

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

by Education International

Executive Summary

The under-resourcing of the public education sector in Lebanon negatively impacts teachers' labour rights, working conditions, wages, professional development, and well-being. These issues stem from systemic problems tied to Lebanon's political and economic context. The education sector in Lebanon is financed by the state, private actors, and foreign donors, but the public sector has been in decline since the Civil War (1975-1990) due to privatisation, namely the growth of public-private partnerships (PPPs), as well as sectarian interests, and economic and financial policies, including the implementation of hiring freezes, contract casualisation, austerity policies and reliance on foreign aid, causing a loss of qualified teachers and a decline of the perceived reliability of the public education system.

Since 2019, Lebanon's education sector faces severe challenges due to the ongoing financial collapse, hyperinflation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Blast in 2020 and most recently, the Israeli war.

Public education teachers' wages have plummeted, with salaries worth 1,000 USD now reduced to 100 USD due to the devaluation of the local currency.

The study "Teacher Remuneration During Emergencies: Just Wages for Public School Teachers in Lebanon" aims to provide evidence-based and up-to-date knowledge to understand the shortcomings of public education funding in Lebanon and the reforms required to address them, specifically in order to improve teacher salaries and conditions. The study uses a mixed-method approach for data collection, with data analysis conducted through thematic content analysis, incorporating semi-structured interviews and desk research.

This summary offers an overview of key findings and recommendations from the study.



Key factors underpinning the protracted multi-crisis in Lebanon

The study identified four categories of factors contributing to the compounded crisis facing the public education sector and teachers in Lebanon - political factors, economic factors, legal factors and psycho-social factors.

Political factors

Study participants highlight that political instability in Lebanon, as well as sectarianism and nepotism, significantly impacts the profession, and specifically teachers' job security and remuneration. The presence of large numbers of Syrian refugee students in public education, placed in grades with local students who are usually younger, further disrupts the system. Participants described the Lebanese government's failure to implement structural reforms or prepare for crises like the pandemic and the 2023-2024 Israeli aggression as exacerbating the sector's issues. While teachers' unions have been playing a critical role in advocating for salary increases, labour rights protections, and reform, organisational and communication challenges have been limiting the impact of their action.

Economic factors

The financial collapse in Lebanon and hyperinflation have severely impacted both permanent and contracted public school teachers. The devaluation of the Lebanese pound (LBP) against the US dollar (USD) led to a severe reduction in the value of teachers' salaries, with wages fluctuating due to the unstable exchange rate and falling below minimum wage. In response, the Ministry of Education introduced a "productivity pay" in USD as an ad-hoc measure, creating uncertainty due to the fluctuating exchange rate and rising price of goods and services. Once the exchange rates had stabilised, teachers were left with a significantly reduced purchasing power, with many of them struggling to afford basic necessities.

Legal factors

Both contracted and permanent teachers face significant legal challenges that affect their labour rights. Contracted teachers work on an hourly basis, without access to paid leave and receive no social benefits like health insurance or financial aid for their children's education. They also bear the cost of transportation. Permanent teachers, while paid from the state budget, receive fixed salaries paid in Lebanese pounds, which have lost value with the dollarization of the economy. They also lack social benefits and, due to budget cuts, do no longer receive transportation allowances.

Teacher unions are not legally recognized in Lebanon and public school teachers cannot unionise or strike, which violates ILO convention 87 that Lebanon has signed. These legal restrictions limit unions' ability to organise and advocate for better working conditions and pay, exacerbating challenges facing the profession.

Psycho-social factors

Teachers in Lebanon are facing significant psychological challenges due to the ongoing multi-crisis. Many teachers declare that they rely on communal support from family, friends and peers to cope. The economic crisis has led to decreased motivation and hopelessness among teachers, worsened by the deterioration of salaries and living conditions. Teachers feel neglected by both school administrations and the Ministry of Education in terms of mental health and well-being support. They stress the need for comprehensive psychological support for both teachers and students to enable recovery. Despite these challenges, teachers strongly believe in the vital role of education and remain committed to students and the public good.

Main consequences on the teaching profession

The study highlights key areas requiring attention to address issues affecting teachers in Lebanon:

- **Low pay and limited hours:** The critical issue of low wages and working hours, especially for contractual teachers, significantly impacts teachers' professional and personal lives.
- **Unpaid labour:** The salaries of both contractual and permanent teachers do not cover non-teaching duties, such as lesson preparation and grading, leading to a situation where teachers risk spending more time on unpaid duties than those that they are remunerated for.
- **Dysfunctional remuneration mechanisms:** Outdated disbursement procedures and lack of transparency on salary deductions lead to delayed payment and financial uncertainty.
- **Lack of social benefits:** Neither permanent nor contractual teachers receive social benefits and ongoing efforts to revise labour policies and legislation have failed to include public school teachers.
- **Discontinued contractual process:** a large portion of public-school teachers work on an hourly basis and the protracted suspension of teacher hiring, which foreign donors fail to address, results in a paralysis of the employment infrastructure in public education.
- **Lack of Professional Development and Capacity Building:** Public school teachers have little or no opportunities for meaning professional development, as such programs are not prioritised or budgeted for, and those offered by NGOs lack continuity due to their project-based nature.
- **Government Inaction and Lack of Crisis Readiness:** Unpreparedness and ineffectiveness of government responses to the compounding crises in Lebanon further exacerbate the deep-rooted and systemic dysfunction of public education financing.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education should:

- Reform the financing structure of public and private education in Lebanon.
- Revise the priorities of the education sector in the post-war period by following a participatory approach that includes syndicates, unions, local civil society actors, international non-governmental agencies working on education, international financial institutions and private actors.
- Implement an interim solution for teacher contracts and salaries by establishing a temporary fund financed by the public treasury, private sector contributors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- Halt austerity and precarity measures that violate teachers' rights.
- Work with school administrations and the Ministry of Finance to assess and update payment mechanisms through digitalization and coordination between banks and local money transfer companies like OMT and Whish.
- Revise the post-war crisis response for the education sector based on the feedback of stakeholders such as unions, researchers and civil society organizations.

- Establish accountability and transparency mechanisms to monitor and address sectarian and nepotistic practices in order to prevent abuses of power.
- Work to revise the updated labour legislation paper issued in 2021 to meet the demands of the post-war context and to reflect the needs of public-school teachers.
- Work with the Ministry of Labor to devise a plan to reinstate the social benefits of public-school teachers with the prioritisation of paid annual leaves, paid sick leaves and transportation allowance.

The researchers recommend that the Ministry of Finance should:

- Publicise public education expenditure and spending.
- Increase transparency on public treasury and the Ministry of Education's savings in order to employ them for reform.

The researchers recommend that donors and International NGOs should:

- Liaise with education civil society organizations and actors and teacher unions during the project drafting phase.
- Fund union and syndical work to ensure sustainability and independence.
- Prioritise three thematic areas for the post-war period: public teacher salaries, reconstruction of impacted public schools and curriculum revision.

The researchers recommend that Teacher Unions and Syndicates should:

- Prioritise centralisation to promote stronger advocacy efforts, more effective communication channels, and a direct democracy approach to leadership and decision-making in organizing.
- Form a national working group or committee that includes governmental and non-governmental stakeholder representatives.
- Work on a teacher capacity building plan and strategy that includes professional development and mental health support.
- Work with public school administrations on implementing capacity building activities.



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