

Lebanon's education crisis – an open letter

24 January 2022

Children and families in Lebanon have endured multiple crises, including a massive explosion in Beirut's port, an economic collapse and severe depression, political deadlock and rising instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Lebanese Pound (LBP) has lost 90% of its value and the country's annual rate of inflation is higher than Zimbabwe's and Venezuela's. Over 80% of the population has been pushed into deep poverty and economic hardship.

These complex and interconnected issues are impacting every aspect of families' lives - and jeopardising children's education and futures.

We recently shared the virtual stage at the 2021 RewirEd summit to advocate for children's and teachers' rights in Lebanon, and to call for increased support to the country's education sector from the government and the international donor community.

Today, on International Day of Education, we are renewing our call, as a matter of urgency.

Over the last school year over 1.3 million children were affected by school closures and over 700,000 were kept out of school. This school year already feels like it will be a similar story, with the government estimating an average of just 21-25 days of teaching since October 2021.¹ Most schools have yet to reopen since the Christmas holidays due to teachers – who are unable to make ends meet in the midst of the economic crisis – striking over inadequate healthcare coverage, lack of pay rises and a transport allowance.

We know what each additional day of lost learning for children will do to the country – there will be serious implications for human capital development and economic growth. More importantly, this crisis is robbing children of their hopes for the future. Academic learning outcomes are already being impacted, in addition to children's social, emotional and physical development, and wellbeing. Children and their families tell us that child marriage and child labour are also on the rise, as well as mental health issues, and violence at home.

If and when schools reopen, there will still be huge challenges to overcome. A recent Save the Children assessment showed that half of Lebanese families in the country's Akkar and Baalbek governorates have drastically reduced spending on education.² Fewer and fewer children and teachers can afford to travel to school, with the average monthly cost of transportation per child having reached the equivalent of a third of the minimum wage. Classrooms are unlit and unheated in a country where temperatures can drop to -10°C, and schools are struggling to afford basic items like stationery, computer equipment, and hygiene material for Covid-19 prevention.³ Online learning is an imperfect solution, with many families lacking access to internet and technology services.

The government and the international donor community must enable the reopening of schools, and minimise the economic burden on children, teachers and schools.

Education is a fundamental right for every child. It is crucial for their learning, social inclusion and development and helps to protect them from poverty, violence, exploitation and abuse.

This right does not end in times of crisis.

Signed:

Nagham Beydoun, teacher with Save the Children in Lebanon

Gwen Hines, CEO Save the Children UK

¹ [MEHE statement](#), 17 January 2022

² Save the Children Household Economy Analysis, soon to be published

³ [HRW article](#), October 2021