss of schooling, but also a turning point that shifts children away from education as a credible pathway. Among respondents who selected the option "Other", several comments reinforced this interpretation by linking school disruption to child labour, exposure to street-based risks, and worsening mental wellbeing. The results therefore suggest that the perceived impact of closure is not limited to schooling access; parents also anticipate wider consequences for children's protection and psychosocial wellbeing.

Anticipated actions and opportunities

If afternoon shifts were to close, a notable share of parents reported that they would try to enrol their children in the morning shift in a public school (40%), while 16% said they would try to register them in a private school if funding was available, showing a preference for formal schooling. However, 20% said they would register them in non-formal schools, 20% said they would have to temporarily take their children out of school, and 12% said they would permanently remove them from education. Only 12% said they might return to Syria to resume education there, and 18% stated that their children would start working.

Figure 17. Actions parents expected to take in response to a potential closure of the afternoon shift

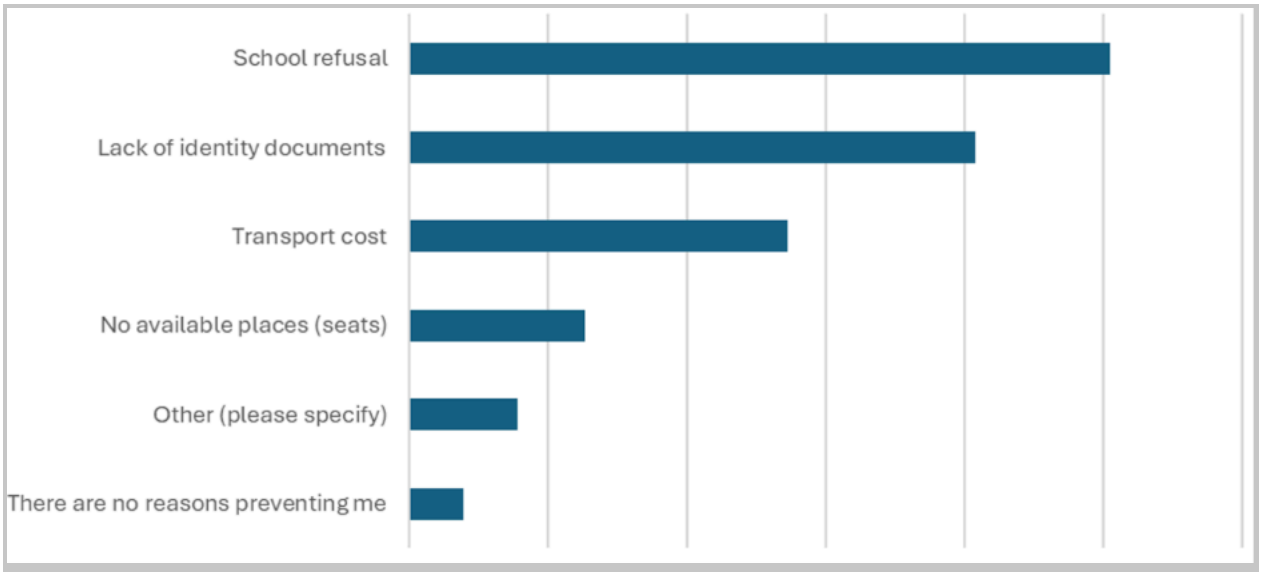


These findings underscore how deeply access to education for Syrian refugees has become dependent on the availability of the afternoon shift. Its closure would not simply create a gap in provision; it would trigger a cascade of exclusion, as the formal system lacks the capacity to absorb displaced learners at scale, particularly in some regions. While families demonstrate a strong commitment to keeping their children in education, structural barriers would force many into unstable or non-accredited alternatives, interrupt learning trajectories, and weaken pathways to certification and progression.

The severity of the potential implications of closing down the second shift became further apparent when we asked respondents about the feasibility of registering their children in the morning shift.

One of the clearest messages from the survey is that parents rightly do not view the morning shift as a universally available alternative. When asked about barriers that might prevent them from enrolling in the morning shift, parents were generally well informed and most commonly reported the expectation that schools would refuse enrolment (51%). Documentation barriers (41%) were also widely reported, alongside transport costs (27%) and, to a lesser extent, limited availability of places (13%).

Figure 18. Barriers parents anticipated to enrolling their children in the morning shift in a public school

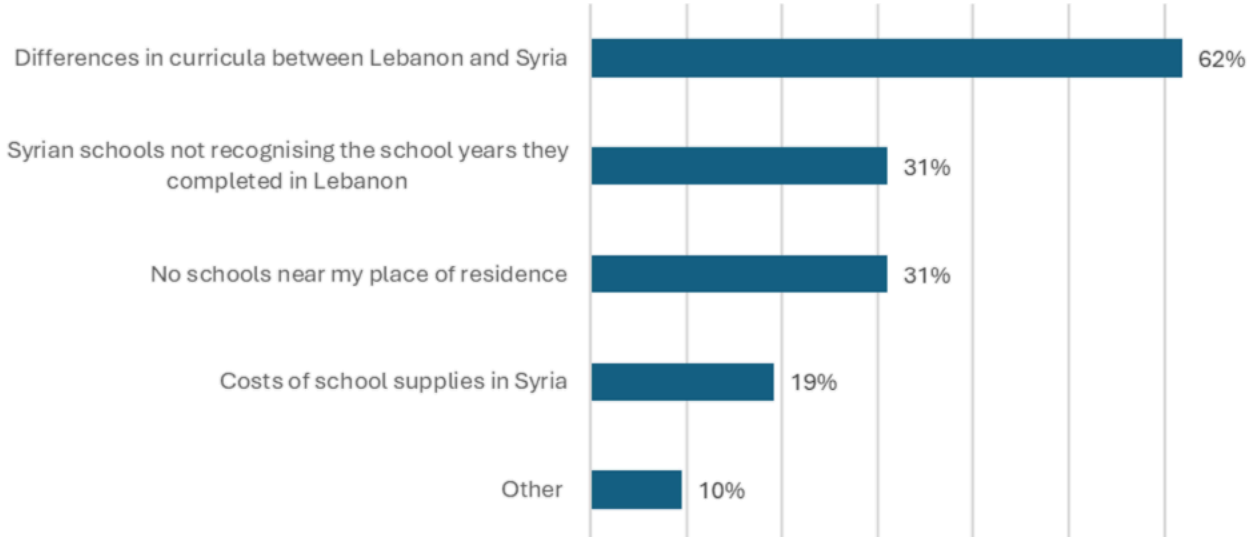


Only a small minority (6%) reported that there were no barriers preventing them from registering children in the morning shift. This finding challenges any assumption that the closure of the afternoon shift could be managed through transfer to the morning shift under prevailing conditions. Parents' responses suggest that the constraints extend beyond individual preference and include institutional, bureaucratic, and financial barriers that would restrict many families' ability to transition. If school refusal and documentation constraints remain as prevalent as parents anticipate, the closure of the afternoon shift would likely result in increased educational exclusion unless accompanied by actionable measures to guarantee access.

Return considerations and future aspirations

Very few parents, 12% as suggested in Figure 17, suggested that they would send their children to Syria to attend school should the afternoon shift close. Most respondents (54%) stated that they are not currently considering return to Syria, but a notable share reported that the discontinuation of the afternoon shift would affect their return decision either significantly (31%) or to some extent (18%). Parents also expressed uncertainty about the feasibility of reintegration into schooling in Syria. Half of the respondents reported that they did not know how easy it would be to enrol their children in schools in Syria. Among those who expressed an opinion, 14% reported that enrolment would be easy, 26% that it would be somewhat difficult, and 10% that it would be difficult. Their concerns centred on differences in curricula (62%) and the risk that the years of study in Lebanon would not be recognised (31%). Moreover, 30% were concerned they would not find schools nearby, while 19% were concerned about the cost of schooling.

Figure 19. Parents' biggest concerns regarding their children's education in the event of return to Syria



When asked about the future education aspirations of Syrian families for their children, a clear majority of parents (78%) prioritised continuing their children's education within the formal system through to university, indicating a strong preference for long-term academic pathways. Only a small proportion considered stopping at secondary education (4%) or prioritising vocational and technical training (5%). A slightly larger group (12%) indicated that they would accept any available educational opportunity, reflecting some flexibility in response to constraints, while a very small share selected other options (1%). Overall, the findings highlight a dominant aspiration for sustained participation in formal education, with limited preference for alternative or shorter educational routes. These findings suggest that education arrangements in Lebanon shape not only present access, but also families' expectations about future mobility and educational continuity across borders. These results reveal a strong and consistent aspiration for formal, long-term education among Syrian refugee families. The overwhelming prioritisation of continuing education through to university indicates that parents do not view education merely as a short-term coping mechanism, but as a central pathway for mobility, stability, and dignity. This challenges common policy assumptions that displaced populations may prioritise immediate income generation or vocational pathways over formal schooling.

Conclusion

Syrian refugee children in Lebanon occupy a deeply precarious position, facing systematic educational exclusion that has intensified amid the country's compounding crises. The afternoon shift, despite its limitations, remains the primary – often only – educational pathway available. Its closure would be a catastrophic disruption: 92% of parents anticipate major negative impacts, 60% identify dropout as their primary concern, while 12% would consider returning their children to Syria. These consequences would be intergenerational, foreclosing social and economic prospects for an already marginalised generation.

The barriers parents anticipate to morning shift enrolment – including schools refusing to register children, documentation requirements, and transportation costs - reveal that mainstream Lebanese education remains structurally inaccessible to Syrian refugees. The afternoon shift did not create this exclusion; it reflects it. Decades of humanitarian investment have sustained access without resolving the underlying inequities. This points to a structural weakness in the current model: an over-reliance on

a single, segregated pathway has produced a fragile system, vulnerable to political pressure and funding shocks. The prioritisation of short-term access has been at the cost of quality, continuity, and integration.

3.3 Children with disabilities

Inclusive education can be understood broadly as the systemic capacity of education systems to accommodate diverse learners and respond to layered forms of exclusion (Ainscow, 2005; Jouni & Al-Hroub, 2023). From this perspective, inclusion is not simply about placing children with disabilities into mainstream schools but about transforming institutions so that they can respond to differences in ability, socioeconomic status, displacement, language, and other intersecting vulnerabilities.

In Lebanon, however, the education system remains far from inclusive. Children with disabilities are largely excluded from formal education and are often positioned on the margins of schooling systems already strained by repeated crises (Human Rights Watch, 2018). While access is key, general questions about equity, quality, continuity, and dignity in the right to education become essential in a system that continues to render children with disabilities invisible. Structural inequalities within the education system, combined with economic crisis, aid dependency, and war and displacement, have compounded the marginalisation of children with disabilities. As a result, they face heightened risks of exclusion from education.

Children with disabilities remain invisible in the statistics of the education system. In response, in this case study we have synthesised data from the CLS survey and a focus group discussion with parents of children with disabilities in October 2024 (see Shuayb et al., 2024), 21 qualitative interviews with parents in spring 2025, and interviews with two civil society organisations in February/March 2026.

A context of exclusion and inequality

"Inclusion becomes a slogan rather than a practice." (Interview with NGO, February 2026)

Estimates suggest 10–15% of Lebanon's population lives with disabilities (WFP, 2023; HI, 2023), but the true figure is likely to be higher given the severe injuries resulting from recent wars (HI, 2024). In 2023, UNICEF estimated that around 300,000 children and youth with disabilities live in the country (UNICEF, 2023). Lebanon lacks comprehensive data on disability in education, and available figures are fragmented (CRDP Statistical Bulletin 2023–2024), but it is clear that participation remains very low: about 3,000 students with disabilities were enrolled in inclusive public schools in 2022/23, which represents less than 0.5% of all students (HI, 2023).

Most children attend specialised institutions rather than mainstream schools, which are funded by donations and receive limited support from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) (Jouni & Al-Hroub, 2023). MEHE data show 5,800 children enrolled in 100 specialised institutions in 2016, highlighting reliance on segregated education (MEHE, 2016).

Access to private education for children with disabilities is unclear, but fees often discriminate towards children with disabilities, as it is seen as more costly to accommodate them (Koplewicz et al., 2018). In 2023, 76 private schools offered specialised services, mostly fee-paying and unevenly distributed (Jouni & Al-Hroub, 2023): 16 in Beirut, 35 in Mount Lebanon, 8 in North Lebanon, 10 in the South, and 7 in the Bekaa. Thus, overall, access remains largely dependent on families' financial resources (Jouni & Al-Hroub, 2023).

In 2009, only five of 997 public schools met standards of accessibility and inclusivity, and in 2011, only 138

of 1,281 were willing to accommodate students with disabilities (Koplewicz et al., 2018). A UNICEF–MEHE initiative increased the number of schools classified as inclusive for learning difficulties to 117 by 2025 (UN, 2025), but the criteria for accessibility focus on learning needs rather than full physical and pedagogical accessibility. Some "inclusive" schools lack basic features like ramps, lifts, and accessible toilets. Access is further shaped by regional inequalities, with services concentrated in certain areas, leaving rural regions underserved (interview with NGO, February 2026).

Interviews with civil society actors suggest that teachers are often untrained in inclusive education, while high turnover – as staff leave for better pay or migrate – limits the impact of training. Despite Law 220/2000 guaranteeing the right to education and prohibiting discrimination, children with disabilities remain marginalised in access and the quality of education available to them (Shuayb & Doueiry, 2023). A key gap, as suggested in the interviews, is the lack of a coherent national strategy, with weak funding, accountability, and coordination.

Barriers persist, including financial constraints, stigma, inaccessible environments, lack of trained staff and materials, and discriminatory fees (Koplewicz et al., 2018; HI, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2018) also documents widespread rejection by mainstream schools, reinforcing exclusion.

Aid dependency in education for children with disabilities

Lebanon has an active disability rights civil society, but disability services remain marginal within state systems and heavily dependent on international funding (Jouni & Al-Hroub, 2023). Key programmes – including the National Disability Allowance and inclusion initiatives – have been financed by donors such as the EU, the Netherlands, UNICEF, and the International Labour Organization (European External Action Service (EEAS)., 2024).

Inclusive education has followed the same pattern. International funding linked to the Syrian refugee crisis expanded education access, though there are indications that donor funds earmarked for inclusive education did not always fulfil their intended aims (El-Helou, 2024; Hussein, 2024). A prominent example is the USAID-funded QITABI (Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education Improvement) programme, which supported teacher training, materials, and infrastructure. Its suspension following USAID's shutdown risks reversing hard-won gains in public education access and quality (Moussa, 2025).

While documentation on the specific impact of aid reductions on children with disabilities remains limited, interviews point to a range of consequences: loss of inclusive education projects, reduced school support services, weakened NGO capacity, and diminished access to assistive technologies and transport. As NGOs and donor-funded programmes have long filled gaps left by the state, funding cuts fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable children. Organisations consistently identified funding instability as a core challenge, and specialised disability staff are frequently among the first to be made redundant during organisational downsizing.

Education for children with disabilities in compounded crises, 2019–2022

"The crises have amplified pre-existing inequalities. Children with disabilities were already vulnerable, but during COVID-19, the economic collapse, and periods of insecurity, they became almost invisible." (Interview with NGO, March 2026)

Lebanon's compounded crises over the past decade have had severe consequences for access and equity. Schools were closed for 49 weeks during the pandemic (Shuayb & Doueiry, 2023), and the

impact on children with disabilities was particularly acute. As Shuayb and Doueiry note, persons with disabilities were already disadvantaged, isolated, and excluded from public education and health care before the pandemic, and the crises deepened these barriers.

Many NGOs providing disability support were forced to reduce or suspend activities due to financial constraints, leaving family support largely ad hoc (Shuayb & Doueiry, 2023). The shift to online learning created additional challenges, particularly for students with ADHD, severe autism, or sensory disabilities who require interactive and multi-sensory approaches – though some with physical disabilities or mild autism found remote environments less overwhelming (Shuayb & Doueiry, 2023).

Critically, institutional preparedness was inadequate, and MEHE lacked comprehensive emergency planning for inclusive education during both the pandemic and the aftermath of the Beirut explosion (Shuayb & Doueiry, 2023; Hammoud, 2024). This absence of planning has had lasting consequences: children with disabilities pushed out of education during these crises have frequently been unable to re-enter. As one parent explained:

"*Yes, he used to go to a centre. It was an excellent place – very organised. But I can't afford it anymore, and it's far from where we live. (…) Ever since COVID started, he hasn't returned to any programme. There's the financial problem, plus transportation is difficult. (…) He's home all day. Sometimes we do a bit of stretching or exercises on our own, but we don't have the devices or guidance he had at the centre. He mostly listens to songs he likes on YouTube or uses a tablet. He has a wheelchair, so he might go outside for a little while, but that's it.*"

War, displacement, and learning since October 2023

Since October 2023, escalating hostilities and Israeli military attacks on Lebanon have triggered widespread displacement and further destabilised education systems. Between September and November 2024, more than one million people were displaced, many of whom, at the time of writing, have been forced out of their homes again. Despite the lessons from COVID and the port explosion, government institutions were not ready to respond to a crisis, let alone meet the needs of students with special educational needs. The impact is both on learning and on access to learning.

Regarding learning disruptions, many children with disabilities received little or no consistent teaching during periods of displacement. Schooling paused or moved online, and the halting of therapy services led to slower learning and increased risk of regression**,** as continuity is critical for many children with disabilities. Parents interviewed repeatedly emphasised the importance of providing ongoing therapy and structured educational support, which closed down or became inaccessible due to displacement. One parent described the impact of disrupted services:

"*My son with autism lost a lot of social skills; before, he used to go out, come back, and manage more independently, but two to three months of complete disruption caused a big setback. He had made progress on certain behaviours around age 9 or 10, and now they resurfaced because he hasn't had therapy sessions in a long time.*"

Displacement also created highly unsuitable learning environments. Families who were displaced to overcrowded shelters or shared housing found that noise, distractions, and a lack of structure contributed to a challenging learning environment, particularly for children with intellectual disabilities who rely on predictable routines and structured spaces for learning. As during COVID, the shift to online learning provided limited solutions. Additionally, access to remote education depended heavily on parental involvement and technological resources. As one parent explained:

"*The activities were good, but I often felt we weren't meeting the goals because he wouldn't fully engage. I told the teacher, 'I'm trying my best,' and she understood. They were very supportive. They'd say, 'Thank you so much for doing your best and not giving up'. (…) We kept trying for the sake of the kids.*"

Remote learning also exposed inequalities in access; some families did not have access to equipment due to a lack of resources, or they could not bring equipment or materials with them when they were displaced, or could not afford to access the internet. As one parent explained:

"*When we were displaced, he lost access to essential learning tools such as Braille materials and his computer. This had a major impact on his education. No organisation stepped in to provide alternatives or resources. The only assistance we received was from 'Al-Rabta,' which provided food support, but nothing related to education.*"

Parents were often forced to assume teaching roles without appropriate training or resources, as recounted by one parent:

"*The teacher brought a Braille-type machine and tried to show me, but I didn't know Braille. I had to figure it out from YouTube. It was exhausting.*"

One NGO worker interviewed in February 2026 suggested that the psychological burden on parents is enormous, and they are exhausted, anxious, and often feel abandoned.

Regarding access, many families experienced worsening economic conditions due to the war. In our interviews, we found that for some, displacement was the last straw, pushing them into poverty after years of living in financial crisis. Rising living costs, often aggravated by displacement and the loss of livelihoods, made it increasingly difficult to afford schooling for children with disabilities who often require additional resources and specialised support. Thus, some parents interviewed had not been able to get their child with a disability back into learning after displacement due to increased costs and limited availability.

Even when schools reopened, many children faced difficulties returning to learning environments that had been damaged by conflict, while others found it hard to re-adapt to a structured learning environment, as highlighted by one parent:

"*The institute where my son with autism is enrolled had been damaged, so he couldn't return right away. There was a terrible smell in the building, and he kept asking why his brother could go to the institute while he could not. I tried explaining everything to him. When he finally went back, it was like starting from zero – both academically and behaviourally. He found it to be a new environment and was uncomfortable. The smell and the sight of damaged buildings really upset him. We noticed new behaviours that might be trauma-based. He began refusing to go to the institute.*"

Conclusion

Across the interviews, there is a consistent pattern in how learners with disabilities are perceived to remain marginalised within national systems and emergency responses, with access to education increasingly determined by financial capacity rather than recognised as a fundamental right.

The findings underscore the central role of the economic collapse as a chronic and pervasive driver of exclusion, transforming education into an unaffordable burden for many families and weakening already fragile institutions. At the same time, the data demonstrate tensions in the system: while

effective disability education depends on individualised, intensive support, current systems lack the capacity, resources, and stability to sustain such approaches. This tension is further exacerbated by workforce precarity, where underpaid and overstretched educators are unable to maintain continuity or deliver inclusive practices at scale.

The study also reveals that inclusion, while increasingly present in MEHE policy discourse, remains largely symbolic in practice due to the absence of a coherent national strategy and adequate accessible infrastructure, training, and coordinated investment. Meaningful inclusion cannot be achieved through awareness alone; it requires sustained, decentralised, and accountable systems that embed support within local schools and communities, ensuring accessibility, continuity, and resilience.

Overall, the findings point to the need for a fundamental shift from fragmented, short-term interventions toward rights-based, system-level reform. Achieving inclusive education in crisis contexts demands political commitment, long-term investment, and robust accountability mechanisms to ensure that resources reach those most in need. Without such structural transformation, inclusion will remain aspirational, and children with disabilities will continue to be left behind.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

Taken together, the surveys and case studies point to a clear and urgent conclusion: Lebanon's education system is no longer experiencing episodic disruption but is operating within a sustained condition of compounded crisis that is structurally reshaping access, quality, continuity, and equity. This reflects a system under prolonged stress across interconnected levels – learner, school, and system – where apparent continuity masks a fragile equilibrium sustained by individual coping rather than institutional resilience.

At the learner level, disruptions to access, quality, and continuity are mutually reinforcing. Cumulative learning loss, declining wellbeing, and increasing exclusion indicate that educational trajectories are no longer stable and affect learners across the country. Yet, barriers to access – financial, administrative, and social – are intensifying, particularly for children living in poverty, Syrian refugees, and children with disabilities. At the same time, reduced instructional time, limited recovery efforts, and widespread psychological distress are undermining both the quality of learning and the capacity of students to remain engaged. For those excluded from education, the report has demonstrated their increased exposure to child labour, early marriage, exploitation, social isolation, and other forms of harm.

At the school level, weakened institutional capacity constrains the delivery of quality and inclusive education. Teacher attrition, declining real wages, and limited support for psychosocial and inclusive practices reduce schools' ability to sustain meaningful learning environments. This directly affects both the quality and continuity of education, particularly in already marginalised regions and communities.

At the system level, governance dynamics further erode resilience. Policy responses remain largely reactive and fragmented, prioritising short-term functionality over long-term system recovery. This reflects a breakdown in the policy and operational pathways required to sustain equitable access, quality provision, and continuity over time. The result is not system resilience, but a form of managed deterioration, in which education provision persists while its foundational capacities decline.

These dynamics are producing an increasingly stratified system. Access to high quality, continuous education is now determined by socioeconomic status, geography, and displacement status, entrenching inequality and accelerating exclusion. External pressures – including declining donor funding, shifting aid priorities, and the potential contraction of key programmes such as second-shift schooling – further threaten system stability and risk triggering deeper breakdown across all levels.

The findings in the report highlight that the outcomes are cumulative and systemic rather than temporary. Disruptions to access, quality, and continuity cannot be addressed in isolation, but require coordinated action across learner, school, and system levels. Without such alignment, existing coping mechanisms will give way to attrition, disengagement, and irreversible losses in human capital.

The report shows that Lebanon's education system is therefore not recovering; it is operating on the edge of structural decline. A fundamental reorientation is required: from crisis response to system recovery; from fragmented interventions to integrated, multi-level reform; and from maintaining minimal provision to ensuring equitable, inclusive, and continuous learning for all.

Recommendations

The report has demonstrated that educational opportunities and outcomes remain unevenly distributed in Lebanon. Differences between public and private schools, the disproportionate impact of conflict and displacement on certain communities, and persistent affordability barriers illustrate how

structural inequalities continue to shape educational experiences. Moreover, the widespread challenges related to learning quality, wellbeing, and continuity demonstrate that access alone is insufficient as a measure of progress. Addressing these issues requires a system-wide commitment to equity, inclusion, and long-term transformation that places the needs of the most marginalised learners at the centre of education recovery efforts. In light of evidence generated through studies conducted over the past five years, the findings of this report have been used to formulate recommendations for both the short and long term. In the short term – "protect" – the aim is to safeguard existing rights, prevent further deterioration, and keep learners and teachers in the system. In the long term – "develop/improve" – the emphasis is on strengthening, adapting, and transforming the system for the longer term. We consider these levels for different stakeholders: learners and communities, teachers and schools, and government and donors. A summary table addressing the stakeholders is presented at the end of the section.

1. Learners and communities

The findings reveal growing threats to students' ability to access, engage in, and benefit from education. Declining examination readiness, persistent learning loss, widespread psychological distress, and repeated disruptions caused by insecurity and displacement have weakened learning continuity for many students, particularly those affected by war, those at risk of dropping out or who have already done so, refugees, and learners with disabilities. At the same time, economic pressures continue to create barriers to participation, particularly for the most vulnerable learners. These challenges highlight the need for interventions that simultaneously protect access, support wellbeing, and accelerate learning recovery. These insights lead to the following recommendations:

Protect: prevent further exclusion and harm

- Map missing data on out-of-school children and identify which groups are not being reached to strengthen evidence-based targeting and ensure that vulnerable learners are not overlooked.
- Protect and enhance access for refugees, war-affected children, and learners with disabilities to reduce inequalities that have widened during periods of crisis and disruption.
- Revise age and re-entry regulations and relax documentation/certification barriers so learners who are over-age or have been out of school, especially refugees, can return rather than being permanently excluded.
- Establish or strengthen safety nets (transport support, fee waivers, targeted cash or in-kind support) that help learners stay in some form of schooling or learning despite economic hardship.
- Use early assessment of learning loss and psychosocial needs, and targeted follow-up, so learners at risk of dropping out are identified and supported before they disappear from the system.
- Link learning recovery with psychosocial and emotional support for learners, recognising the psychological impact of conflict, crisis, and prolonged disruption.

Develop/improve: diversify education pathways and strengthen learning

- Use diagnostic assessment to guide remedial and accelerated learning, including "Teaching at the Right Level" approaches, rather than relying only on age or grade.
- Following on from the first point, improve the quality of remedial and catch-up provision, including that offered by civil society, through basic training and clearer expectations for content and group sizes.

- Provide small-group and tailored support (for example, classroom assistants or targeted remedial sessions) to address significant learning gaps and learning difficulties.
- Develop flexible alternative and non-formal education pathways for learners whose schooling has been interrupted, and link these to recognised progression and skills routes.
- Invest in community-based youth and extra-curricular programmes that provide social, emotional, and skills development, and deliberately use these as bridges back into education and training.
- Strengthen data and research on excluded and marginalised learners so targeting and design of programmes can improve over time.

2. Schools and teachers

The findings demonstrate that schools are operating under significant strain, limiting their capacity to support learning and recovery. Incomplete curriculum coverage, concerns about reduced instructional time, and widespread dissatisfaction with current policy responses point to challenges in maintaining educational quality. At the same time, persistent gaps between teacher salaries and living costs, alongside declining motivation and wellbeing, threaten workforce stability. Strengthening schools as the primary site of learning recovery therefore requires investment in teachers, supportive learning environments, and school-level capacity. Thus recommendations at school level include:

Protect: stabilise schools and the workforce

- Address teacher working conditions to reduce pressures that drive absenteeism, low morale, and workforce instability.
- Provide structured emotional and professional support for teachers (peer support, mentoring, psychosocial services) so they can cope with repeated crises and continue to support learners.
- Support principals to apply flexible, inclusive admission and re-entry practices within clearer national rules, so learners are not excluded simply because they are over-age or have been absent.
- Equip schools and teachers for emergency response in practical terms (basic equipment, realistic contingency plans), so learning can continue during future shocks.

Develop/improve: build school-level capacity and inclusion

- Strengthen teachers' and school leaders' capacity for diagnostic assessment and use of learning data (for planning remedial and catch-up interventions and monitoring progress).
- Involve teachers and their representatives in the design and implementation of reforms, building more dialogical relationships and ownership of school-level change.
- Prepare teachers for blended and online modalities in "normal" times (limited, planned use), so schools and families are better able to shift when face-to-face teaching is interrupted.
- Support schools to adopt practical, systemic inclusion measures for learners with disabilities (reasonable accommodations, flexible grouping, and collaboration with specialised services).
- Build overall school-level capacity (leadership, planning, monitoring) so schools become the primary, confident sites of learning recovery and crisis management rather than passive implementers.

3. System level: government and donors

The findings point to structural pressures that extend beyond individual schools and learners. Household affordability constraints are reshaping enrolment patterns and increasing demand for

public education, while fiscal limitations continue to influence policy decisions and constrain educational provision. The cumulative effects of economic crisis, conflict, and institutional fragility underscore the need for stronger governance, more sustainable financing arrangements, and a more resilient education system capable of responding to future shocks while supporting long-term recovery. Thus there is a need to develop system-wide resilience, anticipatory governance, and sustainable recovery.

Protect: uphold rights and prevent systemic deterioration

- Reform restrictive rules on age, repetition, re-entry, documentation, and certification that currently block re-enrolment, especially for refugees and learners with disabilities.
- Maintain and adapt public education provision for groups most at risk of exclusion. Rather than allowing reliance on ad hoc or purely private/NGO provision, strengthen collaboration with NGO providers to ensure that remedial/catch-up programmes complement school learning.
- Embed inclusive education and special-needs strategies within crisis and recovery planning and budgets, so these learners are not left out when resources are tight.
- Promote sustained, structured engagement between MEHE and teachers' representatives to rebuild trust and reduce the risk of recurrent disruption through unresolved conflict.

Develop/improve: build a more resilient, evidence-informed system

- Strengthen decentralised decision-making and local response capacity, alongside investment in MEHE's own human resources, so crisis response and recovery are led by public institutions with adequate staffing.
- Enhance the implementation of the national framework for non-formal and second-chance pathways (standards, registration, curricula, recognition), and support MEHE to coordinate and set quality expectations across providers.
- Improve data systems and research on access, learning, and wellbeing, with particular focus on under-documented groups (out-of-school children, learners with disabilities), and use these data to adapt policy over time.
- Invest in evaluation of existing and completed programmes (formal, non-formal, remedial) to understand what works, for whom, and under what conditions, and feed findings back into national planning.
- Align donor funding with national priorities, reduce fragmentation, and support predictable, multi-year financing that can bridge humanitarian and development aims and strengthen institutional capacity.
- Encourage donor investment directly in MEHE capacity (including core staff posts and decentralised structures), so the system is less dependent on parallel units and short-term project staff.

What this means for different stakeholders

Table 3. Summary of recommendations for different stakeholders

Stakeholder	Protect – in the short term	Develop/improve – in the longer term
Communities and learners' supporters (parents, caregivers, community groups, youth)	- Help identify and follow up with children at risk of dropping out, including those already out of school. - Support children's continued participation in schooling and learning despite economic pressure, and encourage use of available safety nets.	- Co-create community-based youth and extra-curricular activities that provide safe spaces, and opportunities for social interaction and skills development.. - Work with schools and NGOs to make alternative and non-formal pathways visible and trusted, and feed local knowledge into mapping of out-of-school children and learners with disabilities.
School leaders and teachers	- Use available flexibility to avoid excluding learners because they are over-age or have been absent, and maintain contact with those at risk of dropping out. - Protect basic working conditions and seek/offer peer and psychosocial support so teachers can continue teaching under crisis conditions.	- Lead learning recovery by using diagnostic assessment, grouping learners by level, and planning remedial or accelerated support. - Strengthen inclusive practices in classrooms and schools, especially for learners with disabilities and those with large learning gaps. - Engage in structured dialogue with authorities and unions on reforms, including emergency preparedness and blended/online learning.
Government and public authorities (MEHE at the central and decentralised levels, and municipalities)	- Reform or flexibly apply age, re-entry, documentation and certification rules that block learners' return, especially for refugees and learners with disabilities. - Protect and adapt public provision for those most at risk of exclusion, and integrate inclusive and special-needs education into crisis and recovery plans and budgets.	- Invest in MEHE and decentralised capacity (staffing, data, crisis response) so public institutions can coordinate learning recovery and inclusion. - Enhance implementation of the national framework for non-formal and second-chance pathways and coordinate providers under it. - Strengthen data and evaluation on access, learning and wellbeing, and use evidence to adjust policy and targeting over time.
Donors and international partners	- Use funding to protect core public provision (teacher presence, basic school operations, safety nets), avoiding parallel systems that deepen inequalities.	- Align support with MEHE priorities, reduce project fragmentation and provide predictable multi-year funding that bridges humanitarian and development aims. - Invest directly in state capacity (central and local MEHE, data and evaluation) and require robust, transparent reporting on who is reached and what changes in access, learning, wellbeing and equity are achieved.

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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, The Inclusive Education Foundation (InEd), ODI Global, 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.