



People for development

Education Rapid Needs Assessment

September 2021





Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
AVSI Lebanon	3
Introduction	4
Objective	4
Methodology.....	4
1. Sampling.....	4
2. Limitations.....	5
Findings	5
Increase in school dropouts	5
Inequalities in Access to Learning.....	5
Access to School.....	6
Access to Electricity.....	6
Child Protection & Child Labor.....	7
Food Security	8
Back to School.....	9
A. School Readiness for next School Year	9
B. Households’ Readiness for next School Year.....	10
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	11

Executive Summary

Lebanon is facing an unprecedented economic crisis compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Beirut Port Blast. This quantitative country-wide study analyses data collected from 26 schools and 372 households of children enrolled in AVSI educational activities, both inside and outside the classroom, to show the impact of the crisis on school-aged Lebanese and refugee children. It explores issues of child protection, transportation to school, online learning, power provision, food security and preparedness for next scholastic year. The study findings present an alarming situation regarding children's wellbeing and their access to education. The quality of learning offered in schools has declined significantly, with the number of learning weeks and access to in-presence and distance learning directly affected. One in three children struggles to reach school and has already skipped learning because of it, while teaching personnel also struggle with transportation. Extended power cuts have made remote learning nearly impossible, with households in Akkar reporting less than three hours of electricity a day on average. COVID-19 lockdown measures adversely affected children wellbeing, sparking an increase in stress, anger, and difficulties in socializing. Child labor rates reached a dramatic peak in 2021 with one in three households in Akkar having a working child. Across Lebanon, an average of 15 percent of surveyed households reported having a working child. Food-related negative coping mechanisms were documented in three in four households as a consequence of decreased purchasing power. Against this worrisome framework, schools are not equipped for the upcoming scholastic year. A large number of students from private and semi-private schools have flooded public schools in a trend that is expected to increase, further straining an overstretched public school system. School dropouts increased in 2021 and challenges with sustaining school-related costs will likely exacerbate this problem in the next school year. Considering this rapidly changing context, flexible and innovative approaches are key to support access to quality and inclusive education in Lebanon.

AVSI | Lebanon

Founded in 1972, AVSI is a non-profit organization which carries out development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects in over 32 countries. Present in Lebanon since 1996, AVSI implements emergency and development programs for refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. Its projects, implemented with a national coverage, range over different sectors with a particular focus on **Education** and **Protection**, as well as **Livelihoods** and **Food Security**. To improve readiness, retention and inclusion of vulnerable children in school, AVSI implements non-formal education activities for out-of-school children and retention support programs for in-school children. Currently, AVSI is implementing three education projects and is member of two consortia funded by ECW and EU Trust Fund for the Syria Crisis. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 AVSI reached thousands of vulnerable children through remote support.

2020 Results in Education



6389 Children supported through distant learning

Distribution of distant learning support tools*

8421



*These include internet bundles, booklets, stationery, recreational kits.



7812 Children targeted with COVID-19 awareness

Our main donors in education include:



Introduction

Lebanon is facing an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that has undermined the subsistence capacity of already vulnerable Lebanese and refugees in Lebanon. Over 1.2 million school-age children have had their education disrupted in 2020 alone, with 400,000 children being left out of school as a result of poverty and other factors. In addition to the economic crisis, the country's education system had already been faced with three other major crises, the Syrian refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Port of Beirut explosions.¹ This is impacting Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children alike. With the country slipping deeper into an economic crisis, a safe and systematic school reopening in Lebanon is difficult to imagine. Even before this, children across the country already had lower than average literacy and numeracy rates in the Middle East region.²

Objective

The purpose of this assessment is to identify the challenges influencing access to and retention in education of school-aged Lebanese and refugee children. To this regard, the study aims at assessing the impact of the crisis on service provision (schools) on one hand, and the effects this had on households on the other hand.

¹ERP, Emergency Response Plan, 2021-2022

² Save the children, Education in crisis, Raising the alarm.

Methodology

The assessment adopts a quantitative approach to examine data on a school level and on a household level to scrutinize both the provision of educational opportunities and the ability of users to access it. Two data collection runs through questionnaires targeting households and schools. Data collection was conducted in July 2021 through phone surveys and visits of schools. Informed consent and a disclaimer that the data collected is purely for research purposes was ensured in each interview. Kobo toolbox was employed for survey digitization and field data collection.

1. Sampling

The assessment targeted households (HHs) of beneficiaries enrolled in AVSI educational activities. On a database including 6757 beneficiaries (51% Female), a random stratified sampling was applied (confidence level 95%, margin of error 5%) based on governorate and nationality. The final sample size is of 364 households. The nationality variable grouped Lebanese & Non-Lebanese HHs under the same category.³

AVSI collaborates with several schools in partnership with the Ministry of Education & Higher Education (MEHE) to conduct retention support activities. In this framework, AVSI included 30 schools in the data collection.

The data were analyzed through descriptive and correlation analysis. The latter applied Fisher's exact and Pearson tests using SPSS software.

³ In order to target the assessment equally across nationality and due to the lack of large data on Lebanese HHs, a 50-50 ratio was applied on the Nationality for Lebanese and non-Lebanese. On the other side, governorate sampling calculation reflected the governorate distribution of beneficiaries as per database.

2. Limitations

The strength of this assessment exercise relies on the triangulation of information collected from the different targeted stakeholders. Yet some methodological limitations need to be mentioned as potential reporting bias shall be considered. The sample of interviewed households extends country-wide, however the representativity of the school sample does not. Schools involved are located in Mount Lebanon, South, Nabatiyeh and Bekaa. Whereas the assessment focuses on different sectors impacting girls' and boys' access and retention in education, this is not a multi-sectorial assessment. Specific domains such as food security, child protection, power supply, and health were taken into consideration as these that have a direct impact on children's access to education. Furthermore, the assessment's objective is to be receptive of the elements that characterize the Lebanese context in this particular crisis period (Q3 2021). Each of these domains would require more extensive research using sector indicators, however this was not possible due to the remit of this enquiry. Finally, information provided by interviewed caregivers as well as school directors are often self-reported: this can be cause of inaccuracy or subjective opinion.

Findings

On 364 targeted households, 102% (372) of them completed the survey, 10% of which has a child with special needs, and 47% is Lebanese. Surveyed households were selected by project databases and include 62% (234) students attending public school and 48% (138) of students attending Non-Formal Education (NFE) activities with AVSI spread across CB-ECE, BLN and ABLN. Beyond children supported directly by

AVSI, households' total number of family members below 18 years old amount to 1058 of which 51% is female.

A final sample of 26 schools distributed in four governorates – Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, Nabatiyeh and South Governorate – voluntarily decided to take part to the assessment. These include 14,972 students (50 % boys) and 1,027 teachers (90% women). More than half 58% of the schools have English as basic foreign language and 46% have a second shift.

Increase in school dropouts

Overall, 50% of the schools had an increase in dropouts in the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 with an average dropout rate of 5%. The majority of the schools in South governorate had an increase in dropouts (86%). Most of the of schools noticed the increase in dropouts in the 2020-2021 academic year (77% - 10 schools) and 62% (8) of schools stated that the dropouts involve more Lebanese than non-Lebanese students. The main factors affecting the dropouts are the socioeconomic challenges (55%), followed by the barriers to access online learning (25%) and child labor (19%).

Inequalities in Access to Learning

The 2020-2021 academic year was challenging due to a variety of factors involving COVID-19, fuel, and security concerns: while the normal academic year last on average between 31 and 33 weeks⁴, two-third (158) of caregivers stated that their children had less than 30 weeks of total learning in 2020/2021. Concerning face-to-face learning, over the half of respondents (126) mentioned attending less than 5 weeks of in-school learning in 2020/2021.

⁴ Lebanon, Education in Spotlight

Whereas all schools implemented distance learning in 2021, some schools (2) reported targeting first shift only leaving a major gap in



LBP 285,000

per child per month is the average transportation cost in South governorate

the education of refugee children. Platforms employed for distance learning are WhatsApp (54%), and Microsoft Teams or other. Schools that implemented distance learning reported a general lack of participation. Most schools also implemented blended learning in 2021.

Access to School

Transportation is the greatest challenge for both students and teachers to access the school due to the difficult access to fuel.



1 in 3 students

faces challenges affording transportation costs

Over 57% of respondents stated that they experienced difficulties in paying school transportation or in taking their child/children to school in the past year. This raises to 74% in Nabatiyeh. In July 2021, one in five public-school children skipped some school days and one in ten skipped weeks of school due to issues related to transportation.

The bus is by large the main means of transportation employed to reach the school (nearly 40% of respondents), followed by private car.

The challenges mentioned by the caregivers align to school directors' report. Almost 1 in 3 students faces challenges due to transportation costs. The price of school transportation increased dramatically in the past months: nearly 3 in 4 schools reported an increase of more than LBP 40,000 per child per month. The average reported transportation cost per child is of LBP 175,192 LBP, however this reaches LBP 285,000 in South governorate.

The average transportation cost per child per month is 175,192 LBP and South governorate has the highest average of 285,000 LBP and Nabatiyeh the lowest of 127,000 LBP. All the schools agreed that the cost of transportation increased, and 73% of them stated that it raised by more than 40,000 LBP per child per month.

Access to Electricity

Access to Electricity is heavily compromised with households in some governorates having only 2.92 hours of electricity a day. Whereas average hours of electricity availability do not differ significantly across nationalities, public school children have almost twice the hours of daily electricity than refugees attending Non-Formal Education (NFE) activities (8.31 to 4.97).



Lack of electricity

Has a very negative impact on access to education

A statistically significant correlation was found between electricity availability and the number of learning weeks child attended⁵ (p-value<0.05,

⁵ This is self-reported by the caregiver.

$r=0.3^6$), highlighting that electricity has a moderate effect on access to education.

Adding to that most of households do not have a generator (66%) with households in Nabatiyeh, North and Akkar reporting the lowest access to alternative means of electricity supply (only 17% in Akkar). There is a light correlation between the availability of alternative means of electricity supply and the learning weeks a student is able to attend (fisher exact test with $p\text{-value}<0.05$ and $r=0.14$). The vast majority of households (87%) believes that the lack of electricity will impact the children's ability to access distance learning, this number raises to 95% for households of NFE beneficiaries and the largest reported consequence is internet access. These analyses demonstrate that electricity supply in the implementation of distance learning represents a critical element for access to education.

In schools, electricity and transportation issues are affecting the presence and the wellbeing of both teachers and students with unexpected changes of schedules and online sessions interruption due to sudden power cuts. Basic tasks such as printing cannot be executed, and the workflow and preparations of lessons are affected. Furthermore, if half of interviewed schools do not have a generator, the other half faces challenges with reparation cost or the capacity to supply fuel. Schools reporting worst crisis with fuel are in South, Nabatiyeh and Bekaa.

Child Protection & Child Labor

In a context characterized by a challenging access to education and a compromised provision of educational services, children wellbeing is further compromised by protracted

⁶ A correlation coefficient measures the strength of that relationship. The relationship between two variables is generally considered strong when their r value is larger than 0.7.

lockdowns and disruption of conventional children learning and playing environments mainly due to COVID-19. This is further linked to security reasons as well as economic factors and an increase in children's fears.



1 in 3

OOSC in the age range 10-14 is involved in a form of labor.

Most of children started to work in 2021 as a consequence of the economic crisis

Caregivers reported that 1 in 3 children does not have opportunities to socialize with other children and this is mostly linked with fear of COVID-19, security reasons but also economic factors and children's fears. Caregivers also reported negative changes in children wellbeing. 1 in 3 caregivers observed increase in stress and anger (33%), more difficulties in socializing (14%), issues in memorizing (13%) – all accompanied by reduced practice of outdoor sports and other activities (16%). In addition, during the COVID-19 lockdown, there was an increase aggressive behavior (15% of respondents), tendency towards verbal & physical punishment (5%) and emotional overwhelm by children and caregivers (12%).



1 in 3

children suffer the psychological consequences

of COVID-19 lockdown measures

The crisis had a strong impact on child labor. A large number of households reported working children (15%), particularly in Akkar, Beirut and Nabatiyeh. Amongst households of children

attending Non-Formal Education (NFE) in the age range 10-14, 1 in 3 household has a child involved in a form of labor. 1 in 10 household of children attending NFE in the age range 3-5 also reported a child involved in a form of labor.



2 in 3

schools do not have a system in place to identify and

refer child protection cases

Children attending public school are equally affected (1 in 10). School directors confirmed a high number of working children across all governorates with a total of 3% (568) of children attending schools involved in the assessment. Schools in South governorate recorded up to an average of 28.4% (57) working children. However, this data is in contrast with data reported by HHs which see the majority of working children in Akkar (33%⁷), Beirut (18%), Nabatiyeh (17%) and Mount Lebanon (16%). The vast majority of these children (59%) started to work in 2021, as a consequence of the worsening of the economic crisis.

In a framework that sees children wellbeing deteriorating and protection concerns mounting, some schools do not have systems in place to identify and refer child protection cases. There is a general absence of referral mechanism for special needs and child protection: only 35% (9 schools) have a referral mechanism in place for students in need of specialized services and only 31% (8 schools) have a referral mechanism in place for child protection. In addition, students in Nabatiyeh and south reported fearing bullying, discrimination, or violence on the way to school.

⁷ This refers to the percentage of households with working children against the total number of households interviewed in each specific governorate.

Food Security

A general deterioration across all governorates is reported by individuals as well as educational institutions. Almost all the households (98%) have adopted negative coping strategy related to food with 94% of them reporting that the quality of the food has worsen as a consequence of their inability to afford nutrient and healthy



3 in 4

households had to reduce children's number of meals

per day. Quality of food has reduced across all interviewed households

food and 71% of households had to reduce children's number of meals per day with worse numbers in South, Mount Lebanon, Beqaa and Nabatiyeh. School directors confirmed this trend as 73% (19) of schools noticed adoption of negative coping strategies related to food – this is affecting almost half of the students (44%).

A statistically significant relationship with a moderate effect was found between the children wellbeing and food security (p -value<0.05, $r=0.2$). This demonstrates that children who had their food security compromised recorded stronger deterioration in their wellbeing, therefore confirming a link between food security and children psychosocial status.



Children who had their food security compromised

recorded stronger deterioration in their wellbeing

Back to School

A. School Readiness for next School Year

The majority of the schools (96%, 25 schools) are willing and eligible⁸ to implement a retention support program such as homework support, foreign language courses or remedial courses.

 **Nearly all school directors reported an influx of students from private schools since 2020.**

This will cause an increase in pupil-teacher ratio of two units in 2022

The assessment observed that as a consequence of the economic crisis 92% (24) of interviewed schools saw a significant influx of students (mostly Lebanese) from private or semi-private schools between academic year 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. All interviewed schools are expecting this trend to continue in next academic year with estimates of nearly 100

Classrooms

It was demonstrated that overcrowded classes and high pupil-per-teacher ratio have a direct link with students' failure rate. There is a significant moderate relationship between the pupil-per-class ratio and student's failure rate (Pearson test with $p < 0.05$, $r = 0.504$) meaning that the growth of average number of students per class in a school will be accompanied by higher failure rate of that school. Similarly, findings highlight that schools with higher pupil-per-teacher ratio are more subject to higher failure rates (Pearson test with $p < 0.05$, $r = 0.438$).

⁸A school is considered eligible to open a retention support program if the failure rate for at least one of its cycles is higher than 30%.

students per each of the interviewed school, with higher rates in Nabatiyeh. This will further stretch schools' capacities and will bring teacher-per-pupil ratio from 15 to 17 students per teacher.

As a result, 35% (9) of schools will not have the capacity in terms of teaching staff and school facilities to welcome the new students and will have to refuse additional intakes. There is higher risk for non-Lebanese students to be left behind

Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers in 31% of interviewed schools encountered difficulties with technology and content creation during distance learning. School directors mentioned that trainings related to distance learning such as content creation (videos, learning materials etc.), online platforms usage (MS Teams, Zoom) and new teaching methods for distance learning and interactive learning in addition to other training suggestions such as stress management, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). The main needs related to distance learning revolve around IT devices (laptops, tablets), stable internet connection and reliable power supply.



as some schools (4) reported resorting to nationality as exclusion criteria for enrolment.

In this critical situation, schools must deal with ordinary issues such as paying teachers' and other staff's salaries. Moreover, in the next school year, teachers will struggle to reach school because of lack of fuel and the quality of learning will be compromised as schools are fighting to provide educational supplies to teachers. Overcrowded classes and combined with students' challenges to attend classes will likely result in a dramatic increase of school dropout rates.

 **82%**
of interviewed households
feels safe in sending

children to in-presence educational activities

B. Households' Readiness for next School Year

In spite of the multitude of financial challenges affecting Lebanese and refugee households as well as COVID-19 risks, the majority of interviewed beneficiaries (82%) feels safe in sending children to in-presence educational activities. This is further confirmed by the intention of nearly all HHs with children attending public school to enroll children in next school year. Nonetheless, *transportation & cost of school supplies* remain the most frequently reported challenges to access education (see figure 1).

Access to internet connection was reported as the most important barrier (45%) to access to distance learning

HOUSEHOLDS CHALLENGES FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

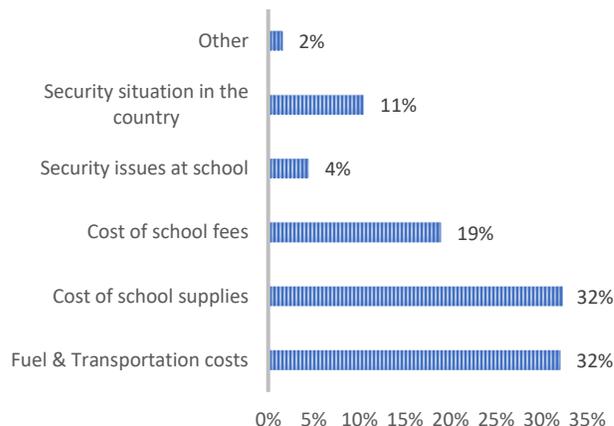


Figure 1 Main challenges reported by households regarding next school year (2021/2022)

The crisis in the country affected HHs' purchasing capacity beyond food items: 3 in 4 households are unable to supply stationery and learning material for the upcoming school year. As a confirmation of the fact that the crisis is hitting all portions of interested population, it can be noted that this rate is similar across the students enrolled in public school and the students enrolled in NFE course. The highest challenges were registered in Mount Lebanon, South, Nabatiyeh and Beqaa governorates. The schools (81%, 21 schools) also noticed an increase in the students' experiencing challenges in the supply of educational material as well as school meals. The school directors also

 **3 in 4**
households
are unable to supply

educational material for the next school year

highlighted that 31% of the students are facing challenges in affording school-related costs especially in South and Nabatiyeh.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This assessment highlights the gravity of a crisis that might deteriorate dramatically in the coming months. The study findings present an alarming situation regarding children wellbeing and access to education. The quality of learning in schools has decreased and access to in-presence and distance learning is hindered by issues such as transportation and electricity. This has already led to missing school days. COVID-19 lockdown measures left a significant mark on children wellbeing; child protection is further strained by increasingly alarming child labor rates. Children's food security has deteriorated in the past six months. In this context, schools face challenges with the intake of students from private schools. School dropouts increased in 2021 and the difficulties with sustaining school-related costs will likely exacerbate this problem in the future.

Strategies addressing access to education of Syrian refugees should slowly be incorporated and adapted to interventions targeting Lebanese learners. Challenges should be tackled in a multisectoral fashion to ensure a protective environment which is conducive to inclusive and gender-sensitive learning of Lebanese as well as refugee children. Finally, interventions should be sensitive of the rapidly changing context and look months ahead to prevent further child protection concerns and ensure continued access to education for girls and boys.

Support to Public Schools

- I. Ensure capacity of schools to increase COVID-19 prevention measures in order to guarantee uninterrupted periods of in-person schooling.
- II. Support schools' capacity to sustain children through provision of learning supplies & food snacks.
- III. Include teaching and other personnel in the provision of transportation.
- IV. Advocate for the importance of paying salaries of education personnel to ensure proper quality of learning as a way to reduce inequalities, fight school dropout and prevent child labor.
- V. Ensure education staff capacity building with a particular focus on distance learning.
- VI. Train education personnel on methodologies to integrate psychosocial intervention in learning in light of the deteriorating protective environment for children and the negative consequences on their wellbeing.

Support to Households

- I. Organize transportation or conditional cash to ensure students are able to reach the school.
- II. Provide educational material as well as data bundles as a way to sustain access to distance learning for all.
- III. Support children's access to quality and nutritious food through provision of ad hoc food assistance to avoid resort to negative coping mechanisms among most vulnerable households.
- IV. Ensure cash assistance to tackle child labor and remove barriers to access to education for girls and boys.
- V. Scale up psychosocial support intervention for children and caregivers in light of the deterioration in children wellbeing and the domestic environments.



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