



Displaced Children in Lebanon A Rights-Based Reading of the Education Crisis in the Context of Conflict



March 2026



Developmental Action
without Borders - Naba'a

This report is based on a qualitative, evidence-driven methodology grounded in direct field observations, drawing on the operational role of **Developmental Action Without Borders – Naba'a** in managing several collective shelters and deploying its teams along the frontlines of the emergency response. This continuous on-the-ground presence within the shelters enabled direct and sustained access to displaced children and their families, allowing for an in-depth assessment of the dynamics of educational disruption and its impacts.

Data was collected through regular field observations, direct engagement with beneficiaries, and program data analysis, complemented by a review of secondary international sources. The report adopts a child rights-based analytical approach, positioning education as a fundamental protection tool and a key entry point for resilience and recovery in emergency contexts.



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661
Collective shelters

400-450



Public schools
used as shelters



133,000+
Displaced
persons
hosted in
shelters



350,000+
Children directly
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current education
crisis



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Children have
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Executive Summary

The education crisis in Lebanon is no longer a temporary disruption, it has evolved into a full-scale protection emergency.

As of March 2026, the widespread use of public schools as collective shelters has severely disrupted the education system, directly affecting **more than 350,000 children and depriving hundreds of thousands of their fundamental right to education. With approximately 400 to 450 schools** currently occupied as shelters out of a **total of 661 sites** hosting **more than 133,000 displaced persons**, access to education has become increasingly constrained.

This crisis is unfolding within an already fragile system, weakened by years of compounded shocks, including the economic collapse since **2019**, the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing



conflict. Even prior to the current escalation, **over 700,000 children were already out of school or at risk of dropping out, while nearly 3 in 10 children were experiencing learning poverty.** The current situation is expected to further exacerbate these structural vulnerabilities.

Critically, the disruption of education is not merely an educational issue, it is a risk multiplier. In fragile contexts, schools serve as essential protective environments, providing structure, stability, and psychosocial support. Their closure exposes children to heightened risks, including child labor, early marriage, violence, and exploitation, while also increasing psychological distress. Evidence suggests that out-of-school children are two to three times more likely to face such risks.

At the same time, the crisis is deepening inequalities. Displaced children residing in collective shelters, as well as those from economically vulnerable households, face the greatest barriers to accessing education, placing them at heightened risk of long-term exclusion and the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Despite the central role of education in protection and recovery, education in emergencies remains severely underfunded, receiving **only 2–3% of global humanitarian funding.** In Lebanon, this marginalization is particularly evident, reflecting a systemic failure to recognize education as a life-saving intervention.

This report underscores the urgent need to reframe education, not as a secondary service, but as a core protection mechanism and a strategic entry point for resilience and recovery. Failure to act risks the emergence of a **“lost generation,”** with long-term consequences for social stability, economic recovery, and human development.

Urgent Priorities

- Integrate education within protection and psychosocial support response frameworks;
- Establish temporary learning spaces linked to psychosocial support services;
- Restore children’s daily routines through structured educational activities;
- Regulate the use of schools as collective shelters and develop rapid plans for their reopening;
- Mobilize urgent and sustainable funding to prioritize education as a non-negotiable right;

Ensuring the continuity of education in emergencies is not optional—it is an immediate and non-negotiable necessity to safeguard children’s rights, dignity, and future.



1. Introduction

Building on the previous report, which examined the psychosocial crisis among displaced children and highlighted how the loss of daily routines and protective environments exacerbates psychological distress, this report focuses on the education sector as one of the most critical of these environments that has been widely disrupted during the emergency response. It also frames education as a fundamental right guaranteed under international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms every child's right to inclusive, safe, and quality education.

This comes amid growing risks of what can be described as a “generation at risk of being lost” in Lebanon, where children are not only deprived of education but also of protection, stability, and future opportunities, with long-term negative impacts on their psychological, social, and developmental trajectories.

With **between 400 and 450 public schools currently being used as collective shelters out of a total of 661 sites hosting more than 133,000 displaced persons**, the education process has been disrupted on a wide scale, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of their right to education. Estimates indicate that **more than 350,000 children are directly affected by the current education crisis**, many of whom are experiencing complete interruption of learning, constituting a clear violation of the right to education and its continuity, as well as minimum standards in emergency contexts.

This is not the first disruption faced by children in Lebanon. In recent years, the education system has been subjected to compounded crises, beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to prolonged school closures, followed by the severe economic crisis since **2019**, and most recently the 2024 conflict. These overlapping shocks have resulted in a sharp deterioration in education indicators, with data showing that:

- **More than 700,000 children** were out of school or at risk of dropping out prior to the latest crisis (UNICEF, 2024);
- **Nearly 3 in 10 children of primary school age suffer from learning poverty** (World Bank, 2022);
- **3 in 10 youth have discontinued their education** (UNICEF, 2023).

Under the current crisis, these indicators are expected to worsen significantly due to:

- Overcrowding in collective shelters and the use of schools as shelters (Save the Children, 2024);
- The loss of household income and inability to cover education-related costs;



- The limited capacity of the state and educational institutions to provide effective and rapid alternative learning solutions (UN, 2024).

This situation unfolds within a context where Lebanon's education sector is already characterized by chronic structural fragility, including insufficient funding, declining education quality, repeated strikes, and the absence of effective strategies for education in emergencies. Previous experiences, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have also demonstrated the limited effectiveness of remote learning due to the digital divide and unequal access, further widening educational disparities among children.

Accordingly, the current crisis does not represent merely a temporary disruption of education, but rather exposes the deepening of a structural crisis within Lebanon's education sector, where acute shocks intersect with chronic vulnerabilities. This has led to the accumulation of learning gaps and the erosion of children's human capital, threatening the future of an entire generation and undermining prospects for recovery and sustainable development in the country.

2. Education in Emergencies: A Shift in Function

In the current crisis, education in Lebanon no longer fulfills its traditional role as a space for learning and knowledge acquisition alone; rather, it has undergone a fundamental transformation within the emergency context. The widespread use of schools as collective shelters has disrupted their primary function as educational institutions, transforming them into spaces for humanitarian response. This shift has effectively stripped schools of their educational purpose and weakened their ability to fulfill their protective and developmental roles for children.



The disruption of education should not be viewed as a temporary service-related issue, but as a key factor exacerbating psychosocial impacts and contributing to the breakdown of the protection system that schools provide. In fragile contexts, schools represent relatively safe environments that offer stability, a sense of belonging, and daily routine—elements that are essential for children's psychosocial protection. With the loss of this environment, children are deprived of one of their most critical lines of protection and become more exposed to risks such as violence, exploitation, child labor, and early marriage in both the short and long term.

This transformation also reflects the limited preparedness of the education system to respond effectively in emergency situations. To date, public institutions have not been able to activate comprehensive and rapid alternative learning solutions that ensure continuity of education.



Previous experiences have demonstrated the limited effectiveness of remote learning, due to the digital divide and insufficient institutional capacity to design and implement quality alternative education programs.

Moreover, the continued use of schools as shelters has further complicated prospects for reopening them in the near term, creating a dual challenge between meeting immediate humanitarian needs and ensuring the right to education. In the absence of clear strategies to manage this overlap, children remain in prolonged limbo outside the education system, exacerbating learning gaps and increasing the risk of permanent dropout.

In this context, education can no longer be understood merely as a disrupted service sector, but rather as a contested space between humanitarian response priorities and children's fundamental rights. This calls for a redefinition of its role within emergency response as a core protection mechanism, rather than a secondary service that can be postponed.

An effective response requires adopting a comprehensive approach to education in emergencies, centered on:

- Ensuring continuity of learning through flexible and safe alternatives (such as temporary learning spaces and non-formal education);
- Reactivating the role of schools as protective and psychosocially supportive environments;
- Integrating psychosocial support into the learning process;
- Strengthening coordination between humanitarian and education actors to ensure that relief efforts do not undermine the right to education.

Within this framework, education becomes not only a tool for learning, but also a critical means of fostering resilience, protection, and the restoration of a sense of normalcy for children, thereby mitigating the long-term impacts of the crisis on an entire generation.

3. Disruption of Education as a Multiplier of Vulnerability

As highlighted in the previous report, the loss of daily routines and stability is one of the primary factors contributing to increased levels of anxiety and psychological distress among children in displacement and emergency contexts. Education represents a key pillar of this routine, providing a structured environment, a sense of continuity, and a relatively safe space for interaction and learning.

Evidence from Lebanon indicates that disruptions in education are directly associated with worsening indicators of vulnerability among children. UNICEF reports show that:



- More than 50% of children in fragile contexts exhibit high levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, fear, and sleep disturbances, particularly in cases of prolonged school interruption;
- Children who are not enrolled in education are two to three times more likely to face protection risks such as child labor and early marriage;
- Assessments also indicate that a significant proportion of children report feelings of insecurity and loss of stability when education is disrupted, given that schools are among the few safe spaces available to them.

Accordingly, the interruption of education does not affect children solely at the academic level; it directly exacerbates their psychosocial vulnerability by:

- Increasing stress and anxiety due to the absence of a structured daily routine;
- Undermining feelings of safety and stability in already fragile living conditions;
- Reducing children's ability to cope with crisis conditions, particularly among younger age groups.

In addition, education serves as a critical entry point into a broader system of supportive services, including psychosocial support, protection services, and awareness-raising activities. As such, its disruption does not only interrupt learning but also triggers a cascading breakdown in the integrated support system on which children rely during times of crisis.

In this context, the absence of education becomes a multiplier of vulnerability, accelerating the accumulation of risks and weakening children's resilience. This underscores the need to treat the continuity of education as a fundamental protection priority, rather than as a service that can be deferred.

4. From Loss of Education to Escalating Protection Risks

The absence of education in emergency contexts is directly linked to the escalation of protection risks highlighted in the previous report. When children are out of school, one of the most critical first lines of defense against abuse and exploitation is weakened. Evidence from Lebanon indicates that out-of-school children face heightened risks, with estimates showing that:

- Between 20% and 30% of children in vulnerable settings are engaged in child labor, with significantly higher rates among those not enrolled in education;
- Households experiencing interruptions in their children's education are more likely to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including child labor and early marriage for girls;



- Reports by **UNICEF** and Save the Children indicate that the risk of violence and exploitation increases substantially for children who are out of school compared to those who are enrolled.

In the absence of a structured school environment, children become:

- More likely to engage in child labor as an economic coping strategy for their families;
- More exposed to various forms of exploitation, including economic exploitation and gender-based violence;
- Less able to access protection systems and services, which are often reached through schools.

The loss of school as a relatively safe and structured space also leads to additional consequences, including:

- Increased unstructured time, heightening children's exposure to risks;
- A higher likelihood of engaging in unsafe or harmful behaviors;
- Reduced supervision and follow-up by qualified adults.

Assessments further indicate that a significant proportion of cases involving early detection of violence or neglect are identified through schools and teachers. This means that disruptions in education result in the loss of a key mechanism for monitoring and referral to protection services.

Schools do not serve only an educational function; they also play a fundamental role in early identification of risks and referral to protection services—functions that are largely absent when education is disrupted. As such, the interruption of education shifts from being a temporary service-related challenge to a direct and multidimensional risk factor for child protection, deepening children's vulnerability and increasing their exposure to long-term violations.

- Accordingly, ensuring the continuity of education in emergencies must be considered a core preventive intervention within the child protection system, rather than a standalone sectoral response.

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5. Education as a Lost Psychosocial Support Space



The previous report demonstrated that displaced children experience high levels of psychological distress, manifested in persistent anxiety, sleep disturbances, and feelings of fear and insecurity. In such contexts, education is not merely an academic process but serves as a key entry point for psychosocial support and emotional stability.

Schools, by providing a structured and predictable environment, can play a critical role in:

- Restoring a sense of safety and stability for children;
- Promoting positive social interaction with peers, thereby reducing feelings of isolation;
- Offering organized activities that support emotional expression and psychological relief.

In addition, the school environment serves as a primary platform for integrating psychosocial support activities into the learning process through teachers and counselors, enabling the identification of psychological challenges and early intervention.

However, the disruption of education has deprived children of this vital space, resulting in the loss of one of the most accessible mechanisms for psychological recovery during crises. Consequently, psychological symptoms intensify in the absence of structured support channels, prolonging distress and deepening its medium- and long-term impacts.

Therefore, reactivating education in emergency contexts should be viewed as a key entry point for psychosocial support, not merely as an educational response, thereby strengthening children's resilience and capacity to recover from repeated shocks.



Children's own testimonies further illustrate the depth of the psychological and social impact of disrupted education. One child states: "Since I stopped going to school, I feel afraid all the time and I don't know what to do during the day," while another expresses the loss of normalcy: "School was the only place where I felt my life was normal; now I feel that everything has changed." Another child highlights being forced into work, stating: "I started working to help my family after school stopped, and I can no longer return," while a fourth simply says: "I just want to go back to school."

- Taken together, these testimonies demonstrate that the impact of disrupted education extends beyond the loss of learning to include the loss of safety, stability, and increased protection risks, reflecting the scale of the crisis faced by children in contexts of displacement and emergencies.

6. Educational Inequality as a Silent Crisis

Not all children are equally affected by the current education crisis. Rather, the emergency response reveals stark disparities in access to education, reflecting and further deepening pre-existing inequalities. Evidence from Lebanon indicates that learning opportunities vary significantly based on socioeconomic status and place of residence. Estimates show that:

- Children from the poorest households are nearly twice as likely to drop out of education compared to their peers from more stable households;
- Displaced children or those residing in collective shelters record the lowest enrollment rates due to barriers related to transportation, overcrowding, and the lack of appropriate alternative programs;
- Reports by **UNICEF** and the **World Bank** highlight significant gaps in learning outcomes based on socioeconomic background, with marginalized groups being disproportionately affected.

These disparities are particularly evident among:

- Children living in collective shelters, who are among the most affected due to near-total disruption of their education;
- Displaced children outside the formal education system, who face difficulties in enrolling in schools or accessing available alternatives;
- Children who are still able to access educational alternatives (private or non-formal), often belonging to households with greater resources or stronger support networks.

These unequal learning opportunities lead to serious cumulative consequences, including:



- The widening of educational gaps among children, not only in academic achievement but also in foundational skills;
- The reinforcement of socioeconomic inequalities, as education becomes a driver of disparity rather than a means of reducing it;
- The emergence of generations with unequal opportunities in accessing education, employment, and a dignified life.

Evidence also shows that children who lose access to learning for extended periods are less likely to return to school, increasing the risk of permanent dropout and perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization across generations.

In this context, the education crisis evolves from a temporary challenge into a silent structural crisis, gradually expanding without adequate response and threatening the principle of equal opportunity, a cornerstone of the right to education.

Accordingly, responses to education in emergencies must adopt an equity-focused approach, prioritizing the most marginalized groups and ensuring fair and inclusive access to learning opportunities, in order to prevent the widening of existing gaps and mitigate their long-term consequences.

7. Response Gap: Education Outside Priorities

Despite the scale of the education crisis and its interlinked impacts on child protection and psychosocial well-being, education in emergencies continues to be treated as a secondary sector within humanitarian response priorities in Lebanon. While the focus on essential needs such as food and shelter is justified, education is often approached as a deferrable service rather than as a fundamental right and a preventive intervention of equal importance to other sectors.

This reality is not limited to a shortage of funding; it reflects a structural imbalance in global humanitarian priorities, whereby education in emergencies receives **only approximately 2% to 3% of total humanitarian funding**. This persistent marginalization constitutes not merely a financing gap, but a systemic failure that directly undermines child protection outcomes, given the critical role of education as a key protective system. Accordingly, reinvesting in education is not a deferred development option, but an urgent humanitarian necessity to safeguard children and mitigate the multiple risks they face.

Funding and response data clearly reflect this situation, indicating that:

- Education in emergencies typically receives **only 2% to 3%** of total global humanitarian funding, despite growing needs;



- In Lebanon, response frameworks such as the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan consistently show that the education sector is among the least funded compared to sectors such as food, shelter, and health, with significant annual funding gaps;
- Reports by UNICEF and “**Education Cannot Wait**” indicate that millions of children in emergency contexts experience prolonged disruptions to their education due to insufficient investment in this sector.

This trend is manifested in several ways, including:

- The low prioritization of education in emergency response plans compared to other sectors;
- The absence of rapid, large-scale interventions to ensure continuity of learning;
- Reliance on fragmented and unsustainable initiatives lacking a coordinated national framework.

The current response also reveals structural gaps in the approach to education in emergencies, most notably:

- Weak integration between the education and protection sectors, despite their strong interdependence in displacement contexts;
- Limited integration of psychosocial support components within educational programming, reducing its ability to address children’s holistic needs;
- The absence of long-term planning that balances immediate response with the sustainability of the education process.

In this context, the response gap reflects not only a shortage of resources but also a failure to adequately recognize education as a core protection mechanism and a central pillar of children’s and communities’ resilience. The continuation of this approach risks prolonging educational disruption and deepening its consequences, potentially leading to a learning gap that will be difficult to reverse in the future.

- Accordingly, repositioning education within humanitarian response priorities is an urgent necessity. This requires adopting an integrated approach that recognizes education as a non-deferrable right, strengthens cross-sectoral coordination, and ensures both immediate and sustainable responses.

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8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report and the previous report on mental health and psychosocial support, there is a clear need to adopt an integrated approach that places education at the core of the humanitarian response, recognizing it as a key tool for protection and recovery rather than a standalone sector. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed:

At the level of integrated response:

- Systematically integrate education within protection and psychosocial support interventions to ensure a holistic response to children's multiple needs;
- Recognize schools and alternative learning modalities (such as temporary learning spaces) as safe spaces that provide both protection and psychosocial support, not solely academic instruction;
- Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination (education, protection, mental health) to ensure a comprehensive and non-fragmented response.

At the programmatic level:

- Establish temporary learning spaces linked to psychosocial support activities, enabling children to regain a sense of routine and stability;
- Rebuild children's daily routines through structured and continuous educational activities that help reduce anxiety and promote coping;
- Develop flexible non-formal education programs targeting out-of-school children, with particular attention to the most vulnerable groups.

At the policy level:

- Regulate the temporary use of schools as collective shelters by establishing clear mechanisms for space management and ensuring minimum continuity of education;
- Develop and adopt comprehensive national plans for education in emergencies, including clear mechanisms for rapid response and continuity of learning;
- Integrate education in emergencies into national policy priorities and response plans as a non-deferrable right.



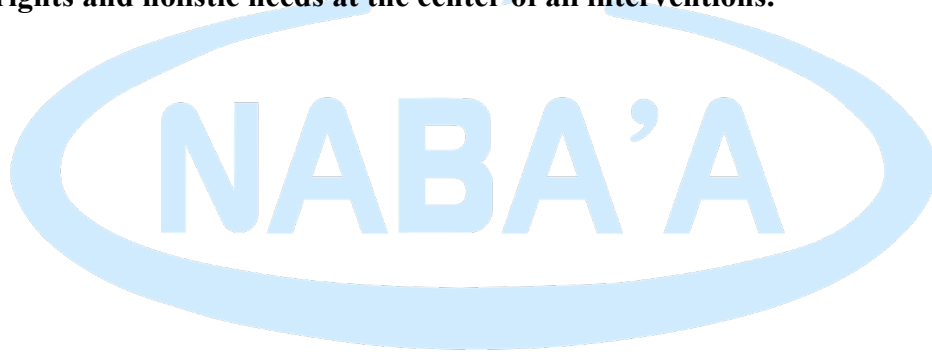
9. Conclusion

While the first report demonstrated that displaced children in Lebanon are experiencing a profound psychosocial crisis, this report shows that the disruption of education constitutes one of the key structural factors exacerbating this crisis, through the loss of a protective and structured environment that contributes to stability, support, and recovery.

Accordingly, the reactivation of education should not be viewed as a standalone sectoral response, but as a multidimensional entry point to address psychosocial distress, strengthen child protection, and restore a minimum level of stability in children's daily lives.

Conversely, the continued disruption of education does not merely result in interrupted learning; it contributes to the reproduction of vulnerability, deepens the effects of trauma, and widens inequalities, thereby directly threatening the future of an entire generation and undermining prospects for recovery and long-term development.

Ensuring the continuity of education in emergency contexts is therefore an urgent and non-deferrable priority, requiring a coordinated, timely, and sustainable response that places children's rights and holistic needs at the center of all interventions.



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