



Global Campus  
Arab World

Chronicles of Displacement

**POLICY BRIEF**

## **Education on the Move: Addressing Learning Gaps Through Non-Traditional Programs in War-Affected Displacement Centers**

By Mansour I. Kfoury

## **Executive summary:**

This policy paper examines non-traditional education programs in Lebanon's war-affected displacement centers, highlighting their role in maintaining learning continuity and psychosocial well-being. Drawing on international case studies, including Finland's war children, and insights from local initiatives like Jusoor, it identifies key strategies: trauma-informed teaching, community engagement, and technological integration. Recommendations emphasize collaborative policymaking, NGO partnerships, and adaptive educational frameworks to address systemic gaps during crises.

- Trauma-informed approaches and community-driven initiatives are critical for effective education in conflict settings.
- Digital tools can enhance learning accessibility in remote and marginalized areas.
- The findings underline the need for adaptive education frameworks that consider the psychological and logistical challenges of displaced populations. A collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to address gaps in educational services during crises.

## **Short-Term Actions**

- Launch teacher training programs focused on trauma-informed methods through the Educational Center for Research and Development (Ministry of Education and Higher Education).
- Partner with NGOs like Jusoor to expand non-formal education programs in underserved areas.
- Conduct an internal assessment within the Ministry of Education to document experiences from the recent conflict and develop resilience strategies.
- Run awareness campaigns for displaced families on the benefits of flexible education programs, particularly in high-risk areas like South Lebanon and the Beqaa Governorate.
- Engage local communities as volunteer facilitators or mentors to support education initiatives.

## **Long-Term Actions**

- Seek advocacy and support from international donors (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR) to drive policy reforms and provide technical assistance for developing long-term, sustainable education strategies.

## **Introduction:**

Education is the right of everyone, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and in all circumstances, equal access to education is an important indicator of IDPs' integration into the local community, whether while they are displaced or when they return to their home areas or settle elsewhere. (Kalin, C. Williams, Koser, & Solomon, 2010)

The right to education is well established in international human rights law also. In addition, international humanitarian law underscores the importance of continued education for children in times of conflict. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)

Lebanon is renowned for its high-quality education system, offering prestigious schools and universities that emphasize academic excellence and cultural diversity.

Lebanon has endured decades of conflict and wars, leaving deep scars on its society, economy, and infrastructure.

Displacement caused by war disrupts formal education systems, leaving children and youth without access to traditional schooling.

What is the role of lighter, non-traditional education programs in supporting learning continuity and psychosocial well-being for displaced students during wartime?

This policy paper is informed by an extensive review of relevant literature and supplemented by insights gathered through semi-structured key informant interview (KII). <sup>1</sup>

## **Analysis:**

In times of war, traditional educational systems often face significant disruptions, necessitating the adoption of non-traditional educational approaches to ensure the continuity of learning. This policy paper outlines strategies to implement non-traditional education during wartime.

“Non-Traditional Education” in times of war refers to flexible, adaptive, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning designed to ensure educational continuity, emotional well-being, and skill development during periods of conflict and instability. This type of education moves beyond conventional classroom settings and standardized curricula to address the unique challenges posed by war, including displacement, trauma, loss of infrastructure, and limited access to resources.

This analysis will begin with a general overview of international experiences and strategies with non-traditional education during crises, then shift to a focused examination of Lebanon's experience during the latest war, highlighting successes and shortcomings, and finally conclude with practical international strategies that can be adapted and implemented in the Lebanese context.

---

<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted with one key actor closely related to the policy issue, Dr. Laila Chamseddine, a professor at the Lebanese University, who has been actively involved with NGOs, working closely with war-affected students in displacement centers and rental homes providing valuable perspectives and context to support the analysis and recommendations.

## Finland “war children” in World War 2

Professor Tommola from University of Tampere, Finland, published an article about Finnish children during the Second World War, looking at children from two different points of view. First, it provides information on around 70,000 children who were transferred to Sweden and Denmark; so-called “war children”. Second, it discusses the results of a survey of Finns born between 1927 and 1938 who stayed in Finland during the war years. The majority of “war children” lived in private homes and many of them forgot their Finnish roots; around 15,000 emigrated permanently. Many of these transferred children do not feel at home in either country. (Korppi-Tommola, 2008)

Professor Tommola also notices a change in children who stayed in Finland and those who left, where “Finnebørn”<sup>2</sup> educational level is lower than the average Finn’s, but their health is better owing to good medical care and nutrition during the war. The Finns who spent their childhood in Finland during the war suffered from hunger.

Compared with those from other European countries, Finnish children lived well and avoided seeing the horrors of war.

This analysis invites reflection on the experiences of displaced children in Lebanon, particularly during the Lebanese Civil War and subsequent conflicts. Like Finland's “war children,” displaced Lebanese children faced challenges of cultural integration, identity preservation, and uneven access to resources. However, the Lebanese context differs in terms of geographic proximity and the sociopolitical dynamics of displacement. For example, while the “war children” of Finland were placed in relatively affluent Nordic countries, Lebanese children often sought refuge in regions with limited resources, impacting their access to education and healthcare. In the Lebanese context, while displacement during conflicts also disrupted the lives of many children, there was no comparable language barrier. Finnish “war children” often struggled with cultural and linguistic integration in Sweden and Denmark, which impacted their education and sense of belonging. In contrast, Lebanese students displaced within the Arab region, or those who emigrated, typically shared linguistic and cultural similarities with their host communities. This relative linguistic continuity enabled Lebanese students to maintain their educational progress and cultural identity more effectively than Finnish “war children.” The Finnish example underscores the importance of balancing immediate physical well-being with long-term cultural and educational outcomes—a consideration vital for designing policies for displaced children in Lebanon. Furthermore, while Finnish children avoided direct exposure to the horrors of war, many Lebanese children experienced such traumas firsthand, adding another layer of complexity to their rehabilitation and reintegration.

## Role of Schools and Teachers

Schools and teachers played a crucial role in supporting the well-being of Finnish war children during and after the war. They provided stability and a sense of normalcy, helping students cope with the traumas associated with the conflict. (Pannula Toft, Paksuniemi , & Westberg, 2018)

The children’s nightmares faded away with time and only a minority still see tanks and bombings in their dreams. (Korppi-Tommola, 2008)

---

<sup>2</sup> Finnebørn: Finnish children who were evacuated to Denmark and Sweden during second world war.

Teachers played the most important role for student. In Denmark, the children's integration to their new home country was facilitated by supportive and understanding teachers.

11 former Finnebørn were interviewed, according to them, going to school every day played an important role in Finnebørn's lives. (Pannula Toft, Paksuniemi , & Westberg, 2018)

In conclusion, the role of teachers in Denmark and Sweden was pivotal in ensuring educational continuity for Finnish "war children" who relocated there. These teachers provided exceptional support, often adopting unorthodox and flexible teaching methods that prioritized the emotional well-being and adaptability of the children, effectively bridging gaps caused by displacement and trauma.

### Addressing Psychological Trauma through Supportive Education

War inflicts psychological trauma on students, affecting their ability to learn effectively. Implementing supportive educational methods can help alleviate negative emotions and promote mental well-being. (Salha, 2024) Integrating activities such as art, music, and play into the curriculum can provide therapeutic benefits and foster a positive learning environment. (Chamseddine, 2024)

### Self-guided learning from home

Education during wars was based more on self-education and not merely on lectures (Warren, 1944). Therefore, teaching programs relied on self-guided books to help kids learn. For instance, in Syria, school books were written for children who are studying without teachers. These books use the principles of writing distance learning materials using conversational style to have the teacher in-built into the text (Holmberg, 2020), and are written in a way for example, saying "Now you've worked very hard, so you may take a ten-minute break" (Grønhaug, 2018)

### Promoting Educational Media Literacy

In conflict zones, misinformation can spread rapidly, exacerbating fear and confusion. Promoting educational media literacy empowers students to critically assess information sources, distinguish factual content from misinformation, and make informed decisions. This skill is crucial for maintaining an informed student body during times of crisis. (Chamseddine, 2024)

### Technology integration

Technology could improve post-war education in several ways. One approach is the use of digital education platforms, which provide access to education for displaced students, those in refugee camps and damaged buildings (Almasri, , Tahat, , & Terkawi, 2018)

These platforms consist of hardware, software, curriculum, and support services, and are designed to address the challenges faced in war situations, such as insecurity, instability, lack of resources, and lack of supervision (Sarnovska, 2022).

## Lebanese Experience

This is not Lebanon's first experience with war, but it is undoubtedly the harshest. An estimated 400,000 children have been forced from their homes. (UNICEF, 2024)

In the face of this crisis, many teachers found themselves confused and uncertain. Some attempted to navigate the situation individually, adopting their own approaches, while others persisted with traditional teaching methods that failed to address the immense trauma students were experiencing. Many children and young people faced profound emotional distress, having lost loved ones, their homes, or entire neighborhoods. (Chamseddine, 2024)

Every child who has been displaced has a story – of loss, of a life upended, of uncertainty for what lies ahead.

“If I’m destined to die, I’ll die, and if I am destined to live, I will live,” Ghazal, 9, says matter-of-factly. She fled from southern Lebanon to Beirut and recalls how simple life used to be – playing with her brother and friends, being able to take showers, have dinner, and go to bed in peace.

Ghazal is particularly worried about her grandmother. “How could I know if she passed away now, God forbid? What would I do then?”

She also worries about the school she left behind. “I hope my school stays safe and doesn’t even get a single scratch because, in the end, it’s my school, and when I grow up, my future will be there,” she says.

“I don’t just want to play. I want to learn and study.” (UNICEF, 2024)

The levels of trauma vary depending on the severity of each individual's experience. Despite these hardships, fostering resilience and ambition among the youth remains essential. However, the relentless pressures of daily life have added significant strain. Furthermore, both public and private school and university administrations lacked a cohesive and well-defined strategy to address these extraordinary challenges. (Chamseddine, 2024)

## Developing Crisis-Specific Educational Strategies

The absence of clear strategies during crises blocks educational continuity. Developing and generalizing crisis-specific educational strategies, accompanied by comprehensive training for educators, is essential. Such strategies should be adaptable to various crisis scenarios, ensuring preparedness and resilience in the face of disruptions. (Chamseddine, 2024)

One of the key challenges was that the Minister of Education decided to continue education, which, in principle, was a commendable step—as evidenced by the experience of the 11 Finnish war children in Denmark, where attending school played a vital role in their stability and well-being. However, the critical difference lies in the fact that schools in Lebanon often doubled as displacement centers, making it extremely difficult to transform these spaces into functional classrooms while simultaneously accommodating displaced families.

Many public schools were repurposed as shelters for the approximately 840,000 internally displaced persons, complicating the resumption of regular classes. (Stezycki & Alkousaa, 2024)

Furthermore, there was no clear plan or strategy on how to ensure the continuation of education under such circumstances. The ministry aimed to resume education as if conditions were normal, relying on the same tasks and plans designed for times of peace. Teachers were neither prepared nor trained to adapt to this reality, and no immediate measures were taken to introduce a lighter, non-traditional approach to education tailored to the needs of traumatized students and an unstable environment.

Except the development of educational platforms such as “Madristi” and “Mawaridy” to provide online regular lessons to all students. (Naffah, 2024)

The decision to continue education during the conflict was met with criticism. Critics pointed out the lack of a comprehensive emergency plan and the challenges posed by using schools as shelters, which hindered the effective continuation of education. (Sejaan, 2024)

“To me, it is unacceptable that private school students have access to education while public school students still don’t know their fate,” said Mirna Moussa, director of the Zouk Mosbeh public school, which was hosting 116 displaced people from all over the country.

“The government had a year to set an emergency plan on how to welcome internally displaced people in centers while keeping the school year on track,” Moussa continued, referring to the Cabinet’s creation of an “emergency committee” after the Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon began on October 8, 2023.

“They could have readied other government-owned buildings, or prepared an ‘online learning kit’ with what a student might need to start the school year digitally,” she suggested, “Instead, here we are, a month after the school year was meant to begin, with no real plan.” (Sejaan, 2024)

### Coordinating Among Stakeholders

Effective implementation of non-traditional education requires coordination among various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, educational institutions, media experts and foreign embassies. Collaborative efforts ensure the development of cohesive strategies that address the multifaceted challenges posed by wartime education. (UNICEF, 2024)

On October 24, one year after the onset of the war and two months after the displacement crisis, during the International Conference in Support of Lebanon’s People and Sovereignty held on the initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron, the Minister of Education and Higher Education, Abbas Halabi, announced a strategic plan with four goals which he asked donors, and particularly the French President, to support. (Al Joumhouria, 2024)

These goals were limited to ensuring access to inclusive learning for all, providing psychosocial support, empowering teachers through financial aid, and building a resilient, crisis-responsive education system. (Naffah, 2024)

Tracking of these strategies remain impossible at the moment.

### Ensuring Institutional Support and Adjustments

Educational institutions must make necessary adjustments to support non-traditional education during conflicts. This includes providing resources for online teaching, offering psychological support services, and creating policies that address the unique challenges of wartime education. (Chamseddine, 2024).

The second strategic objective proposed by Minister Halabi was: providing psychological and social support. “Education is not limited to academic content; it is also a humanitarian mission and a pathway to healing. In times of crisis, schools become a lifeline, offering stability and emotional support to children and teachers whose lives have been profoundly disrupted. Restoring hope is essential, which is why psychological and social care must be placed at the forefront of priorities.” (Al Joumhouria, 2024)

This means that the Ministry of Education must prioritize appointing psychological counselors and experts in every school affected by displacement or ensure they are available to support students even outside school hours. With approximately 400,000 displaced students, addressing their psychological and educational needs is an enormous task that cannot be achieved in a short time frame.

### Success stories in Lebanon

However, an innovative model has emerged through civil organizations such as the NGO "Jusoor", which has implemented a highly effective and easily adaptable program for lighter and continued education. Utilizing the simple and widely accessible platform of WhatsApp, Jusoor offers learning opportunities even in times of displacement, enabling children to continue studying core subjects like Math, Arabic, and English, along with Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE). (Jusoor, 2024)

Through dedicated educators providing personalized support, Jusoor ensures that children remain engaged and motivated despite their challenging circumstances. Building on the success of its award-winning WhatsApp-based initiative, “Azima” (عزيمة) Jusoor scaled up its efforts through the "Himam" (هيمم) initiative, reaching over 1,100 children in its first phase, with the broader goal of ensuring educational continuity for Lebanon's 400,000 displaced children. (Jusoor, 2024)

By implementing these strategies, educational systems can adapt to the challenges posed by war, ensuring that learning continues and students receive the support they need during tumultuous times.



## **Recommendations:**

### ○ **Short term recommendations**

- Launch short-term teacher training programs focused on participatory and trauma-informed teaching methods in the “Educational Center for Research and Development - Ministry of Education and Higher Education”- المركز التربوي للبحوث والانماء - في وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي
- Partner with NGOs and international organizations to expand non-formal education programs in under-resourced areas. “Jusoor” for example can coordinate and share its best practice method which is WhatsApp-based initiative with rural schools and breach peripheral areas.
- Facilitate an internal assessment in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education with teachers and directors to document their educational experiences during the last war. Invite representatives from international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, and the Finnish Embassy's cultural attaché to participate, leveraging their expertise in post-war education. Use the findings to develop strategies for resilience and innovation in education during crises.
- Conduct awareness sessions for displaced families about the value of lighter education programs. Ministry of Education and Higher Education should launch independent workshops for parents and for children, even after the ceasefire agreement. Focused on the riskiest areas like South of Lebanon and Beqaa Governorate.
- Engage local communities to volunteer as facilitators or mentors, through municipalities.

### ○ **Long term recommendation**

- Advocacy and support from donors like UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR can drive policy formation by providing expert guidance, funding, and technical assistance to shape education policies that address post-crisis needs. These organizations bring global experience, evidence-based practices, and credibility, which can influence policymakers to prioritize reforms and allocate resources effectively

## **Conclusion:**

In the context of Lebanon's ongoing challenges, non-traditional education programs have emerged as a crucial tool to support displaced students during wartime. These programs offer a flexible, trauma-informed approach that caters to the unique needs of students affected by conflict, providing continuity of learning and promoting psychosocial well-being. The experiences of other nations, such as Finland's "war children," demonstrate the essential role of education in maintaining stability and fostering resilience during crises. Lebanon's adoption of these strategies, while still in development, has shown promise in mitigating the effects of displacement and trauma.

However, Lebanon's experience also highlights several areas for improvement. The lack of a comprehensive crisis-specific education plan, combined with the challenge of using schools as

dual-purpose shelters, has impeded the effective delivery of education. The government's response has been slow, and a more coordinated effort involving local communities, educational institutions, and international stakeholders is necessary to ensure a more cohesive and resilient education system.

By implementing the recommended actions—such as teacher training in trauma-sensitive pedagogy, expanding non-formal education opportunities, and leveraging technology and media literacy—Lebanon can better support its displaced student population. Furthermore, stronger partnerships with NGOs, such as Jusoor, which has shown success in delivering education via accessible platforms like WhatsApp, can provide valuable lessons in scalability and adaptability.

Ultimately, education in times of crisis is not just about academic learning; it is a vital humanitarian service that helps restore hope, stability, and a sense of normalcy to displaced children. As Lebanon continues to face the challenges of war and displacement, the integration of non-traditional education models will be critical to preserving the future of its children and fostering the long-term resilience of its society.

## References

- Al Joumhouria*. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.aljournhouria.com/ar/news/740691/-الحلبي-سلم-ماكرون-خطة-وزارة-التربية-قطاع-التعليم-رمز-للامل-والابتكار>
- Almasri, N., Tahat, L., & Terkawi, L. (2018). *How Can Technology Support Education in War*. Retrieved from WarAware Education Platform for Syria.: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02131-3\\_39](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02131-3_39)
- Chamseddine, L. (2024, December). Non traditional education in Lebanon during war 2023-2024. (M. Kfoury, Interviewer)
- Emma, C. (2014). Finland's low-tech take on education. *Politico*.
- Grønhaug, K. (2018). Education during wartime. *Norwegian Refugee Council*.
- Holmberg, B. (2020). Guided didactic conversation in distance education. In B. Holmberg, *Distance Education: International Perspectives*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003033950-10>
- Jusoor. (2024). Retrieved from Adapting Education in Response to Escalating Conflict in Lebanon: <https://www.jusoor.ngo/news/adapting-education-amidst-escalating-conflict-in-lebanon>
- Kalin, W., C. Williams, R., Koser, K., & Solomon, A. (2010). Incorporating the guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into Domestic Law: Issues and Challenges. *The American Society of International Law*, 247.
- Korppi-Tommola, A. (2008). *War and children in Finland during the Second World War*. Retrieved from *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(4), 445–455. : <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230802218405>
- Naffah, C. (2024). *The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies*. Retrieved from Education in Times of Emergency in Lebanon: Improvised Solutions and Missed Opportunities: <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/en/articles/details/4896/education-in-times-of-emergency-in-lebanon-improvised-solutions-and-missed-opportunities>
- Pannula Toft, P., Paksuniemi, M., & Westberg, J. (2018). *Paedagogica Historica*. Retrieved from The challenge of returning home: the role of school and teachers in the well-being of Finnish war children, “Finnebørn”, during and after World War II.: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2018.1521449>
- Salha, S. (2024). *How to Maintain Education During Wars? An Integrative Approach to Ensure the Right to Education*. Retrieved from open praxis: <https://openpraxis.org/articles/10.55982/openpraxis.16.2.668?>
- Sejaan, M. (2024). Education During Times of War in Lebanon. *Daraj Media*.
- Stezycki, K., & Alkousaa, R. (2024). *Reuters*. Retrieved from Lebanon's public schools reopen amid war and displacement: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-public-schools-reopen-amid-war-displacement-2024-11-12/>
- (2024). *UNICEF*. Education under attack.
- UNICEF. (2024). Loss and uncertainty for Lebanon's children. *UNICEF*.
- (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. G.A. Res. 217(a), U.N. Doc. A/810 : United Nations.
- Warren, C. (1944). A New College for a New World: Miss Warren says that students and faculty returning from war will demand a different kind of education. *New York Times*.