

A woman wearing a dark hijab and a denim jacket is standing in a classroom, pointing towards a whiteboard. The whiteboard has Arabic text and diagrams on it. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in the room. The entire image has a blue tint.

# Teacher Remuneration During Emergencies

## Just Wages for Public School Teachers in Lebanon

Nour Nahhas  
January 2026



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## Acronyms

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This report uses several acronyms and abbreviations. The list below provides the meaning of each acronym, in alphabetical order:

<b>CERD</b>	Centre for Educational Research and Development (also known as CRDP in French)	<b>QITABI</b>	Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education Improvement
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development	<b>RACE</b>	Reaching All Children with Education
<b>CPI</b>	Consumer Price Index	<b>SIMS</b>	School Information Management System
<b>CRDP</b>	Centre for Educational Research and Development (French: Centre de recherche et développement pédagogique)	<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>CSB</b>	Civil Service Board	<b>TREF</b>	Transition and Resilience Education Fund
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>ECW</b>	Education Cannot Wait	<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>EI</b>	Education International	<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (United Kingdom)	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion	<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership for Education		
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People		
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation		
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund		
<b>KfW</b>	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)		
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview		
<b>LBP</b>	Lebanese Pound		
<b>MEHE</b>	Ministry of Education and Higher Education		
<b>MoF</b>	Ministry of Finance		
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support		
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation		
<b>NSSF</b>	National Social Security Fund		
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development		
<b>PD</b>	Professional Development		
<b>PPP</b>	Public-Private Partnership		



## Executive Summary

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Lebanon's public education system has been under severe stress since 2019 due to economic collapse, political gridlock, the COVID-19 emergency, the Beirut Port explosion (2020), and the 2023–2024 war. This study examines how these shocks affected teacher remuneration and payment regularity in public schools, and identifies the political, economic, and legal drivers of the problem, as well as the psychosocial and social consequences for teachers and students. Using a mixed-methods design grounded in field evidence, the research combines desk review with three focus group discussions (45 public-school teachers, February–May 2025), 15 individual teacher interviews, and key-informant interviews with union representatives and sector stakeholders.

Thematic analysis shows that teacher salaries fell sharply in real terms and payments became irregular; ad-hoc “productivity” allowances offered temporary relief but increased uncertainty. A large share of teachers are employed on precarious contracts with limited benefits and no predictable path to permanence; recruitment and salary-scale reforms have been repeatedly delayed. Weak payroll and school-level administrative capacities, fragmented policy making, and heavy reliance on external aid further undermine predictable pay. Consequences include teacher burnout, brain drain, larger classes for remaining staff, lower professional standards, and classrooms under strain where students' psychosocial needs outpace available support.

The study proposes a practical way forward. First, fold emergency allowances into the base salary and link salaries to inflation so pay does not lose value again. Second, restart recruitment and open fixed-term posts with full benefits to give contract teachers a fair and transparent path to stable jobs. Third, increase and protect the education budget, use an equity-based formula to fund schools, and launch a national rehabilitation program for damaged or neglected buildings. Fourth, digitise payroll and human resources so salaries are calculated and paid on time, and publish clear, timely financial data to build trust. Fifth, invest in regular professional development and basic mental-health support for teachers so they can cope and improve practice. Sixth, create a stable channel for social dialogue between unions and the government to solve problems before they become crises. Finally, ask donors and NGOs to align their support behind a single, costed, government-led plan, with multi-year commitments that strengthen public systems rather than create parallel ones.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education should lead on salary policy, hiring, and payroll systems with the Ministry of Finance. Teacher unions should co-design pay and hiring reforms and help monitor

delivery. Donors should align support behind one costed government plan and fund time-bound gaps. School leaders should apply the measures and report monthly on pay, attendance, and learning time.

Early signs of progress include salaries paid in full and on time each month, clear posts opened for contract teachers, fewer teacher resignations, classes meeting weekly timetables, and a public dashboard showing payments and school funding. The main risks are budget delays and political gridlock; these can be reduced by ring-fencing education funds, publishing monthly pay data, and keeping a standing dialogue with unions. Funding should follow needs first: schools in poorer areas and schools hit by conflict should receive priority support.



# Introduction

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## *Context Overview*

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The education sector in Lebanon is a reflection of the country's deeply rooted political, social, and economic complexities<sup>1</sup>. In the 2019-2024 period, Lebanon slid into compounded crises that impacted its education sector, with public education being devastated. The crises and their consequences had an immense impact on public school teachers, whose wages were slashed due to hyperinflation, and their livelihoods were severely affected.

The onset of the financial collapse in Lebanon in 2019, the following outbreak of COVID-19, and the 4 August Beirut Port Explosion in 2020<sup>2</sup> have been detrimental to the country's economy, and consequently<sup>3</sup>, caused a significant decrease in the wage value of public school teachers. With the exchange rate of the local currency rising against the US dollar, the monthly salaries of educators that had previously amounted to USD 1,000 have seen their pay lose over 90% of its value in real terms<sup>4</sup>. Due to limited funding, school buildings are not regularly maintained, and the procurement of stationery and supplies is disrupted. The recent Israeli war on Lebanon, which started on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, impacted villages in the south of the country, escalating in mid-September 2024 into a full-scale war that led to the displacement of at least 1.2 million residents from south Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley<sup>5</sup>. Many displaced people sought refuge in public and private schools in central Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and North Lebanon, which were not equipped to host a large number of internally displaced people (IDPs) by Israeli strikes, leaving their students unsure of the fate of their education.

## **The Financing of Education in Lebanon**

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Political, economic and security crises harmed public education in Lebanon, and caused the devaluation of public school teachers' salaries. While this is a direct result of the economic crisis, the financial structure of the education sector also plays a role. Education in Lebanon is financed by the state's budget and public treasury as well as private actors, including households, private companies, religious and political institutions, and private education institutions<sup>6,7</sup>. Following the Civil War (1975-1990) and the signing of the Taif agreement, economic and financial policies that were implemented as part of the country's reconstruction caused the gradual decline of public education<sup>7,8</sup>. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)<sup>8</sup> led to the privatisation of the economy<sup>7</sup> and the protection of reinforced sectarianism, contributing to the disintegration of the public sector. During the 90s, hiring freezes

were implemented, which meant that most public school teachers ended up working on a contractual basis, with agreements that do not comply with the Labour Code of 1946<sup>9,10,11</sup>. This has caused a drain in qualified and experienced teaching cadres in public education, and few opportunities for their capacity development through training. The quality of public education decreased, weakening the whole sector<sup>8</sup> and increasing the reliance on private education<sup>7</sup>.

Government spending on public education has been low as a share of GDP. World Bank data shows an average of about 2.1% of GDP spent on education in 2013–2015, around 2.6% in 2019, and 1.67% in 2020 (the latest official value available for Lebanon). Over the last decade, education spending remained well below the UNESCO benchmark of 4–6% of GDP<sup>7,12</sup>.

Lebanon's public education sector has struggled to recover due to limited funding and resources. As a result, it has lost public trust and its capacity to provide schooling for all. The system has been under stress for about four decades. Between 2011 and 2022, total allocations to education, including government funds, mutual funds, in-kind donations, investments, and foreign grants, were estimated at USD 43 billion. However, official budget reports indicate that the amount actually spent was much lower (about USD 10.4 billion in total), showing a large gap between allocations and disbursements<sup>13</sup>. This gap raises concerns about financial transparency, budget execution, and what happened to unspent funds. Official data also show that government education spending fell from about 2.6% of GDP in 2019 to about 1.67% in 2020. World Bank reviews describe broader weaknesses in public financial management and reporting that help explain under-execution<sup>14</sup>. In this context, hiring freezes and growing reliance on contract teachers, combined with tight budgets and donor-financed projects that sit partly outside core government systems, keep teacher pay low and irregular and delay needed reforms<sup>15,16,17,18</sup>.

## **International Donor Support for Teacher Salaries in Lebanon (2019–2024)**

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Foreign donors, bilateral donors and international agencies have largely financed Lebanon's public education sector over the past 15 years. Between 2011 and 2023, total external support to education is estimated at USD 2.5 billion in grants, in-kind aid, and loans, in addition to state budget and treasury spending. Aid averaged roughly USD 250 million per year, and reliance increased after 2019 as the economic collapse deepened<sup>16</sup>. During 2019–2024, the sector depended even more on foreign aid as the state's capacity shrank. The government's mitigation measures and policies were funding-dependent, often financed by external partners<sup>17</sup>.

In January 2025, the U.S. administration ordered a 90-day stop-work/pause on foreign assistance, triggering an immediate halt to most USAID-funded projects worldwide. Lebanon's education programs were hit due to long-standing reliance on U.S. funding. For example,



the status of **QITABI-3**, the program that aims to support MEHE and CERD in improving student learning and teaching quality in public and low-cost private schools (approved in September 2023 with a budget of USD 96.9 million), became uncertain during the pause, and around 100 employees reportedly received temporary contract suspensions pending review<sup>18,19,20</sup>.

## UNICEF, EU and KfW – Direct Support via TREF

In 2022, Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) launched the TREF in partnership with UNICEF and key donors, notably the European Union and Germany (through KfW)<sup>21</sup>. This pooled fund introduced a new aid modality to improve the timeliness of payments to public schools and teachers, with an emphasis on accountability<sup>21</sup>. TREF links disbursements to performance indicators (especially student attendance) to ensure funds reach active schools and staff<sup>21</sup>. All ~1,200 public schools and about 12,000 teachers were expected to benefit<sup>21</sup>. Crucially, donors shifted to direct payments: since 2021–22, UNICEF and partners have stopped channelling funds through MEHE and instead pay teachers, school staff, and schools directly in US dollars based on verified attendance<sup>22</sup>. In the 2022–23 school year alone, over USD 70 million were disbursed under TREF, including USD grants to 1,074 schools and payment of salaries (in USD) for 12,500 “special contracted” Lebanese public-school teachers and staff, plus a productivity allowance for 15,000 teachers as an incentive to attend and teach classes<sup>22</sup>[22]. These special contract teachers, often hired to teach additional “second shifts” for Syrian refugee children, have had their wages essentially funded by donors (even before TREF, donor funding under the RACE program had long covered the salaries of second-shift contract teachers for Syrian refugee education<sup>23</sup>[23]). By dollarizing and topping up pay, TREF has been a stopgap to keep educators in classrooms despite the collapse of the Lebanese pound<sup>22</sup>[22].

### ***Advisory and systems support***

Alongside funding, TREF has a strong governance focus. It imposed accountability and transparency measures on MEHE, which “triggered a reform in governance, data management and financial management across schools and regional education offices”<sup>24</sup>. In practice, donors required MEHE to use the School Information Management System (SIMS) to record teacher data (including bank details and hours for contractors) and commissioned third-party monitors to verify teacher attendance and lessons delivered before incentives are paid<sup>25</sup>. These technical safeguards, essentially an advisory intervention to improve payroll systems, were directed at strengthening MEHE’s capacity to manage funds and ensure only eligible teachers receive the donor-funded compensation<sup>25</sup>. The EU and KfW have emphasised that TREF’s design ensures more efficient, transparent use of funds in Lebanon’s education system<sup>26</sup>. While TREF and UNICEF administer the payments, the initiative is coordinated with MEHE, and donors continue to provide policy advice (for example, on data collection and school performance) to the Ministry. Notably, the World Bank also contributed in this

period: in late 2021, the World Bank and the UK's FCDO repurposed USD 37 million under a trust fund to finance an emergency teacher Incentive Program, giving public-school teachers additional pay to afford transport and remain on the job<sup>27</sup>. This one-time program (2021–22) similarly conditioned payments on 90% attendance and relied on MEHE's SIMS and third-party verification<sup>28</sup>. Such donor-funded incentives were effectively salary top-ups, and became critical as regular teacher wages lost over 90% of their value during the crisis.

### ***Impact***

The direct donor assistance partially offset the collapse of teachers' salaries and helped avert the total closure of schools. By providing hard-currency stipends and performance-based bonuses, international partners kept many teachers working: for example, the USD 90/month "social assistance" incentives and transport stipends offered in recent years were funded by donors in coordination with the government<sup>29</sup>. This external funding for remuneration is significant enough to warrant mention as an economic factor. However, donors have been clear that their support is temporary. UNICEF emphasised that its contributions "cannot replace, but only complement the government's investment in education", urging the Lebanese government to budget liveable salaries for teachers<sup>30</sup>.

In sum, foreign aid directly propped up teacher pay from 2019 to 2024 through dollarized salaries for contract teachers, attendance-based bonuses for all teachers, and improved payment systems, but these measures are short-term remedies and depend on external financing.

## **Education Cannot Wait (ECW) – Emergency Education Support.**

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ECW, the global fund for education in emergencies, has also invested in Lebanon since 2019, contributing over USD 25 million by 2024 in grants to sustain education during crises<sup>31,32</sup>. While ECW's funding did not generally directly pay regular teacher salaries, it played a supporting role for teachers through emergency programming. ECW grants implemented chiefly by UNICEF and partners ensured that schools could operate and teachers could teach amidst instability. For example, ECW provided "First Emergency Response" grants in 2023 - 24 that equipped schools in high-risk areas and funded non-formal education hubs when public schools were shut<sup>33,34</sup>. Part of these ECW-funded programs focused on training and supporting teachers: the investments included training teachers to address the unique needs of displaced and crisis-affected children, with special emphasis on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), gender-responsive teaching, and inclusive education practices<sup>35</sup>. This helped build teacher capacity to cope with the emergency context. ECW programming also supplied teaching materials and remedial content, indirectly easing teachers' burden<sup>36</sup>.



### ***Advisory coordination***

ECW's role has been more about bolstering MEHE's crisis response rather than reforming teacher pay structures. ECW works in close partnership with MEHE: for instance, during the 2023 South Lebanon displacement crisis, UNICEF (with ECW funds) supported MEHE and the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) in executing an emergency education plan<sup>37</sup>. This included advising on strategies to keep children learning (through "hub" schools, remote learning, etc.) and ensuring teachers could continue teaching displaced pupils<sup>37,38</sup>. In this way, ECW's support has an advisory dimension directed at both MEHE and its affiliated institutions (like CERD), strengthening their ability to manage education in emergencies. However, ECW did not create new teacher compensation schemes; its funds did not go into public teacher payrolls for first-shift Lebanese classes (It should be noted that donors, including ECW, have historically funded second-shift teacher salaries for refugee education, as part of the broader crisis response<sup>39</sup>, but they refrain from funding the regular salaries of first-shift Lebanese teachers<sup>40</sup>). Overall, ECW's influence on remuneration was indirect, mainly by advocating that no teacher be "left behind" in crises<sup>41</sup> and by contributing resources so teachers had training and safe facilities to continue working.

## **Global Partnership for Education – System Strengthening Initiatives-GPE Engagement**

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In April 2024, Lebanon joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) as a partner country, marking a new avenue of donor support for the education sector<sup>42,43</sup>. GPE is not a humanitarian fund but a multilateral partnership focused on education system transformation. Upon joining, Lebanon finalised a four-year education sector plan (2024–2027) through an inclusive consultation process supported by GPE<sup>44</sup>. This plan targets improvements in early childhood education, student enrolment/retention, and out-of-school children's access, with the broader goal of strengthening the quality and resilience of the education system<sup>44</sup>. While teacher remuneration is not the sole focus of GPE, the plan's success relies on stabilising the teacher workforce, and GPE's engagement reflects donor interest in long-term solutions for issues like teacher retention and funding.

### ***Grants and advisory support***

Lebanon became eligible for a GPE Multiplier grant (an incentive-based matching fund) and a System Capacity Grant<sup>45</sup>. The System Capacity Grant is essentially an advisory/technical assistance fund directed at MEHE: it can finance expert support, data systems upgrades, and policy studies to help implement reforms (for example, improving education budgeting, teacher management systems, or training programs). In Lebanon's context, GPE's advisory support is likely to reinforce areas like education financing and governance, which would encompass payroll and human resource management improvements as part of governance reforms. Indeed, the GPE partnership dovetails with

UNESCO's technical assistance to MEHE in developing the Five-Year General Education Plan (2021–2025), which included governance and cost-efficiency reforms (e.g. proposals to digitise payroll and achieve savings)<sup>46,47</sup>. We can thus expect GPE funds to support measures such as strengthening MEHE's financial management capacity, improving data transparency, and aligning donor contributions with the national plan. However, GPE does not directly pay teacher salaries; its role is to help Lebanon mobilise and use funding more effectively. Any impact on teacher pay from GPE would be indirect, e.g. through better budget planning or leveraging the GPE Multiplier to attract new grants that could potentially support teacher incentives. In summary, GPE's involvement signals increased advisory support to MEHE at the strategic level (planning and system reform), rather than a direct infusion into teacher payroll. This is an important development in the 2019–2024 period, showing a shift towards a coordinated, government-led approach (with donor alignment) to address education challenges, including the teacher salary crisis.

## **The Government of Lebanon's Role in the Education Crisis Response - Ownership and Coordination**

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The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has taken an active leadership role in coordinating the education sector response during the crisis. In late 2021, MEHE developed a Five-Year General Education Plan (2021–2025) outlining national priorities for access, quality, and governance in education<sup>48</sup>. To align donor support with this plan, MEHE, in partnership with UNICEF and major donors (notably the EU and Germany), officially launched the Transition and Resilience Education Fund (TREF) in June 2022<sup>49</sup>. TREF is a government-led funding modality that channels international assistance toward Lebanon's public education system<sup>50</sup>. All programs under TREF are aligned with MEHE's 2021–2025 education strategy, ensuring that external funding reinforces the country's own vision for inclusive, quality education<sup>51</sup>. Importantly, MEHE co-chairs sector coordination mechanisms (with UNICEF as a coordinating agency) to guide these efforts<sup>52</sup>. In practice, this means the government leads on policy and planning while working jointly with donors to harmonise interventions. Through such ownership and coordination, the Government of Lebanon has provided a platform for a multi-year partnership with UNICEF and other international partners, steering aid towards national objectives and maintaining oversight of the education response<sup>51,52</sup>.

### ***Operational Facilitation***

Beyond high-level coordination, MEHE has also been instrumental in the operational facilitation of keeping schools running during Lebanon's compounding crises. With the public school system on the verge of collapse due to economic turmoil (and prolonged teacher strikes over salaries), the ministry and its partners adopted emergency measures to reopen and sustain schools. MEHE authorised and oversaw an approach of direct disbursements to



schools and education personnel, a novel arrangement aimed at bypassing bureaucratic bottlenecks and getting resources where they were needed most<sup>53</sup>. Rather than channelling funds through the standard government budget (which was constrained by the financial crisis), UNICEF and donors, under TREF, paid school grants and teacher incentives directly in USD on MEHE's behalf<sup>54,55</sup>. Crucially, these payments were performance-linked: money was released only against verified attendance of teachers and students, upholding TREF's accountability and transparency principles<sup>53</sup>. In the 2022–2023 school year, for example, MEHE's collaboration with UNICEF enabled over 1,070 public schools to receive operational funding in dollars, and ensured that some 12,500 contract teachers received monthly dollar-denominated stipends tied to their presence in classrooms<sup>55</sup>. By endorsing this approach and providing oversight (such as validating staff lists via the School Information Management System and commissioning third-party attendance monitoring), the government helped rapidly resume the school year after months-long stoppages<sup>56,57</sup>. This operational facilitation by MEHE, working hand-in-hand with international partners, was critical in keeping schools open and mitigating learning losses during the crisis<sup>56,53</sup>. It demonstrated the ministry's willingness to implement flexible solutions (like direct cash support and monitoring) to uphold children's right to education in dire times<sup>54,55</sup>.

### ***Limitations and Outstanding Challenges***

Despite these efforts, the Government of Lebanon faces structural limitations that hinder a sustainable resolution of the education crisis. Temporary stop-gap measures have not yet been matched by long-term systemic reforms. Key steps such as establishing a new salary scale for public school teachers, creating a reliable payroll system, and securing sustained budget allocations for education remain pending. As a result, teachers' livelihoods are still heavily dependent on ad-hoc allowances and external donor funding rather than stable government salaries<sup>58,59</sup>. The financial collapse since 2019 has decimated the value of teacher pay. The base salary of many public teachers fell to only tens of dollars per month, and while donors have stepped in with "productivity allowances" to top up incomes, a comprehensive government-led solution is lacking. International partners (including UNICEF, the World Bank, and the UK) have explicitly urged the Lebanese government to implement reforms to ensure it can self-finance teacher wages and school operating costs in the coming years<sup>59</sup>. They warn that without increased domestic funding, greater transparency in expenditures, and efficiency improvements (timely payment processes), Lebanon will likely see a repeat of strikes and school closures in future academic years<sup>59</sup>. To date, however, government budgets for education have not risen to meet these needs, and efforts like lobbying Parliament for extra funds are ongoing<sup>58</sup>. In summary, while MEHE's leadership and emergency interventions have been commendable, the lack of structural fixes – such as a revamped salary scheme and reliable public financing – means the system is still propped up by external cash infusions.

Both UNICEF and other stakeholders stress that their support is no substitute for institutional reforms: only a political commitment to adequately and regularly pay educators will put public education on a stable footing<sup>58,59</sup>. The government's role thus remains crucial and dual-edged: it has shown it can coordinate and innovate in a crisis, but it now must follow through with policy reforms to permanently strengthen the education sector.

## ***Research Aim and Objectives***

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This research aims to provide clear, evidence-based guidance to secure fair and regular pay for Lebanon's public school teachers during and after emergencies.

### ***Primary Objective:***

- To assess how the 2019–2025 crises affected teacher wages and payment regularity in public schools.

### ***Secondary Objectives***

1. Analyse the political, economic, and legal factors that drive low and irregular pay.
2. Identify the psychosocial impact of low and irregular pay on teachers (e.g., stress, motivation, well-being, coping).
3. Examine how financing sources (state budget, private contributions, foreign aid) shape teacher remuneration and payment systems.
4. Assess effects on teachers' labour rights, working conditions, professional development, and well-being.
5. Map the roles and actions of MEHE, MoF, teacher syndicates/unions, donors/NGOs, and school administrations.
6. Identify practical policy and budget options (e.g., salary scale reform, reliable payment systems, restoration of benefits, transparency).
7. Recommend short- and medium-term actions for each stakeholder group to stabilise and improve teacher pay.



## 2. Methodology

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### *Study design and approach*

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This study uses a mixed-methods design anchored in grounded theory. We combine qualitative and quantitative evidence to describe teacher pay and payment systems, explain why problems persist, and identify practical solutions. We build a context-specific framework from the data and the Lebanese education context.

### *Setting and period*

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The study focuses on public education in Lebanon between 2019 and 2025. This period includes the economic collapse, COVID-19, the 2020 Beirut Port explosion, and the 2023–2024 conflict.

### *Population and sampling*

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- Primary population: Public school teachers (contractual and permanent) across Lebanon.
- Key informants: Officials or former officials from MEHE and MoF, CERD/school administrators, leaders of teacher syndicates/unions, and education program leads in donor agencies/NGOs.

#### *Sampling strategy*

- Teachers: purposive sampling to ensure diversity by region (Beirut/Mount Lebanon, North/Akkar, Bekaa/Baalbek-Hermel, South/Nabatieh), contract type (contractual/permanent), gender, seniority, and school level (elementary/intermediate/secondary).
- Key informants: purposive and snowball sampling to include actors with direct roles in teacher remuneration policy and practice.

#### *Sample size*

- Focus group discussions (FGDs): 3 FGDs with ~15 teachers each (~ 45 teachers in total).
- Key informant interviews (KIIs): 15 KIIs with stakeholders, as listed above.

## ***Data sources and collection***

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### ***Qualitative data***

- FGDs with teachers: Semi-structured guide covering pay levels and trends (2019–2025), payment channels and timing, unpaid work, benefits, coping strategies, well-being, and perceived effects on teaching quality.
- KIs: Semi-structured guide tailored to each group (policy design and implementation, budget flows, donor roles, union actions, constraints, and feasible reforms).

### ***Quantitative and documentary data***

- Secondary data (desk review): National budget and expenditure data, payroll regulations, circulars, ministerial decisions, donor project documents, and credible public datasets.
- Context timeline: Compilation of dated policy and crisis milestones (2019–2025) to align events with salary and payment changes.

## ***Instruments***

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- Interview/FGD guides: Brief, focused questions with probes (validated by two local experts; piloted with 2–3 teachers).
- Demographic form (teachers): Gender, age range, region, contract type, seniority, position, union membership.
- Document abstraction form: Source, date, measure (% of GDP to education, productivity pay rule), and key notes.

## ***Operational definitions***

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- Multi-crisis: The overlapping shocks since 2019 (economic collapse, COVID-19, the Beirut Port explosion, 2023–2024 conflict).
- Low remuneration: Teacher salary (and allowances) that does not meet living costs in real terms.
- Equitable remuneration: Fair pay that reflects workload, experience, and inflation; equal treatment for contractual and permanent teachers.
- Productivity pay/incentive sum: Ad-hoc USD (or LBP-indexed) top-up added to base salary.
- School fund: School-level operating account used for running costs.



- Salary irregularity: Late, skipped, or incorrect payments; unstable amounts or exchange rates.
- Payment mechanism: The full pathway from calculation to disbursement (system, channel, currency, timing).
- Contractual teacher: Paid per hour with limited benefits and no fixed-term civil service appointment.
- Permanent teacher: Civil service post with a fixed base salary (paid in LBP) and formal grade/scale.
- Qualified teacher: Meets MEHE/CERD qualification and subject standards.
- Syndicate / Union (rabta): Teacher collective body advocating for rights and pay.
- State budget / State treasury: Central government allocations and the account used to execute payments.
- Private financing: Non-state domestic funding (households, private entities).
- Foreign donor funding: External grants/loans to the education sector.
- In-kind donation: Goods/services provided instead of cash.

## ***Data management and quality assurance***

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### ***Data analysis***

- Qualitative and quantitative analysis (thematic content analysis)
- Integration of findings (mixed-methods)

### ***Ethics***

- Risk management: No sensitive personal data collected; participants may skip any question; support contacts offered if distress arises.
- Approvals: Institutional or organisational ethics clearance (where applicable); permissions for school/union access.
- Voluntariness and withdrawal: Participation is voluntary; withdrawal is allowed at any time without consequence.

## ***Limitations***

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- Access and representation: Not all regions or sub-groups may be equally represented; we address this by purposive sampling and clear reporting of who participated.
- Recall and social desirability bias: Mitigated by triangulating interviews with documents and (where available) administrative data.

- Evolving context: Policy changes during 2025 may shift realities; we timestamp all findings and note any post-fieldwork changes.

### ***Rigour and trustworthiness***

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- Credibility: Triangulation across sources; member checks where feasible.
- Dependability: Documented procedures and codebook; peer review of coding on a sample of transcripts.
- Confirmability: Audit trail and reflexive memos on assumptions and decisions.
- Transferability: Thick description of context to help readers assess applicability to other settings.

## **3. Participants and Data Collection**

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This study engaged a sample of public school teachers and key stakeholders through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In total, 45 public school teachers were consulted, organised into three FGDs conducted between February and May 2025. These focus groups included teachers from all eight Lebanese governorates, representing the education levels in which the three public teacher unions organise workers (elementary, secondary, and technical education). Additionally, 15 one-on-one interviews were carried out with individual teachers from diverse regions (Beirut, South Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and Baalbeck) to gather in-depth perspectives. We also conducted key informant interviews with two educational stakeholders who serve as public teacher union leaders.

All interviews were semi-structured and scheduled during the spring of 2025. Two of the FGDs were held online (via video conferencing) between March and May 2025, while one FGD session took place in person in May 2025. The individual teacher interviews were similarly conducted mostly online (given the geographic spread of participants), and the key informant interviews with union representatives were done via online calls between March and May 2025. This combination of remote and face-to-face formats ensured both safety and inclusivity, allowing participation from teachers across Lebanon despite ongoing crises.

### ***Teacher Participant Demographics***

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The teacher participants varied in background, ensuring a rich range of perspectives.



A total of 60 public school teachers participated in the study: 45 in focus-group discussions (three FGDs of ~15 teachers each) and 15 in one-on-one interviews. Among them, women comprised about one-third (~35%) and men about two-thirds (~65%). Participants' ages ranged from the mid-20s to the 50s. For example, roughly 10% of teachers were in their 20s, 40% in their 30s, 33% in their 40s, and 17% in the 50+ range. Teaching experience was similarly broad: about 10% of teachers had 0–4 years of experience, 20% had 5–9 years, 30% had 10–14 years, 20% had 15–19 years, and 20% had 20 or more years. The sample included both contractual and permanent teachers: approximately one-third worked on fixed-term (hourly) contracts and two-thirds held permanent civil-service posts.

The table below details the demographic breakdown of teachers participating in the study. This count excludes any key-informant interviews (KIIs) with union or government stakeholders; only participants in teachers' interviews and FGDs are included here.

**Table 1: Demographics of teachers who participated in the study**

Demographic	Category	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Women	35%
	Men	65%
<b>Age group</b>	20–29	10%
	30–39	40%
	40–49	33%
	50+	17%
<b>Years teaching</b>	0–4 years	10%
	5–9 years	20%
	10–14 years	30%
	15–19 years	20%
	20+ years	20%
<b>Contract type</b>	Contractual (hourly)	33%
	Permanent (civil serv.)	67%

## 4. Findings

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### ***Economic, Political, and Legal Drivers of Teacher Remuneration and Psychosocial Consequences for Teachers***

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This chapter has two parts. First, it explains the economic, political, and legal factors that drive low and irregular teacher pay in Lebanon. Second, it presents the psychosocial consequences for teachers that arise from low and irregular pay (stress, motivation, well-being, coping).

#### ***Economic Factors***

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Lebanon's ongoing financial collapse and hyperinflation have severely undermined public education financing and teachers' livelihoods. Public teachers' real incomes have collapsed due to the Lebanese pound (LBP) losing over 98% of its value since 2019<sup>60</sup>. Where a typical monthly teacher salary was approximately USD 1,500–2,300 before the crisis, it is now effectively worth only on the order of USD 70–\$200<sup>61</sup>. For example, one estimate puts a public school teacher's salary at roughly USD 90 per month as of 2023<sup>61</sup> – an over 90% devaluation of income in US dollar terms<sup>[60]</sup>. This extreme erosion of pay, coupled with soaring prices, has left many teachers unable to afford necessities and fuel. One interviewed teacher noted colleagues can no longer pay even USD 100–200 monthly generator bills for electricity, forcing them to endure long blackout periods. Teachers describe the post-2019 period as “rock bottom,” with drastically diminished purchasing power and dependence on borrowing to get by.

During the crisis years, donors and the government arranged additional stipends in US dollars (“productivity allowances”) to partially compensate public school teachers (both permanent and contractual) on top of meagre LBP salaries<sup>62</sup>. By 2024, this allowance reached \$375 per month for each teacher<sup>62</sup>. However, in early 2025, the new Ministry of Education and Higher Education moved to restructure teacher compensation – integrating the USD 375 allowance into base salaries and initially excluding many contract teachers from the bonus, which sparked immediate protests<sup>63</sup>. Teachers staged strikes and street demonstrations demanding that this critical allowance be maintained or replaced with a more sustainable salary increase that protects their rights. Ultimately, the Ministry clarified it would not fully cancel the productivity bonus but would formalise it within public sector pay, after facing pressure from educators<sup>63</sup>. Still, the episode underscored teachers' mistrust and the precariousness of these stopgap payments. Many educators report chronic late payments and confusing irregularities in compensation (hours logged vs. pay received),



symptomatic of a dysfunctional payroll system. With school directors themselves often calculating pay instead of adequate administrative staff, errors and delays have become commonplace.

Donor salary support was channelled mainly through the Transition and Resilience Education Fund (TREF), which made USD, attendance-linked payments directly to schools and teachers (see “International donor support for Teacher Salaries in Lebanon (2019-2024)” for details)<sup>64</sup>.

Shrinking public budgets have compounded these woes. Lebanon’s government expenditures have nosedived amid the economic collapse; total public spending fell from USD 17.6 billion in 2018 to just USD 1.2 billion in 2022 (nominal)<sup>65</sup>. The World Bank has called this a “hollowing out of the state”<sup>66</sup>. Education funding in particular has always been low by regional standards and is now critically insufficient. Even before the crisis, Lebanon’s public expenditure on education was only about 2% of GDP and 6–8% of government spending<sup>66</sup>, consistently among the lowest in the Arab region (for comparison, neighbouring countries often spend around 4% of GDP on education<sup>67</sup>). In 2020, the Ministry of Education’s budget was just 2.4% of GDP (8.9% of the state budget)<sup>68,66</sup>. As the crisis deepened, the education budget in 2022 was a mere USD 114 million equivalent<sup>65</sup>, dramatically down from an average of USD 1.2 billion annually in the period 2013–2015<sup>66</sup>. In real terms (accounting for inflation), this represents an outright collapse of public education spending. Such budget cuts mean many public schools cannot afford maintenance, supplies, or investments in infrastructure. Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools “proved to have no infrastructure” for online learning, as years of under-investment left them without equipment or reliable electricity/internet. Schools’ funds have been devalued by the currency free-fall, leaving no cushion for operational expenses. Heavy public debt and elite corruption form the backdrop of this fiscal crisis. Lebanon entered the crisis as one of the most indebted countries in the world (third-highest globally), with a public debt of about 178% of GDP by 2019<sup>60</sup>. In March 2020, the government defaulted on a USD 1.2 billion Eurobond, its first-ever sovereign default<sup>60</sup>. Since then, foreign creditors (led by the IMF and the World Bank) have conditioned any bailout or development aid on serious economic reforms<sup>69</sup>. However, the country’s ruling elite has resisted reforms that would threaten their patronage networks or expose corruption<sup>69</sup>. This stalemate has left Lebanon without an IMF program or international rescue, forcing drastic austerity by default. Public finances have instead been managed via opaque measures (multiple exchange rates, money printing) that enriched insiders while wiping out the value of salaries and pensions<sup>60</sup>. Notably, the central bank was skimming donor education funds: as of late 2021, it only allowed aid dollars to be withdrawn at an artificial rate (e.g., LBP 8,000 per USD 1 when the market rate was LBP 25,000+), effectively seizing much of the aid’s value for the bank<sup>70</sup>. Such corruption has starved schools of resources that foreign donors intended for them. Lebanon’s new government, formed in early 2025 after over two years of political vacuum, has vowed to implement reforms and rebuild state institutions<sup>71</sup>. Yet educators remain sceptical, as political elites historically profited from a weak public sector.

Over time, political patronage shaped staffing and pay practices in public education, with sectarian politicians using the system to hire loyalists while neglecting quality improvements<sup>69</sup>. The Ministry of Education employs roughly 50,000 staff, and learning outcomes remain weak<sup>72</sup>. A large share of the education budget goes to salaries and pensions, leaving limited room for operations, investment, and pedagogy<sup>[66]</sup><sup>66,72</sup>. By 2023, more than 60% of government spending was absorbed by public-sector personnel costs (wages, benefits, and debt interest), squeezing out other expenditures<sup>65</sup>. This spending pattern, together with hiring freezes and reliance on contractual positions, directly affects how salaries are set, updated, and paid, and helps explain current pay instability and uneven remuneration mechanisms.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's education system is unusually privatised, creating further inequities. Even before the crisis, the majority of students – roughly 60–70% – were enrolled in private schools, versus under 30% in public schools<sup>73,72</sup>. Successive governments have spent large sums subsidising private education: for instance, an estimated USD 900 million per year of state funds went to private educational institutions (including tuition subsidies for children of civil servants), while only a fraction of this amount supported public schools<sup>69</sup>. One report found wealthy households captured 64% of those government education subsidies, whereas low-income families got only 16%<sup>69</sup> – reflecting a regressive policy that benefited elites in private schools. This unequal funding has long undermined public schools. The result is a two-tier system: well-resourced private schools (often owned or run by religious and political groups) versus neglected public schools serving the poor. As economic conditions deteriorated post-2019, many families could no longer afford private school fees, forcing a surge of students into public schools. Over 55,000 students switched from private to public in the 2020–2021 year alone<sup>74</sup>. Public schools – already strained by an influx of tens of thousands of Syrian refugee children – have been overwhelmed by rising enrolment even as their budgets shrink<sup>75,65</sup>. This puts further pressure on resources and class sizes in the public sector, potentially eroding quality unless funding increases. Moreover, Lebanon's elites historically “insulated themselves” by using private schools and thus felt little urgency to reform public education<sup>69</sup>. This dynamic of elite capture and neglect has left public schools as the system of last resort, now swamped by the newly impoverished.

## ***Key education finance and workforce indicators illustrate the gravity of the situation (2010 - 2023):***

### ***Government Education Expenditure***

Public spending on education averaged USD 1.2 billion annually (2013–2015), about 2% of GDP and 6.3% of total spending<sup>[66]</sup>. By 2022, it fell to only USD 114 million (at the parallel exchange rate), a collapse in real terms<sup>65</sup>. Public education spending had risen slightly as a share of GDP (to ~2.4% by 2020) simply because GDP contracted so sharply<sup>68</sup>.



However, in absolute terms and per capita, current education funding is woefully inadequate after hyperinflation.

### ***Student Teacher Ratios***

Lebanon's public schools have an average student-teacher ratio of  $\approx 12:1$ <sup>73</sup>, one of the lowest ratios in the region (by contrast, many Arab countries have 20+ students per teacher). While a low ratio can be positive, in Lebanon it partly reflects under-enrolment and excess staffing. Despite the favourable ratios, learning outcomes remain poor. Simply having more teachers has not translated into quality because of very low pay (which depresses morale and retention and pushes teachers to take second jobs), as well as absenteeism, limited training, and weak school support systems.

### ***Teacher Qualifications***

A significant share of public school teachers are not fully qualified. As of 2018, around 40% of public school teachers did not even hold a university degree<sup>72</sup>. More recent UNESCO data show that only about 40% of primary teachers are formally trained to the required standards<sup>73</sup>, meaning the majority lack pedagogical training or certification. The workforce includes many under-qualified, ad-hoc hires. For example, 21% of teachers have only a high-school diploma, and 5% have merely a technical teaching certificate<sup>72</sup>. This skills gap undermines instruction quality. It is both a cause and effect of the crisis: low salaries drove many qualified teachers to leave the profession (or emigrate), and the state responded by hiring cheaper contract teachers with minimal credentials.

### ***Teacher Workforce Size and Shortage***

The public education sector employed roughly 50,000 teachers and staff before the crisis<sup>72</sup>. However, thousands have quit in recent years due to unpaid wages and hardship. It is estimated that the education system lost about 10,000 teachers between 2019 and 2022<sup>74</sup>. This exodus of experienced educators creates a growing shortage of qualified teachers, even as student needs increase. Many who remain are near retirement, and there is little recruitment of new talent, given the unattractive pay. If conditions do not improve, Lebanon faces a severe teacher shortage in the coming years, especially of qualified instructors in key subjects.

### ***Contract vs. Permanent Teachers***

The majority of public school teachers are now on precarious contracts rather than tenured civil servants. Over 70% of official teaching staff are contract teachers without job security<sup>76</sup>. These contractors are paid hourly or monthly with no benefits or pension, and often go months unpaid. By contrast, permanent teachers (the minority) receive fixed LBP salaries (now almost worthless) but at least have formal civil-servant status. The state increasingly relied on temporary and "daily" contract teachers, a trend which exploded in the 1990s and 2000s (at one point, 90% of new hires were contractual<sup>66, 76</sup>). This two-tier system

has demoralised the workforce – contract teachers feel exploited (many earn barely USD 1–2 per hour<sup>61</sup>, yet they shoulder most of the teaching load. 99.7% of teachers reported dissatisfaction with the recent cancellation of allowances and the general precariousness of their employment<sup>61</sup>. The heavy reliance on contract labour saves the government money in the short run but undermines teacher commitment and stability.

### ***Teacher Workload and Hours***

Paradoxically, Lebanese public school teachers have among the lowest annual working hours in the world, due to system inefficiencies and frequent disruptions. Before the crisis, a civil servant teacher taught on average only ~380 hours per year, and a contractual teacher ~430 hours/year<sup>76</sup>. This is barely half of the OECD average of 770+ hours<sup>76</sup>. In terms of weekly workload, many full-time teachers teach only about 10–15 hours per week in the classroom<sup>76</sup>. The reasons include shortened school calendars (strikes and closures have cut the school year to a fraction of normal days<sup>61</sup>) and certain rules that limit how many sessions permanent teachers teach (with some supplementing income in private tutoring). The low number of instructional hours – combined with low pay – mean students receive far less learning time, and teachers ironically remain under-utilised yet under-paid. During 2020–2023, repeated teacher strikes and crisis-related school shutdowns meant some public schools were open only a few days per month. As of March 2023, public schools had been closed more often than open over the preceding 3 years<sup>74</sup>, severely curtailing instructional time.

### ***Teacher Pay Relative to Other Professions***

Public teacher salaries have fallen below almost any comparable profession requiring a university degree. At roughly USD ~90 per month, a teacher now earns less than a private chauffeur or a junior shop clerk in Lebanon's dollarised economy. Even after adding stipends (transport allowance and the often-uncertain "productivity" top-up), monthly income for many teachers reaches only USD ~200–300, still below basic household needs and far short of a reasonable living wage. For reference, the government raised the legal minimum wage to LBP 18 million per month ( $\approx$  USD ~200) in April 2024<sup>77</sup>, but a survival minimum expenditure basket for a typical family of five was around USD 450–500 per month in 2024–2025<sup>65</sup> (a true living wage is higher than that survival basket because it must also cover decent housing, healthcare, transport, and contingencies). In practice, this means a teacher with decades of experience often earns the legal minimum wage or just above, yet below what is needed for a basic but decent standard of living. The collapse in relative pay has pushed many teachers to seek other work (odd jobs, private tutoring) or to emigrate to hard-currency labour markets (e.g., Gulf countries). Lebanon is already experiencing a brain drain of educators; many of the most experienced English and STEM teachers have left for better pay abroad<sup>74</sup>. Those who remain often must work multiple jobs or rely on remittances from relatives overseas. All these economic factors have profoundly impacted the quality and continuity of education in



the public sector. Financial stress and uncertainty have led to burnout and low morale among teachers, impairing their performance in classrooms. Many report feeling demotivated and unable to “give their all” when they are worrying about basic survival. Strikes and absenteeism have skyrocketed as teachers protest for living wages or simply cannot afford transport to work<sup>61</sup>. By early 2023, public school teachers had engaged in months-long strikes, bringing learning to a halt<sup>74</sup>. Students have lost out on hundreds of school days, and an entire generation’s learning has been severely interrupted – prompting warnings of a “lost generation” in Lebanon<sup>78</sup>.

Public education has essentially been in crisis mode since 2019, first due to economic meltdown, then COVID-19, and even the fallout of regional conflicts (e.g. schools used as shelters during the 2024 Israel–Gaza war spillover<sup>77</sup>). Crucially, the collapse of public education hits the most vulnerable Lebanese families hardest, as wealthier families have alternatives. As one international official observed, Lebanon’s elites hardly feel the pain since “they have their schools, their hospitals...they live despite the state<sup>69</sup>”. The burden of the failing public system thus falls on the poor and dedicated educators left to prop it up.

Donor assistance has become a double-edged sword in this environment. On one hand, foreign donors have stepped in to prevent total collapse – paying for school supplies, financing “second shift” classes for refugees, and even covering portions of teachers’ salaries in some cases<sup>64,77</sup>. For example, between 2011 and 2021, donors gave an estimated USD 2.5 billion to support public education (especially to cope with the Syrian refugee crisis)<sup>65</sup>. In the 2022–23 school year, UNICEF alone spent over USD 70 million on education programs in Lebanon<sup>65</sup>. Donor funds have been used to pay the salaries of “second shift” teachers (teaching Syrian refugee children in the afternoons) and, recently, to provide “incentive” top-ups to morning shift teachers as well<sup>64,77</sup>. For instance, the UK and EU financed the interim productivity allowances in 2022–2023, essentially dollar bonuses to keep teachers in classrooms<sup>62,64</sup>. This aid has indeed kept schools running – UN aid to public institutions in 2022 was USD 300 million, roughly 25% of the entire state budget that year<sup>65</sup>. However, the reliance on external aid raises concerns about sustainability and sovereignty. Stop-gap donor payments may “perpetuate dysfunction,” allowing Lebanese leaders to delay necessary reforms<sup>69</sup>. Donors themselves are uneasy about endlessly subsidising Lebanese public salaries<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, the aid is often inequitable or insufficient – by late 2024, the education sector had received only 19% of the donor funding it appealed for that year<sup>65</sup>. And critically, if political will for reform remains absent, donor support could simply relieve pressure on the government to fix corruption and mismanagement<sup>69</sup>. This is the essence of Lebanon’s aid dilemma: humanitarian assistance is preventing outright collapse – keeping teachers and students barely afloat – but it risks entrenching a “downward spiral of aid dependency<sup>69</sup>” while the root problems (fiscal insolvency and governance failure) remain unaddressed.

In conclusion, Lebanon’s public education sector is caught in a perfect storm of economic collapse, fiscal crisis, and governance failure.

Hyperinflation and dollarisation have ravaged teachers' salaries and school budgets, pushing education professionals into poverty. The shrinking state budget and massive public debt have left education grossly underfunded, even as more families turn to public schools as a last resort. Corruption and elite capture of resources mean that funds often do not reach those who need them – whether through central bank siphoning of aid or decades of skewed subsidies favouring private schooling for the rich. Teachers are overwhelmingly underpaid, under-supported, and employed on precarious terms, leading to strikes, emigration, and a loss of teaching talent. All key metrics – from spending per student to training levels – indicate a system in serious decline. The economic factors detailed above are not abstract numbers; they translate directly into crowded classrooms with no heating or electricity, children without textbooks or transportation, and demoralized teachers unable to focus on instruction. Ultimately, without a comprehensive stabilization of the economy and a reordering of national priorities toward education, the crisis will continue to self-perpetuate. As public school teachers themselves warn, they are at “rock bottom,” and the collapse of education will have long-term repercussions on Lebanon’s human capital and social stability. Robust investment and structural change are urgently needed to pull Lebanon’s education system out of this downward spiral. Otherwise, an entire generation’s future is at stake<sup>78,65</sup>.

## ***Political factors***

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### ***Chronic Instability and Sectarian Power-Sharing***

Lebanon’s chronic political instability, marked by frequent government vacuums and delayed decisions, has severely hindered the development and consistent implementation of education policy (that is, stable rules and plans applied on time and in the same way across public schools). The country’s sectarian power-sharing system often paralyzes decision-making because major reforms require cross-sect consensus. As a result, policies are delayed, stalled, or applied unevenly. For example, Lebanon spent extended periods without a president or under caretaker cabinets, which derailed urgent reforms. In early 2023, while public schools were shut down by teacher strikes over pay, the caretaker cabinet failed to even convene an emergency session to resolve the crisis<sup>79</sup>. Such paralysis exemplifies how sectarian political arrangements result in slow, deferred policy actions – including on updating teacher salary scales or improving school resources – ultimately harming the education sector. Participants in this study stressed that decades of sectarian power-sharing have produced frequent policy deadlock, where education decisions are delayed or avoided due to political bargaining and fragmentation. The accumulation of unresolved issues since 2011, which peaked in the 2019 financial collapse, reflects this pattern of governance failure<sup>79</sup>. In short, political leaders’ inability to govern effectively – exacerbated by sectarian rivalries – has left public education vulnerable and under-prioritised. Crucial strategic plans are postponed or abandoned, and



long-term vision is sacrificed for short-term sectarian interests, directly impacting teachers' remuneration and job stability. As one Lebanese educator observed, the root problem "is not that there is no money, it's the poor financial management and wasting [of] funds for political reasons... it's the sectarian politics<sup>80</sup>". This endemic mismanagement means that even when budgets exist, they are often not allocated based on actual needs, leaving teachers without the salary support or resources they deserve.

### ***Patronage, Nepotism, and Misuse of Resources***

Lebanon's public education sector is further weakened by clientelism and patronage networks that prioritise political loyalty over merit or need. Participants described how resources and opportunities are distributed based on sectarian or political allegiance rather than schools' real needs. For instance, some contractual teachers reportedly receive more teaching hours for nepotistic reasons, not because of student demand or teacher performance. Such favouritism undermines fairness and can leave more qualified or needy teachers underutilised. This patronage system extends to hiring and appointments: political leaders have historically secured public jobs for loyalists even if underqualified – entrenching a culture of non-accountability in state institutions. In the post-Civil War era, sectarian politicians engaged in massive recruitment of their followers into public service and appointed loyalists to key education posts, practices which "permitted a high degree of non-accountability across the sectarian divide<sup>80</sup>". The result is widespread corruption and misuse of public school funds, with scant transparency or oversight. Education funds are often diverted or expended on "wasteful spending" that serves political ends rather than improve schools. Participants pointed to the mismanagement of education budgets by successive ministers, many of whom lacked expertise in the sector, and a lack of accountability for how public school funds are spent. Indeed, Lebanon's political class has been widely criticised for corruption, nepotism, and clientelism, and teacher unions have echoed demands for a "radical change of a political system that is... characterised by corruption, nepotism, and clientelism<sup>81,82</sup>". Without robust accountability mechanisms, embezzlement or political allocation of school resources goes unpunished, directly impacting remuneration: funds that could have been used for teacher salary increases or benefits often vanish into political fiefdoms. This toxic blend of patronage and corruption has left teachers struggling with inadequate pay and resources, while those with the right connections may receive preferential treatment. Participants emphasised that restoring meritocracy and transparency in public education is critical – for example, by ending sectarian favouritism in teacher appointments and enforcing financial oversight – so that remuneration can be based on fairness and actual needs rather than patronage.

### ***Lack of Strategic Planning and Ad Hoc Policies***

Another major governance challenge is the lack of long-term strategic planning for education, which has led authorities to rely on short-term

fixes. Education policy in Lebanon is fragmented across various power centres and often shifts with each change of government, undermining any sustained vision. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has frequently been accused of having no comprehensive plan to modernise or support the sector<sup>83</sup>. Instead of proactive reform, officials tend to resort to improvised, ad-hoc measures when crises hit. For example, rather than instituting a durable adjustment to teachers' base salaries amid the financial crisis, the government introduced a monthly "productivity pay" in U.S. dollars as an emergency stipend<sup>83</sup>. While this provided temporary relief, it was a stopgap solution that fluctuated with exchange rates and failed to address the core issue of collapsed salaries. Similarly, when security crises erupted, planning was reactive. During the 2023–2024 Israeli aggression on Lebanon's southern border, no emergency education contingency was in place – despite the threat of war having been anticipated for months. One interviewed teacher noted that after nearly a year of escalating hostilities, the Ministry still lacked pre-emptive plan to ensure learning continuity - safeguarding teaching, protecting instructional time, and preserving the school year. Only after the conflict intensified did officials hastily announce a "belated" emergency plan, largely improvised and reactive. Analysis by education experts in The Legal Agenda observed that this late plan relied on ad-hoc measures and failed to account for realities on the ground, such as the strain on public schools being used as shelters and the damage to school infrastructure<sup>84</sup>. Indeed, by October 2024, half of Lebanon's public schools, over 500 schools, were being used as shelters for displaced families, forcing the start of the academic year to be postponed. Critics argued the ministry's plan prioritised administrative formalities (e.g., private-school calendar adjustments) over operational needs; the plan was belated, piecemeal, and did not address schools used as shelters or damage to school infrastructure<sup>84</sup>. This pattern illustrates a governance approach to crisis management that involves piecemeal steps rather than resilient, well-thought-out strategies. Participants underscored that decades of inaction and shortsighted policies have eroded public education. With no unified vision and with education policy often influenced by multiple ministries or sectarian interests, reforms remain fragmented and inconsistent. The absence of a long-term plan means that fundamental issues (like updating salary scales, investing in school infrastructure, or training teachers) are perpetually postponed. In effect, Lebanese teachers find themselves in a system that lurches from one quick fix to another, with their remuneration and working conditions never receiving the thorough, structural improvements that are needed.

### ***Regional Crises and External Shocks***

Lebanon's volatile political context is further complicated by regional crises that have directly affected the education sector and teacher remuneration.

Notably, the Syrian civil war and the massive influx of Syrian refugees since 2011 have added immense pressure on public schools. With Lebanon hosting an estimated 1.5–2 million Syrians, including around



450,000 school-aged children, the government introduced a double-shift system in public schools to accommodate refugee students. Lebanese students attend a morning shift, and Syrian students mostly attend an afternoon shift in separate classes<sup>85</sup>. However, participants reported that refugee enrolment has sometimes spilt into the Lebanese morning classes due to capacity limits in the afternoon<sup>85</sup>. In fact, as of 2018, roughly 220,000 Syrian children were attending Lebanese public schools either in second shifts or alongside Lebanese pupils in morning classes<sup>85</sup>. This has led to mixed-age and mixed-background classrooms, where students of vastly different ages and prior schooling experience sit together. For example, UNHCR documented a 13-year-old Syrian refugee who, after losing two years of education to the conflict, had to enrol in Grade 5 instead of Grade 7, ending up in a class with children much younger than him<sup>86</sup>. Educators note that such disparities in age and academic level within the same class present huge challenges for teaching and learning, as they must address diverse needs often with limited support, which can slow down the curriculum and strain teachers' capacity. Additionally, differences in curriculum and language (Syrian vs. Lebanese curriculum, and instruction often in foreign languages in Lebanon) create learning barriers<sup>87</sup>. The refugee influx has also stretched resources thin: more than 140 public schools are dedicated to afternoon shifts for refugees, employing around 4,500 Lebanese teachers on a contractual, second-shift basis; these teachers are typically paid a modest hourly wage with no compensation for prep time<sup>88</sup>. Importantly, the Syrian refugee crisis not only burdened schools but also altered Lebanon's internal political and funding dynamics. Participants observed that it increased the complexity of Lebanese politics; policymaking became entangled with managing the refugee situation and negotiating with international donors. While significant international aid was directed toward education (to fund the second shifts, school renovations, etc.), the dependence on external funding sometimes allowed the Lebanese government to defer comprehensive reform<sup>85</sup>. In essence, the Syrian war's spillover created an environment where the government was distracted by emergency response and political wrangling, further postponing attention to teachers' pay and systemic improvements.

Lebanon's instability was also exacerbated by the 2023–2024 Israel–Lebanon hostilities. The fighting in border regions (amid the Gaza war spillover) directly disrupted education: hundreds of public schools in the South and along the border closed or were repurposed as shelters during the hostilities. Many public schools became shelters for displaced civilians, and some school buildings suffered damage in the violence. Teachers in affected areas had to suspend classes for months, and the entire public school system delayed the start of the 2024 academic year due to security concerns<sup>89</sup>. Planning was reactive; in border areas, this translated into prolonged closures, schools used as shelters, disrupted timetables, and uncertainty over pay for teachers who could not work. This experience further underscores how external shocks, when met with poor planning, magnify the hardships for teachers. Not only do teachers risk their personal safety and cope with trauma during conflicts, but they also face uncertain pay (in some

instances, “productivity” salary top-ups were temporarily suspended for teachers who could not work due to the emergency).

The cumulative effect of these regional crises is a highly precarious environment for public school teachers: their classrooms can turn into refugee centres or war shelters overnight, their student populations can double with refugees or shrink due to displacement, and their salaries and work conditions become afterthoughts in a national emergency. All these factors, rooted in political instability and regional turmoil, profoundly impact teacher remuneration and well-being by creating uncertainty, extra workload without pay, and constant crisis management instead of steady progress.

### ***The Struggle of Teachers’ Unions and Syndicates***

In light of the above political challenges, the role of teachers’ unions and syndicates emerges as a critical (if embattled) force in advocating for better remuneration and conditions. Lebanon’s public school teachers have a long history of union activism through bodies like the Teachers’ Syndicate and the Union Coordination Committee, fighting for salary increases, benefits, and education reform<sup>81</sup>. However, the very sectarian political system they challenge also permeates union dynamics, creating internal and external obstacles. Several interviewed union activists pointed out that “the root cause of the education crisis in Lebanon can be traced back to the sectarian nature of the political system that permeates all areas of public life, including syndicates’ work.” Sectarian influence can sow division among teachers (by aligning some with sectarian patronage networks) and can be used by authorities to discredit or fracture union efforts.

In response, reformist teachers have tried to organise independently of traditional sectarian patronage, striving for unity around common professional demands<sup>81</sup>. Their primary demands have been clear and consistent: meaningful salary increases via an updated salary scale, regular hiring of new teachers under fair contracts, and enforcement of labour rights (such as paid leave and social benefits) for all teachers<sup>81</sup>. For example, the Teachers’ Syndicate spent years pressing for a new salary scale, finally achieving the adoption of Law 46/2017, which granted raises<sup>90,91</sup>. Notably, this victory came after protracted legal struggle and industrial action and arguably, due to political expediency on the eve of the 2018 elections. Yet, even that win was undercut by partial implementation: some school administrations (especially in the private sector) refused to fully apply the law, and the government failed to enforce it, leaving many teachers without their entitled raises<sup>91</sup>. This illustrates both the effectiveness of union advocacy and the limits resulting from weak governance.

Teachers’ unions also emphasise the deterioration in real wages and benefits since 2019, when Lebanon’s economic collapse began. The currency crash and hyperinflation decimated the value of public teacher salaries (which remained paid in Lebanese pounds), pushing many below the poverty line<sup>92</sup>. Unions have repeatedly sounded the alarm that without salary adjustments pegged to a stable value, teachers cannot afford transport to school or even necessities. Despite



these pleas, the government's responses have been piecemeal (like the temporary stipends in U.S. dollars), and structural salary reform is still pending. Union leaders note that failure to institutionalise a new salary scale and hiring plan means the sector relies increasingly on precarious contract teachers, who work for low hourly pay with no benefits. This two-tier system (permanent vs. contract teachers) further undermines solidarity and morale.

A key challenge unions face is the lack of legal protection and recognition. Remarkably, public school teacher "unions" in Lebanon are not officially recognised as unions under the law, and public sector employees (including teachers) are effectively barred from striking by archaic statutes: the Public Sector Staff Regulation (Law-Decree No. 112 of 1959) states that government employees can neither go on strike nor create unions – contrary to ILO Convention 87 principles<sup>93</sup>. This legal constraint hangs over every teacher mobilisation – strikes do occur (out of sheer necessity), but they are technically illegal, leaving participants vulnerable. The absence of a robust legal syndicate framework means that teacher associations have limited bargaining power and no formal role in policy negotiations. Union activists feel that this is by design: the sectarian-political elite is wary of empowered independent unions, so laws have never been updated to grant them full rights<sup>94</sup>.

Despite these hurdles, Lebanese teacher unions remain a significant political force advocating for educators. They have mounted sustained campaigns and strikes – for example, in March 2023 and again in early 2025, through nationwide strikes and sit-ins to demand salary adjustments<sup>95</sup>. International education organisations have lauded Lebanese teacher unions for their commitment to delivering quality education amid the crisis<sup>94</sup>. The unions have also sought alliances with broader civil movements, especially during the October 2019 uprising, which called for an end to sectarian corruption. Teachers were visible in those protests, framing their struggle as part of a larger fight for good governance and social justice. Union members stress that their work is not only about wages but also saving the public education system from collapse. They see themselves as defenders of a vital public good, insisting that without qualified, decently paid teachers, there is no future for Lebanon's youth. Yet, they acknowledge that their impact is limited as long as the political status quo remains unchanged. As long as sectarian patronage can trump union demands, and as long as the government answers crises with ad-hoc measures instead of reforms, the dilemma of salaries and salary scales will persist. The failure to hire new permanent teachers (a hiring freeze has been in place for years) and the over-reliance on temporary teachers are direct outcomes of this stalemate.

## ***Legal Factors***

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Lebanon's public education system operates within a challenging legal framework that shapes teacher employment, labour rights, and professional development.

Scale of contractual employment: Public schools in Lebanon rely heavily on non-permanent, contractual staff. During the 2016–2017 academic year, the public sector employed about 43,500 teachers, approximately 21,500 of these teachers – roughly half of the workforce – were contractual part timers<sup>96,97</sup>. Researchers note that this reliance on contract teachers was a cost-cutting strategy used by successive governments to reduce personnel spending.

Precarious contracts and lack of benefits: Contract teachers are hired on an hourly paid basis for limited weekly hours. Their contracts exclude basic labour rights: there is no paid annual leave, sick leave or maternity leave, so any absence is unpaid<sup>96</sup>. Contractors are paid infrequently – in many cases only once per year – and are remunerated solely for actual teaching hours; public holidays or school closures are not compensated<sup>96</sup>. The hourly rate does not increase with experience or qualifications, locking long-serving teachers into entry-level pay<sup>96</sup>. Contractual teachers are not enrolled in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), meaning they lack health insurance coverage, family allowances and end-of-service indemnities. They also receive no transportation stipend, so commuting costs fall entirely on them<sup>96,97</sup>. This unequal framework leaves contract teachers performing the same duties as tenured staff but without job security or social protection.

### ***Permanent teachers' hardships: salary erosion and weak benefits***

Salary collapse: Permanent public school teachers are paid in Lebanese pounds (LBP) at the official exchange rate. Lebanon's financial collapse led to rapid dollarisation and a currency crash; the LBP lost more than 95 % of its value after 2019, causing teacher salaries to plummet from the equivalent of around USD 100<sup>98</sup> to around USD 40 or less according to teacher unions<sup>82</sup>. In the absence of indexing or cost-of-living adjustments, permanent teachers' real incomes have been wiped out.

Limited benefits and delayed adjustments: Beyond their base salary, permanent teachers do not receive meaningful transportation allowances or other stipends. The last major salary scale adjustment was repeatedly delayed due to political gridlock, and there is no mechanism to protect wages from inflation. Teachers report relocating to remote areas with cheaper rents because they cannot afford commuting costs under the existing pay structure.

### ***Legal restrictions on organisation and collective action***

Ban on independent unions: The Public Sector Staff Regulation (Law Decree No. 112 of 1959) restricts civil servants' rights to association. Article 15 forbids civil servants, including teachers, from engaging in political activities or participating in strikes, while Article 65 stipulates



that taking part in a strike is equivalent to resigning<sup>99</sup>. The same decree bars the creation of multiple leagues to represent teachers<sup>99</sup>. These provisions mean public school instructors are organised into government-sanctioned “leagues” rather than independent unions and face disciplinary action for striking. Lebanon has not ratified the International Labour Organisation’s Convention 87 on freedom of association, leaving public sector workers without internationally recognised union rights<sup>99</sup>. Teachers’ representatives argue that ratifying Convention 87 would provide legal protection for union activities and collective bargaining, aligning national law with international norms.

Suppression of strikes and collective bargaining: Because strikes are treated as a breach of duty, teachers who participate in industrial action risk dismissal. During recent mobilisations, the Education Ministry cited the 1959 decree to remind teachers that striking is illegal; union activists stress that leagues function more as lobbying groups than true unions. This restrictive legal environment undermines collective bargaining power and leaves teachers vulnerable to fragmentation and reprisals.

Lebanon’s restrictions on unionisation and strikes conflict with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. As an ILO member, Lebanon is expected to respect and promote freedom of association and the right to organize.

### ***Professional development and capacity building***

Stalled training systems: Formal professional development programmes for public school teachers have largely stalled since 2019. Although the Ministry of Education and the Centre for Educational Research and Development have frameworks for in-service training, most training since 2019 has been short-term and donor-driven, focusing on emergency response rather than sustained capacity building. Programmes funded by organisations such as UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait have delivered one-off workshops and small teacher networks, but there is no nationwide system for assessing training needs, providing coaching or financing regular professional development.

Reliance on donor support: Interviews with education experts confirm that donors such as the World Bank and UNICEF have been providing diagnostic tests and training sessions for teachers and that training remains heavily dependent on external funding<sup>100</sup>. In 2022, UN agencies and international donors supplied about USD 300 million to public institutions, including partial salary payments for teachers<sup>101</sup>. While these initiatives help fill immediate gaps, they do not establish a coherent or sustainable professional development system. Many teachers have gone years without systematic training on new curricula, pedagogy or inclusive practices.

### ***Broader legal and policy failings***

Government inaction and policy paralysis: Stakeholders describe the

government's labour policies as ineffectual and neglectful. Efforts to convert contract teachers to permanent status have stalled. Only a small cohort of secondary-level contract teachers has been absorbed, leaving thousands, especially at the elementary level, waiting for parliamentary approval. Demands for a revised salary scale reflecting inflation have languished since the last adjustment in 1998. The absence of emergency safeguards (such as inflation-indexed pay, special allowances or social assistance) has forced teachers to shoulder the hardships of Lebanon's economic collapse, pandemic and conflicts.

Chronic uncertainty and strikes: With salaries unpaid or paid infrequently, teachers' leagues have launched repeated strikes and sit-ins. For example, the Committee for Contract Teachers demanded higher wages, productivity bonuses and transportation allowances for hourly paid teachers, highlighting the ongoing struggle for fair compensation<sup>102</sup>. However, authorities have often offered only temporary fixes or unfulfilled promises, leaving teachers in prolonged precarity.

The precarious employment of half the teaching workforce, combined with salary erosion and inadequate training, undermines educational quality. Analysts warn that reliance on poorly protected contract labour is a precarity-based model that offloads costs onto teachers and threatens the resilience of Lebanon's public education system[96]. Without reforms to guarantee decent work, social protection and professional development, public education faces declining teacher morale and deteriorating student outcomes.

## ***Psychosocial Consequences for Teachers***

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In focus group discussions, public-school teachers describe heavy emotional strain from the economic collapse and the 2023–2024 Israel–Lebanon hostilities. They report carrying their own war-related stress while working with students who are also distressed. In classrooms, teachers observe more aggression, frustration, and anxiety; many say there is little or no school-based psychological support to refer pupils or themselves to.

Teachers link this stress directly to everyday conditions: low and irregular pay, the cost of transport and electricity, shortages of materials, and repeated school closures or relocations when buildings are used as shelters. These pressures make it harder to plan lessons, sustain classroom management, and keep up with marking. Several participants said they struggle to sleep, feel constantly "on edge," or arrive at school already exhausted. Sometimes, they described a sense of "hopelessness" or low motivation tied to unpaid hours and uncertainty about when salaries will arrive.

Time and money constraints limit access to formal coping options such as counselling or structured wellness activities. Teachers say they often rely on informal, low-cost strategies: brief exercise and walks, prayer



or reflection, simple breathing techniques between classes, and strict limits on news consumption to reduce stress. Social support is central: participants noted turning to colleagues for advice, to friends and family for emotional and, at times, financial help, and to peer groups to share classroom strategies that reduce conflict and de-escalate tense moments.

Despite the strain, teachers point to strengths and assets that can be built upon. Many entered the profession out of a commitment to public service and still see teaching as “a vital role” that benefits society. Interviewees spoke of renewed purpose when students show small gains, when a lesson engages a difficult class, or when a parent expresses appreciation. In South Lebanon, focus group participants highlighted resilience and steadfastness, community solidarity during displacement, and mutual aid among staff as protective factors that helped them keep schools functioning when conditions allowed.

The immediate impacts on staff well-being are clear: fatigue, headaches, anxiety symptoms, and lowered morale were commonly reported. Teachers also describe “emotional spillover” after work, less patience at home, withdrawal from social life, and persistent worry about money. In school, stress shows up as reduced bandwidth for differentiation and follow-up with struggling students, shorter tempers during behaviour incidents, and less energy for enrichment activities. Several participants said that the lack of predictable pay and support “crowds out” the time and headspace needed for professional reading, lesson redesign, or mentoring of younger colleagues.

In terms of implications for support structures for teachers, participants consistently asked for simple, practical measures: predictable salary payment schedule; a small, ring-fenced fund for school-level staff care (tea/coffee, quiet rooms, short wellness sessions); access to basic MHPSS services (confidential counselling hours, referral pathways); and short trainings on classroom de-escalation and stress management that fit the timetable. They also called for lighter, realistic administrative loads during crisis periods, and clear protocols for supporting teachers who experienced direct loss or displacement.

Low and irregular pay, crisis-mode operations, and the emotional demands of teaching distressed students are driving high stress, low morale, and signs of burnout among public-school teachers. Informal coping - peer support, community ties, and simple stress-management routines - helps, but cannot substitute for predictable pay and basic psychosocial support. Without targeted measures to protect staff well-being, the quality of teaching and classroom climate will continue to deteriorate.

### ***Discussion***

This section draws on economic, political, and legal factors that impaired public school teachers’ remuneration during the multi-crisis of the 2019-2024 period in Lebanon, as well as their consequences on teachers’ psychosocial health and wellbeing<sup>103</sup>. The following are the main themes of this impairment, which are analysed against the wider

context of the Lebanese government's role in public education, the role of foreign funding, and unionising.

### Low wages

Public school teachers in Lebanon have low wages without the option of working extra hours to increase their salaries. Low wages for educators are not a new phenomenon, and it is certainly a decade-long feature of public education in Lebanon<sup>104</sup>. It is important to note that the livelihoods of contractual teachers are immensely vulnerable to the current remuneration system because they lose work hours during public holidays and sick leaves. Contractual teachers' work hours were significantly slashed during the pandemic, following the 4 August Beirut Port Explosion and during the 2023–2024 war<sup>105</sup>.

### Unpaid work

The wages of both contractual and permanent teachers do not cover non-teaching duties (e.g., lesson preparation and marking), so teachers spend significant time working for free relative to their paid classroom hours. Recent analysis also notes that many civil servant teachers' contracted teaching hours are used for non-teaching tasks due to the absence of a clear policy on working time<sup>106</sup>.

### Dysfunctional remuneration mechanisms

The current payment mechanism is unorganised and archaic, vulnerable to technical and logistical issues that jeopardise the financial certainty of both permanent and contractual teachers. While there is a complaints hotline and a mechanism to file complaints related to salary and productivity pay disbursements, issues with transparency and accountability in the payment mechanism remain<sup>107</sup>.

### Lack of social benefits

Permanent and contractual public school teachers don't receive social benefits<sup>108</sup> such as sickness and maternity benefit, family benefit, end of service indemnity for elderly teachers, and employment injury benefit, transportation allowance, school grants for children's education, paid overtime, and leaves of bereavement. In 2021, the Ministry of Labour conducted the Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net Project<sup>109</sup> to revise labour policies and legislation in light of the pandemic. While the document specifies that this revised legislative document involves employees in both the public and private sectors, it has not been adopted by the Ministry of Education for public school teachers, particularly with regard to the minimum hourly wage.

### ***Discontinued contractual processes***

#### Size and status of the contracted workforce

As of the 2022–2023 school year, only 42.6% of public-school teachers were civil servants on permanent posts, while 57.4% were non-civil-servant (contract) teachers. This composition, drawn from MEHE's SIMS data and analysed by the World Bank, confirms that the majority of the public teaching force works on short-term, low-hour contracts rather



than on tenured appointments<sup>110</sup>.

### *What “contracted” means in practice*

Most contract teachers are hourly paid and lack standard protections (paid leave, health insurance/NSSF, predictable pay cadence). Many contracts are for very limited hours: at the secondary level, half of non-civil-servant teachers are contracted for less than 7 hours/week, underscoring precarious attachment to schools and limited income security<sup>111</sup>.

### *Discontinued routes to permanence*

The main pathway to tenure, competitive recruitment (concours) through the Civil Service Board (CSB), has effectively stalled: the last CSB intake for primary teachers was in 2010 and for secondary teachers in 2017. A broad public-sector hiring freeze (Law 46, 21/8/2017) further curtailed appointments. Although the 2022 budget formally lifted the freeze, competitive hiring has not resumed, leaving thousands of contract teachers without a realistic route to permanent status<sup>112</sup>.

### *Fixed-term renewable appointments*

In parallel, MEHE’s use of fixed-term renewable contracts that provide clearer protections and regular hours has been scaled back or paused since the fiscal crisis began, with schools relying instead on hourly contracting to cover classes and cope with attrition. The World Bank traces this trend to fiscal controls and to policy choices favouring “right-sizing” via attrition rather than creating new protected posts, outcomes that shift risk onto teachers<sup>113</sup>.

### *Why this matters for remuneration and rights*

When tenure channels are shut and fixed-term posts are scarce, teachers are pushed into freelance-like arrangements where income fluctuates with assigned hours, and where productivity allowances or ad-hoc bonuses substitute for a stable salary scale. This architecture is a labour and budget workaround, not a solution: it depresses earnings, complicates payroll regularity, and weakens retention. MEHE/World Bank analysis also flags that heavy reliance on small contracts reduces stability and quality control in the profession<sup>113</sup>.

### *Historical baseline*

Contracting expanded long before the current collapse. UNDP documented that in the 1990s contract teachers made up a very large share of the workforce (nearly 90% by one university estimate), and that struggles over regularisation have recurred for decades in the context of today’s paralysis<sup>114</sup>.

### *Salary-scale reform repeatedly deferred*

Teachers’ salary-scale updates have been contentious and delayed for years (e.g., strikes in 2014 over a long-awaited increase; a major but fiscally offset scale in 2017), then overtaken by the post-2019 devaluation, which wiped out real wages and made contract work even less viable. With concours on hold and no structural pay reform, the

employment infrastructure is effectively paralysed: schools fill gaps with hourly contracts while teachers lack a credible path to tenure or to liveable, predictable pay<sup>115</sup>.

### ***Lack of Professional Development and Capacity Building in Lebanon's Public Education***

Public school teachers in Lebanon have seen their formal professional development programs largely stall during the crises since 2019. Although the Ministry and Centre for Educational Research have frameworks for continuous in-service training, in practice, most teacher training in recent years has been short-term and donor-driven, focused on emergency response rather than sustained capacity building<sup>116,117</sup>. Donor-funded initiatives (for example, UNICEF's crisis-response trainings and ECW's resilience programs) have provided useful one-off workshops like psychosocial first aid and learner-centred pedagogy and supported modest networks for teachers<sup>118,119</sup>. Similarly, the British Council's "Teaching for Success" initiative and English teachers' professional network offer courses and peer exchange for language teachers<sup>120</sup>. UNESCO in Beirut has convened policy roundtables (e.g. on second-language learning) stressing that "teacher capacity building" is critical to reform<sup>121</sup>, and even ran a regional "safe schools" training for over 600 educators in 2025<sup>122</sup>. These efforts, however, remain project-based and time-limited. There is no stable, nationwide system for assessing teachers' training needs, following up with coaching, or financing regular professional development. In short, the existing PD framework sits mostly on paper: teachers get sporadic support during emergencies, but lack ongoing mentoring or career-long support that research shows is needed to change classroom practice<sup>117</sup>.

Lebanon's teacher-development blueprint has not translated into practice during the crisis years. Large programs like UNICEF's Transition and Resilience Education Fund (TREF) or USAID's new QITABI 3 initiative are implemented in partnership with the Ministry and CERD, aligning with national plans<sup>123</sup>. For example, USAID's USD 96.9 million QITABI 3 (2023–28) explicitly "supports Lebanon's education system capacity" via MEHE and CERD and aims to improve instruction for some 25,000 teachers<sup>124</sup>. However, the government itself currently has almost no budget or mechanism to run CPD at scale amid the fiscal collapse. Teacher unions, while very active on pay and conditions, have only informally supported training (e.g. by joining Education International workshops and the "Go Public! Fund Education" campaign) and have no formal role in shaping CPD policy<sup>125,126</sup>. There is no regular national needs assessment or data system guiding professional development, and even the teacher database has "duplications [and] missing data" that hinder planning<sup>116</sup>, so training tends to be ad hoc or driven by whatever projects are available.



## 5. Recommendations

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Each recommendation below derives from common themes voiced by teachers and stakeholders in our interviews. By prioritising these actions – raising pay, securing jobs, improving school conditions, and engaging educators in policymaking – Lebanon’s public education system can begin to rebuild in line with the needs identified by those who live it.

### ***Increase Teacher Compensation and Secure Employment***

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#### **Restore and index salaries**

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Interviewees consistently reported that teacher pay has collapsed (from pre-crisis levels of USD 1,500–2,300 to only USD 50–200 by 2023, undermining morale. Teachers urged updating the official salary scale and adding automatic cost-of-living adjustments. One noted that receiving a USD 50 monthly salary was “a form of slavery”. The government should raise wages toward pre-crisis levels and legislate regular inflation adjustments (for example, via annual reviews tied to the CPI).

#### **Include productivity pay in base salary/pensions**

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Currently, “productivity” bonuses and any extra allowances are paid on top of salary but excluded from pension calculations. Respondents recommended folding these bonuses into the base salary (or adding a flat incentive on top) so that all income counts toward retirement. Unions have explicitly called for the government to “cancel productivity pay [as a separate bonus] and add it to the basic salary”, which would also stabilise teachers’ future pensions.

#### **Convert qualified contract teachers to permanent status**

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A large majority of educators work on hourly contracts with no job security. Teachers and union leaders stressed the need for open “concours” (competitive exams) so that experienced contract teachers can gain permanent posts. Permanency would provide steadier pay (e.g. guarantee minimum monthly hours) and accountability. For example, one interviewee urged finding ways to make “the contractual teachers permanent employees”. Likewise, a union advocated authorising older contract teachers (over the age of 44) to obtain permanent contracts, removing arbitrary limits.

## **Grant full labour rights and benefits**

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All teachers, permanent and contract teachers, should receive basic labour protections. Interviewees noted that currently, “they don’t have paid annual leaves, and their sick leaves are unpaid. No social or health benefits... no health insurance or social security”. The Ministry should immediately enact paid leave (annual, sick and maternity) and provide health insurance, transportation allowances and end-of-service pensions for all public sector educators. This would address educators’ most pressing livelihood concerns and stabilise morale.

## ***Improve Working Conditions and School Resources***

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### **Hire education support personnel**

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Teachers and principals are currently overburdened with administrative tasks. For example, one principal described how school directors must now do all accounting and data entry (“the school has no accountant... the director has to do all the work”). The Ministry should assign accountants, clerks or IT assistants to schools so that teachers can focus on instruction. This will reduce burnout from “excessive requirements of work and bureaucracy”, noted by many respondents.

### **Replenish school budgets and maintenance funds**

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Schools have virtually no operating budget, forcing teachers or parents to cover basics. One principal suggested the government “cut down on unnecessary building rentals and use that money for school funds”. In practice, MEHE should restore per-school maintenance grants and parent contributions (which many schools report have dried up). Specifically, funds are urgently needed to buy textbooks, laboratory materials, and to repair school facilities. Donors and the Ministry should also prioritise reconstruction of war-damaged schools (as recommended by educators) so students can return safely.

### **Upgrade infrastructure and teaching resources**

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Many interviewees pointed out the absence of basic infrastructure: “old school logistics that do not meet current technology” and “no theatres, labs, music rooms, etc.”. The Ministry must invest in reliable utilities (electricity, heating/cooling) and in-school internet or computer labs to enable modern teaching. Textbooks and up-to-date learning materials should be provided to every school (the lack of MEHE-provided books was cited as a major gap). Finally, schools should be staffed and budgeted to restore extracurricular subjects – many teachers lamented that art, music and sports classes were cancelled for lack of personnel. Hiring specialised teachers and allocating funds for arts and athletics would greatly enrich the learning environment.



## ***Expand Professional Development and Curriculum Modernisation***

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### **Revise outdated curricula**

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Educators repeatedly observed that Lebanon's official curricula have not kept pace with students' needs: "the curriculum has not had any serious updates" and there is "no updated curricula or unified courses" across technical schools. Stakeholders recommend a thorough curriculum review to incorporate critical thinking, analytical skills and practical content. New curricula should be introduced gradually (in consultation with teachers) along with the necessary textbooks. In the short term, even modular updates such as releasing missing subject materials (teachers noted that books stopped being printed at the war's start) would mitigate learning losses.

### **Provide continuous teacher training**

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All interviewees emphasised the need for systematic in-service training. Several teachers reported they had received no official training in over a decade, leaving them unequipped to use new methods or technology. The Ministry (possibly with donor support) should organise regular workshops on modern pedagogy, classroom management, and digital tools. Programs like the QITABI project, praised by participants as "one of the best" in training teachers with follow-up support, could serve as models. Online or hybrid training modules may also help reach remote teachers.

### **Engage communities and CSOs**

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Multiple respondents noted the value of involving local stakeholders. For example, teachers recommended partnering with civil society and community members to run programs (one interviewee listed "including local communities and CSOs" as a factor that makes a better educator). Donors and MEHE should therefore liaise with teachers' unions, parents' committees, and educational NGOs during the planning and implementation of reforms. Such collaboration can ensure that initiatives, whether for curriculum, training or school repair, meet the real needs identified by educators.

## ***Provide Psychosocial Support and Wellness Services***

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### **Offer counselling and stress relief**

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Many teachers described high anxiety and trauma due to repeated crises. One interview noted "significant traumas among teachers and students" with "no psychological support" available. The Ministry should

establish counselling services for teachers (for instance, through school psychologists or social workers) and create formal stress-management programs. During acute crises (war or economic shocks), psychosocial first aid teams should be deployed to support both staff and students. Even modest steps, such as confidential hotlines or teacher support groups, would respond to teachers' urgent calls for "mental health provision".

### **Ensure job continuity and stability in crises**

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Teachers reported that during war or displacement, many could not reach schools or lost their jobs. To mitigate this, MEHE should develop emergency plans so that teachers and students have continuity (e.g. a clear policy for when and how displaced teachers will continue to get paid or reassigned). For example, one principal noted the lack of any mapping of schools to remain open or host displaced families. A proactive disaster plan with remote-teaching contingencies, secure salary transfer mechanisms, etc., would alleviate much of the trauma teachers currently face.

### **Promote work–life balance**

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Interviewees coped largely through personal resilience (sports, family time). The Ministry can encourage this by providing modest benefits that ease stress: reliable transportation subsidies, modest housing support in high-cost areas, or discretionary leave for family emergencies. Every teacher should also have access to paid sick leave so they can take health emergencies without losing salary. In a context where many educators now juggle multiple jobs, even basic supports would help stabilise teachers' personal well-being.

## ***Strengthen Governance, Accountability, and Union Engagement***

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### **End nepotism and politicisation in hiring**

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Interviewees emphasised that sectarian favouritism currently distorts school staffing and pay. MEHE should enforce transparent, merit-based hiring and promotion practices. For example, all job postings and salary schedules should be publicly available, with clear criteria for selection. This would address reports that some teachers get extra hours for "nepotistic reasons" and restore trust in the system.

### **Clarify and publicise policies on pay and contracts**

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Many teachers reported confusion over pay rules: unclear criteria for assigning hours, opaque deductions from productivity pay, and arbitrary penalties for absences. The Ministry should issue clear regulations



on how teachers are paid (including a published scale for productivity bonuses) and establish a grievance mechanism for payroll issues. Transparent rules would prevent abuses: one interviewee noted, for instance, that maternity or sick days were being unfairly deducted from teachers' productivity pay.

## **Empower teacher unions**

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Unions were repeatedly cited as under-resourced. Interviewees recommended legally empowering and funding them. For example, donors and MEHE were urged to “liaise with... teacher unions during project drafting”. In practice, the government should consult teacher representatives on all education reforms (as one teacher advocated) and consider formalising union input in policy committees. This could involve reinstating the historic Dar al-Muallimeen (Teachers' House) as a professional body to coordinate training and advocacy. Greater union capacity would help teachers articulate collective needs (such as the current demand to restore the salary scale to 50% of its pre-crisis value) and ensure accountability in implementing reforms.

## **Enhance accountability and coordination**

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Interviewees noted a lack of oversight in education spending: “no monitoring and accountability mechanisms” by MEHE or donors. To address this, the Ministry should set up regular audits of school budgets and seek joint oversight committees with community and teacher union members. Donor-funded programs must similarly be transparent to teachers. Finally, given repeated crises, a more stable governance framework is needed: one proposal was to implement performance-based evaluations and bonuses for both teachers and administrators, tying resources to measurable improvements (while safeguarding against politicised interference).

## 6. Conclusion

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This study set out to understand how the recent crises in Lebanon have affected teacher pay and payment regularity in public schools. It drew on focus groups, individual interviews with teachers, and key informant interviews with union and sector stakeholders. The voices we heard were consistent and clear.

Teachers' salaries lost most of their value, and payments often arrived late or not at all. Short-term "productivity" allowances brought some relief but also added confusion and did not solve the fundamental problem. Many teachers work on precarious contracts without benefits or a path to stable jobs. School and payroll systems are weak, which leads to errors and delays. In many places, schools depend on temporary external aid to function. These conditions have harmed teachers' well-being and pushed some to leave the profession. Those who remain face larger classes, rising needs in their classrooms, and little support.

Across interviews, teachers and stakeholders asked for simple, concrete fixes: fair and predictable pay each month; clear rules that put emergency allowances into base salary; help with transport and hardship posts; a fair route from contract work to permanent posts; basic social protection; and a working school budget for maintenance and learning materials. They also asked for regular, practical training linked to classroom needs, and for access to psychosocial support for staff and students. Many stressed the need for honest communication, transparency on budgets and payroll, and a formal role for unions in decisions that affect work and pay.

The way forward is government-led, with teachers at the table. One plan, one budget, and one set of clear rules can bring order where there is now uncertainty. Partners can help, but their role should be to support a national plan rather than replace it. Progress can be tracked with a few simple indicators, such as the share of teachers paid on time each month, the share of contract teachers moved into stable posts, and the share of schools that receive operating funds on schedule. This research has limits. The situation is changing fast, and the sample cannot represent every school and region. Even so, the patterns are strong and repeated across sources.

The core message is simple: keep teachers in classrooms by paying them fairly and on time, fixing contracts and payroll systems, funding basic school needs, and giving teachers a real voice in decisions. If these steps are taken, public schools can stabilise and students can learn. If they are not, instability will continue, and the cost to children and to the country will grow.



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# Teacher Remuneration During Emergencies: Just Wages for Public School Teachers in Lebanon

Nour Nahhas  
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