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ENHANCING QUALITY IN PRE- PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LEBANON IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CERD	Center for Educational Research and Development
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus of 2019
ECD	Early child development
ECE	Early child education
GDP	Gross domestic product
IFC	International Finance Corporation
KG	Kindergarten
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
QITABI	Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education Improvement
RACE II	Reaching All Children with Education
SQ	Study question
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar

TERMINOLOGY

Human capital. The concept of developing human capital is used throughout this report. Human capital is defined as “the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. Investing in people through nutrition, health care, quality education, jobs and skills helps develop human capital, and this is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies.”¹ Human capital development means building people’s soft skills that translate into hard economic return for nations.

Nurturing care. The Nurturing Care Framework maps the complementarity of multisectoral programming for children around “inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning” needed to help children reach their full potential.²

Pre-primary education. The Lebanese system uses the terms *early child education*, *preschool education*, *kindergarten*, *KG*, and occasionally *pre-primary education*, to refer to early learning that happens before primary-school entry. The strategy of the United States Agency for International Development focuses on pre-primary education. Therefore, when referring to Lebanon, the term *pre-primary education* is more commonly used throughout this report to encompass all modalities and terminology in use in the country context.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STUDY PURPOSE

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Middle East Bureau requested the Middle East Education Research, Training, and Support initiative to support USAID/Lebanon by conducting a study to better understand key factors affecting quality in pre-primary education in Lebanon. Quality is a central concern of the USAID/Lebanon Mission. The Mission would like to better understand what makes for good quality in pre-primary education to determine the areas where quality in pre-primary might be improved in the Lebanon context, based on gaps and knowledge of best practices in this area.

CONTEXT

- Lebanon emerges from a context of strong appreciation of education and well-established systems and structures. Public education starts at age three, and early child education consists of three years, including nursery for three-year-olds, first-year kindergarten for four-year-olds, and second-year kindergarten for five-year-olds.³ Before the crisis, Lebanon's pre-primary enrollment was one of the highest in the region, at 85.9 percent in 2017, with a high proportion of private-school enrollment. Current estimates are 70 to 80 percent enrollment, with high disparity according to socioeconomic status.
- The past two years, in particular, have seen multiple crises, such as the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Port of Beirut explosion, the government's loss of liquidity, the collapse of the economy, the collapse provision of basic services, political instability, and street violence among factions.
- Public schools have been closed, nonoperational, or partly operational for long periods across multiple crises. These contextual factors, as well as preexisting system factors, have all had massive impact on the quality of early child learning in the public education system of Lebanon.
- An immense influx of Syrian refugees has overwhelmed the public education system in recent years. By 2021, there were nearly as many non-Lebanese as Lebanese children enrolled in the public system, and more than half of all refugees lacked legal-residency papers.
- In 2021, 10 percent of the entire student population migrated from private schools to the public system, reducing private school enrollment from 71 to 60 percent, and overwhelming public systems.
- Before the crisis, pre-primary was the most equitable level of education by wealth quintile. However, pre-primary enrollment of Syrian children is currently restricted due to lack of birth certificates, lack of residency status, bias among school personnel against admitting Syrian children, overcrowding, lack of space, lack of proof of graduation from a nonformal program, distance from school, cost of transport to school, violence and unsafe or inhospitable school environments, inability of parents to accompany children to school for fear of police detention, and other barriers.

- Quality in Lebanon’s public pre-primary system is negligible and uneven. Before the crisis, 46 percent of a sample of classrooms had inadequate or minimal quality in the learning environment. An early grade reading assessment showed no difference in performance between preschool attendees and nonattendees. This directly contrasts with data patterns in other countries and contexts, where pre-primary attendees frequently outperform other learners.

Ministries of finance across the globe are shifting funding to invest more in early childhood, including pre-primary education, due to numerous studies that clearly link quality early child education and care programs with higher academic skills in older children and youth,⁴ as well as calculated rates of return in lifetime income based on high-quality early (up to age five) education.⁵ Investments in early child education equate to large gains in gross domestic product, and absence of investments equate to losses.⁶ These are remarkable and important potential economic reasons to invest in early child and pre-primary education. However, this reasoning is based on high-quality pre-primary education, thus turning the focus of this report to understanding what makes for good pre-primary education, what is happening in Lebanon’s pre-primary education at present, and what is recommended to improve quality in order to realize the investment gains in Lebanon that have been documented globally.

Specifically, this report seeks to address the following study questions (SQs):

1. What makes for good quality in pre-primary education?
2. What is happening in the Lebanese pre-primary education context? What are the gaps between high-quality pre-primary and the current experience?
3. What recommendations could be offered to enhance quality within the existing context and constraints?

This report delineates inputs, conditions, and factors in the components of the ecosystems around the child that make for good quality in pre-primary education. It describes the current situation in pre-primary education, at the levels of context, system, school, classroom, teacher, child, family, and community. The report offers recommendations about how to invest in improving the quality of pre-primary education during times of crisis in Lebanon.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

The study conducted a mixed-methods evaluation, consisting of document review and key-informant interviews. The research team conducted an in-depth review of the literature on pre-primary education, focusing on the Middle East, Lebanon, pre-primary education, early childhood, quality, access, and finance. Interviews were conducted with eight key informants in Lebanon. They were identified through recommendation of the donor and snowball sampling. Key informants provided the research team with governmental, civil-society, educational, multilateral, and other perspectives.

FINDINGS

SQI: WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD QUALITY IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION?

Quality pre-primary education is determined by country context, policy environment,⁷ and other factors in the ecosystem of the pre-primary education subsector. Pre-primary education serves as a bridge between the child's home environment and participation in formal primary education.⁸ Young children's ability to learn is intimately associated with other aspects of their well-being. Additionally, the well-being of stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents) who engage with children, a conducive context, and well-functioning systems are all critical aspects of quality pre-primary education. The study identified the following components that make for good quality in pre-primary education:

- Conducive context:
 - A context that protects children, as well as those who support children (caregivers, teachers, civil servants) from exposure to conflict, from extremes of wealth and poverty, from political upheaval, and from other environmental threats
 - An economy that generates enough governmental revenue for the government to compensate its service providers adequately and for families to meet basic needs
- Well-functioning system:
 - An operational system of civil service, with policies and processes that function
 - An education system that values pre-primary as the first building block of learning
 - An education system that adequately prepares human capacity
 - An education system that adequately compensates its pre-primary teaching force
 - An education system that encompasses cognitive learning as well as psychosocial and broader holistic learning outcomes at pre-primary level
 - An education system with robust quality-assurance mechanisms covering both public and private pre-primary provision⁹ that monitors progress; develops clear, consistent standards; and uses data to inform decision-making¹⁰
 - Systems of protection that buffer children, families, and teachers from violence, economic stress, and other forms of adversity
- Schools that prioritize and support pre-primary education:
 - School leaders that prioritize pre-primary education
 - Schools that support, coach, and mentor teachers' growth, development, and good performance
 - Schools that track and monitor progress on quality-assurance standards
 - Schools that provide safe spaces, conducive to learning
- Classrooms conducive to learning:
 - Schools and classrooms that are free from safety hazards, such as pollution, disrepair, lack of water, and poor sanitation
 - Classrooms that are free from violence or threats to teachers and students

- Classrooms with adequate and accessible space for participating children
 - Classrooms that contain age-appropriate materials for play-based early learning
 - Curricula based on age-appropriate milestones, play-based early learning, and national early learning and development standards, as opposed to overly academic approaches to pre-primary education
- Teachers prepared to engage with young children:
 - Teachers who have a minimum level of well-being themselves to interact with young children
 - Teachers who have a minimum level of education and life preparation to be ready to teach young children
 - Quality professional development that prepares teachers to engage in high-quality interaction with children, through playful, child-centered, age-appropriate pedagogy
- Children who are ready to learn:
 - Children who have been protected from violence, poverty, instability, conflict, and other forms of adversity
 - Children who have been primed for learning, through high-quality interaction with other adults and youth in their life
 - Pre-primary education accessible to all (including children with disabilities)
- Families who are engaged:
 - Families with enough support to buffer adversity and stress in the home environment, from preconception through timing of entry into pre-primary education
 - Families who engage children in learning and stimulating interaction outside the school environment
 - Families who work in partnership with the school, to promote high-quality interaction with children
 - Families able to access wraparound support and services, such as counselors, nutrition and health services, parenting classes, home visits, activities to do at home, and early screening for children with disabilities
- Communities That Are Supportive
 - Communities supportive of and valuing early education
 - Communities that actively engage in the promotion of learning and well-being of children in learning spaces
 - Communities that protect children’s safety
 - Communities that facilitate access to service and support for children and families

SQ2: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE LEBANESE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION CONTEXT? WHAT ARE THE GAPS BETWEEN HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION AND THE CURRENT EXPERIENCE?

This report compares and contrasts Lebanon’s gaps between high-quality pre-primary education, per the metrics outlined in SQ1, and the current experience. Table I shows the conclusions drawn concerning the current state of pre-primary education in Lebanon.

Table I. Conducive Context and Current State of Pre-Primary Education in Lebanon

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILD EDUCATION	CURRENT STATE OF PRE-PRIMARY
CONDUCTIVE CONTEXT	“CODE RED” CONTEXT
A context that protects children, as well as those who support children (caregivers, teachers, civil servants) from exposure to conflict, from extremes of wealth and poverty, from political upheaval, and from other environmental threats	A historical tradition of national culture, philosophy, and policy that values education, but a current context that exposes children to violence, extremes of wealth and poverty, political upheaval, parental stress, and public system service delivery breakdown
An economy that generates enough governmental revenue for the government to compensate its service providers adequately and for families to meet basic needs	Inability of parents and teachers to earn a wage that supports the basic costs of living, resulting in teachers who are unable to afford transport to the school site, teachers who must engage in other activities during school hours to earn subsistence funds, and parents who are not able to make any nonfood expenditures
WELL-FUNCTIONING SYSTEM	SYSTEM UNDER SEVERE STRAIN
An operational system of civil service, with policies and processes that function	Well-established system, but challenged with operations and policies hampered by lack of inter-entity coordination, bureaucracy, centralized decision-making, or political interference
An education system that values pre-primary education as the first building block of learning	Early child education not given priority, but subsumed into the larger system, with little visibility and attention
An education system that adequately prepares human capacity	High volume of contract teachers, low proportion of university graduates, few linkages between preservice and in-service training and between in-service training and mentoring
An education system that adequately compensates its pre-primary teaching force	Teacher with salaries devalued from the equivalent of 13 USD to 1 USD per hour
An education system that encompasses cognitive learning as well as psychosocial and broader holistic learning outcomes at pre-primary level	Parental value ascribed to sports and arts, serving as a precursor to public acceptance of holistic education, yet strong tendency to favor overly academic outcomes
An education system with robust quality-assurance mechanisms covering both public and private pre-primary education that monitors progress; develops clear, consistent standards; and uses data to inform decision-making	Lack of well-functioning quality-assurance and accountability systems
Systems of protection that buffer children, families, and teachers from violence, economic stress, and other forms of adversity	Some psychosocial support counselors available, but lack of a consistent, coordinated system for protecting and buffering children from adversity

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILD EDUCATION

CURRENT STATE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LEBANON

SCHOOLS THAT PRIORITIZE AND SUPPORT PRE-PRIMARY

SCHOOLS THAT PARTIALLY SUPPORT PRE-PRIMARY

School leaders that prioritize pre-primary education

According to key informants, school principals operate without specialized training and preparation in leading schools and without specialized training in understanding concepts of developmentally appropriate pre-primary education and in supporting quality pre-primary education

Schools that support, coach, and mentor teachers' growth, development, and good performance

Various entities are slated with classroom observations and mentoring, but may not necessarily engage in teacher mentoring with continuity, and not in areas related to pre-primary education and without connection to teacher training (e.g., school principals, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Center for Educational Research and Development, Lebanese University)

Schools that track and monitor progress on quality-assurance standards in pre-primary education

Lack of a system for tracking and monitoring progress (including at school level, between training and monitoring functions, between in-service and preservice, and between school management and teacher promotion systems)

CLASSROOMS CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING

CLASSROOMS WITH VARYING DEGREES OF LEARNING

Schools and classrooms that are free from safety hazards, such as pollution, disrepair, lack of water, and poor sanitation

Classrooms often ill-maintained, and those in the area of the Port of Beirut explosion structurally unsound or destroyed

Classrooms that are free from violence or threats to teachers and students

High level of exposure to violence, harassment, and bullying en route to school; corporal punishment use in the school context; extraordinarily high levels of discrimination and violence toward children of non-Lebanese origin

Classrooms with adequate and accessible space for participating children

Low pupil/teacher ratios in the system; however, massive shortages of seats available for early childhood learners and many refugee children denied entry; only 805 of 962 offer kindergarten sections; many learning spaces not developmentally appropriate and safe for pre-primary age group

TEACHERS PREPARED TO ENGAGE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

TEACHERS NOT WELL EQUIPPED TO ENGAGE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Teachers who have a minimum level of well-being themselves to interact with young children (physical well-being through health and safety, economic well-being through basic needs met, psychosocial well-being in terms of ability to cope with stressors)

Teachers experiencing vulnerabilities, along with the generalized population; teachers experiencing plunging devaluation of salary, food insecurity, inability to pay for travel to teaching site, and high stress

Teachers who have a minimum level of education and life preparation to be ready to teach young children

Teachers with inadequate formal career preparation, in addition to lack of training in early child education and developmentally appropriate pedagogy

Quality professional development that prepares teachers to engage in high-quality interaction with children

Teachers frequently moved or transferred for political reasons, breaking the flow of interaction and child attachment; sparse professional development in pre-primary education

High-quality instruction in early child education through playful, child-centered, age-appropriate pedagogy

Solid foundations in service delivery in the promotion of good pedagogy; significant space at the central and local levels for strengthening the system for better efficiency and higher learning outcomes; lack of attention to service delivery at the early child age range, with not all schools serving the early child range, not all years of early education served, and early education subsumed into general education

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILD EDUCATION

CURRENT STATE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LEBANON

CHILDREN WHO ARE READY TO LEARN

Children who have been protected from violence, poverty, instability, conflict, and other forms of adversity

Children who have been primed for learning, through high-quality interaction with other adults and youth

Pre-primary education accessible to all

CHILDREN FACING ADVERSITIES THAT MAY IMPEDE LEARNING

High rate of children living with or witnessing violence, poverty, instability, conflict, and other forms of adversity; children exposed to violence in the school environment; concerns of parents, education stakeholders, and civil-society members about the psychosocial well-being of children; pressure on all, but most acutely on Syrian refugees, who make up a large proportion of public-school attendees

Families under high psychosocial stress, high economic stress, heightened instability, and mobility; these factors may affect the quality of interaction between families and children in terms of time available to spend with children, level of engaged oral interaction, time for support to home learning, and use of positive discipline as opposed to corporal punishment, etc.

Degree of socioeconomic equity of enrollment in pre-primary compared with other levels of education is an encouraging sign, though this may have dropped drastically during the recent crises; public school enrollment of Syrian refugees remains almost nil in the early education years, and non-Lebanese graduates of nonformal education are barred access to formal primary education, sometimes for multiple consecutive years; few children with disabilities enrolled

FAMILIES WHO ARE ENGAGED

Families who engage children in learning and stimulating interaction outside the school environment

Families who work with the school to promote high-quality interaction with children

Families with enough support to buffer adversity and stress in the home environment, from preconception through timing of entry into pre-primary education

Families able to access wraparound support and services, such as counselors, nutrition and health services, parenting classes, home visits, activities at home, early screening for children with disabilities, social protection and cash-transfer mechanisms, connections to services, interventions and providers for children

FAMILIES UNDER SEVERE STRESS

High proportion of families who face discrimination, legal-residency issues, lack of security in movement, and lack of knowledge of language that may affect ability to engage in high-quality interaction and learning with children

Families who sense lack of power to influence the education process; little engagement of the school in support of parents' creation of learning and high-quality interaction in the home environment

Families facing escalating economic stress with little social support to buffer stress. Increasing lack of employment, escalating poverty, shortage of food, domestic violence

Families hardly receiving any services and support, as the public services of government are collapsing; support offered through nongovernmental organizations covers only a patchwork of locations, whereas the needs of families and their children far outpace supply

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILD EDUCATION	CURRENT STATE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LEBANON
COMMUNITIES SUPPORTIVE OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	COMMUNITIES UNDER STRAIN
Communities supportive of and valuing pre-primary education	Solid foundations, value, expectations, and demand for high-quality education generally; little comprehension of the real impact of pre-primary education and early child investment
Communities that actively engage in the promotion of learning and well-being of children in learning spaces	Community services and structures under stress, due to economic collapse, political upheaval, and violence; communities largely unable to link with preschool classes
Communities that protect children's safety	Some children exposed to violence, child labor, and other adversities
Communities that facilitate access to service and support for children and families	Traditional community structures altered or overwhelmed due to high influx of Syrian refugees and rapid rise in extreme poverty; community services and structures under stress, due to economics, political upheaval, and violence; communities largely unable to facilitate access to services

Summary of key findings from the Lebanese context related to pre-primary education quality:

Data is mixed on pre-primary enrollment and learning outcomes in Lebanon.

- An early grade reading assessment showed no difference in performance in reading between preschool attendees and non-attendees.¹¹ This contrasts with data patterns in other countries, where pre-primary attendees frequently outperform other learners.
- PISA precrisis (2015) scores show that youth in Lebanon who had attended one year of preschool outperformed those with no preschool, and youth who had attended two years of preschool outperformed both other groups. However, the socio-economic backgrounds of families with children enrolled in ECE in the mid-2000s did not reflect the diversity of the Lebanese population, thus learning gains cannot be directly tied to preschool attendance.

Modifications are needed for pre-primary education to improve economic equity, learning and development for all children.

- Investments in early learning and development should start much earlier in the life cycle and layer investment in preschool with other programs that directly address maternal and child health, family economic well-being, violence reduction, and positive parenting in the household.

Children's experience of violence in the school environment affects their learning. Many children cite violence as the reason for dropping out of school.

- Sixty-three percent of children are bullied, with boys at higher rates than girls, children in poorer areas and in high-refugee-density areas experience more violence, and 32 percent of children as young as age five experience peer-to-peer violence.

The current context necessitates outreach beyond school-based or center-based interventions to developing community-level systems, family- and community- based interventions, that merge humanitarian and development approaches.

- For example, one way to reach young children and families is through mothers' groups, where children can read stories, play board games, learn songs, and play music. In these settings mothers can also learn how to keep their children entertained and learning at home.

Political will, awareness, and system strengthening are core components to improving the quality of pre-primary education.

- Studies from other countries in the Middle East and North Africa have found that financing has no effect when it is not accompanied by technical assistance and vision building on the part of government.¹²
- Another lesson learned from other Middle Eastern countries, funding will be to no avail unless government has a vision and political will: If the system wastes resources or uses them ineffectively, funding will not improve quality.

SQ3: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE QUALITY IN THE CURRENT LEBANON CONTEXT

In Lebanon, many national and international stakeholders are working to increase quality of pre-primary education and ongoing efforts should guide USAID investments in efforts to strengthen quality at the early grade levels. The research team makes the following recommendations:

- Work through a national platform that engages the relevant actors across platforms, building on the platform preliminarily developed through the Higher Council for Childhood and the Lebanese University.
- Engage in pre-primary education with interventions that are complementary to the work of other stakeholders (Lebanese government institutions, the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Finance Corporation, civil society), providing multisectoral inputs that support children and families.
- Enter a pooled fund or shared partnership with other investors and stakeholders supporting pre-primary education in Lebanon, financing quality in the public pre-primary system through joint stakeholder funding from domestic, bilateral, multilateral, philanthropic, and private sources.
- Mobilize additional resources for USAID/Lebanon's work through making use of USAID mechanisms designed to leverage nonstate funding into early childcare and education. (See example under "Findings" in "Stakeholders," under "Findings" for SQ3, below, on the [USAID CATALYZE](#) mechanism's [Early Childcare and Education Initiative](#).¹³)
- Issue funding that is multiyear and long-term, even if the absolute dollar value may not be high.

- Establish results-based financing mechanisms where service deliverers are paid on achievement of outcomes.
- Invest in a Lebanese nongovernmental organization or entity to support to systems building so that efforts remain part of the Lebanese context after the cessation of funding support.
- Link pre-primary education programming to other multisectoral wraparound support and services for children and families, in health, mental health, education, nutrition, social protection, and child protection.
- Apply the Nurturing Care Framework to layer multisectoral services for children and families to strengthen pre-primary learner performance, coordinating with government, USAID, UNICEF, and nongovernmental actors.¹⁴

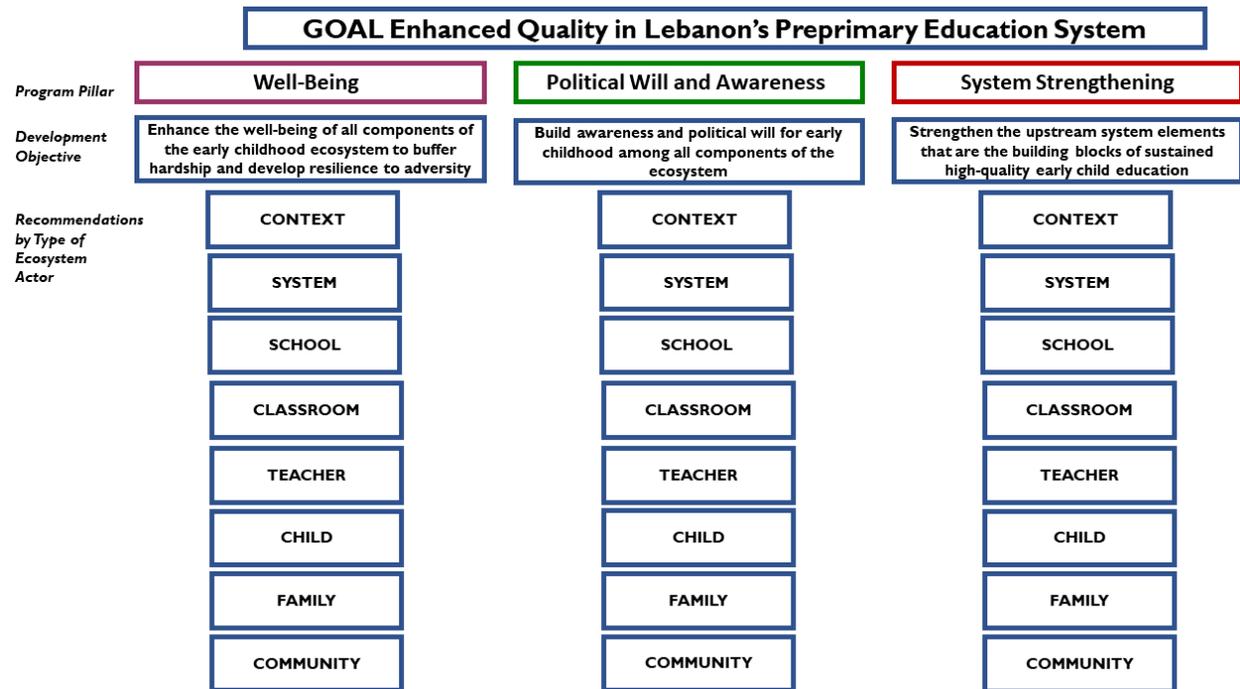
Recommendations for designing interventions follow, based on sequential steps toward strengthening quality through system building. System-strengthening recommendations for USAID investment have been aligned with recommendations already agreed on through the Lebanon Five-Year General Education Plan, the National Strategy on Early Child Development, UNICEF guidance on strengthening pre-primary, Foundations for Building Forward Better Education Reform Path and Political Economy Analysis of Lebanon and Brookings-supported Road Map for Scaling Early Childhood Education in Lebanon.¹⁵ Recommendations are intended to leverage USAID investment in areas complementary to USAID reforms, initiatives, and expertise.

If USAID designs interventions to improve quality in pre-primary education, it should engage with three central objectives (pillars):

- I. First secure basic well-being of ecosystem actors
- II. Next prioritize political will and awareness of early childhood
- III. Then lead into system strengthening

Under each of these pillars the key components of high-quality pre-primary education (detailed below under SQ2) are considered, with recommendations for improving these areas from the current state. The following schematic has been developed to frame the recommendations, with further schematics detailing recommendations under each of the program pillars presented in Annex I.

Figure I. Recommendations Schematic



The annexes also include detailed recommendations on lines of action, an early child education scenario planning tool for investing in times of rapidly changing crises ([Annex 2](#)), and resources and tools for financing quality enhancement of pre-primary education during crisis ([Annex 3](#)).

The document is intended to be used to help USAID plan its future funding directions, as well as to stimulate dialogue on how early-child-education stakeholders in Lebanon can converge to leverage institutional strengths and funding complementarity to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Lebanon’s public pre-primary education system.

PURPOSE AND STUDY QUESTIONS

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Middle East Bureau requested the Middle East Education Research, Training, and Support initiative to support USAID/Lebanon by conducting a study to better understand key factors affecting quality in pre-primary education in Lebanon. Quality is a central concern of the USAID/Lebanon Mission. The Mission would like to better understand what makes for good quality in pre-primary education to determine the areas where quality in pre-primary might be improved in the Lebanon context, based on gaps and knowledge of best practices in this area.

Pre-primary education in Lebanon is not compulsory, but is provided free through the public system.¹⁶ Lebanon's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has 45 early childhood centers, most of which are attached to public primary schools. Out of 962 public primary schools, 805 offer pre-primary education, with a total of 2,983 classes across all three levels of kindergarten (KG) in 2021 and an average student-teacher ratio of 40.¹⁷ Before the multiple crises of the past several years, Lebanon's enrollment rate in pre-primary education was one of the highest in the region, at 85.9 percent in 2017.¹⁸ This was primarily due to high private enrollment. The devastating crises have shifted enrollment trends, with high dropout rates and large-scale shifting from private to public education; therefore accurate current data on access and quality is not available.

STUDY QUESTIONS

This report addresses the following study questions (SQs) drafted in collaboration with USAID:

1. What makes for good quality in pre-primary education?
2. What is happening in the Lebanese pre-primary education context? What are the gaps between high-quality pre-primary and the current experience?
3. What recommendations could be offered to enhance quality within the existing context and constraints?

AUDIENCE

This report is intended for use by USAID/Lebanon and its collaborators to inform its future approach to intervening in the Lebanon education system. USAID should share this report with national stakeholders as an entry point for starting a more in-depth conversation about where USAID inputs could be constructive and useful, rather than duplicative or tangential. The aim is that all partners work together, leverage institutional strengths, and leverage funding complementarity to contribute to the goal of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in Lebanon's pre-primary education system.

METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a mixed-methods evaluation, consisting of document review and key-informant interviews. The research team conducted an in-depth review of the literature on pre-primary education, focusing on the Middle East, Lebanon, pre-primary education, early childhood, quality, access, and finance. Interviews were conducted with eight key informants in Lebanon. Key informants were identified through recommendation of the donor and snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted via the Zoom virtual communications platform. Key informants provided

the research team with perspectives from the MEHE, the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Lebanese University, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others working in teacher training, nonformal education, and pre-primary education provision. Data was documented thoroughly, with identifiers stripped.

SCOPE

This study had originally intended to focus on access to and financing of pre-primary education. Discussions with USAID/Lebanon identified a specific interest in improving quality in the public system. Therefore, the public system became the exclusive focus of this study. The private system of early child education (ECE) in Lebanon is, in fact, the primary mechanism through which the majority of pre-primary-age children are currently being reached, but time and resources did not allow for fuller comparisons of quality between public and private systems.

LIMITATIONS AND BIASES

This study was conducted during the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; therefore, it was not possible to conduct travel in-country or meet face-to-face with stakeholders. The study team addressed this limitation by conducting virtual interviews via Zoom. An additional limitation was that key informants were identified with the donor, and additional interviewees were identified through snowball sampling indicated by interviewees. Finally, time did not allow for interviews with teachers, principals, and other pre-primary-system actors at regional and local levels. Therefore, the full range of views and perspectives were not incorporated. The data presented in the report reflect the available literature and the ideas and inclinations of the key informants interviewed.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT IN LEBANON

Lebanon has historically been a middle-income country with strong appreciation for education and well-established systems and structures. The past two years have seen multiple crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Port of Beirut explosion, collapse of the economy, collapse of the provision of basic services, political upheaval, and street violence among factions. These factors have resulted in a deep decline in the quality of learning within the public system, and they have destabilized the delivery of government services,¹⁹ including health, energy, water, waste collection, and education.²⁰

The massive influx of Syrian refugees in recent years has overwhelmed the public education system. Lebanon hosts 1.5 million refugees from Syria, accounting for more than one fifth of its population.²¹ This calculation of the refugee population—among the world’s densest—does not tabulate unregistered refugees²² and 500,000 Palestinian refugees.²³ Lost revenue due to the Syrian conflict and the burden of hosting refugees had cost Lebanon 13.1 billion United States dollars (USD) by 2016.²⁴ The World Bank has calculated that effects of the Syria crisis have cut Lebanon’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 2.9 points per year.²⁵ This has severely reduced government ability to fund pre-primary education and the education systems as a whole.

Though ranked as a middle-income country, Lebanon has been classified as a fragile state.²⁶ During the past year, Lebanon has undergone one of the world’s most severe economic crises since the 1850s; Lebanon’s rate of economic contraction has been the highest among 193 countries.²⁷ This

economic crisis has occurred in parallel with political discord and social unrest.²⁸ Due to the multiple crises, and particularly the economic collapse, many of the country's most talented and promising citizens are emigrating, which could have massive ramifications for the nation's human capital and public service delivery systems.²⁹

PUBLIC SERVICE CRISIS ON EDUCATION

The multiple crises from 2019 to 2022 have placed more stress on an overstretched system³⁰ and have had particularly grave effects on the education sector, with the MEHE as the second-largest employer of civil servants.³¹ The massive out-migration or brain drain³² has left a voluminous gap of qualified human capital. Due to COVID-19, schools were closed and replaced by distance learning, resulting in a significant learning loss, which has yet to be measured. Lack of access to electronic devices and poor connectivity have been particularly harmful to the poor, causing low-income students to fall further behind their peers.³³ Schools have been largely closed over the past three years.³⁴ As of March 31, 2022, public schools had been open for only 34 days (including days that were only half-operational) since the start of 2021.³⁵

In January 2022, public-school teachers commenced an open-ended strike due to the devaluation of their salaries by 90 percent and lack of adjustment in accordance with inflation.³⁶ Most schools closed and refused to open. The Minister of Education acknowledged the problem, but noted that it affects all public servants, necessitating a whole-of-government solution.³⁷ Pre-primary education has been completely nonfunctional in many locations. Informants reported that where public provision of pre-primary education had been occurring, it was sporadic, with low or nonexistent quality.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF CRISIS CONTEXT AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM CRISIS

A key informant observed that the government's "capacity is in emergency—because the ability of government has collapsed." A number of informants reported that system issues are at the root of crises and that these issues preexisted the current crisis: "In the crisis, incentives are important as [a] pain killer, but they are not the modality of healing." Informants pointed to how "the state of crisis is normalized in Lebanon" and opined that what is needed is a "reconstruction and rethinking of the system, with a focus on what the causes [were] that led to the current state of crisis." They suggested to developing "a structured model for emerging from crisis" and "moving step by step from bad, to a little bit better." Yet several informants suggested that the government is not capable of tackling quality in pre-primary education at the moment: "Now, no I don't think now the public schools are capable of tackling quality in any level. Their focus is on keeping their schools open, paying their teachers, they are absorbed in the crisis, they want to look good and do the effort, but they are facing so many crises." "If there is a functioning government and political will to deliver its obligation to its people then there is a chance . . . but there should be a reform of the system to clear the ground and start from scratch with a solid foundation."

Many key informants strongly advocated for focusing on long-term system building over short-term solutions: "We are stuck in the low hanging fruits. Most of the decisions are taken based on short term feasibility—which doesn't build a solid structure for the long-term." "We need to have small success from low hanging fruits, but we need to organize these successes towards a longer term of vision—to be more prepared for crises—not only being responsive and reactive, we need to be proactive."

HISTORY OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LEBANON

Pre-primary education reforms in Lebanon began in 2003, and legislation was enacted in 2011 to establish the KG cycle as ranging from ages three to five (various terminologies are in use, and country documentation refers to kindergarten, KG, early childhood education (ECE), and occasionally pre-primary),³⁸ with the expansion of public provision of ECE touted as one of the main reform achievements.³⁹ The Reaching All Children with Education (RACE II) strategy affirms the commitment to supporting children and youth between ages three and eighteen years, with quality and inclusive education opportunities, including pre-primary education.⁴⁰ The government has released a general education strategy for 2021 through 2025, which outlines a human-capital-based vision and identifies one key outcome as “a strengthened pre-primary education to increase school readiness.”⁴¹

GOVERNANCE

Lebanon lacks a national regulatory framework to govern institutions working in early child development (ECD). As a result, there is a lack of comprehensive and multifaceted programs to address the holistic facets of childhood.⁴² The draft National Strategy for Early Child Development for 2016 through 2020 sets out definitions, a framework, principles, concepts, and values aligning to sustainable development goals, as well as strategic recommended lines of action across the sectors of early childhood.⁴³

In terms of responsibility for different forms of early learning among young children, the MEHE is responsible for public schools for children ages three to eighteen years and is the body connected to CERD. The Ministry of Public Health is responsible for the health and well-being of children under five years of age, women’s childbearing, and licensing and overseeing for-profit private nurseries. The Ministry of Social Affairs regulates nursery programs and health programs through Social Development Centers, in collaboration with civil society.⁴⁴ The Higher Council for Childhood serves as an independent intermediary body that liaises among relevant government structures, civil society, and stakeholders to initiate and coordinate programs and policies, with particular focus on compliance with international conventions; this body has been integrally involved in the development for a national strategy around ECD.⁴⁵

This National Strategy for Early Child Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 was designed and developed in an iterative participatory manner, engaging the relevant stakeholders from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, MEHE, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Court, and other government entities; academic institutions; civil-society organizations; media; and specialists on childhood health, education, protection, welfare, and development. In 2017, a country study on ECD in Lebanon found a lack of exclusive early childhood divisions within all the ministries.⁴⁶ The MEHE Directorate General for Education governs the management of schools and provision of services. The MEHE houses a directorate responsible for KG and overseeing ECE.⁴⁷ The Preservice and Inservice Training Bureau at CERD oversees training of in-service teachers and houses an Early Childhood Department.

The Early Child Development Country Case Study Lebanon notes that both public and privately funded programs are subject to respective government regulations; however, laws are not being obeyed; there are no clear guidelines in terms of quality; and great variation exists in the type and extent of regulations.⁴⁸

POLITICAL WILL AND VISION

Political will, vision, and understanding of the importance of early education were identified as key variables, but a number of stakeholders pointed toward the vision of the government, lack of awareness of early childhood, and lack of political focus as impediments. Said one key informant, “There are no steps to prioritize preschool.” According to another particularly articulate key informant: “There is attention to the early years, but it is not systematic and not part of any clear or explicit plan to target the early years. There is no awareness around the importance of early years—and that’s why we are where we are. When you have funds and a study is done, it is not the initiative of the government to say what is needed. They just fit in the funds in the little holes. It is not a strategy for a whole year, it is very fragmented. There are people who understand the importance of early childhood, but the decision-making people are not aware, and you end up in a broken system with some committed people who do not have power to make the needed change. It is so much based on individuals who are advocating and moving forward.”

Reforms have been dragged down. “The system itself is embedded in a history of inconsistencies, especially political, financial, and societal problems; political, given the sectoral nature of the country and the differing ideologies and agendas from one minister’s term to the next.”

Pioneering insight led the government to pass forward-looking laws in 2011, but it lacks vision for preschool education, understanding of its importance compared with other levels of education, and attention to pre-primary education. This lack of awareness has resulted in lack of strategy, planning, quality, funding, and capacity-building, as well as low levels of learning and participation in public ECE in Lebanon.

SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

Before the crisis, a committee of experts convened to develop the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 conducted a Systems Approach for Better Education Results analysis, which found general system ineffectiveness in early childhood.⁴⁹ It examined several governmental factors: ministries concerned with early childhood, supporting government policies, departments and programs in other ministries, legislation, and child-friendly government budgets.

The multistakeholder, multisectoral development process of the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 prioritized recommendations for education-sector interventions. Key recommendations were expansive, from establishing systematic and documented systems to professionalizing the status of teachers, to revising curriculum. The full set of recommendations is available.⁵⁰

Around 2017, a World Bank partnership supported the government’s effort to improve children’s school readiness by five measures⁵¹:

1. Increasing the percentage of children enrolled in public KGs between the ages three and five years
2. Increasing access to quality education by upgrading the physical infrastructure of ECE (KGs and preschool sections in existing schools)
3. Enhancing the curriculum and learning resources for ECE consistent with national needs and global trends

4. Initiating a specialized program of professional development for ECE teachers and staff
5. Improving family awareness and active involvement in ECE.

In 2021, UNICEF was prioritizing ECE by mapping related programs and conducting internal and external interviews with key stakeholders. The objective of these efforts was to prepare a strategic recommendation paper to advise UNICEF's country office on quality interventions, entry points, and implemented programs for ECE within Lebanon. UNICEF was also seeking to create more integrated services around early childhood centers. This intervention in ECE is situated in UNICEF Lebanon's early-child-development operational multisectoral integrated framework, which looks strategically across programs.

ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT

Pre-primary education in Lebanon is free but not compulsory.⁵² Most pre-primary education in Lebanon is private, serving primarily the Lebanese population. Civil society nonformal ECE is the vehicle used for reaching Syrian children and refugees from other origins. Public pre-primary education has served as a space to accommodate lower-income Lebanese children as well as Syrian children if they manage to overcome barriers to enrollment. In 2010, 80 percent of pre-primary enrollment was private,⁵³ and as of 2019 precrisis figures, private pre-primary enrollment was 74.9 percent.⁵⁴

In terms of public pre-primary education, Lebanon's MEHE has 45 early childhood centers, most of which are attached to public primary schools. Of the 962 public primary schools, 805 offer pre-primary education, with a total of 2,983 classes across all three levels of KG in 2021 and an average student-teacher ratio of 40.⁵⁵ However, schools in some locations do not serve the early childhood range, and in many schools there are limited seats available for learners ages three to five years (or principals decline to enroll Syrians even when spots are available).⁵⁶ ECE theoretically starts at age three, but in 2017 a study found that not one of thirty-one public schools with KG1 and KG2 classes had even one nursery class.⁵⁷

Before the multiple crises of the past several years, as of 2017 Lebanon's enrollment rate in pre-primary education was among the highest in the Middle East, at 85.9 percent.⁵⁸ However, this figure hid inequities in that higher wealth quintiles had almost 100 percent enrollment rates, compared with extremely low rates among lower socioeconomic quintiles.⁵⁹ The 1994 plan for education reform expanded pre-primary education to three years of schooling and preempted a significant increase in enrollment rates.⁶⁰

The current Lebanon Five Year General Education Plan 2021–2025 aims to move from 50 percent enrollment to above 90 percent in vulnerable areas by 2025.⁶¹ The target remains high, despite the devastating crises that have shifted enrollment trends, with high dropout rates and large-scale shifting from private to public education. Therefore, current data on access and quality are not comprehensively available. But data shows that by 2021, there were nearly as many non-Lebanese as Lebanese children enrolled in the public system.⁶² Despite high enrollment nationally, less than 10 percent of refugee children ages three to five years were enrolled in public pre-primary education in 2016,⁶³ compared with 40 percent of Syrian primary-age children enrolled in primary school and 10 percent of Syrian secondary-age children enrolled in 2019.⁶⁴ The majority of Syrian children who attend pre-primary are enrolled through civil-society provision. In 2015, 400,000 Syrian children from ages three to eighteen years old remained out of school, yet consequent progress in enrolling Syrian children has been limited to the primary level.⁶⁵

The small proportion of children in school at age three to five years reduces the beneficial effects of pre-primary education on the system and will probably result in higher costs later on arising from remedial education and repetition in later grades.⁶⁶ Population subsets with lower participation in pre-primary education will likely have higher dropout rates, lowering Lebanon's GDP and labor productivity. In addition, when vast numbers of Syrian children are prevented from entering at pre-primary age, this deepens inequity, division, and potential for later crime and instability, from a huge youth population without solid education or employment.

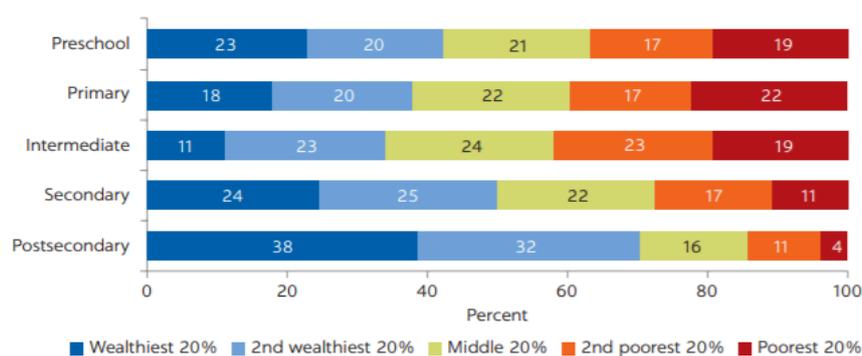
EQUITY

Lebanon's system is highly inequitable, with children of poorer households at significantly increased risk of dropping out or achieving lower learning outcomes.⁶⁷ Lebanon's highest- and lowest-status socioeconomic groups have the largest student-performance gap in the Middle East and North Africa.⁶⁸ Low education levels correlate with levels of poverty in Lebanon; citizens with a tertiary education are four times less likely to be poor than those whose education stopped at the primary level.⁶⁹ This trend is accentuated in the gaps between private and public education, with 71 percent private enrollment reported in 2020 and 60 percent private enrollment reported in 2021.⁷⁰ Lebanon ranks in the top 2 percent on the globe in terms of the private-sector share of student enrollment.⁷¹ In 2021 it was reported, based on precrisis data, that the public system enrolled only 29 percent of Lebanese students. Inequity in quality is a major concern, since public-school students score significantly lower than their private-school peers.⁷² A twenty-six-point difference in achievement exists between private and public schools; sixteen of these points are attributable to school quality, whereas ten of these points are attributable to student socio-economic status.⁷³

With the plummeting economy, more Lebanese are unable to pay for private school and are enrolling in public school. Inability to pay private-school fees caused 50,000 additional Lebanese students to transfer to public schools in 2021.⁷⁴ By 2021, 10 percent of the entire student population had migrated from the private to the public system.⁷⁵ Therefore, while public schools undergo rapid expansion in enrollment, they are serving as baskets to catch those who are struggling.⁷⁶

At the primary-school level, almost half of all over-age children are from the poorest quintile—evidence of late enrollment or high repetition among the poorest children.⁷⁷ Before the crisis, however, pre-primary education was among the most equitable of all levels (Figure 2).⁷⁸ According to the data, compared with other levels of education, pre-primary enrollment education was more equitable and fairly distributed across the wealth quintiles, with less extreme gaps between disadvantaged and higher-income children.⁷⁹

Figure 2. Composition of Each School Level by Socioeconomic Quintile



Source: Calculations using CAS (database), Household-based Survey 2011–2012, Central Administration of Statistics, Beirut, <http://www.cas.gov.lb/index.php/demographic-and-social-en/householdexpenditure-en>. Note: Wealth quintiles defined by asset index. Levels include corresponding vocational and technical programs. The total for each bar is not equal to 100 percent because percentages have been rounded. CAS = Central Administration of Statistics.

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These precrisis trends in equity in the three-to-five-year age range were promising. Some stakeholders assert that the equity is greater because refugee children ages three to five are not expected to work. Since refugee older children and parents are at risk of detention at police check posts for inspection of residency and legal documentation,⁸⁰ parents are more likely to send younger children to work as early as age seven.⁸¹ Therefore, early enrollment at age three in pre-primary education could be the most valuable or only exposure to education if economics forces children to work and leave primary school at very early ages.

These promising precrisis data mask the fact that massive new entrants to the system, Syrian refugees, are being denied access to public pre-primary education. Key informants on the ground questioned the assertion of pre-primary equity. Restrictions on birth certificates, residency, widespread bias, overcrowding, proof of graduation from a nonformal program, distance, cost of transport, inability to pay fees and costs, and other barriers prevent Syrian children from enrolling in pre-primary education.⁸² Key informants noted that pre-primary-age children, especially Syrians, are regularly denied access. They attest to Syrian children trying to enroll three years in a row and never being admitted to public pre-primary school until they have passed the three-to-six-year age range. Key informants also reported that in first grade in public school, children of non-Lebanese origin are subjected to additional scrutiny in that they are required to take an exam to transition from nonformal ECE, while Lebanese ECE-age children do not need to sit for any examination. Therefore, research may be necessary to learn how the situation of inequity today differs from earlier periods.

There are no clear data on the number of children with disabilities in Lebanon or the number of children with disabilities in school,⁸³ and there is a particular dearth of data at the pre-primary level. While 8,558 children with disabilities between five and fourteen years old have registered their disability status with the government, Human Rights Watch has extrapolated from World Health Organization, UNICEF, and World Bank data on global incidence of disability that at least 45,000 children in Lebanon may have disabilities.⁸⁴ Only 3,806 are registered in government-funded institutions, and there are no consolidated data for public and private schools. No data could be ascertained on disability enrollment or prevalence in pre-primary education.⁸⁵

Laws exist to protect children with disabilities, including a right to education and freedom from discrimination. A progressive law passed in 2000 guaranteed right to education, rehabilitation

services, employment, medical services, sports, and access to public transport and other facilities.⁸⁶ However, children with disabilities have been excluded from public schools due to lack of a disability card, discriminatory admission policies, lack of accommodations, lack of trained staff, lack of curricula or programming for special-needs children, fear of lower quality for nondisabled children, discriminatory fees, and inability to pay expenses for children with disabilities.⁸⁷

In 2017, despite there being no clear procedure on how to register children with disabilities or include children with disabilities in schools, reform efforts at that time included: “1. Exempting children in public schools from 1st–2nd grade from paying registration fees 2. Building infrastructure including 62 schools to accommodate 40,000 students (funded by World Bank) 3. Developing new guidelines to equip schools with handicap accessible physical space (classrooms, indoor and outdoor spaces) to accommodate children with disabilities 4. Increasing government contribution to semi-private schools for each student, since they cater for the largest special needs populations.”⁸⁸

Another area of equity is language of instruction. Lebanon has a trilingual system of Arabic, French, and English, and French and English become mandatory for math and science after primary school.⁸⁹ Arabic speaking refugee children from neighboring countries have trouble adapting and learning when Lebanese schools offer content in English or French. The language of instruction used at the pre-primary level in Lebanon may differ according to the educational institution. For example, a Muslim religious school may use Arabic, a Christian missionary school institution may use French or English, and a public pre-primary school may use French or English. Equity and inclusion in pre-primary education is a key theme in the current five-year plan,⁹⁰ so ample opportunity exists to prioritize this area between now and 2025.

QUALITY

Provision of high-quality ECE by the national system is a key area prioritized in the current five-year plan, and plans are delineated for a quality assurance mechanism.⁹¹ This builds on continuity from the RACE II national education strategy, where the MEHE has prioritized quality, stipulating that Lebanon should “implement systemic and holistic interventions that address both the demand for, and the availability of, quality public education services” for both Lebanese and non-Lebanese families.⁹² Additionally, the national philosophy, culture, and legislation to extend social services and to provide basic education provide a firm foundation for quality pre-primary education.⁹³ Education is a source of national pride and receives resounding support from multiple levels of the societal and political spectrums.⁹⁴ There are also diverse providers of pre-primary education, which can create a climate for coalitions, collaboration, and healthy competition.⁹⁵

However, the quality of education has been reduced by overcrowding, shorter school hours in the second afternoon shift, and strains on school and teaching resources.⁹⁶ Lebanese children attend a morning session of school, called KG, and a session called ECE Prep is held in the afternoon with afternoon shifts for Syrian pre-primary children. The afternoon session was opened specifically to accommodate large volumes of Syrian refugee new entrants into the education system. Yet, shorter hours are offered in the afternoon session and contract teachers are not necessarily willing or available to teach in the afternoon, which escalates systemic inequity in quality of education available to Syrian populations. If this trend continues from pre-primary to higher grades, this could escalate youth unemployment and unrest and threaten social cohesion.

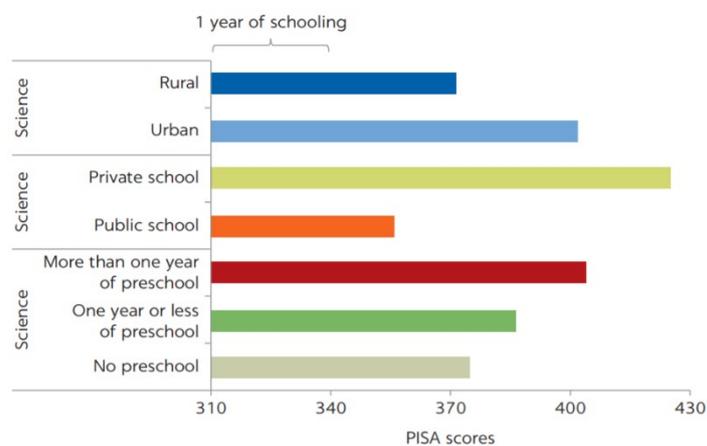
Quality across programs in pre-primary education is uneven,⁹⁷ and little learning is happening. The impact of a low-quality learning environment can be detected in early grades. An early grade reading assessment showed no difference in performance in reading between preschool attendees and

nonattendees.⁹⁸ This contrasts with data patterns in other countries, where pre-primary attendees frequently outperform other learners.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Despite the low quality of pre-primary education, its effects may be seen in long-term outcomes of Lebanon’s adolescents. While quality at all levels of education is low, there is a differential effect of preschool on science outcomes of Lebanese adolescents taking the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam (Figure 3).⁹⁹ PISA precrisis (2015) scores show that youth in Lebanon who had attended one year of preschool outperformed those with no preschool, and youth who had attended two years of preschool outperformed both other groups. This finding is consistent with global trends that demonstrate that adolescence is a time when investments in early childhood begin popping out and becoming markedly clear, indicating an effect of fade-up, not fade-out, of pre-primary education. Across large-scale country data sets, PISA outcomes demonstrate that preschool attendees have stronger academic outcomes at age fifteen.¹⁰⁰ This trend carries across context and country. However, in Lebanon in the past decade, the very high proportion of private enrollment in preschool may have an even greater association with higher economic status. This is consistent with cross-country PISA findings showing that ECE is associated with improved learning outcomes. However, children enrolled in ECE (in the mid-2000s) who took the PISA in 2015, reflect a subset of the population whose children were enrolled in ECE at a time when a smaller percent of children in Lebanon were enrolled in ECE than today. Those families with children in ECE in the mid-2000s were more often from higher socioeconomic status families, i.e., greater parental educational attainment, than the more diverse enrollment of children in ECE today. Therefore, these data are directional, but dated and cannot be disentangled from other relevant variables that impact learning outcomes.¹⁰¹

Figure 3. Lebanon Program for International Student Assessment 2015 Scores in Science by School Profile



Source: World Bank 2016.
Note: PISA = Program for International Student Assessment.

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The population-level data across countries did not show that preschool participation reduces economic inequity; they simply showed the persistence of differences that were present by age two to three, before preschool entry.¹⁰² Therefore, if a pre-primary intervention intends to use preschool participation to improve economic inequity between groups, it would need to follow on to interventions that start much earlier in the life cycle, and it would need to layer investment in

preschool with other programs that directly address maternal and child health, family economic well-being, violence reduction, and positive parenting in the household. Such an intervention would reduce economic inequity and improve learning and development. An investment in pre-primary education without linkage to other interventions would create output numbers in terms of higher enrollment and possible increases in learning outcomes, but would not significantly affect economic inequity, long-term life outcomes, or long-term economic productivity and human-capital outcomes of preschool attendees as adults.

FINDINGS

SQ1: WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD QUALITY IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION?

WHAT IS PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION?

Pre-primary education is organized learning preceding entry into formal education. USAID defines pre-primary education as “any group-based, organized instruction and can be school- or community-based. While programs may look different across contexts, considering schedules, learning models, settings, or other features, all pre-primary programming focuses on early learning. Content covered often includes emergent literacy and numeracy, social and emotional, and physical skills.”¹⁰³ Pre-primary education is sometimes referred to as kindergarten, KG, preschool, early child education (ECE), early learning, and other terms.

USAID defines quality pre-primary education as comprising strong teacher-child relationships, play-based learning approaches, individualized and inclusive instruction, and an attention to holistic development.¹⁰⁴

WHY INVEST IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION?

The impact of pre-primary education is now globally recognized, with studies in Philippines, Argentina, Bangladesh, and the United States showing standard deviations of 0.1 to 0.43 on cognitive ability as learners.¹⁰⁵ Pre-primary education has been demonstrated to correlate with increased academic success, lower grade repetition, lower dropout rate, and higher lifetime education attainment.¹⁰⁶ Across the life cycle, pre-primary attendees are more likely to be employed as adults, gain higher income, be more law-abiding, and have better overall physical and mental health.¹⁰⁷ Beyond individual benefits, pre-primary participation enhances education system efficiency, particularly in the areas of dropout rate and grade repetition.¹⁰⁸ Investing in pre-primary education is not a threat to the budget of primary, secondary, or higher education. Rather it is an early input into greater efficiency of resource use at higher levels of education. At the societal level, increasing preschool enrollment to between 25 percent and 50 percent in developing countries would, based on rates of return on education estimates (which are dependent on enrollment rate and discount rate), generate benefit-cost ratio between 6.4 and 17.6, illustrating a significant economic return to investments in pre-primary education.¹⁰⁹

James Heckman, a Nobel laureate economist, has calculated a 13 percent rate of return in lifetime income on high-quality early (birth to five years old) education.¹¹⁰ Investments in the early years equate to large gains in GDP. For example, Madagascar risks loss of 12.7 percent of GDP if it does not invest in preschool, nutrition, and home visiting of its young children.¹¹¹ The lost GDP from not investing in the early years is several times more than what some countries expend on their entire health or education national budgets. Even pausing preschool enrollment for just six months brings an estimated 3.38 percent loss in GDP in upper-middle-income countries.¹¹² Ministries of finance across the globe are now shifting funding to invest in early childhood, including pre-primary education, as a path toward greater human-capital and economic growth and enhanced efficiency in spending across sectors.

WHY DOES QUALITY IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION MATTER?

The world has seen a marked increase in school participation in recent decades, with greater numbers of children in school than ever before.¹¹³ However, one key lesson learned from the

Education for All global movement is that quality and access must progress in tandem.¹¹⁴ Low quality, particularly in the early years of education, depresses demand, wastes resources, and does not close the learning gap for disadvantaged children.¹¹⁵

These rationales establish the basis for investing in quality pre-primary education as an investment in quality and efficiency across the entire education system.¹¹⁶ Quality standards in pre-primary education, such as supportive coaching of teachers, robust quality assurance, focus on holistic learning outcomes, and use of data to inform decision-making, all set a precedent that influences later educational patterns and learning uptake.¹¹⁷ Because participation in quality pre-primary education is correlated with children persisting in later schooling¹¹⁸ and because participation in pre-primary education reduces later costs of addressing poor learning outcomes, prioritizing quality pre-primary education strengthens the entire education system.¹¹⁹ Not only must pre-primary education be recognized, supported, and funded on a basis similar to those of other education subsectors,¹²⁰ but also the quality of pre-primary must be elevated and prioritized as a core strategy for enhancing learning outcomes across all levels of education.

WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD QUALITY IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION?

Quality is a complex concept—the sum of many inputs, components, and processes. Financing is often viewed as the greatest barrier to quality.¹²¹ However, increased budget allocations will not always translate into improved learning outcomes. Even after adequate financing is secured, human resources, public administration, and issues specific to each local context may hamper quality pre-primary education and improved learning outcomes.¹²² Indeed, recent experiences have shown that clear vision, clear planning, and concrete system building presuppose infusion of finance. Quality of provision is not necessarily determined by provider type, but rather by country context, policy environment,¹²³ and other factors in the ecosystem of the pre-primary education subsector.

Enhancing the quality of pre-primary education requires a systems approach.¹²⁴ Reaching quality is not an overnight transformation, but rather a progressive, gradual process of advancement toward a shared vision for quality pre-primary education.¹²⁵ By investing in quality in tandem with the growth of the system, stakeholders can find a balance between expanding reach and coverage while maintaining quality,¹²⁶ rather than expanding reach and then grappling with quality issues later.

USAID's Center for Education has noted systematic meta-analyses that show that comprehensive, multisectoral programs that combine such areas as ECE, cognitive stimulation, nutrition, and parenting education show higher impact on children than single-focus programs, covering just one area of child development, such as education.¹²⁷

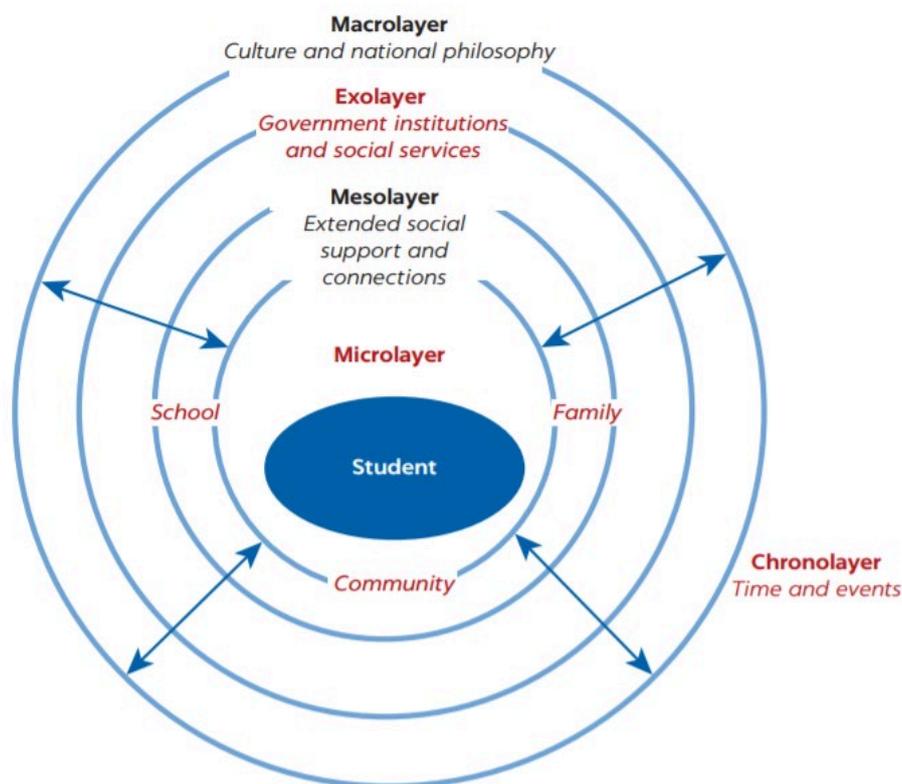
Pre-primary education serves as a bridge between the child's home environment and participation in formal primary education.¹²⁸ The child is situated within concentric environs, each of which affects the quality of pre-primary education. Together, these environs make up an ecosystem of pre-primary education.

The ability of a young child to learn is intimately associated with other aspects of the child's well-being. Mental health and psychosocial well-being are increasingly associated with student development and learning outcomes.¹²⁹ Indicators of well-being, such as food intake, access to health services, family economic status, legal registration status, and child protection support, all show up in children's learning and development milestones.

An analysis of the political economy of Lebanon’s education system refers to the ecology of the system centered on the child, based on Bronfenbrenner’s model (Figure 4).¹³⁰ Five layers around the child shape the child’s development and interactions with the education system:

1. Microlayer: systems and institutions around the child, the first being the institution of the family, as well as the school and the community
2. Mesolayer: extended social support and connections through interactions family, schools, community, and faith context
3. Exolayer: government institutions and delivery of services, including the education system, the health system, the protection system, water and sanitation systems and others
4. Macrolayer: the wider context, including culture, national values, and national philosophies, as well as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, political context and other elements of the wider context
5. Chronolayer: events and transitions over the life span of the individual, which could include wars, conflict, refugee crises, political upheavals, economic stability, and periods of sustained progress

Figure 4. Ecology of an Education System Centered on the Child: Bronfenbrenner Layers



Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner 2009.

Reproduced from: Husein Abdul-Hamid and Mohamed Yassine, *Political Economy of Education in Lebanon: Research for Results Program* (World Bank, 2020), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33369>.

The following inputs, conditions and factors in the components of the ecosystems around the child make for good quality in pre-primary education:

CONDUCTIVE CONTEXT

- A context that protects children, as well as those who support children (caregivers, teachers, civil servants) from exposure to conflict, from extremes of wealth and poverty, from political upheaval, and from other environmental threats
- An economy that generates enough governmental revenue for the government to compensate its service providers adequately and for families to meet basic needs

WELL-FUNCTIONING SYSTEM

- An operational system of civil service, with policies and processes that function
- An education system that values pre-primary education as the first building block of learning
- An education system that adequately prepares human capacity
- An education system that adequately compensates its pre-primary teaching force
- An education system that encompasses cognitive learning as well as psychosocial and broader holistic learning outcomes at the pre-primary level
- An education system with robust quality-assurance mechanisms covering both public and private provision of pre-primary education that monitors progress; develops clear, consistent standards; and uses data to inform decision-making¹³¹
- Systems of protection that buffer children, families, and teachers from violence, economic stress and other forms of adversity

SCHOOLS THAT PRIORITIZE AND SUPPORT PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

- School leaders who prioritize pre-primary education
- Schools that support, coach, and mentor teachers' growth, development, and good performance
- Schools that track and monitor progress on quality-assurance standards
- Schools that provide safe spaces, conducive to learning

CLASSROOMS CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING

- Schools and classrooms that are free from safety hazards, such as pollution, disrepair, lack of water, and poor sanitation
- Classrooms that are free from violence or threats to teachers and students
- Classrooms with adequate and accessible space for participating children
- Classrooms that contain age-appropriate materials for play-based early learning
- Curricula that are based on age-appropriate milestones, play-based early learning, and national early learning and development standards, as opposed to overly academic approaches to pre-primary education

TEACHERS PREPARED TO ENGAGE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN:

- Teachers who have a minimum level of well-being themselves to interact with young children
- Teachers who have a minimum level of education and life preparation to be ready to teach young children
- Quality professional development that prepares teachers to engage in high-quality interaction with children, through playful, child-centered, age-appropriate pedagogy

CHILDREN WHO ARE READY TO LEARN

- Children who have been protected from violence, poverty, instability, conflict and other forms of adversity
- Children who have been primed for learning, through high-quality interaction with other adults and youth in their lives
- Pre-primary education accessible to all (including children with disabilities)

FAMILIES WHO ARE ENGAGED

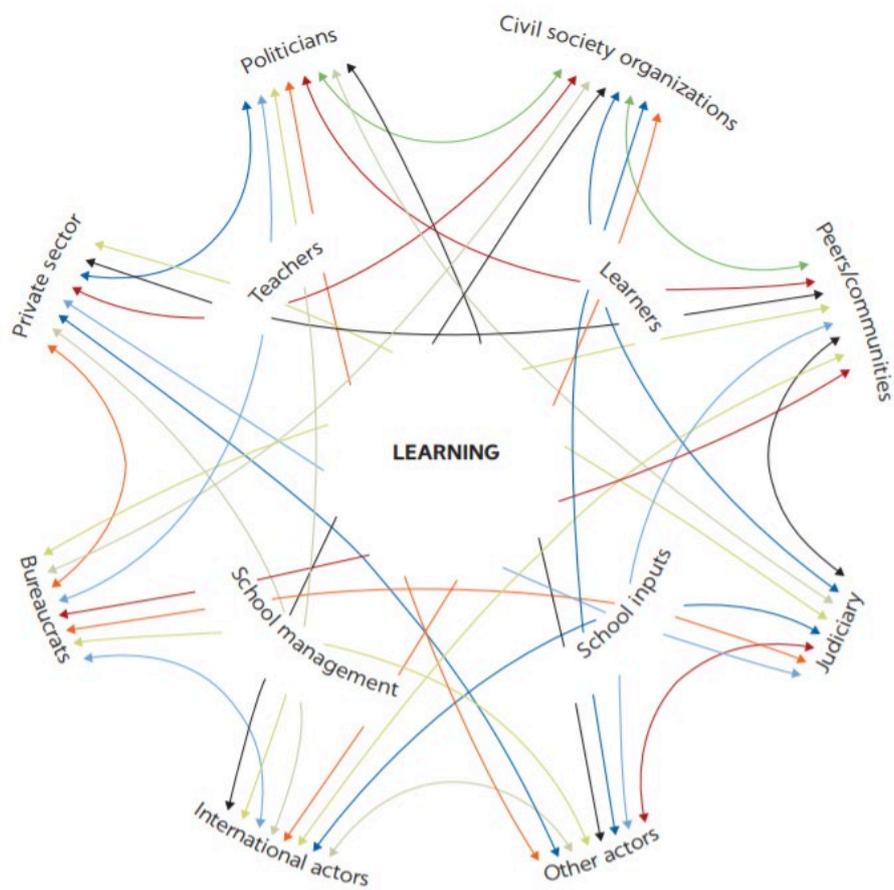
- Families with enough support to buffer adversity and stress in the home environment, from preconception through timing of entry into pre-primary education
- Families who engage children in learning and stimulating interaction outside the school environment
- Families who work in partnership with the school to promote high-quality interaction with children
- Families who are able to access wraparound support and services, such as counselors, nutrition and health services, parenting classes, home visits, activities to do at home, and early screening for children with disabilities

COMMUNITIES THAT ARE SUPPORTIVE

- Communities supportive and appreciative of early education
- Communities actively engaged in the promotion of children's learning and well-being learning spaces
- Communities that protect children's safety
- Communities that facilitate access to service and support for children and families

Figure 5 shows how stakeholders in Lebanon's education ecosystem influence and interact with one another to affect child learning outcomes.

Figure 5. Stakeholders in an Education System



Source: World Bank 2018.

Reproduced from: Husein Abdul-Hamid and Mohamed Yassine, *Political Economy of Education in Lebanon: Research for Results Program* (World Bank, 2020), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33369>.

SQ2: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE LEBANON CONTEXT?

This section compares components of high-quality ECE, as were outlined in [SQI findings](#), with the current state of ECE in Lebanon. The key findings related to the first two components, conducive context and well-functioning system, are summarized below, with related background information already covered in the Introduction, above. Aspects of the current Lebanese context and education system specific to other components, schools, classrooms, teachers, children, families, and communities are detailed below (rather than under context or systems) to avoid repetition.

CONDUCTIVE CONTEXT

The current operating context can make for, or hinder, the provision of high-quality pre-primary education. Building on the context detailed in the Introduction, the following points summarize the key aspects of high-quality pre-primary education and the current operating context in Lebanon:

- A context that protects children, as well as those who support children (caregivers, teachers, civil servants) from exposure to conflict, from extremes of wealth and poverty, from political upheaval, and from other environmental threats
 - *Lebanese context:* There is a historical tradition of national culture, philosophy, and policy that values education, but the current context exposes children to violence, extremes of wealth and poverty, political upheaval, parental stress, and breakdowns in public-system service delivery breakdown.
- An economy that generates enough governmental revenue for the government to adequately compensate its service providers and for families to meet basic needs
 - *Lebanese context:* Parents and teachers are unable to earn a wage that supports the basic costs of living. This results in teachers not being able to afford transport to the school site, teachers who must engage in other activities during school hours to earn subsistence funds, and parents who are not able to make any nonfood expenditures.

WELL-FUNCTIONING SYSTEM

For high-quality pre-primary education, the educational system must function well. System quality usually follows system stability. It is not usually possible to effect quality across a system when it is in crisis. Therefore, increased quality in pre-primary education is intertwined with overall stability and greater effectiveness of the education system.

The key components of a well-functioning system and the current case in Lebanon are summarized below:

- An operational system of civil service, with policies and processes that function
 - *Lebanese context:* The system is challenged with operations and policies that may be hampered by lack of inter-entity coordination, bureaucracy, centralized decision-making, or political interference.
- An education system that values pre-primary education as the first building block of learning
 - *Lebanese context:* Pre-primary education is not given priority, but rather is subsumed into the larger system, with little visibility and attention.

- An education system that adequately prepares human capacity
 - *Lebanese context:* The system has a high volume of contract teachers, a low proportion of university graduates, little linkage between preservice and in-service training, and little in-service linkage between training and mentoring.
- An education system that adequately compensates its pre-primary teaching force
 - *Lebanese context:* Teacher salaries have been devalued from the equivalent of 13 USD to 1 USD per hour.¹³² (No census has been conducted since 1932, but it is estimated that 82 percent of the population is have fallen below the poverty line.¹³³)
- An education system that encompasses cognitive learning as well as psychosocial and broader holistic learning outcomes at the pre-primary level
 - *Lebanese context:* Parental appreciation of sports and arts serves as a precursor to public acceptance of holistic education, yet there is a strong tendency to favor overly academic outcomes.
- An education system with a robust quality-assurance mechanisms covering both public and private pre-primary provision that monitors progress; develops clear, consistent standards; and uses data to inform decision-making¹³⁴
 - *Lebanese context:* Well-functioning quality-assurance and accountability systems are lacking, and there is no communication, coordination, or information sharing among preservice training, in-service training, in-school monitoring, and teacher promotion.
- Systems of protection that buffer children, families and teachers from violence, economic stress, and other forms of adversity
 - *Lebanese context:* Some psychosocial-support counselors are available, but there is not a consistent, coordinated system for protecting and buffering children from adversity.

SCHOOLS THAT PRIORITIZE AND SUPPORT PRE-PRIMARY

This section addresses what school factors make for high-quality pre-primary education, what is happening in Lebanon, and how a conducive environment compares with the Lebanese context. Additional details are provided, expanding on the general overview of the context and system in Lebanon provided in the Introduction.

EDUCATION SYSTEM PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Key informants reported that the MEHE needs support in developing strong child protection policies for Lebanese students, refugee students, and other vulnerable populations.¹³⁵ Further details on protection issues are denoted below, as they relate to schools, children, and families. RACE II sought to integrate human rights, child rights, and child protection into education interventions,¹³⁶ and the Lebanon Five Year General Education Plan 2021–2025 continues a focus on equity and retention of vulnerable groups.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Principals do not receive special training in school leadership. Key informants shared how they are often regarded not as principals or school directors, but rather as “teachers who handle a few additional responsibilities.” Within this environment, principals are not aware of specialized pre-

primary training or content, do not support teachers to improve performance, and may not even be monitoring pre-primary teacher participation. This gap in management has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 where schools stopped functioning or went remote. Twenty percent of Lebanese students attend schools with moderate to severe disciplinary problems, such as absenteeism, classroom disturbance, cheating, profanity, bullying, vandalism, theft, verbal abuse, and physical injury.¹³⁷ This contrasts with international rates of 11 percent of students attending schools with such harmful elements.¹³⁸ Because many KGs are collocated inside schools, rather than in separate or protected spaces, there is no buffer to protect age-three-to-five children from the ills affecting older students. Immersion in such a school environment directly affects both learning and student well-being, with proportionally greater effects on the toxic stress levels of very young children.

SCHOOL PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Schools and classrooms are often dilapidated and ill-maintained; some children need to pass exposed wires to reach their classrooms.¹³⁹ The Central Bank of Lebanon has set limits on the funds that schools can withdraw. Some principals could not withdraw more than 110 USD per month in 2021.¹⁴⁰ “There is no electricity, there is no internet, there is no money,” said one principal. Even fuel and janitors’ wages could not be covered, despite 1.2 billion USD from donors from 2017 to 2021.¹⁴¹

VIOLENCE

Key informants reported high proliferation of violence in schools for children aged three to five. They also noted a lack of official data collection, but affirmed incidences of violence toward young children in schools and around school gates. Types of violence include systematic beating, insults, harassment, and kidnapping. Key informants reported, “There are no boundaries for slapping and hitting children.” Young children cannot report, so mothers speak on the behalf of the children, and parents are attacked by school principals when they report high levels of discrimination toward Syrians by school staff. Key informants reported that in one case, “a preschool teacher would beat [a Syrian refugee] child and put him outside the school gate. Someone kidnapped the child. Parents and relatives went looking for the child and they were beaten up by the headmaster when they wanted to complain.” Even before the crisis, teachers condoned and implemented corporal punishment in the classroom. In one case a teacher commented, “It is unfortunate that the Minister banned the policy of corporal punishment because I think it works best in disciplining the children because most of them belong to political parties.” Despite existing policies, corporal punishment is still rampant and policies are not enforced, particularly for vulnerable and refugee students.

Across age groups, children’s experience of verbal and physical violence at schools exceeds international averages, nearly 20 percent of Lebanese students experiencing verbal or physical violence on a weekly basis, compared with 8 percent of students internationally.¹⁴² Children face violence at school inflicted both by school personnel and by peers, in the forms of bullying and corporal punishment.¹⁴³ Sixty-three percent of children are bullied, with boys at higher rates than girls, children in poorer areas and in high-refugee-density areas experience more violence, and 32 percent of children as young as age five experience peer-to-peer violence.

Children’s experience of violence in the school environment affects their learning. Many children cite violence as the reason for dropping out of school. The difference in education attainment between students never bullied and those bullied once per week is equal to one year of formal education. Recent research found that by the time Lebanese students reached grade 8, those who experienced violence on a weekly basis scored an average of 412 on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, in contrast to 456 among students who had never experienced violence.¹⁴⁴ The Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education Improvement (QITABI) 2 project has

collaborated with MEHE departments to strengthen capacity in psychosocial support, but this has not been scaled and has not been brought to the age range of the three-to-five-year-old learning. The MEHE needs support in developing and expanding programs that tackle violence and bullying in schools, in providing transport to distant schools, and in opening more schools in areas of high refugee density.

DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL

Children in poorer areas and refugee areas generally live farther from schools, making them more likely to drop out, with rates rising from 15.32 percent to 35.71 percent as distance increases.¹⁴⁵ Factors that increase the likelihood of dropping out due to distance include need to pay for vehicular transport, unsafe walking conditions, and necessity of adults to walk through police checkpoints on the way to school.

Summarizing the key factors related to high quality pre-primary schools and the current status of these markers in the Lebanese context:

- School leaders that prioritize pre-primary education
 - *Lebanese context:* School principals lack specialized training and preparation in how to lead schools and in understanding concepts of developmentally appropriate pre-primary education and how to support quality pre-primary education.
- Schools that support, coach, and mentor teachers' growth, development, and good performance
 - *Lebanese context:* Various entities (e.g., school principals, the MEHE, CERD, the Lebanese University) are slated conduct classroom observations and mentoring, but may not necessarily engage in teacher mentoring with continuity, and not in areas related to pre-primary education or teacher training.
- Schools that track and monitor progress on quality-assurance standards
 - *Lebanese context:* Schools lack of a system for tracking and monitoring progress (including at school level, between training and monitoring functions, between in-service and preservice, and between school management and teacher promotion systems).
- Schools that provide safe spaces, conducive to learning
 - *Lebanese context:* Some school environments expose children to violence and harassment, leading to poorer learning outcomes and higher dropout levels among vulnerable populations.

CLASSROOMS CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING

This section addresses what factors inside the classroom make for high-quality pre-primary education, what is happening in Lebanon, and the comparison of a conducive environment with the Lebanese context.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The overall classroom environment in public pre-primary seems poor, with antiquated pedagogical techniques. Key informants described public pre-primary teaching as “a blackboard sort of setting with a teacher and stick in a hand.”

CONTENT

Lebanon's curriculum, at all levels of education, is centered more on subject matter rather than competencies or skills, with the last curriculum update occurring in 1997.¹⁴⁶ Lebanon's pedagogical standards are not learner centered, nor do they contain life skills or a gender lens.¹⁴⁷ Key informants both within and outside of government structures noted that the curriculum is not suitable for young children: It is complicated and based on memorization, without any sort of extracurricular or holistic activities. Many NGOs use their own curricula for nonformal education and weave in the government's curriculum. In 2020/21, the government reduced its curriculum by 50 percent, and in 2021/22 it reduced it by 50 percent again (due to teacher strikes and inability to compensate teachers).¹⁴⁸ Efforts are currently under way by a coalition of individuals from the Lebanese University, the Higher Council for Childhood and other entities engaged in forming a national platform on children age three to five, to suggest new curricular pre-primary revisions, but these efforts need support to pass through political processes. Any intervention to enhance quality should align, dovetail, and collaborate with curricular efforts being advanced by internal stakeholders. Specific suggestions for how USAID interventions can align with ongoing stakeholder efforts are detailed in SQ3 and [Annex I](#).

SHIFTS

Across all levels of education, only 14 percent of Syrian refugees are in classes with Lebanese students. The morning shift caters to 88 percent Lebanese enrollment (with 9 percent Syrian and 3 percent Palestinian),¹⁴⁹ whereas the second shift of schooling is devoted primarily to refugee populations.¹⁵⁰ KG occurs in the morning, and the afternoon session targeting Syrian pre-primary children is called ECE Prep. Key informants reported that classrooms are overcrowded.

Summarizing the key factors related to high quality pre-primary classrooms in the context of Lebanon:

- Classrooms (and schools) that are free from safety hazards, such as pollution, disrepair, lack of water, and poor sanitation
 - *Lebanese context:* Infrastructure is generally good, but there is some disrepair, in particular in the area of the Port of Beirut explosion.
- Classrooms that are free from violence or threats to teachers and students
 - *Lebanese context:* There is a high level of exposure to violence, harassment and bullying en route to school, corporal punishment is used in the school context, and there are extraordinarily high levels of discrimination and violence toward children of non-Lebanese origin.
- Classrooms with adequate and accessible space for participating children
 - *Lebanese context:* Classrooms are crowded. There are low pupil-teacher ratios in the system, but there are massive shortages of seats available for the early childhood learners, and many refugee children are denied entry. Only 805 of 962 schools offer KG sections. Many learning spaces are not adapted to be developmentally appropriate and safe for pre-primary-age children.

- Classrooms that contain age-appropriate materials for play-based early learning
 - *Lebanese context:* Classrooms are not equipped for early childhood, in some locations there are dangers and hazards, and play materials are locked in closets even after school distribution.
- Curricula that are based on age-appropriate milestones, play-based early learning, and national early learning and development standards, as opposed to overly academic approaches to pre-primary education
 - *Lebanese context:* Curricula have not been revised in many years, and they lack a play-based approach. Curricular reform efforts are under way. There is a need for parallel curriculum reform at early education levels, and there is a need for support to those pushing curriculum reform within the system.

TEACHERS PREPARED TO ENGAGE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

This section frames the current issues related to teachers in terms of teaching goals, teacher preparation, teacher salary, teacher value, teacher transfer, professional development, teacher support, and teachers' ability to support children experiencing adversity.

NATIONAL TEACHING GOALS

The Five-Year Plan specifically contains objectives to improve the quality of the ECE learning environment and ensure inclusive and effective school leadership and a qualified ECE workforce.¹⁵¹ The complete list of strategies is delineated in [Annex I](#). The RACE II strategy additionally contains output goals that are directly tied to quality in pre-primary education:

Output Goal 1: Teachers and educational personnel have improved capacities to provide learner-centered teaching in formal schools or non-formal spaces

Output Goal 2: Educational personnel at the school level are enabled and empowered to provide safe and enabling learning environments

TEACHER SALARY

Currently, professionally educated teachers are not being attracted into public education because compensation does not cover basic needs, benefits are limited, there is little professional support, infrastructure is declining, and employment security is low. The value of teachers' salaries has drastically declined with inflation, and teachers commenced an open-ended strike in January of 2022 after wages diminished from the equivalent of 13 USD to 1 USD per hour. The government responded with transportation subsidies or 90 USD per month of social assistance subsidies. The majority of public school teachers earn 1.50 to 2.50 USD per hour.¹⁵² The small minority of teachers on permanent contracts earn from 45 to 95 USD per month. Teachers are having challenges supporting basic living expenses, even to the extent of not being able to afford public transport to get to school. Key informants pointed to a root challenge being low esteem and regard for teachers. Teaching the early child age group is at the bottom of the hierarchy within the teaching profession and is seen as the only alternative when the candidate could not achieve high-paying options.

TEACHER PREPARATION

In 2003, the MEHE issued a decree that obliged all teachers to attend the Lebanese Faculty of Pedagogy and earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood to be allowed to teach KG classes.

However, key informants reported that teachers in rural areas can complete an eight-month preparatory course and then begin teaching ECE. Legislation in 1985 and 2002 enabled the recruitment of contractual teachers as an alternative to tenured teachers. Contractual teachers may be recruited on an ad hoc basis, responding to individual requests from schools. Key informants stated that the only tenured teachers are those who received graduation certificates from CERD before 2002. By 2010, 54.5 percent of public-school teachers did not have a university degree. In one representative sample of a study on teachers of all levels, only 19 percent had a teacher-training diploma.¹⁵³ Because only a university degree is required for recruitment, many teachers have no or little knowledge or skills in pedagogy and may be assigned to teach a subject that differs from their area of specialization. A teacher of any level or background could be assigned to teach early childhood. Public schools have increased the number of contractual teachers in service, leading to a significant oversupply of underqualified teaching staff in public schools. The professional preparation, level of education, area specialization, and instability of the current teaching force has had an impact on quality, linked with greater disparities in learning outcomes between regions and national origin.

Key informants reported that in 2006, the Lebanese University reformed its curriculum for ECE to consist of three years of training (instead of four for other levels of education) and school-based internships and observation. The university has two or three sections of early childhood trainees. Graduates of the Lebanese University are qualified to teach at day-care facilities, for children up to age three; at preschools, for ages four to six; and in the first two primary grades, for ages seven and eight. Key informants described the university program as disconnected from reality, with training staff not even being aware of whether ECE is offered in public schools or not. University staff have spent significant time on strike due to lack of pay, which has significantly interrupted training of a professional workforce for ECE. Key informants reported that most graduates of the university program go to the private sector because public early childhood teachers were not paid for the past two years. An in-depth analysis of ECE preservice teacher training is detailed in "Early Child Development Case Study: Lebanon."¹⁵⁴

IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The three entities (the School Guidance and Counseling Department within the MEHE Directorate for General Education, the General Inspectorate of the Council of Ministers' educational inspectors, and CERD) that provide in-service professional development through both training and in-school support are independent institutions, with separate procedures. The professional development of teachers is carried out by various entities in education, yet there is no mechanism of coordination among them. There is also very little specialized support for ECE.

CERD controls, supervises, and evaluates professional development of teachers in the public schools. It also produces schoolbooks, revises curricula, and engages in educational research.¹⁵⁵ CERD offers some sessions related to ECE. Topics include the curriculum of the KG, teaching content, approaches to ECE, methodologies of teaching, teaching through playing, developmental stages of children, differentiated instruction, and dealing specific special needs in the classroom. Some sessions are specific for ECE, and others, such as like classroom management, stress management, life skills, social and emotional learning, and psychosocial support, are common to all teachers.

CERD trains 25,000 teachers per year, with teachers requested to participate in at least one training session per year, according to their own interests or desires. Training choices need not be connected in any way to their teaching. One informant spoke of teachers who receive training in using advanced online tools when there is no online technology present in their schools. Ministry staff who monitor teachers at school sites have no awareness of what type of training they have

received. During 2020, training pivoted toward online sessions, which some key informants associated with even less accountability.

Professional development is not mandatory. Key informants described how contractual teachers are disincentivized from attending training because they lose paid weekday teaching hours when attending training. They reported that when USAID-funded projects began to pay teachers or offer financial incentives of per diems for training attendance during the post-COVID-19 period, these training offers were met with enthusiasm and desire for participation. However, they expected this approach to dampen participation in other training sessions in the future when organizers would not compensate with per diems.

Said one key informant: “We need experts to help us in the strategies and in the content. We need funding as well to do the trainings for all the teachers. It should not be a two three-day training, it should be a 2-year training plan.”

Teachers are frequently transferred during the school year due to surpluses of teachers in a location, political interference around transfer requests, or teachers’ own efforts to secure political backing to approve a transfer. Such transfers may undermine investments in school-level training for pre-primary education.

TEACHER SUPPORT

There is indication, neither from key informants nor from documentation available, that any specific in-service mentoring or support is being offered to KG teachers. In terms of support to teachers more broadly, the School Guidance and Counseling Department within the Directorate for General Education provides pedagogical counselors who conduct in-school follow-up support by conducting school visits, performing classroom observations, and providing feedback and support to teachers and school principals. In addition, the General Inspectorate of the Council of Ministers sends educational inspectors who conduct school visits and who can perform classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers. However, neither type of support to schools is conducted in a consistent and standardized manner. Coaches and inspectors may choose a school to visit with no clear policy on how to manage and evaluate teachers. They must cover their transportation, further disincentivizing visits to remote schools. Key informants reported that “inspectors are very few and they are not paid. Their salaries have not changed even with inflation.”

Additionally, there is no standardized approach to performance assessment, and there are various assessment and observation tools or approaches in use. There is currently no feedback loop between training and in-school coaching, with the two functions being dissociated and performed independently. Since 2017, efforts have been under way to establish professional standards and competency frameworks for teachers, teacher trainers, pedagogical counselors, and psychosocial counselors that would be adopted across the entities providing these services. These efforts serve as the first step in developing greater consistency in support to teachers and later assessment of teacher performance. However, much remains in terms of operationalizing a functional system of teacher support, in general, and any specialized support to ECE teachers.

TEACHERS’ ABILITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN EXPERIENCING ADVERSITY

The MEHE’s procedures delineate that teachers selected to provide services in second-shift school hours (serving fully Syrian populations) should be drawn from the first shift. Challenges have arisen around whether teachers are prepared to meet the needs of children who are victims of trauma, adversity, and emergency situations and whether teachers are able to perform well under greatly extended hours. Humanitarian organizations in particular have expressed concern. Teachers receive little training on pedagogy or socioemotional skills. This combination of lack of awareness of trauma-

informed teaching and lack of experience with the early child age range heightens the probability that children ages three to five will experience toxic stress.

Summarizing the key factors related to high quality pre-primary and teacher preparation in the context of Lebanon:

- Teachers who have a minimum level of well-being themselves to interact with young children.
 - *Lebanese context:* Teachers experience vulnerabilities, along with the generalized population. They also experience plunging devaluation of salary, food insecurity, inability to pay for travel to teaching sites, and high stress.
- Teachers who have a minimum level of education and life preparation to be ready to teach young children
 - *Lebanese context:* Teachers have inadequate formal preparation, in addition to lack of training in ECE and developmentally appropriate pedagogy.
- Quality professional development that prepares teachers to engage in high-quality interaction with children, through playful, child-centered, age-appropriate pedagogy
 - *Lebanese context:* Teachers are frequently moved or transferred, for political reasons, breaking the flow of interaction and child attachment, and there is sparse professional development in pre-primary education.

CHILDREN WHO ARE READY TO LEARN

This section addresses what factors affecting children make for high-quality pre-primary education, what is happening in Lebanon, and the comparison of a conducive environment with the Lebanese context.

CHILD LABOR AND RELATED PROTECTION ISSUES

Beyond the threats faced in the school environment alone, children also face a multitude of threats across different dimensions of their lives. Families, the government of Lebanon, and international organizations have expressed concern for the safety of young children—in particular, their vulnerability to becoming ensnared in child labor, early marriage, or extremism as extreme poverty escalates.¹⁵⁶ Poverty is correlated with children’s entry into the labor market at a school age.¹⁵⁷ Children and youth make up the bulk of breadwinners of families living in extreme poverty,¹⁵⁸ especially children of pre-primary age. Three out of four children working on the streets of Lebanon are from Syria.¹⁵⁹ Despite education outreach campaigns, almost 60 percent of refugee children who work indicate that working is their own choice and that their desire to support their families is more compelling to them than attending school. While Syrians were previously the ones most deeply affected by poverty, the ratio has now changed, postcrisis, as 82 percent of all households in Lebanon have fallen into poverty and 40 percent of all households have fallen into extreme poverty.¹⁶⁰ Among the hyper-marginalized class of extreme poverty accentuated in the last two years, children as young as seven, both of Syrian and of Lebanese descent, are sent out to work.¹⁶¹ In 2021, the rate child labor was as high as 45 percent of children in some areas.¹⁶²

DISCRIMINATION

Children face various forms of discrimination along lines of religion, disability, gender, and economic class. Syrian refugee children face particularly high discrimination. Many Syrian families have tried to enroll children in school multiple years, to no avail. One mother recounted her interaction with a school official: “She threw the papers in my face. I tried to explain that UNICEF said I could enroll my kids. She told me to ‘go boil the paper and drink it with UNICEF.’ Then she kicked me out and called the police on me so I left the school without enrolling my children.” In another case, a Syrian mother of a KG student went to the school to report twice that her child had been beaten at school by other children. Teachers denied that the child had been beaten, and as soon as the mother left, she exclaimed: “It’s enough that they’re Syrian and we’re allowing them to come, they come dirty and smelly and still we allow them in! They have killed our children and yet we still welcome them!”

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Amid co-occurring crises, children and youth with physical and cognitive disabilities remain the most marginalized and heavily under-enrolled in all levels of education, including KG. As referenced in the Introduction, under “Equity,” above, 3,806 individuals are registered in government-funded institutions; no data on disability enrollment or prevalence in pre-primary education could be ascertained.¹⁶⁴ Lebanon’s Law 220 grants rights to education and health, as well as other basic rights, to people with disabilities. However, logistical, social, and economic barriers prevent them from enrolling in school.¹⁶⁵ Lebanese law prohibits schools from discriminating against children, yet admission to both public and private schools is left to the discretion of teachers and school directors. Many children with disabilities are barred from school entry.¹⁶⁶ A parent has reported that she was repeatedly told, “We don’t take handicap,” or “We cannot accept your son, because the other parents might not approve.”¹⁶⁷ In another case, a four-year-old with a hearing disability was denied admission to his local school. His options were to enroll in a residential institution 150 kilometers away or travel to the nearest large town for a ten-hour school day costing 100 USD per month. His mother was not able to afford either option, and he remained out of school.¹⁶⁸ The multiple crises have only exacerbated the challenges that children with disabilities already face in terms of social stigma, discrimination, access, parent and teacher knowledge and support, and access to accommodations.

PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

Over half the children in the public system are refugees who have undergone forced migration, which brings with it lived experience of conflict, economic deprivation, and toxic exposure to mental stress on caregivers. The other half of public education’s student population is composed of the lowest quintiles of Lebanon’s socioeconomic classes. Children living in crisis are often exposed to increased levels of verbal and physical abuse. Parents, teachers, principals, and representatives of humanitarian organizations have all expressed concern about students’ psychosocial well-being and socioemotional state amid the multiple co-occurring crises of the past few years. There have been many anecdotal reports of skyrocketing violence, yet those studies still need to confirm the exact numbers. All of these factors have to do with quality of early education for children ages three to five. If trauma prevents children from coming to school ready to learn,¹⁶⁹ quality learning will not happen in the pre-primary classroom, despite the best attempts to reform the pre-primary system. “The single most important thing the school can do is create a caring, safe environment that supports students and is sensitive to the complex dynamics of life that might be fueling childhood trauma.”¹⁷⁰

Summarizing the key factors related to high-quality pre-primary education and children’s readiness to learn in the context of Lebanon:

- Children who have been protected from violence, poverty, instability, conflict, and other forms of adversity
 - *Lebanese context:* There are high rates of children living with or witnessing violence, poverty, instability, conflict, and other forms of adversity and children exposed to violence in the school environment. Parents, education stakeholders, and civil-society members are concerned about the psychosocial well-being of children. Pressure is on all, but most acutely on Syrian refugees, who make up a large proportion of public-school attendees.
- Children who have been primed for learning, through high-quality interaction with other adults and youth in their lives
 - *Lebanese context:* Families under high psychosocial stress, high economic stress, heightened instability, and mobility. These factors may affect the quality of interaction between families and children, both in terms of the resource of available time to spend with children, level of engaged oral interaction, time for support to home learning, use of positive discipline as opposed to corporal punishment etc.
- Pre-primary education accessible to all (including children with disabilities)
 - *Lebanese context:* The degree of socioeconomic equity of enrollment in pre-primary compared with other levels of education is an encouraging sign, though this may have decreased drastically during the recent crises. Enrollment of Syrian refugees in the public early education remains almost nil, and non-Lebanese graduates of nonformal education are sometimes barred from formal primary education for multiple consecutive years. Children with disabilities are enrolled at negligible levels.

FAMILIES WHO ARE ENGAGED

This section frames the current issues related to families in terms of the effects of crises on families, refugee status, parental toxic stress, private expenditure on education, and school engagement with parents.

Engagement of families requires a level of effort additional to traditional education programming. However, this level of effort translates directly into return on investment in pre-primary education. In 2021 James Heckman, the economist who has calculated 13 percent rate of return on pre-primary education, said: “Nobody wants to talk about the family, and the family’s the whole story. And it’s the whole story about a lot of social and economic issues.” He also noted, “These childcare programs that I’ve looked at are only successful when they kind of ‘turn on’ the parents.”¹⁷¹ Family engagement is central to generating that high rate of return on investment in pre-primary education. Pre-primary programs that do engage parents or guardians may generate much lower rates of return.

“Nobody wants to talk about the family, and the family’s the whole story. And it’s the whole story about a lot of social and economic issues [...]. These childcare programs that I’ve looked are only successful when they kind of ‘turn on’ the parents.”

-James Heckman

IMPACT OF CRISIS ON FAMILIES

In recent years, particularly the past two, families have faced skyrocketing inflation, escalating poverty, and scarce jobs. In 2021, 53 percent of families had at least one child who had skipped a meal in October, up from 37 percent in April. Three in ten households reduced expenditures on education. The multiple upheavals of the past two years have created a new class of hyper-marginalized ultrapoor, with one mother saying: “The distance between us and society’s other urban poor has grown. I don’t recognize my life any longer.”

REFUGEE STATUS

Lack of valid residency documentation hinders children’s ability to obtain birth certificates. In 2015, 70 percent of the 60,000 children born to Syrians in Lebanon did not obtain birth certificates from Lebanese authorities. A Syrian child can renew residency status for free, but the child is barred from renewing residency if the parent lacks correct documentation or cannot pay the fee. This status of statelessness has the knock-on effect of impeding enrollment in pre-primary education. Legal concerns make many refugee parents reluctant to accompany children to school. This can have a particularly detrimental effect on regular attendance of children ages three to five, who need accompaniment. The following elements are barriers to Syrian households’ enrolling or keeping children in school: lack of residency; lack of a work permit; need for child labor (due to children’s ability to cross checkpoints without being stopped); lack of money to register for school; local noncompliance in implementing the education policy for refugees; teacher-student ratios; lack of space; unfamiliar language of instruction; lack of residency; work restrictions; transportation; harassment; bullying; corporal punishment; lack of quality of education; lack of access to sanitation facilities; health, psychosocial, and environmental factors; and lack of a safe environment around school.

PARENTAL TOXIC STRESS

All parents and guardians, especially those with young children, face myriad challenges in the current Lebanese crisis context, which can elevate their stress to toxic levels. In particular, Lebanon studies have documented that Syrian mothers experience intimate-partner violence, harassment and community violence, crowding and lack of privacy, adult unemployment, and overall feelings of helplessness.¹⁷² They often respond with negative coping strategies, including passing on high levels of toxic stress and even physical harm to their children. Thus, there is a great need to link pre-primary education with parenting programs that engage male and female caregivers in psychosocial support, stress reduction, and caregiving education.

FAMILY EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

In Lebanon, parental contribution to education expenditure historically has been massive compared with other countries. In 2014, before the crisis era, average household expenditure on education exceeded 10 percent of the family budget. Parental expenditure on education exceeds government expenditure on education. Parents pay 1.5 billion USD a year to finance their children’s education, while the government pays 1.2 billion USD a year.¹⁷³ By 2021, household expenditure on education had reached 1.45 percent of the GDP.¹⁷⁴ The economic plummet has greatly devalued parental income and therefore ability to pay for education. Families face great economic stress in seeking the highest standard of pre-primary education available to them. Public pre-primary education generally regarded as serving poor families.

FAMILY VIEWS ON EDUCATION

Many Lebanese households have positive opinions about the quality of education in Lebanon, and 88 percent of them support increasing the number of public KGs,¹⁷⁵ demonstrating high public awareness of the importance of pre-primary education. Nevertheless, parents and children have low appreciation of the income-earning potential of education. When parents do not see direct

correlation between family spending on education and return in future salary, this suppresses demand for education and the willingness of families to pay fees.¹⁷⁶ Public-school parents rank arts and sports first in wishes for more time allocation, which highlights parental support for holistic, play-based pre-primary education. Only 38 percent of parents of children in public school are fully satisfied with the skills of their children's teachers, in contrast with 71 percent of private-school parents.¹⁷⁷ Households expressed top priorities for education reforms as teacher competencies and school accountability and quality control systems for schools and teachers.¹⁷⁸ This demonstrates interest of families in holding schools accountable for delivering high-quality education.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS

Family engagement in early education is key to quality pre-primary education. Parents' engagement in education is higher among private schools than public schools in relation to subject areas ascribed high value, such as math and English, among parents with special needs and among parents with younger children.¹⁷⁹ Twenty-two percent of parents in public schools never meet with their children's teachers.¹⁸⁰ In addition, many refugee parents lack functional literacy, numeracy, comprehension of English, or comprehension of French and may find it difficult to communicate about school or understand learning in other languages. Public-school parents are four times less likely than private-school parents to have completed secondary school and five times less likely to have completed higher education. These factors could impede parents' ability to communicate and interact with the school or support children's learning in the home environment.

Many interactions between schools and parents are characterized by schools lecturing parents on school requirements, not on active participation of parents, engaging parents in home learning, or collecting feedback from parents.¹⁸¹ Establishment of parents' associations at schools has not strengthened parents' engagement. Despite parents' involvement in school budgeting processes, through parent-school councils, schools' accountability to parents on expenditures is low. Parents have little power to influence the education process.¹⁸² Studies have shown that the low rate of participation from parents in education is due to the perception of lack of accountability of school management to parents and the lack of authority for parents to influence decisions on education.¹⁸³ When parents interact and communicate with schools, relations between parents and children improve.

Summarizing the key factors related to high-quality pre-primary and family support in the context of Lebanon:

- Families with enough support to buffer adversity and stress in the home environment, from preconception through timing of entry into pre-primary education
 - *Lebanese context:* Families face escalating economic stress with little social support to buffer stress, increasing lack of employment, escalating poverty, shortage of food, and domestic violence.
- Families who engage children in learning and stimulating interaction outside the school environment
 - *Lebanese context:* Many families face discrimination, legal-residency issues, lack of security in movement, and lack of knowledge of language, which may affect their ability to engage in high-quality interaction and learning with children.

- Families who work in partnership with the school, to promote high-quality interaction with children
 - *Lebanese context:* Family sense their lack of power to influence the education process and there is little engagement of schools in support of parents' creation of learning and high quality in the home environment.
- Families able to access wraparound support and services, such as counselors, nutrition and health services, parenting classes, home visits, activities to do at home, and early screening for children with disabilities
 - *Lebanese context:* Families receive hardly any services and support, because the public services of government are collapsing. Support offered through NGOs covers only a patchwork of locations, whereas the needs of families far outpace the supply.

COMMUNITIES THAT ARE SUPPORTIVE

This section addresses what factors affecting communities make for high-quality pre-primary education and what is happening in Lebanon, and it compares a conducive environment with the Lebanese context.

RACE II prioritized communities that “are capacitated to actively engage in the promotion of learning and well-being of students and children in learning spaces.” The Lebanon Five Year General Education Plan 2021–2025 continues building on this theme. However, community safety issues, such as those described in “Conducive Context,” above, heighten children’s fear of coming to school and interferes with a sense of a safe community environment, which would promote the learning and well-being of students. The walk to and from ECE has now become a danger point, where children may encounter violence, theft, child labor, police harassment, or discrimination. In addition, the strong community solidarity that has particularly characterized rural locations has been overwhelmed by the rapid escalation of needs, due to influx of refugees and rapid escalation of poverty. Traditional structures have been overwhelmed and unable to cope with the scale of need, particularly since the 40 percent of the population are now extremely poor.

A local Lebanese civil-society sector has grown up around the influx of refugees in the past decade. However, civil-society efforts are largely donor dependent and not sustained. Even by 2017, the Ministry of Social Affairs had contracted 236 NGOs and 240 welfare institutions to provide services, including early childcare and ECE.¹⁸⁴ Key informants posited that “the public system is not capable of stimulating community-based interventions.” They spoke of the unwillingness to invest in social services or to beyond allowing use of local social development centers, and they noted that the majority of government funding at the local level goes to salaries, not to delivery of educational or other local services for young children.

Key informants suggested that the best practice in crisis is to strengthen community-level service resilience, using a bottom-up approach and working closely those on the ground to meet the essential needs of children and families. Key informants suggested that developing community-level systems merges humanitarian and development approaches and that the current context necessitates that school-based or center-based interventions not be the sole method for reaching target populations. They proposed family- and community-based interventions as the way forward for reaching young children and families. Mothers’ groups were offered as potentially valuable

interventions, where children can read stories, play board games, learn songs, and play music and mothers can learn how to keep their children entertained and learning at home.

Summarizing the key factors related to high-quality pre-primary and community support in the context of Lebanon:

- Communities supportive of and valuing early education
 - *Lebanese context:* Communities have solid foundations, appreciation, expectations, and demand for high-quality education generally,¹⁸⁵ but little comprehension of the real impact of early education and early child investment.
- Communities actively engage in the promotion of learning and well-being of children in learning spaces
 - *Lebanese context:* Community services and structures are under stress due to economic collapse, political upheaval, and violence, and they are largely unable to link with KG classes.
- Communities that protect children's safety
 - *Lebanese context:* Some children are exposed to violence, child labor, and other adversities.
- Communities that facilitate access to service and support for children and families
 - *Lebanese context:* Traditional community structures have been altered or overwhelmed due to the influx of Syrian refugees and the rapid rise in extreme poverty, community services and structures are under stress due to economics, political upheaval, and violence, and communities are largely unable to facilitate access to services.

SQ3: RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

WHAT WOULD ENHANCE QUALITY WITHIN THE EXISTING CONTEXT AND CONSTRAINTS?

Many key informants strongly advocated focusing on long-term system building over short-term solutions. Additionally, comprehensive approaches to ECD have been shown to be more effective than isolated interventions. Many stakeholders are taking comprehensive approaches, and this is a primary recommendation to USAID, detailed in “Stakeholders,” below. In Lebanon, many stakeholders are working to increase the quality of pre-primary education, and ongoing efforts should guide USAID investments in efforts to strengthen quality at the early grade levels. The areas for intervention thus begin with a review of stakeholders and then shift to how USAID can design and interventions that enhance quality in pre-primary education through focusing on the core framework of the components of high-quality pre-primary education described in the [SQI findings](#), under “What Makes for Good Quality in Pre-Primary Education?” above: well-being of actors and components, awareness and political will for early childhood, and system investments.

STAKEHOLDERS

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The USAID Center for Education’s *Examining What Works in Pre-primary: A Review of the Evidence* finds that comprehensive, multisectoral programs that combine pre-primary education with cognitive stimulation, nutrition, parenting education, and other related activities have greater impact on children than do programs focusing on just one area of child development, such as education.¹⁸⁶ The *Nurturing Care Framework* maps the complementarity of such multisectoral programming.¹⁸⁷ Lebanon’s National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 clearly stipulates this holistic integrated approach.¹⁸⁸

Key informants indicated that children aged three to five are touched by various entities: CERD, the MEHE, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, these efforts are not organized into comprehensive multisectoral programs. The Lebanese University is responsible for the training of teachers. In addition, large volumes of children in this age group are served by nonpublic entities, such as private education institutions and nonformal education. Because of the diversity of actors, several in the system have made steps toward calling for a national platform on children aged three to five. CERD has convened a committee to address pre-primary and primary linkages for children in that age range. However, there is currently no platform for ECE stakeholders placed together under one umbrella, key informants reported that this committee’s outputs were “like shopping list—not operationalized or broken down, with no prioritization, sequencing, or strategies.” In addition, key informants reported that “there is no real acknowledgment that the private sector carries the bulk of the service delivery” of ECE and that the majority of existing early childhood centers are private, for Lebanese citizens. NGOs run the majority of early childhood centers for Syrians. “Few are government-run and those are very bad in terms of quality.” Many key informants noted the positive potential of harvesting and sharing lessons learned across private, nonformal, and public provision of pre-primary education.

In terms of international stakeholders, UNICEF has been articulating a comprehensive early childhood strategy across sectors and ministries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has been engaging in the early childhood space. It is recommended that USAID collaborate with the programs, funders, institutions, and entities that have been or are being launched so that inputs into the system dovetail and synchronize.

LEVERAGING STAKEHOLDER RESOURCES

With many stakeholders already engaged in pre-primary education, it is recommended that support to enhance quality in the in the public pre-primary system be through pooled joint stakeholder funding from domestic, bilateral, multilateral, philanthropic, and private sources. This recommendation is backed by *Analysis of International Aid Levels for Early Childhood Services in Crisis Contexts*, which reports that in 2017, multilateral funders contributed 51 percent of development funding for early child-directed interventions in crisis situations and that bilateral funders contributed 49 percent.¹⁸⁹

If USAID/Lebanon wishes to unlock additional resources for pre-primary education, it could consider buying into mechanisms that pool funds and leverage additional pots of funds. For example, it could consider investing in the USAID CATALYZE mechanism’s *Early Childcare and Education Initiative*, which has the mandate to blend public, private, multilateral and bilateral funds for investment in early childcare and ECE.¹⁹⁰ This could enable leveraging of the banking and equity sector into education, in addition to philanthropic and multilateral finance.

Working through this mechanism could also enable leveraging and comingling of funds with the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank. For instance, the International Finance Corporation's new Care2Equal program, (which is funded by the World Bank Child Care Incentive Fund with a current total value of 200 million USD, to which USAID is contributing 50 million USD) will conduct additional research on innovative ways to mobilize more capital with respect to childcare, early childcare, and ECE. In addition, the World Bank's Mashreq Gender Facility serves Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan and is leading an early childcare and ECE market assessment to outline ways to expand early childcare and ECE. There could be great value in leveraging mechanisms that are built to pool USAID funds and leverage from other sources for research, assessment, and support to intervention.

The wider sector is seeing a convergence of these actors and a breaking down of silos around early childcare and ECE. Accessing funding mechanisms for convening of cross-sectoral actors and pooled funds would enable application of cross-sectoral funds to help children aged three to five improve learning and development outcomes, with direct benefits to the education sector as well as beyond.

In terms of working with stakeholders, it is recommended that USAID proceed as follows:

- Work through a national platform that engages the relevant actors across platforms, since services for pre-primary education are spread across various institutions and one common framework is still needed. Faculty at the Lebanese University and the Higher Council for Childhood have proposed such a platform and could be engaged to help operationalize it.
- Engage in pre-primary education with interventions that are complementary to the work of other stakeholders (World Bank, UNICEF), providing multisectoral inputs that strengthen children and families.
- Enter a pooled fund or shared partnership with other investors and stakeholders supporting pre-primary education in Lebanon, for example, through joint stakeholder funding from domestic, bilateral, multilateral, philanthropic, and private sources.
- Issue funding that is multiyear and long term, even if the absolute dollar value may not be high.
- Establish results-based financing mechanisms, where service deliverers are paid out according to achievement of outcomes, quality is enhanced, and there is in-depth external monitoring. (Results-based financing has been shown in other locations to have a direct link to improvement of quality of educational outputs.)
- Use results-based financing to forestall corruption. (Key informants spoke of rampant corruption, and some felt that no money should go to the government without a strong monitoring system from an external entity, particularly to combat corruption and political interference in allocation of funds. Said one: "If we have money everything is feasible—this money needs to be paid in the right place and based on deliverables.")
- Invest in a Lebanese NGO or entity to provide support to system building so that this institution (as opposed to an international NGO) remains part of the Lebanese context after the cessation of funding support. Building domestic Lebanese capacity will contribute in the long term to quality.

- Mobilize additional resources for USAID/Lebanon’s work through USAID mechanisms designed to leverage nonstate funding into the early childcare and ECE space (see the [USAID CATALYZE example](#), above.)
- Link pre-primary education programming to other multisectoral wraparound support and services for children and families in health, mental health, education, nutrition, social protection, and child protection. This applies to USAID pre-primary programming linking with other USAID sectoral interventions as well as other donor- and government-led wraparound support and services for children and families.
- Apply the [Nurturing Care Framework](#) to layer multisectoral services for children and families to strengthen pre-primary learner performance, coordinating with government, USAID, UNICEF, and nongovernmental actors.¹⁹¹

Recommendations are outlined below and detailed in [Annex I](#). These recommendations are grounded in what has already been already agreed upon through the Lebanon Five-Year General Education Plan 2021–2025, the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education, Foundations for Building Forward Better: An Education Reform Path for Lebanon*, *Political Economy of Education in Lebanon: Research for Results Program*, and *Scaling Up Early Childcare & Development in Lebanon: Early Child Development Country Case Study: Lebanon* in order to facilitate complementarity of USAID investment with ongoing reforms and initiatives.¹⁹²

For instance, the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 has already been agreed on by multiple government, academic, civil-society, media, and other organizations. Such a stakeholder buy-in could be valuable to the success and sustainability of a systems-oriented intervention. Drawing upon the recommendations developed by multiple initiatives allows not only for buy-in but also for blending multiple pots of funding together. USAID may not experience success in effecting improvements in pre-primary education if it works only bilaterally with the United States government and government of Lebanon.

The theory of change describes how the three objectives (pillars) are to be achieved and how they are presumed to ultimately affect the ongoing provision of high-quality pre-primary education in Lebanon (Figure 6). The key objectives (pillars) are (I) securing basic well-being necessary to engage and effect behavior change, (II) raising awareness of why early childhood should be prioritized amid so many pressing priorities, and (3) building awareness and political will to construct the foundations and vision that will serve as prerequisite building blocks for system strengthening in pre-primary education. Under each of these three pillars the key components of high-quality pre-primary education (detailed in [SQ2 findings](#), above) are considered, with recommendations for improving these areas from the current state. The section below is a summary, specific actionable recommendations for context, system, school, classroom, teacher, children, families, and community are delineated in [Annex I](#).

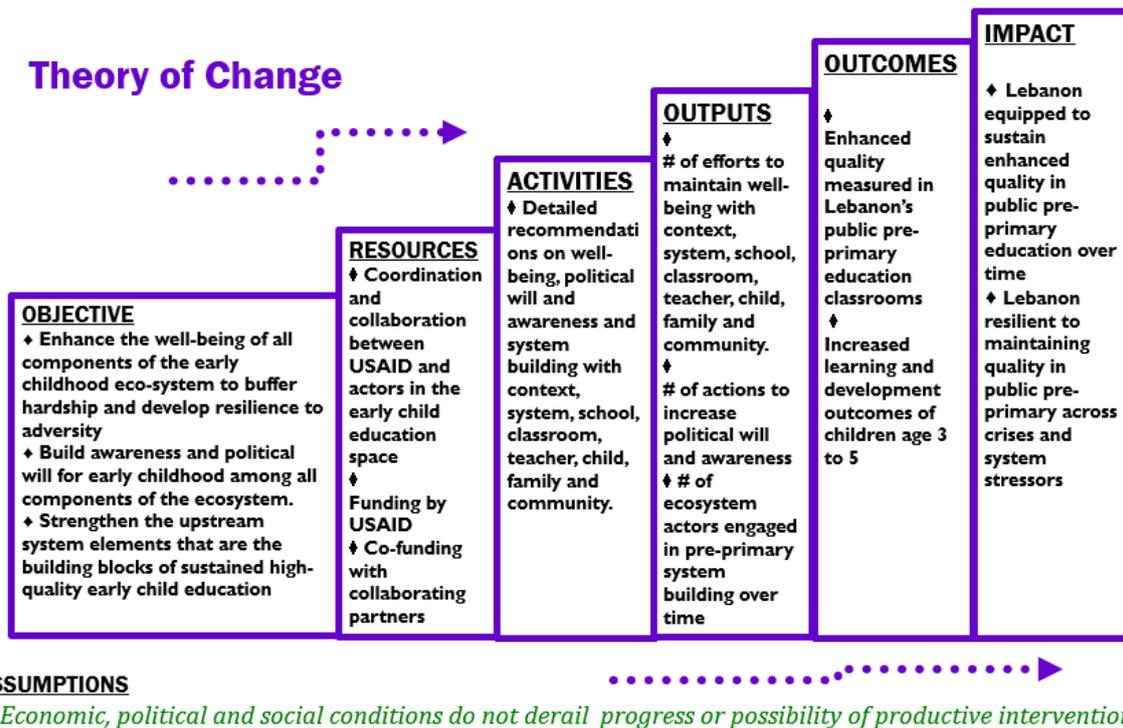


Figure 6. Theory of Change

FOCUS ON WELL-BEING OF ACTORS AND COMPONENTS

Development objective: Enhance the well-being of all components of the early childhood ecosystem to buffer hardship and develop resilience to adversity (from conducive context to system components to family and community support)

Because of the severity and strain of the crises on all components of the early childhood ecosystem, it is recommended that USAID focus on well-being (support functioning of actors and components) across the components of the ecosystem of pre-primary education. Not all root causes of stress can be removed, but protections can be put in place to safeguard well-being during a time of crisis. The objective of investing in well-being for all actors and components of the ecosystem is to effect resilience that buffers ecosystem actors from adversity and enables them to bounce back from hardship.

FOCUS ON AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Development objective: Build awareness and political will for early childhood among all decision points of the ecosystem.

“Human reality is bounded by the limits set in the mind. When consciousness is expanded, so is the potentiality for action.”¹⁹³ Key informants identified a need to implement a “mindset shift about what early education looks like,” which “starts from the basic awareness of giving early childhood priority.” Investments that target system decision-makers are particularly salient in light of the findings of a 2022 United Nations report that the actions of Lebanon’s political and financial leaders are responsible for the nation’s downward spiral into economic crisis and that “political leadership is completely out of touch with reality including with the desperation they’ve created by destroying people’s lives.”¹⁹⁴

Other countries in the Middle East and North Africa have conducted studies and found that financing has no effect when it is not accompanied by technical assistance and vision building on the part of government.¹⁹⁵ Another lesson learned from other Middle Eastern countries: Funding will be to no avail unless government has a vision and political will. If the system wastes resources or uses them ineffectively, funding will not improve quality. For these reasons, political will, awareness, and system strengthening are core components of the model proposed.

Therefore, it is key to focus first on the ability to understand, plan, and strategize around human-capital building and ECD and on how they can shift the course of the nation out of economic downturn. This step must be the precursor to any significant infusion of financing as well as investment in system building.

- Awareness raising and building political will must start at the level of political decision-makers understanding the return to GDP from human-capital investments in pre-primary education.
- Next, awareness raising must occur with education stakeholders so that pre-primary education is understood to be a foundational building block for quality in the follow-on grade levels and a predictor of higher education attainment.
- Advocacy can help families and communities to understand the effects of pre-primary education on long-term earnings and to increase awareness and political support for investments in pre-primary education.

Political Economy of Education in Lebanon has elaborated recommendations for energizing political will and support for education across actors and components of the ecosystem.¹⁹⁶ These recommendations are adapted and customized to the enhancement of quality in pre-primary education.

FOCUS ON SYSTEM INVESTMENTS

Development objective: Strengthen the system elements that are the building blocks of sustained high-quality pre-primary education.

System-level investment is prioritized as the most important investment, because when key informants were asked what was most critical to enhance quality in public pre-primary education, they responded: “We need to look at the system as a whole . . . to see what is missing the strategic level of planning and thinking.” “We are stuck in the low hanging fruits—most decisions are taken on short term feasibility which doesn’t build a solid structure for the long-term. We need to have small success from low hanging fruits, but we need to organize these successes towards a longer term of vision to be more prepared for crisis. It’s not only being responsive and reactive—we need to be proactive. [We need] higher hanging fruits for sustainability.”

In the current context of system fragmentation, nonfunctionality, and collapse, it would be of little value to invest in such efforts as equipping a handful of classrooms with learning materials and training a sample of teachers. These low-hanging fruits become like “puffs of excellence in a sea of deprivation,”¹⁹⁷ and the investment will not be sustained. Reaching high-hanging fruits takes more time, is more complex, and entails strong relationship building to navigate politicized issues and persevere through processes of structural or organizational change.

The figures below summarize the recommendations by each of the three pillars, and Annex I further details the background behind each of the recommendations.

Figure 7. Goal: Enhanced Quality in Lebanon’s Pre-Primary Education System

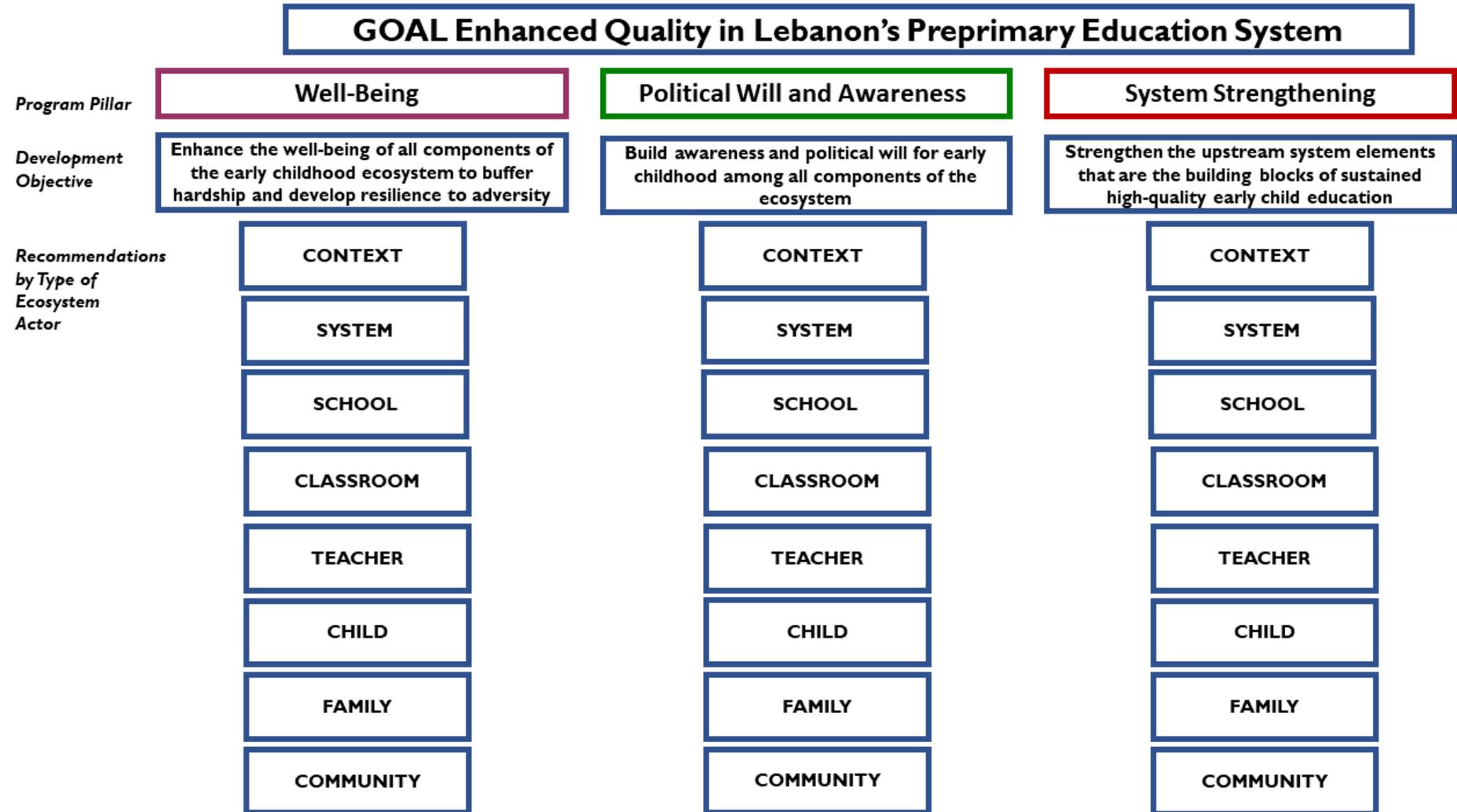
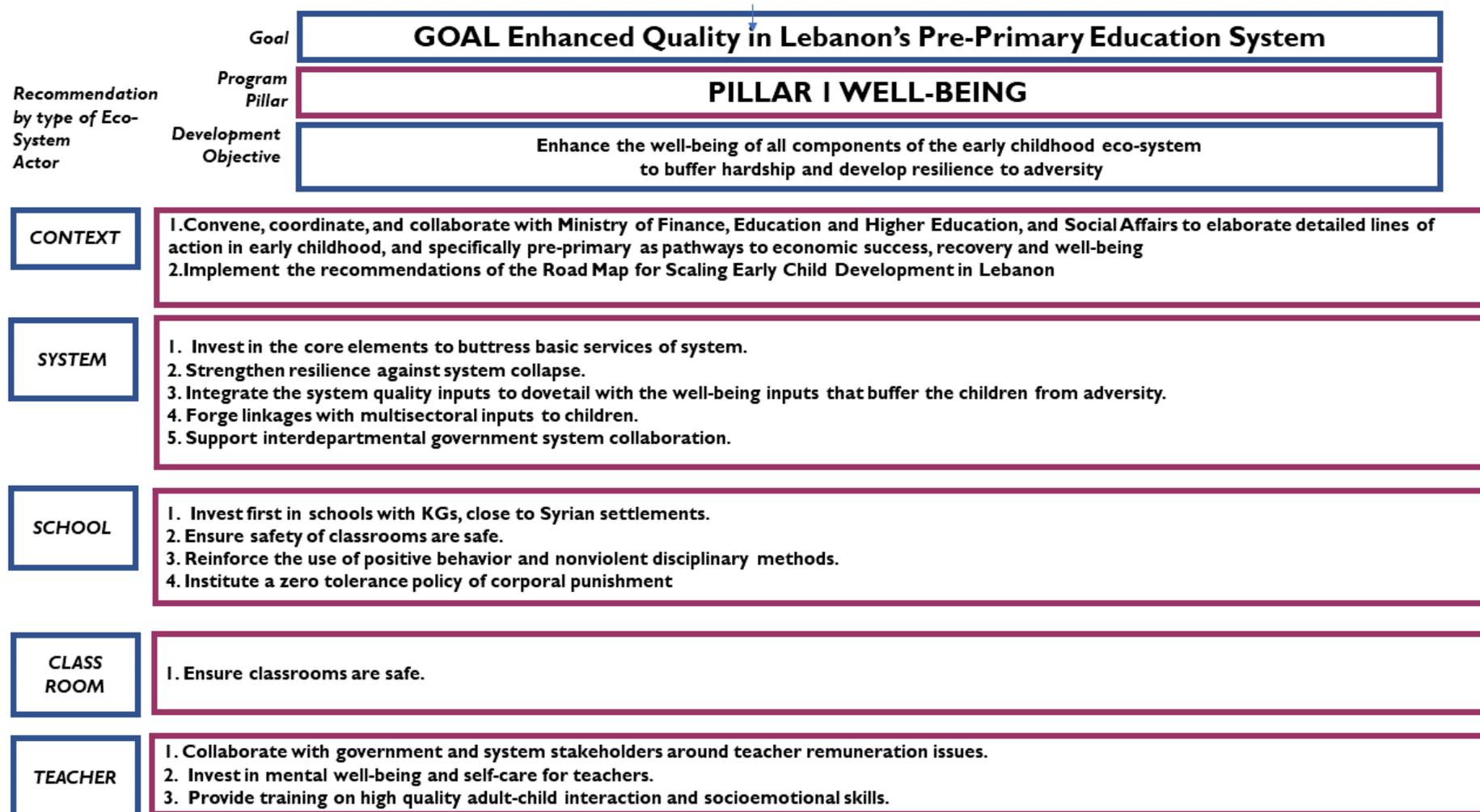


Figure 8. Pillar I: Well-Being



continued ...

**Program
Pillar**

PILLAR I WELL-BEING

CHILD

1. **Align with the Five Year Plan strategy 2.2.2 Improving health and child wellbeing .**
2. **Link children with social protection, cash transfer, and economic strengthening programs.**
3. **Link children with nutritional programs.**
4. **Infuse classroom activities with social-emotional learning and psycho-social support activities.**
4. **Infuse pre-primary education to provide psychosocial support to children.**
5. **Foster sector to unite fragmentation to support children's mental health and psychosocial support**

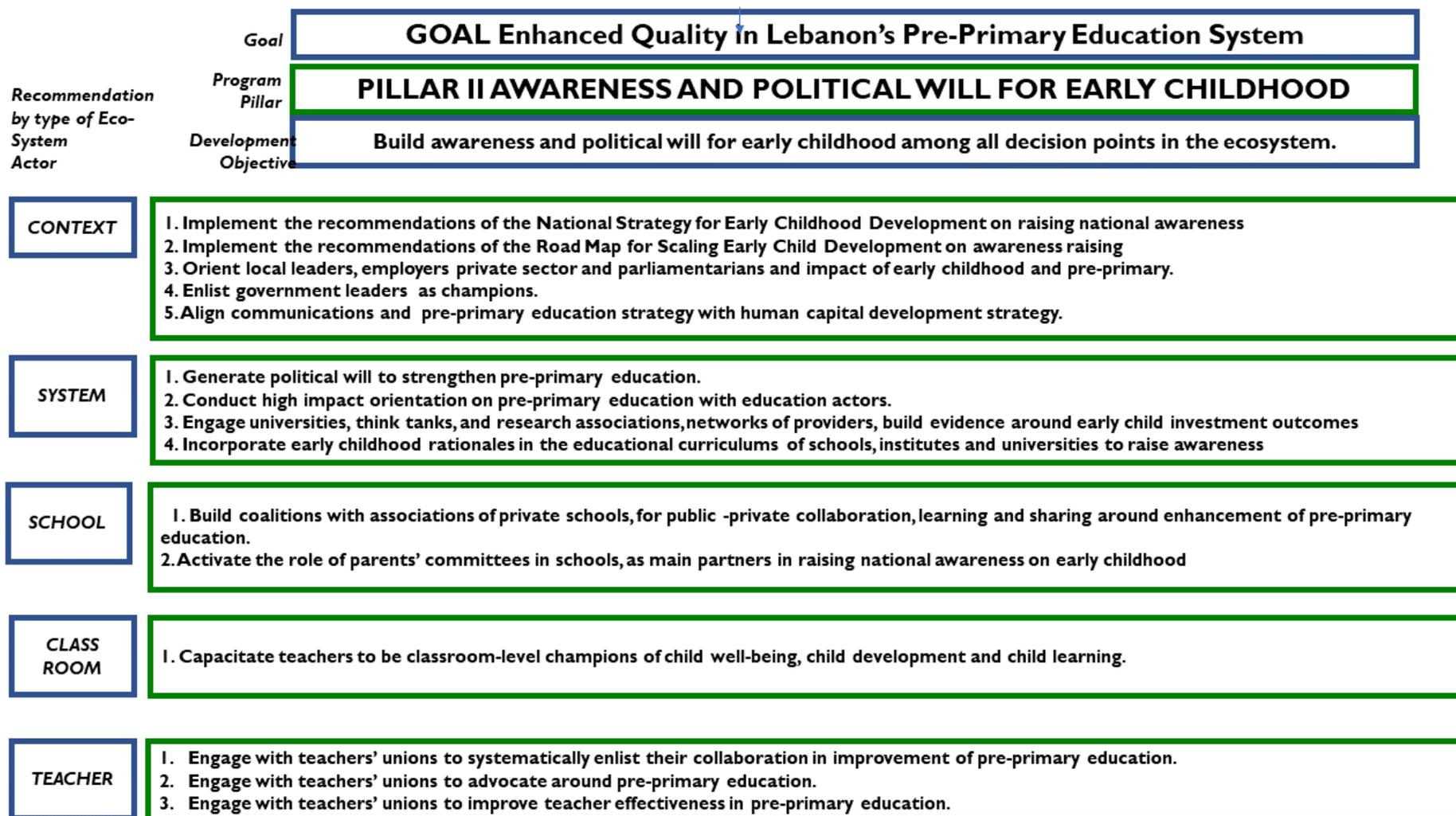
FAMILY

1. **Align with Five Year Plan “2.2.5 Enhancing household support for ECE” and 2.2.10 “Support to vulnerable Parents/Caregiver”**
2. **Accompany pre-primary education, with parenting, stress reduction and psycho-social support.**
3. **Link families with programs on social protection, economic strengthening programs, gender violence reduction and nutritional support.**
4. **Link with cash transfer programming, especially for Syrian refugees and extreme poor.**
5. **Synergize multisectoral support across donors /service providers**

COMMUN- ITY

1. **Align with Five Year Plan Strategies 2.2.5 “Enhancing household support for ECE” and 2.2.10 “Support to vulnerable Parents/Caregivers”**
2. **Appoint community actors to follow-up Syrian students**
3. **Enlist civil society organizations and communities to provide material / emotional support to parents.**

Figure 9. Pillar II: Awareness and Political Will for Early Childhood



continued ...

Program
Pillar

PILLAR II AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

CHILD

Not applicable

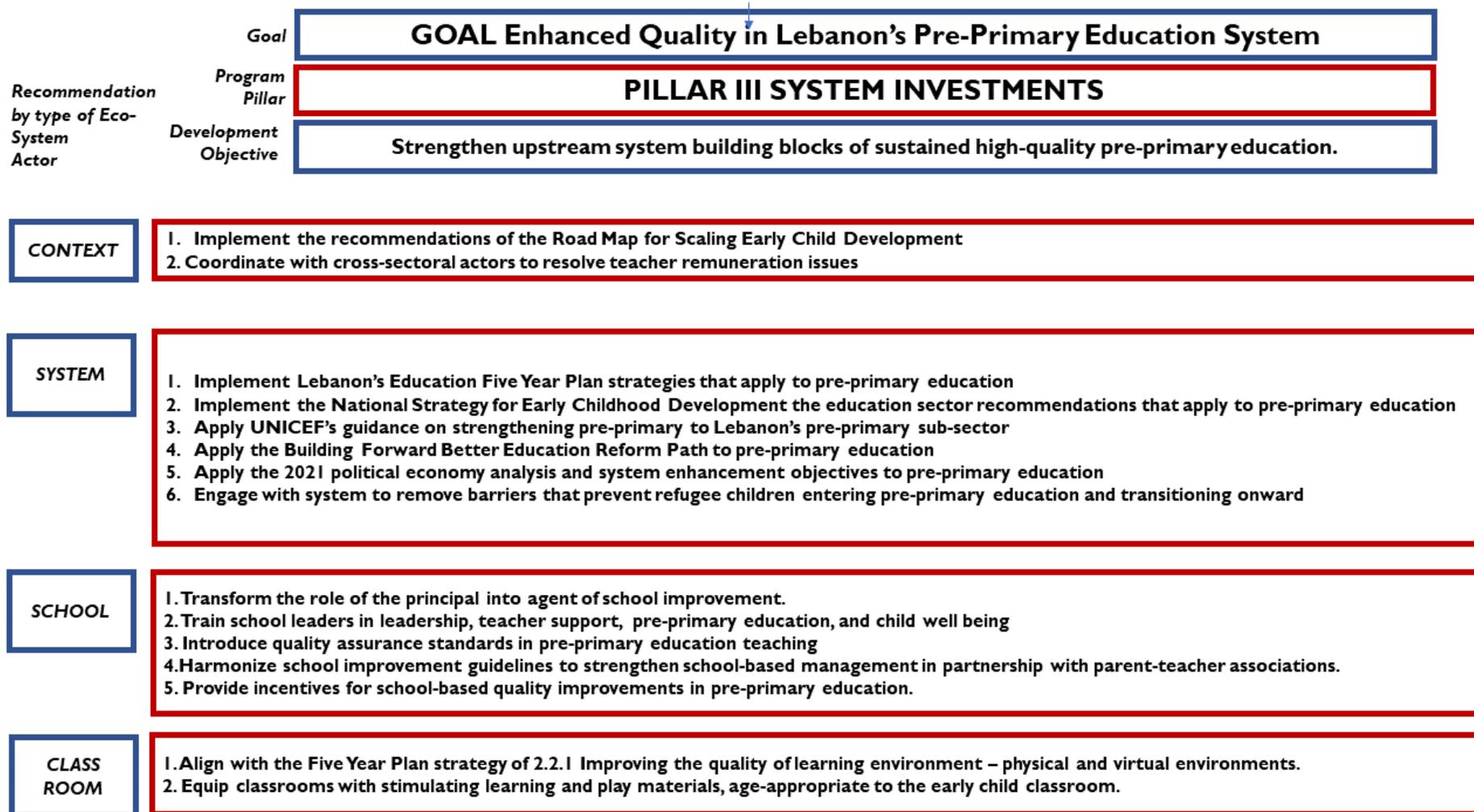
FAMILY

1. Conduct in-depth sensitization of parents to the value and outcomes of early child investment.
2. Implement the activities recommended for parents in the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon.

COMMUN-
ITY

1. Foster dialogue and consultations with civil society organizations and local communities on the value of and return on quality pre-primary education.
2. Enlist civil society organizations and local communities as advocates for interventions to strengthen quality of pre-primary education.
3. Engage public media and social media as mechanism for greater community engagement in early childhood.

Figure 10. Pillar III: System Investments



continued ...

Program
Pillar

PILLAR III SYSTEM INVESTMENTS

TEACHER	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop standards for classroom observations and teacher performance assessment.2. Infuse into teacher training belonging and commitment to teaching profession.3. Develop early child education accreditation system4. Support pre-primary teacher training in continuous monitoring, mentoring and guidance by school principal and subject coordinators and by counselors.5. Support training of teachers and personnel in pre-primary education content and pedagogy.6. Accompany training with coaching monitoring, mentoring and guidance from school-based mentors.7. Encourage early childhood teacher peer-learning.8. Develop and distribute teaching material and teaching guides on pre-primary education.9. Ensure pre-primary education focus in any curriculum redesign.10. Support Ministry capacity on recruitment and promotion of teachers, as well as depoliticization of teacher placement assignments.
CHILD	Not applicable
FAMILY	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Integrate parenting into early child education system, according to National Strategy for Early Childhood Development.2. Invest in parental engagement interventions for optimal learning3. Engage public schools to play a larger role in engaging parents in at-home learning4. Engage schools to energize active parent school engagement5. Engage public media and social media as mechanism for greater parent engagement6. Link education system actors with to multisectoral inputs to families around nutrition, child protection, social protection, refugee humanitarian support, etc.
COMMUN- ITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Link education system actors with community level actors providing multisectoral inputs to early child development and family strengthening.

ANNEX I: DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS AND LINES OF ACTION

This annex categorizes lines of action and detailed recommendations to strengthen pre-primary education by the three pillars: (I) well-being of actors and components, (II) awareness/political will for early child education (ECE), and (III) system investments. This annex applies these three pillars to the following components: context, system, school, classroom, teacher, child, family and community.

CONTEXT

This pre-primary education ecosystem extends beyond the education sector, across other sectors and into a wider context, in terms of influences on the quality of pre-primary education in Lebanon.

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

It may not be feasible for a USAID investment to affect well-being in the wider context. However, efforts can be made to buffer the well-being and strengthen resilience of concentric circles of ecosystem actors within that context.

USAID can convene, coordinate, and collaborate with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Social Affairs to elaborate detailed lines of action on how investments in ECE, and specifically pre-primary education, are pathways to economic success, recovery, and well-being in Lebanon.

ROAD MAP FOR SCALING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON

The Brookings-funded Road Map for Scaling Early Childhood Education in Lebanon offers the following recommendations for scaling up early childhood development (ECD) in Lebanon, as pertaining to well-being¹⁹⁸:

- Prioritize reaching and protecting the most disadvantaged and marginalized in Lebanon with early childcare and ECD.
- Integrate early childcare and ECD actors in national preparedness plans to respond to emergencies
- Activate and equip all social development centers to be able to provide early childcare and ECD actors' services.
- Encourage partnerships between the public and the private/civil-society early childcare and ECD actors in Lebanon, especially in the underprivileged areas.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

It may be crucial for the public at large (including political decision-makers and voters) to understand that the issues of political upheaval, factional violence, and economic collapse will be solved or accentuated by the young children growing up in these conditions. A child's lifelong capacity to address these issues is determined by what environments and inputs the child experiences in the first eight years of life. While investment in childhood may appear far off and less pressing than solving urgent problems at hand, there is greater value in educating the public on the science and economics of pre-primary education and the return reaped from investment in early childhood so that the nation and its political actors can make decisions that equip the next generation to solve the

current challenges. Statistics (e.g., the loss of average individual adult income per year is 26 percent, the risk of not investing in the early years is a 12.7 percent loss in gross domestic product) are helpful in drawing attention to the issue.¹⁹⁹

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON

The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 delineates activities as concrete steps toward “raising national awareness on early childhood care and development”²⁰⁰ There is a consensus among actors across government regarding these activities, so USAID can capitalize on an ongoing multiyear process where buy-in of stakeholders has already been achieved.

- Develop an action plan for the government to adopt to raise national awareness.
- Develop an action plan for concerned parliamentary committees to adopt to raise national awareness.
- Develop an action plan to enhance the role of municipalities in raising national awareness.
- Incorporate the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 into a social development strategy.
- Include early childhood in media curricula.
- Prepare specialized workshops to train media professionals on early childhood.
- Establish a network of media professionals to advocate and promote ECD.
- Conduct comprehensive media and advertising campaigns in all media, including social media, to raise national awareness of early childhood.
- Produce programs in all media to educate parents about parenting and early childhood care and ECD.
- Review and draft laws and regulations for raising national awareness based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Review and draft laws and regulations for raising national awareness, taking into consideration the rights of individuals with special needs.

ROAD MAP FOR SCALING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON

The Brookings-funded Road Map for Scaling Early Childhood Education in Lebanon offers the following recommendations for scaling up ECD in Lebanon, as pertaining to awareness raising²⁰¹:

- Promote the concept of early childhood (birth to eight years old) care and development as a holistic and integrated approach.
- Establish a leadership movement advocating early childhood care and ECD that can take the lead role in promoting and disseminating early childhood care and ECD.
- Reinforce community ownership of early childhood care and ECD through parenting education programs.

- Launch a national early childhood care and ECD campaign, using the available infrastructure and resources in the country.
- Launch a national day for early childhood care and ECD in Lebanon.
- Identify a national champion to advocate for early childhood care and ECD.

In addition, USAID can proceed as follows:

- Provide municipal and local government leaders with brief, succinct, high-impact orientations on the economic, neuroscience, and social effects of high-quality pre-primary on early grade outcomes, secondary and higher education outcomes, and broader economic development.
- Enlist municipal and local government leaders as champions and advocates of early child investment and high-quality pre-primary education. (It may be of value to build on the strategies and approaches developed through Bernard Van Leer Foundation investments in building municipal champions for early childhood.)
- Provide employers and the private sector with brief, succinct, high-impact orientations on the economic, neuroscience, and social effects of high-quality pre-primary education on the education system, highlighting the strong connection between pre-primary education and the future labor market.
- Provide the Parliamentary Committee on Education and parliamentarians with brief, succinct, high-impact orientations on the economic, neuroscience, and social effects of high-quality pre-primary education and development.²⁰²
- Align communications with pre-primary education and ECD with the nation's human capital advancement strategy.

PILLAR III: SYSTEM INVESTMENTS

The multiplicity of crises may need to be resolved step-by-step before quality can even be addressed. Because the presence of teachers is so fundamental, it may be necessary to solve the crisis of paying civil-servant salaries before addressing other issues of quality. It is recommended that USAID closely collaborate with other multilateral, bilateral, and government actors (in both the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Finance) to ensure that essential teacher-pay issues are addressed before pouring significant resources into the system.

Global and national platforms that cover early childcare and ECE in emergencies, cross silos of funders, service providers, and experts and can help unify actors for collective action.

Examples of national platforms:

- Ministry of Health (convened cross-sector actors for a platform on ECD in emergencies and connected the global Moving Minds Alliance)
- Early Child Development Steering Committee

Examples of global platforms:

- Moving Mind Alliance

- University of Virginia Mechanism for Coordination on Early Childhood in Emergency Situations
- Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies

SYSTEM

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING OF THE SYSTEM

Recommendations for USAID:

- Focus on buttressing the functioning of basic services of the system. Rather than revamping curricula or overhauling teacher training, invest in the core elements of a system that works and that can retain teachers with healthy salaries.
- Strengthen resilience against system collapse.
- Integrate system inputs around quality of education to dovetail with well-being inputs that buffer the children from adversity to maximize learning. Make direct linkages and collaboration between education-system actors and other partners providing multisectoral inputs to ECD.
- Support government system strengthening to communicate internally among departments and entities.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon delineates the following activity, agreed upon by multiple actors, which may be undertaken through the education system²⁰³:

- Incorporating early childhood programs in the educational curricula of schools, institutes, and universities to raise awareness of this topic.

USAID can also work within the education system:

- Focus the elements of the ecosystem on generating political will to strengthen pre-primary education.
- Provide key actors and leaders in the education landscape with brief, succinct, high-impact orientations on the economic, neuroscience, and social outcomes of high-quality pre-primary education and development.
- Engage universities, think tanks, research associations, and networks of providers to leverage their capacity and expertise in research to build evidence around the value and impact of early child investment.²⁰⁴

PILLAR III: SYSTEM-FOCUSED EFFORTS

This section of the recommended lines of action serves as the core recommendation that forms the backbone of system building for the entire activity. Significant labor, analysis, time, stakeholder buy-in, consensus building, and financial resources have already been invested in developing detailed

recommendations for improving pre-primary education in Lebanon. It is recommended that USAID base its planning on these significant levels of effort and resources expended so that the Agency builds upon strategies for which consensus already exists. This will contribute to greater stakeholder buy-in, cost efficiency in resource expenditure, and reduction of time needed to build openness to system-level reforms. Some of these reform recommendations apply to different aspects of the system. It would be important to convene stakeholders to identify which components are already receiving partial funding or levels of effort from various actors in the system so that USAID's efforts align, complement, and dovetail with existing long-term efforts. This process will also help identify which lines of action need USAID investment of resources and effort.

LEBANON'S FIVE-YEAR EDUCATION PLAN

The outcomes delineated in the Lebanon Five Year General Education Plan 2021–2025 as well as the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE II) plan around three pillars (improved access to education opportunities, improved quality of education services, and improved education systems)²⁰⁵ correspond with the exact system elements that would be foundational prerequisites of system quality necessary for pre-primary education to flourish. USAID should prioritize investments that support Lebanon's current Five Year Plan primary objective and main strategies.²⁰⁶

Objective: To improve the quality of the ECE learning environment and ensure inclusive and effective school leadership and a qualified ECE workforce

Main strategies:

- Improving the quality of the learning environment—physical and virtual environments
- Improving health and child well-being
- Improving the teaching of language, early literacy, and strengthening learning activities through curriculum reform
- Improving child-teacher interactions in class
- Enhancing household support for ECE
- Enhancing child-centered pedagogies (transitions, play, and learning)
- Strengthening the ECE workforce through enhanced qualifications and training
- Delivering language instruction programs
- Support to vulnerable parents and caregivers

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The multistakeholder, multisectoral development process of the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 prioritized the following recommendations as most needed education-sector interventions.²⁰⁷ Those that apply to the three-to-six-year age group and pre-primary education are specified here:

- Empowering both public and private educational institutions, in a real partnership, to increase learning and development opportunities for all students of Lebanon

- Establishing a systematic and documented system, based on specific and clear standards for assessing the quality of public and private education, to lead to more investment in early childhood
- Developing curricula, materials, and subjects in accordance with early childhood and benefiting from curricula that include play in their activities
- Adopting a comprehensive and holistic approach in the kindergarten (KG) and early elementary years, which enables developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and linking curricula to the daily lives of students
- Amending existing teaching curricula and teacher-training centers to incorporate an ECD practice based on children's rights (based on brain studies)
- Transforming education into a profession while preserving the teacher's role in developing moral values, which cannot be confined to knowledge and technical skills, specifically during early childhood
- Developing the skills of the ECE cadre and working on their rehabilitation and widening the scope of early childhood specialists: adopting a specialized diploma for ECD in universities and encouraging scientific research and field studies related to early childhood
- Addressing the problem of failing school, which leads to dropping out—a waste on many levels, especially the economic level
- Paying attention to the transition-to-school phase, as studies indicate that this is a critical phase and that not treating it as such may lead to failure and dropping out from school in the future
- Preparing programs for parents and workers on the transition-to-school phase (elementary)
- Securing free early childhood programs for all children
- Applying compulsory education and legalizing it from three to six years
- Making participation in parent-education programs obligatory, as a prerequisite to registering their children in schools

UNICEF GUIDANCE ON STRENGTHENING PRE-PRIMARY

Based on UNICEF guidance in [A World Ready to Learn](#), the following recommendations have been adapted to pre-primary education in the Lebanon context²⁰⁸:

- Develop strong implementation plans for the pre-primary subsector to back up policy commitments.
- Develop robust strategies for growing and supporting the pre-primary workforce.
- Implement clear quality standards for the subsector, and put in place a functional framework for regular monitoring of pre-primary programs across both public and nonstate/private providers.
- Dedicate at least 25 percent of recurrent pre-primary budgets to non-salary expenditures.

- Strengthen the engagement with families as active participants in their children’s development and education.
- Fortify curricular frameworks to ensure that they reflect a child-centered, inclusive, and holistic approach to learning and development, aligned with early grades.

USAID should also articulate direct linkages with UNICEF’s 2021 mapping of programs related to ECE and strategic recommendation paper on quality interventions, entry points, and implemented programs for ECE within Lebanon. In addition, USAID would be well advised to link with UNICEF’s efforts create more integrated services around early childhood centers.

FOUNDATIONS FOR BUILDING FORWARD BETTER EDUCATION REFORM PATH

USAID would be well advised to coinvest in the education-system inputs recommended in the 2021 [Foundations for Building Forward Better Education Reform Path](#), applying these recommendations specifically to the pre-primary sector²⁰⁹:

- **Financing:** Restructure pre-primary-education financing to be more efficient and equitable and to prevent further learning loss.
- **Diagnostics:** Understand the factors of the learning crisis at the pre-primary level through diagnostics to propose evidence-based solutions.
- **Teachers:** Improve teacher utilization, and support teachers to ensure high-quality pre-primary education services.

ANALYSES OF EDUCATION REFORM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Lebanon’s recent analyses of education reform, political economy, and other subjects have identified three key areas as requiring strengthening to achieve learning outcomes: (1) system governance and leadership, (2) culture of evidence, information flow, and feedback loops, and (3) accountability and quality-assurance mechanisms. To enhance the system’s ability to improve quality in pre-primary education, it is recommended that USAID apply the recommendations of these analyses:

- Continually share and communicate ECE objectives and responsibilities and produce and discuss assessments and process-evaluation reports so that interests are aligned among education actors.²¹⁰
- Establish coherence in legislative, regulatory, and normative laws and frameworks, as these apply to quality in pre-primary education.²¹¹
- Support strengthening and updating of teacher preservice efforts in pre-primary in the higher education space.
- Align teacher training between in-service and preservice and among entities engaged in teacher training.
- Strengthen decision-making power and capacity at the regional and school levels. Reinforce decentralized decision-making with a system of accountability,²¹² drawing on the Ministry of Education and Higher Education’s school autonomy initiative, which provides skills and financial resources to school leaders²¹³ and infusing that initiative with a focus on pre-primary education.

- Revamp the pre-primary education coaching system, with a focus on school-based professional development, coaching, and structured pedagogy and on inculcating a culture of collaboration.²¹⁴
- Deploy effective, appropriate systems to improve monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality, learning outcomes, and learning environments in pre-primary education.²¹⁵
- Establish a quality-assurance system—consisting of measurement, comparison of findings with standards, and feedback to practitioners and authorities for reflection and calibration—to ensure that services delivered meet agreed-upon standards.²¹⁶
- Incorporate a systems approach for planning and execution of pre-primary education professional development, assessment and monitoring.²¹⁷
- Support the seconding of human resources to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education with the specific mandate of strengthening the capacity of permanent Ministry staff in the provision of quality pre-primary education.²¹⁸
- Build the strategy of enhancing pre-primary education in alignment with the national strategy and highlighted directly into the national strategy, rather than in the bilateral project documentation alone.²¹⁹
- Update systemwide alignment, connections, and integration to ensure coherence and alignment with common goals among key stakeholders, elements, drivers, principles, and laws as they relate to pre-primary education.²²⁰

Applying a system lens would entail customizing the following overarching recommendations on system enhancement to become applicable to the early childhood subsector²²¹:

- Strengthen governance, institutionalization, and internal organization of the pre-primary education subsector.
- Strengthen the ability of the relevant entities to plan for meeting targets in the pre-primary education subsector.
- Reduce gaps and inequity within and between schools' pre-primary education cohorts.
- Evaluate and scale up innovations in ECE across schools
- Strengthen the regulatory framework guiding school performance in early childhood.
- Strengthen data systems to track budgets, personnel, and infrastructure of pre-primary education.
- Improve institutional capacity of early child-serving institutions.
- Engage universities, think tanks, and research associations in the overhaul of capacity-building for planning, research, and preservice teacher preparation around pre-primary education.

REMOVING BARRIERS THAT PREVENT SYRIAN CHILDREN FROM TRANSITIONING INTO PUBLIC EDUCATION

The public education system is intimately tied to private education and nonformal education systems, yet many Syrian children are blocked from transitioning into formal education. USAID can work with the legal and education system to improve the transition process:

- Relax requirements and barriers to non-Lebanese participation in public pre-primary education.
- Strengthen linkages between nonformal KG graduation and transition into formal system.

SCHOOL

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

Issues of security and lack of funds for transportation are real barriers, particularly when Syrian parents are stopped at checkpoints, when they fear sending young children alone through checkpoints, and when children experience violence at schools. Recommendations for USAID:

- Invest first in schools with KGs, that are close to Syrian settlements.
- Ensure that classrooms are safe and free from safety hazards and that there is adequate access to water and sanitation.
- Reinforce the use of positive behavior and nonviolent disciplinary methods by teachers and school management and empower school principals to be change agents in school safety when interacting with students.²²²
- Institute a zero-tolerance policy regarding corporal punishment, addressing bullying and discrimination on the part of teachers and school staff.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

USAID can play a role in this area. The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 delineates the following activity as one that multiple actors have agreed upon, which can be undertaken through the schools²²³:

- Activate the role of parents' committees in schools as main partners in raising national awareness on early childhood.

PILLAR III: SYSTEM

Recommendations for USAID:

- Elevate and transform the role of the principal from a that of teacher who is saddled with additional responsibilities into an agent of school change and improvement. Use standardized terms of reference and quality-assurance mechanisms to accomplish these aims.²²⁴
- Invest in training of school leaders in school leadership and teacher support, as well as in the content and techniques of pre-primary education, how to support and mentor high-quality pre-primary education, and the protection and well-being of children.

- Introduce quality-assurance standards in pre-primary teaching.²²⁵
- Harmonize school improvement guidelines to strengthen school-based management in partnership with parent-teacher associations.²²⁶
- Provide incentives for school-based quality improvements in pre-primary education.²²⁷

CLASSROOM

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING IN THE CLASSROOM

Recommendation for USAID:

- Ensure classrooms are safe, free from safety hazards, and have adequate access to water and sanitation.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Recommendation for USAID:

- Support efforts to empower teachers to be advocates of early child learning and development.

PILLAR III: SYSTEM

Recommendations for USAID:

- Align with the National Strategy to improve learning environments.
- Support efforts to equip classrooms with age-appropriate learning and play materials.

TEACHER

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS

Teachers themselves need to be paid a decent wage and to be able to manage mental stress in order to teach well. Recommendations for USAID:

- Invest in resolution to teacher salary challenges.
- Collaborate with government, the World Bank, and other actors working on teacher-remuneration issues.
- Invest in mental well-being and self-care for teachers.
- Provide training in high-quality adult-child interaction and socioemotional skills to both civil-servant and contract teachers.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Recommendations for USAID:

- Engage with teachers' unions to systematically enlist their collaboration in improvement of pre-primary education.
- Engage with teachers' unions to advocate around pre-primary education.
- Engage with teachers' unions to improve teacher effectiveness in pre-primary education.²²⁸

PILLAR III: SYSTEM

FIVE-YEAR GENERAL EDUCATION PLAN

The strategies outlined in the Lebanon Five Year General Education Plan 2021–2025 are conducive to quality improvement among pre-primary teachers. Six of the plan's ten strategies directly address teachers.

Objective: To improve the quality of the ECE learning environment and ensure inclusive and effective school leadership and a qualified ECE workforce

Main strategies:

- Improving the quality of the physical and virtual learning environments
- Improving the teaching of language, early literacy, and strengthening learning activities through curriculum reform
- Improving child-teacher interactions in class
- Enhancing child-centered pedagogies (transitions, play, and learning)
- Strengthening the ECE workforce through enhanced qualifications and training
- Delivering language instruction programs

REACHING ALL CHILDREN WITH EDUCATION (RACE II)

Based on the [World Bank's RACE II technical assessment](#), it is recommended that USAID support teacher training in the area of early childhood with continuous monitoring, mentoring, and guidance by school principals and subject coordinators and by counselors from Department of Guidance and Counseling within the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's General Directorate of Education.²²⁹

- Infuse into teacher training programs the need for teacher preservice programs that instill a "sense of belonging to the teaching profession and a commitment to education as a public good."²³⁰
- Support development of Ministry capacity around recruitment and promotion of teachers, as well as depoliticization of teacher placements.
- Support the training of teachers and educational personnel in pre-primary education content and pedagogy, including broader skills across subsectors, such as learner-centered teaching,

classroom management, sensitivity to diversity, and differentiating learning for children with special needs.²³¹

- Accompany training with coaching, monitoring, mentoring, and guidance from school-based mentors (e.g., school principals, subject coordinators) and by counselors from the Direction d’Orientation Pédagogique et Scolaire who visit schools to observe teachers and provide feedback.²³²
- Encourage early childhood teacher peer-learning by pairing high-performing teachers with teachers in need of assistance to work together on skill areas identified from classroom observations.²³³
- Develop and distribute teaching material and teaching guides on pre-primary education.²³⁴
- Ensure that major focus is placed on pre-primary education in any upcoming curriculum design.²³⁵
- Develop standards for pre-primary education classroom observations and teacher-performance assessment based on clear and specific criteria set by the teacher standards developed by the Ministry.²³⁶

CHILD

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

Over half the children in the system are coming out of a context of forced migration, lived experience of conflict, economic deprivation, and exposure to mental stress on caregivers. As a preparation to learning, the pre-primary education environment should focus on children’s well-being. Recommendations for USAID:

- Align with the Five Year General Education Plan’s main strategy: improving health and child well-being.
- Link children with social-protection, cash-transfer, and economic-strengthening programs.
- Link children with nutritional programs.
- Infuse classroom activities with socioemotional learning and psychosocial support activities.
- Infuse pre-primary education with psychosocial support to children, reinforce positive behavior, and improve the socioemotional skills of children.²³⁷
- As one key informant said, “come together as one whole sector to support children's mental health and psychosocial support instead of being fragmented.”

FAMILIES

PILLAR I: FAMILY WELL-BEING

The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 specifically names psychosocial support for parents as a key recommendation for families.²³⁸ Recommendations for USAID:

- Align with two Five Year General Education Plan strategies:
 - Enhancing household support for ECE
 - Supporting vulnerable parents and caregivers
- Accompany provision of pre-primary education with sessions for families on parenting, stress reduction, and psychosocial support.
- Link families with programs on social protection, economic strengthening, gender violence reduction, and nutritional support.
- Partner and link with cash transfer programming, especially for Syrian refugees and the extreme poor. Rather than increasing host community resentment leading to increased violence, this may aid families and decrease community violence through increased economic participation in consumption of local goods and services.
- Proactively partner across USAID’s sectoral inputs, as well as with the multisectoral inputs of other donors, to align and synergize multisectoral support to the well-being of families and children.

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

The multistakeholder, multisectoral iterative development process of the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 prioritized the following recommendations as the most needed education sector interventions:²³⁹

- Prepare and implement parental education programs for parents to develop, care for, and communicate with children.
- Prepare and implement educational programs for parents about reading stories, listening to music, playing, and developing children's talents.
- Prepare and implement programs to develop the skills of parents on the first week of the baby's life.
- Provide manuals for parents to learn about all types of violence and exploitation in early childhood and the related reporting mechanisms.

PILLAR III: SYSTEM

USAID can link integrate parenting into pre-primary education through the following means:

- Invest in parental engagement at home so that children come to school ready to learn.

- Engage public schools to play a larger role in engaging parents in at-home learning.²⁴⁰
- Engage schools to energize parent engagement in schools that goes beyond membership in parent committees and plays more active and decisive roles in the processes of school improvement and effectiveness for pre-primary education.²⁴¹
- Engage public media and social media to encourage greater parent engagement, alongside more targeted family programming.
- Make direct linkages and collaborations between education-system actors and other partners, providing multisectoral inputs to families around ECD (e.g., parenting, nutrition, child protection, social protection, refugee humanitarian support).

USAID would be well advised to implement the specific recommendations of the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Lebanon 2016–2020 regarding integration of parenting into the system:

- Preparing and implementing mother-to-mother programs in places of residence, workplaces, and hospitals
- Preparing training manuals and other parenting resources for staff working with parents
- Conducting training-of-trainers courses on early childhood care and ECD for staff working with parents in schools and communities
- Preparing and implementing parenting programs and early childhood care and ECD for students at the middle, secondary, and university levels
- Preparing and implementing parenting programs and early childhood care and ECD for students, parents, parents' committees, and teachers
- Building partnership with civil society in the areas of ECD and early childhood care and collaboration with parents
- Activating a help line (hotline) for protection against violence and exploitation

COMMUNITIES

PILLAR I: WELL-BEING

Recommendations for USAID:

- Align with two General Education Plan strategies:
 - Enhancing household support for ECE
 - Supporting vulnerable parents and caregivers
- Appoint community actors responsible to take on personalized follow-up of Syrian students on behalf of schools.²⁴²

- Enlist civil-society organizations and local communities in providing material and emotional support to parents and schools for pre-primary education and development.²⁴³

PILLAR II: AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Recommendations for USAID:

- Foster dialogue and consultations with civil society organizations and local communities on the value of and return on quality pre-primary education.²⁴⁴
- Enlist civil-society organizations and local communities as advocates for interventions to improve pre-primary education.²⁴⁵
- Engage public media and social media to encourage greater community engagement in early childhood.

PILLAR III: SYSTEM

Recommendation for USAID:

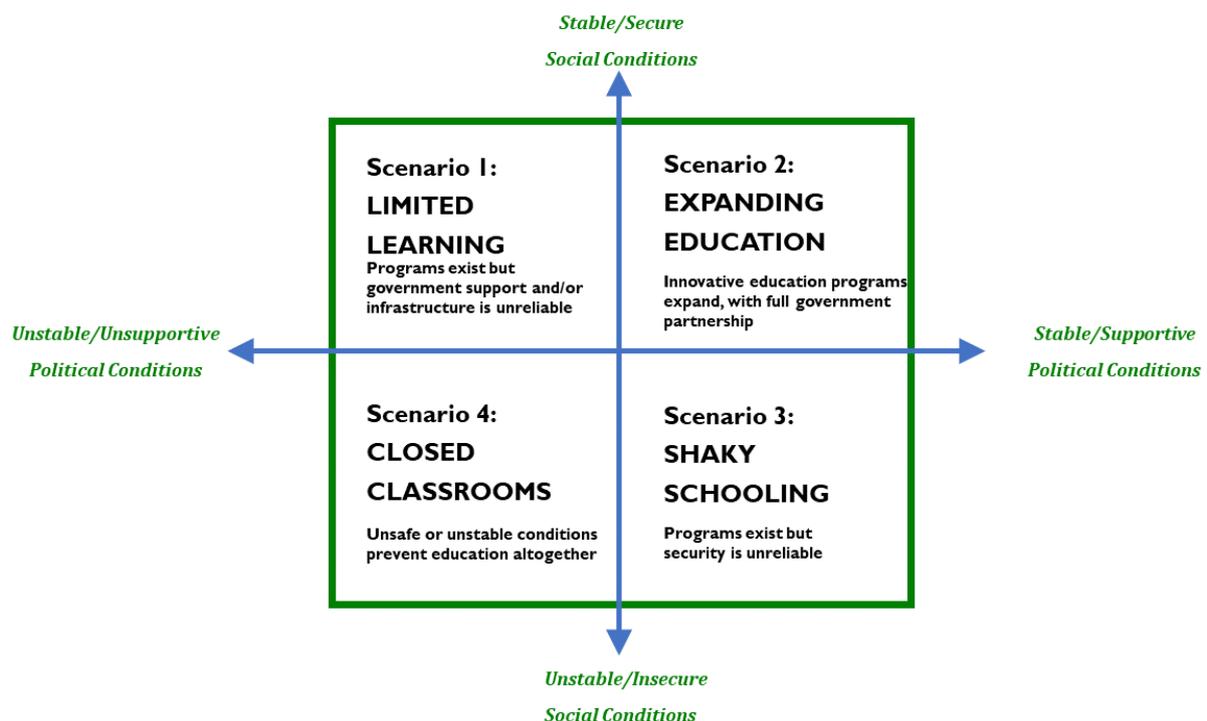
- Make direct linkages and collaborations between education-system actors and community-level actors providing multisectoral inputs to ECD and family strengthening.

ANNEX 2: APPLYING CRISIS SCENARIO PLANNING TO PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

SCENARIO PLANNING

The Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education Improvement (QITABI) scenario-planning tool has been developed to respond to a rapidly changing educational context in Lebanon (Figure 1).²⁴⁶ The tool serves as a barometer of social and political conditions, for adapting the current basic education cycle. If a crisis were to resume, application of this tool is recommended to shape pre-primary investment and ascertain what is possible under the current scenario at the time of investment.

Figure 11. Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education Improvement (QITABI) Scenario-Planning Tool



Source: Wafa Kotob, "Scenario Planning for Unstable Environments," World Learning, June 30, 2021, <https://medium.com/quality-instruction-towards-access-and-basic/scenario-planning-for-unstable-environments-3f23ea85d5eb>.

Applying the QITABI scenario-planning tool to pre-primary education, the following recommendations are developed for each potential scenario. System building is included in each scenario because system building is fundamental.

SCENARIO 1: LIMITED LEARNING

- Invest in retooling teachers with early childhood techniques.
- Invest in protection of children in the home environment.
- Invest in early learning at home.
- Invest in system building.

SCENARIO 2: EXPANDING EDUCATION

- Invest in political will for pre-primary education.
- Invest in system quality inputs.
- Invest in robust training of teachers in early childhood and of school principals in coaching, mentoring, and supporting early childhood education.
- Invest in quality-assurance mechanisms.
- To complement the above actions, invest in the well-being of actors in the ecosystem.

SCENARIO 3: SHAKY SCHOOLING

- Invest in system elements, to the level that the system can absorb.
- Invest in protection.
- Invest in at-home learning.
- Invest in teacher well-being.
- Invest in enabling teachers to provide psychosocial support.

SCENARIO 4: CLOSED CLASSROOMS

- Invest in protection at home and in the community.
- Invest in at-home learning.
- Invest in digital solutions to augment at-home learning.
- Invest in system building.

Under any of the scenarios, it is deemed a high priority to invest in the well-being of the actors in the ecosystem. In other words, focus first on well-being and then on learning. One is a prerequisite to the other.

Then, awareness precipitates action. Therefore, investments in political will and awareness are precursors to system inputs.

If Lebanon's context becomes conducive to scenario 2, system inputs could be absorbed. But in scenarios 1, 3, and 4, system inputs may not be absorbed: Money could be expended, but interventions might not stick.

NONFORMAL EDUCATION

Numerous key informants raised the issue of how Syrian children may not register in public early education without a graduation certificate from nonformal education enroll in grade one, yet even those who have certificates have been denied access to the early grades.

If the scenario analysis reveals that the public education system is almost nonfunctional or that Syrian children are not being served in public pre-primary education, one could consider investing in system inputs simultaneous to provision of nonformal education so that some children do receive the benefit of pre-primary education before the system is able to respond to inputs (particularly since a child may age out of early childhood before the investments in a system would incubate to maturity to be able to affect that child's education). Provision of nonformal pre-primary education could occur in high-density Syrian settlement areas or locations of extreme poverty.

Investment in nonformal education risks diverting resources from the source of the problem and the solution to long-term change. When everything is on fire, there is value in concentrating resources on what can quench it. However, in this case, the fire is caused by fallout from the Syrian crisis in the region and from issues in the Lebanese economy and systems that existed before to the crisis of recent years. These upstream causes may not easily be addressed. Systems investment may take a long time to incubate and require dedicated, consistent human resources and tenacity to overcome setbacks to mature to fruition. Notwithstanding, analysis of a large number of interventions across decades and continents shows that many USAID investments have not been effective unless they have involved long-term work with systems.²⁴⁷ Therefore it is highly advisable to work with the government to reform the system for accepting non-Lebanese entrants, rather than to fund stopgap measures that help a small subset of those in need.

Concerns have been raised about working with Lebanese civil-society organizations, because their proliferation has accelerated since the Syrian refugee crisis and there may not be sustainable funding pathways beyond that crisis.²⁴⁸ It is advisable to focus on investment in public pre-primary education at the system level, as the main avenue for reaching the poorest quintile of residents, and to engage in nonformal education only if the public system is completely nonoperational.

ANNEX 3: FINANCE RESOURCES

Resources on how to finance quality enhancement of pre-primary education during times of crisis:

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