

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all

What about the repercussions of COVID-19 in vulnerable countries?

Case Study

(Lebanon - Afghanistan - DRC- Ukraine)

On the sidelines of HLPF



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



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Introduction:

Attacks continue unabated across the world, as warring parties continue to violate one of the most fundamental rules of war, and the time-spanning nature of current conflicts affects the futures of entire generations of children. Without access to education, a generation of children living in conflict situations will grow up lacking the basic skills necessary to the active participation and effective contribution to their countries and economies, exacerbating the already dire conditions for millions of children and their families, and inconsistent with the targets of SDG 4.

On the sidelines of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2022, which takes place this July in New York City at the United Nations, under the theme “Building back better from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” and on the sidelines of the participation of Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights in the HLPF, it issued a study entitled **"Ensuring Equitable and Inclusive Quality Education for All: The Repercussions of Covid-19 in Conflict Countries"**, to focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the achievement of SDG 4 related to quality education in conflict-afflicted countries, which is significantly impacted by the serious situations in the countries, and even exacerbated by the spread of the Covid-19.

The study focused on four countries as case studies for those suffering from political crises and wars, namely, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Lebanon and finally Ukraine. Each of these countries has different reasons for the outbreak of wars, but what they all have in common is the instability and the badly affect education sector and the decline in indicators of achieving SDG 4.

First: The reality of achieving SDG 4 in conflict countries?

a. Monitoring Methodology:

The methodology adopted while writing this report depends on the data collected from direct monitoring of publications of previous studies, as well as the national voluntary reports submitted by the countries of interest in the Voluntary National Review (VNR)



process at the HLPF, in addition to published data from the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO among other bodies.

b. Conflict Countries of Interest:

As for the conflict countries mentioned in the report, they are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Lebanon, with a particular focus on the most volatile countries at the present time in each of the following regions; Africa, Asia, Europe and finally the Arab region, where crises exacerbate day after day. Therefore, these countries were highlighted and the impact of Covid-19 and the conflict on achieving SDG 4 related to quality education was assessed.

c. Why SDG 4 on Quality Education is so important?

The study focused on SDG 4 for two reasons as follows; first: SDG 4 is one of the goals upon which the review process at the 2022 HLPF is based; second: the importance of education. As previously mentioned, generations of children who live in conflict situations grow up lacking the basic skills necessary for active participation and effective contribution to their countries and economies, in light of the fact they are the hopes of nations for changing current conditions and improving their future.

Second: Background on the political and economic situation in the conflict countries

The study reviews in this section the political and economic conditions in the conflict countries of interest, as follows:

a. Democratic Republic of the Congo:

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been suffering from political and security instability for many years. To this day, the country faces many challenges, topped by the repercussions of the civil war that impede internal stability. The internal war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo differs from other African countries as the conflict there has different characteristics, as many African countries participated in it. At least four neighboring countries interfere in the Congolese civil war. Rwanda and Uganda interfered in favor of opposition groups, whereas both Angola and Zimbabwe intervened



on behalf of the government, many other African countries also participated in this civil war in some form.

Thus, the beginning of the civil war in the Congo was due to the collapse of the political-military alliance that was behind the success of Laurent-Désiré Kabila in overthrowing the Mobutu regime in May 1997, due to many internal, regional and international situations. After Kabila came to power, as for the regional level, the governments of Rwanda and Uganda adopted opposing positions to the government of Laurent-Désiré Kabila in the Congo because of his inability to stop the violence launched by the Hutu Rwandan refugees residing in eastern Congo, and this was the beginning of a clear tension at the regional level.

Also, based on Mobutu's failure to respond to the United States' demands for a democratic transition, it also refrained from supporting the Kabila government. Accordingly, **civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo began in August 1998** after Kabila's extensive changes in the ranks armed forces to remove the pro-Rwanda elements.

But in the subsequent periods of this year, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo witnessed a degree of relative stability between the conflicting parties, and then the conflict erupted again in mid-January 2001. The turning point in the conflict this time was the assassination of President Laurent Kabila, who was succeeded by his son, Joseph Kabila on January 26, 2001.¹

The Democratic Republic of the Congo held its first multi-party elections in 2006 after a history of conflict, and this step was made after a comprehensive political settlement. These elections helped bringing peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo because most of the conflicting military forces had withdrawn and dropped weapons.²

The Democratic Republic of the Congo also held presidential and parliamentary elections on November 28, 2011. The latest results, after counting about 90 percent of

¹ المركز الديمقراطي العربي، النظام السياسي في الكونغو الديمقراطية منذ عام ٢٠٠٦، <https://democraticac.de/?p=58021>

² Ajol, *Democracy and elections in Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Lessons for Africa*, <https://bit.ly/3aL7oxl>



the votes, indicated that President Joseph Kabila had won 49 percent of the votes over his closest rival, opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, who got 33 percent. The 2016 elections were postponed until 2018, and after the elections in 2018, it was announced that Felix Tshisekedi took office on January 18, 2019.³

Despite the current apparent stability in the country, the repercussions of the political crisis that afflicted the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its people, which impeded the efforts to achieve a decent life for its citizens due to political instability, cannot be overlooked.

Speaking of the economic situation, the DRC's economy has faced a period of slow recovery, after decades of deterioration due to political instability and internal strife. After signing peace agreements and the appointment of a transitional government in 2003, economic conditions began to slowly improve, especially after the government restored its relations with international financial institutions and international donors, progress was slow, even reaching the interior of the country, although clear changes were detected in the capital, Kinshasa, and Lubumbashi, and the activity in the mining sector returned, which accounts for the largest proportion of export earnings, which has boosted Kinshasa's financial position and GDP growth in recent years.

The 2009 global economic recession reduced economic growth to less than half the level. However, growth returned to about 7% annually during the period 2010-2012. The Democratic Republic of the Congo signed with the International Monetary Fund the "Growth Facilitation and Poverty Reduction" program, and it received an amount of 12 billion US dollars to ease its debt burden. The price of copper - the primary exports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo - dropped in 2015 and remained at standard levels. Inflation reached nearly 50% in mid-2017 - the highest level since the early 2000s, but poverty remains widespread in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the country has not achieved any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the poorest countries in the world despite its vast natural resources. The east of the country is still suffering from the Congo

³ Kavanagh, Michael J. "*Congo Electoral Commission Says Presidential Elections to Be Held*", Bloomberg, <https://bloom.bg/3Pf94yz>



wars that killed six million people from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s. The country has not witnessed any major investments since the 1960s to improve its poor infrastructure, and the country's population has few basic services, including health care.

b. Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest, most fragile and unstable countries, where many years of war and political instability have left the country in ruins and heavily dependent on foreign aid. The primary source of income in the country is agriculture. In its good years, Afghanistan produces enough food and food products to provide for the people and also to create a surplus for export.

However, Afghanistan's economy has suffered from a massive shock since the Taliban takeover, and the current crisis is prompting the cutting of development aid, the existing international sanctions and the freezing of Afghan foreign exchange reserves. This has led to the initial collapse of the private sector, the banking system and the urban economy in particular - precipitating massive humanitarian needs. The dire situation highlights the urgent need for immediate action by the United States and the international community to help prevent complete economic collapse and mitigate the impact on millions of Afghans.

The isolation of the Afghan economy in the wake of the August 2021 political crisis also threatens to erase the development gains made over the past two decades, leading to extreme poverty, displacement, fragility and extremism that threatens Afghanistan, the region, and the world.

As for the political situation in Afghanistan, the Islamic Taliban movement dominates politics in Afghanistan and has the sole authority to make government appointments. After their takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban announced a transitional government on September 7, 2021 consisting entirely of well-established Taliban figures from the insurgency period.⁴

⁴BCC ، أفغانستان تحت حكم طالبان: من المستفيد ومن المتضرر؟، ٣ سبتمبر ٢٠٢١، <https://bbc.in/3O8v9NL>



c. Ukraine:

Ukraine is experiencing political and economic crises against the background of internal and external conflicts related to the government and its international alliances, such as the dispute with Russia over the Crimea and the eastern regions of the country, which are predominantly Russian. Ukraine is divided politically between a predominantly Russian-speaking east and a Ukrainian-speaking west. Ukraine is the second largest European country in terms of area after Russia, and its geographical location plays a major role in the transit of Russian gas supplies to Western European countries. Ukraine's borders lie from the northeast of Russia and from the western European Union countries, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, making it a link between two different political trends.

After years of political and economic tension, the Ukrainian economy began to stabilize, but the outbreak of COVID-19 pushed it into recession in 2020 (-4%). GDP growth rebounded to 3.5% in 2021, supported by a revival of external and domestic demand, as well as fiscal and monetary stimulus, and despite new waves of Covid-19 infections, economic growth was expected to accelerate marginally in 2022 by (3.6%) before dwindling slightly in 2023 to (3.4%), but Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 destroyed expectations.

The government has called on Ukrainian citizens to resist but Russia's determination points to further escalation, and the massive destruction of infrastructure, disruption of agriculture, industry and trade, and large capital outflows have led to a sharp contraction in economic growth in 2022. Moreover, the region's economy is contracting by 4.1% this year compared to a pre-war forecast of 3% growth, as economic shocks from the war exacerbate the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic. This contraction will be the second in two years, and will be twice as large as the contraction caused by the pandemic in 2022.⁵

⁵ أخبار الأمم المتحدة، تقرير أممي جديد يسلط الضوء على تراجع النمو الاقتصادي العالمي بسبب تداعيات الحرب الأوكرانية،

<https://bit.ly/3zcHpJ3>



Until February 2020, the Ukrainian economy was still in a strong macroeconomic condition thanks to the successful implementation of the reform program, with low public debt, declining inflation and positive growth prospects, but the outbreak of the pandemic and the government reshuffle had dimmed expectations. In June 2020, the International Monetary Fund approved a \$5 billion support package to help Ukraine respond to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policies under the new arrangement focused on four priorities: mitigating the economic impact of the crisis, ensuring the continued independence of the central bank and a flexible exchange rate; protecting financial stability while recovering costs from bank decisions; and going ahead with key governance and anti-corruption measures to preserve and deepen recent gains.

The unemployment rate in Ukraine was declining until 2019 but due to the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is estimated that it rose to 9.7% in 2021 and was expected to remain high in 2022 (8.7%) and 2023 (8.2%). Before the war began, the human cost of the war in Russia was still unknown, but until now, hundreds of civilians have been killed, hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled the country, and disruptions in supply chains have caused food shortages.

The agricultural sector plays a major role in the Ukrainian economy. In 2020, it contributed 9.3% of GDP and provided employment opportunities for 14% of the population (World Bank). The main crops and food items are cereals, sugar, meat, and milk. Ukraine is the fifth largest grain exporter in the world. The European Union has lowered its tariffs on agricultural areas of Ukraine, which could be a boon for the sector. The country is rich in mineral resources, especially iron and magnesium, as well as energy resources (coal and gas).⁶

d. Lebanon:

Lebanon's political and economic crisis is swelling due to the inability to form a government for continuous months, which worries the Lebanese people about the future of this country. Practically Lebanon is living in a state of uncertainty after losing

⁶ الجزيرة، فورين بوليسي: اقتصاد أوكرانيا يسير نحو الهاوية، ١١ مايو ٢٠٢٢، <https://bit.ly/3AUfVJ9>



hope of getting out of the political impasse and weakening the country. Due to the conflict between its divided categories due to ministerial quotas, instead of running the country in a way that serves the public interest. The most dangerous thing is that the Lebanese are already living through a living crisis that Lebanese citizen has not witnessed before, even in light of the unfortunate civil war that took place in this country for 15 years.

This crisis affects the stability of the state, which is still hostage to the sectarian quota mentality and its consequences, which agrees in the national interest between the parties subject to profit and loss accounts; Either in influence or gains.⁷

Lebanon is also suffering from an economic crisis that began in 2019 when the financial system collapsed due to sovereign debt and the unsustainable ways in which it was financed, while politicians have not yet come up with a rescue plan. The gross domestic product declined to an estimated \$20.5 billion in 2021 from about \$55 billion in 2018. It is a kind of deflation that usually accompanies wars, as described by the World Bank, which classified this financial collapse as one of the worst in the world since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value, raising the cost of everything in the import-dependent country and undermining the currency's purchasing power. A soldier's monthly salary, which was once equivalent to \$900, is now \$50. Poverty rates have also increased significantly among the population of 6.5 million people, as 80 % are classified as poor. The situation is exacerbated, and more than half of the families have at least one child who does not get one meal of the day.

The Lebanese financial system incurred heavy losses, including about \$44 billion in the central bank related to the failure of efforts to support the currency, according to government data in 2020. This rate is almost twice the size of the economic output. The overall losses, which include the expected reduction in the face value of the sovereign debt, also outweigh this.

⁷ الخليج، لبنان والاستعصاء السياسي، ٢٣ أبريل ٢٠٢١، <https://bit.ly/3yFs8ib>



Lebanon, which depends on imported fuel, is also facing an energy crisis. Even before the crisis, fuel supplies for power stations were in short supply in the capital. Currently, families consider themselves lucky if they have more than an hour or so of electricity daily. Fuel prices also rose sharply. Riding a shared taxi, which is a widespread means of transportation there, used to cost 2,000 liras before the crisis, but now it costs about 30,000 liras for the trip.

The Lebanese emigrate in the largest mass exodus since the 1975-1990 civil war. Convinced that their savings have evaporated, many Lebanese do not intend to return this time, as they started building their lives from scratch.⁸

Second: The repercussions of the Coronavirus pandemic on the SDG 4 “Quality Education” in countries of conflict

A child's right to education cannot be guaranteed in conflict zones without the protection of education sector itself. Education can be a lifesaver. Children become easy targets for abuse, exploitation, and recruitment into armed forces and groups when they are not in school. It should provide a safe place where children can be protected from threats and crises. That is also a critical step to breaking the cycle of crisis and reducing the possibility of future conflicts.

Crises and unstable situations, in addition to COVID-19, have affected the achievement of SDG 4 related to quality education. Goal 4 includes the target of ensuring that all girls and boys have equitable and quality primary and secondary education. That leads to achieving relevant and effective educational outcomes by 2030, which has been difficult to achieve in conflict countries.

A. Democratic Republic of the Congo:

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and because of the pandemic, the Congolese constitution stipulates the right of everyone to receive education through national

⁸ النهار، الأزمة اللبنانية بالأرقام... ما مدى سوء الوضع الاقتصادي؟، ٢٣ يناير ٢٠٢٢، <https://bit.ly/3lClo9y>



education, which consists of public and accredited private institutions. The constitution also stipulates that primary education is compulsory and free in public institutions.⁹

The government in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made huge strides toward universal primary education over the past few decades. The net attendance rate increased from 52% in 2001 to 78% in 2018, but 7.6 million children aged 5-17 are still out of school, and the nursery rate for children aged 3-5 is only 5%.

This level is considered very low given the benefits that preschool can bring to young children in terms of improved primary school enrolment and early cognitive and social development. Moreover, the repetition and drop-out rates at the primary level undoubtedly affect the secondary level.

However, the public education sector faces many difficulties, including the exhaustion of absorption capacity, the deterioration of the infrastructure, and the failure of the training provided to respond to the needs of learners and society as a whole. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, four million children are not in school, mainly because families cannot afford school fees.

For its part, the government has provided free basic education and has introduced increases in teachers' salaries, but viable and sustainable financial measures are needed. Free education was decreed at the beginning of the September 2019 academic year and the cost of free education is estimated at \$2.64 billion annually, which is huge for the DRC's budget.

When the DRC government closed all schools in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it disrupted the education of 27 million children (12.9 million girls). It is estimated that about 6 million school-age children and adolescents (3.2 million girls) were out of school before the pandemic.

In December 2020, after the reopening of schools, there was an overall decrease in the number of children (aged 12-17) who returned to secondary school in Goma in October 2020 compared to October 2019 (all school types combined).

⁹ UNICEF- Education- Every child has the right to go to school and learn .<https://www.unicef.org/education>



That was identified in private secondary schools, which experienced a significant drop in attendance during this period. The attendance of boys decreased by 18.7%, and the girls' attendance decreased by 24.1%. However, public secondary schools in Goma witnessed a slight increase in the attendance of both boys and girls by 2% for boys and 6.8% for girls.

Many schools increased fees at the start of the new school year in October to make up for lost revenue in the period when schools were closed. That has resulted in many parents having to transfer their children to public schools due to the financial cost. There has been a drop in income for many private school teachers due to parents taking their children out of school¹⁰

And to build educational facilities, upgrade existing educational facilities, and create an effective and safe learning environment. The number of private schools in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has increased in recent years in response to the increasing demand of the population and the limited ability of the government to respond by providing sustainable, state-run alternatives. Many of these private schools are unlicensed, do not meet educational standards set by the Congolese government, and lack the equipment and infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of students.¹¹

Many families have also transferred their children to different schools due to overcrowding in public schools and the associated significant decline in the quality of teaching. Families with low incomes due to COVID-19 response measures may have a limited option of removing their children from private schools due to the high cost. Children drop out of public education due to the poor quality of public education and overcrowding in classes.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, parents have become increasingly dependent on their children to financially support the family (children of primary and secondary school age), and 52% of parents, following the effects of COVID-19, are dependent on children

¹⁰ مرجع سابق

¹¹ البنك الدولي يطلق مبادرة للتصدي لتحديات تمويل التعليم، البنك الدولي، ٢٠١٩/١٢/١١.



in six provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August 2020. Some students in Masisi and Goma confirmed in December 2020 that they would rather continue to work and earn money for themselves and their families than go back to school¹².

About the goal of eliminating gender disparity in education and ensuring equal opportunities for vulnerable groups; Monitoring the situation in October 2020 by secondary school teachers and principals in Tanganyika and in South Kivu who reported a decrease in attendance indicated that the main reason teenage girls did not return to school was that they got married during the lockdown, and statistics show that in the Ituri countryside the typical age for marriage is 12 or 13 years.

Regarding the goal of increasing by a large percentage the number of qualified teachers and providing them with appropriate incomes, the unstable political situation and the spread of the pandemic, and the resulting closure of schools has affected 67% of teachers who were unable to work that they suffer from low income, and therefore the inability to support their families¹³

B. Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, education has been devastated by more than three decades of ongoing conflict. For many of the country's children, completing primary school remains a dream - especially in rural areas and for girls - despite recent progress in raising school enrolment rates. It is estimated that 3.7 million children are out of school in Afghanistan - 60% of whom are girls.

For the purpose of building educational facilities, upgrading existing educational facilities, and creating an effective and safe learning environment, the lack of schools and inadequate transportation are obstacles to education - long walks to school mean fewer children go. Geographical barriers, especially in mountainous areas, make it difficult for children to reach classrooms. In addition, the social, political, and humanitarian crises that Afghanistan is facing are seriously affecting the fragile

¹² الأمم المتحدة، الجمعية العامة، مجلس حقوق الإنسان، تقرير وطني مقدم وفقا للفقرة ١٥ (ألف) من مرفق قرار لجنة حقوق الإنسان ١/٥، جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية.

¹³ SOCIAL SCIENCES ANALYTICS CELL (CASS), COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES IN THE DRC: IMPACT ON THE HEALTH, PROTECTION AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH. <https://bit.ly/3uPEC5T>



education system. Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and landslides exacerbate the situation for all children¹⁴. These factors raise parents' safety concerns and prevent them from sending their children to school.¹⁵

Once children do, they often receive lower quality education because only 48 percent of their teachers have minimum academic qualifications (the equivalent of an associate's degree). That contradicts the goal of a significant increase in qualified teachers.

For the very purpose of achieving gender equality, Afghanistan has always been the epicentre of gender inequality in various aspects. In particular, women and girls face various obstacles in education. Despite efforts to improve the education sector in the past decade, the situation of female education remains deplorable. There is still a long way to go in improving education, especially female education. One issue of particular concern is women's access to higher education, as a Taliban decree was passed to deny girls and girls' access to secondary education¹⁶.

As for the goal related to improving the quality of education, Afghanistan is one of the countries that is experiencing difficulties in many areas, including the field of education, which has many negative effects on the development movement in the country. With remarkable developments taking place in the education sector, the quality of the educational system still constitutes a challenge in the country. Schools lack the necessary facilities and quality that match internationally approved standards¹⁷.

With the goal of ensuring that all girls and boys, girls and boys, have equitable and quality primary and secondary education, school closures have kept nearly 90 % of all students out of school, and access to home learning has revealed the disproportionate impact that global crises can have on children. The underprivileged and vulnerable and their families¹⁸.

¹⁴Unicef, Education, <https://uni.cf/3nKQ1jm>

¹⁵<https://bit.ly/3yO0jpi> Scientific Research, 2015, Education,

¹⁶United Nation, Education, <https://bit.ly/3bZU7lj>

¹⁷ مركز الدراسات الاستراتيجية والإقليمية، التعليم، <https://bit.ly/3ABYqC7>

¹⁸ Afghan aid, Education <https://bit.ly/3AvCkMQ>



The Afghan Ministry of Education faced the task of providing education to more than 9 million learners during school closures due to the coronavirus. To control and limit the spread of the virus, the Ministry of Education, in consultation with the government, decided not to start the new school year on March 23, 2020. The government also decided to close all public and private higher education institutions. The initial closures were for over a month (March 14 - April 17) and were subsequently extended for another month until the end of May. The outbreak of COVID-19 has suddenly pushed Afghanistan into the world of digital distance learning¹⁹.

C. Ukraine

The global pandemic COVID-19 has affected life in Ukraine, as in many other countries. But Ukraine was able to deal with the pandemic and reduce its effects on education. While the quarantine was announced from March 17 to May 11, 2020, many public institutions and private companies were forced to introduce new strategies to survive the downturn. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has developed a bilingual website in Ukrainian and English to inform a wider audience about the situation under development and the preventive and restrictive measures in Ukraine in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several e-learning platforms support teaching and learning through distance learning technologies. The H2020 projects have contributed significantly to the smooth transition to distance learning modes and the exchange of open educational resources. Higher education institutions have confirmed that students can deal with distance learning. However, many students have had problems accessing the Internet at home, especially those who live in rural areas²⁰.

But during the recent Ukrainian crisis and Russia's attacks on Ukraine, the education sector was severely affected. For the purpose of building educational facilities, upgrading existing educational facilities and creating an effective and safe educational environment, which was not provided in Ukraine because of the crisis, as attacks on schools in Ukraine threatened the lives of and the future of 7.5 million children in the

¹⁹ Ukfiet, Education, <https://bit.ly/3uyHl3w>

²⁰ Supportthere, Ukrainian Higher Education responds to the COVID-19 challenges, <https://supportthere.org/news/ukrainian-higher-education-responds>



country with up to 10 children killed in the fighting and bombing of educational facilities across the country. The conflict in eastern Ukraine has also destroyed, damaged or forced closure of more than 750 schools, disrupting access to education for thousands of children, with many afraid to attend and disturbed by the presence of armed soldiers in and around their schools.

In order to, provide a suitable environment for qualified actors and provide their entry, there was no luxury in choosing basic competent teachers where teachers were killed. For example, two teachers were killed when a rocket hit a school in Gorlovka, eastern Ukraine kindergarten and orphanage were among the buildings damaged in attacks in the northeastern city of Okhterka, With the death of a seven-year-old girl among the six dead.

Schools in eastern Ukraine closed on 21 February as hostilities escalated, leaving an estimated 350,000 children with no access to education. Some schools in other areas of Ukraine had closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but others have remained open, with reports that some parents are sending their children wearing stickers denoting their blood type as they fear for their safety²¹.

As to the target of ensuring that all girls and boys have access to free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, it has not been achieved, as the war in Ukraine has prompted more than 6 million Ukrainians to flee to neighboring countries. This includes nearly 665,000 students (16% of total number of enrolled students) and over 25,000 educators (6% of total educators in the country). Another 8 million Ukrainians are displaced internally. Over 74% of IDPs have children within their households. Displacement has had a significant impact on education service delivery, along with damage and destruction of educational facilities. 1,635 schools and universities (5% of total) have been damaged from the war and 126 have been destroyed.²²

²¹ Save the Children, Ukraine: Attacks on schools endangering children's lives and futures, 27 February 2022, <https://bit.ly/3O9LQbR>

²² World Bank, Education: Impact of the War in Ukraine (May 2022), 21 Jun 2022, <https://bit.ly/3o1nG8P>



D. Lebanon

In Lebanon, In the light of the country's economic and political crisis, the crisis has affected the tendency of 6 in 10 youth in Lebanon to reduce spending on education in order to purchase basic supplies of food, medicine and other basic materials. Every 3 out of 10 was completely drop out of school.

The goal of providing a suitable environment and income for qualified teachers has not been achieved in Lebanon owing to the low salaries of teachers in the formal sector. Prior to the crisis, it was estimated at \$1,556 per year for basic class teachers, \$2,428 for middle and secondary grades teachers, and with the current collapse, salaries have fallen to \$120 and \$150 per month. During 2022, teachers migrated to the Gulf States and Australia.²³

With the aim of ensuring that all girls and boys enjoy free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, Lebanon's education system has registered approximately 1.25 million students, of whom 60% attend private schools (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2021). The private school sector receives about 25% of public funding, yet it is subject to minimum regulation and quality assurance. The burden of education in Lebanon lies with the parents. Together they pay US \$1.5 billion a year, with the government paying US \$1.2 billion a year 3 completion rates in primary 78% and preparatory 59% schools declining.

In addition, school completion is highly unequal among economic groups, with half of 18-year-olds completing one of the lowest economic ratios. The rate of out-of-school children of primary and secondary school age is very high (21%).

On ensuring that all youth and a large proportion of adults are aware in Lebanon two thirds of Lebanese students do not achieve basic literacy. This is a very low proportion according to international standards, and the limited learning achieved in the

²³ سكاي نيوز عربية، أزمة لبنان تهدد مصير مليون طالب في مهب الريح، ١٥ أغسطس ٢٠٢١، <https://bit.ly/3RNijb1>



ineffective and unfair education sector and recent crises have been translated into a mismatch of skills, labor market needs and high unemployment rates.

32% of young people work in jobs that require lower qualifications than their level of education, i.e., they are too educated. Skills mismatch is directly related to the quality of higher education, a sector currently unregulated to quality standards that will ensure the transfer of quality education and required skills.

Recent macroeconomic factors have also put additional pressure on the system, such as an increase in teachers' salaries to account for inflation, potential increases in tuition fees, and reduced job security for education managers and teachers - all factors limiting the quality of education. In Beirut, which took place a few weeks before the beginning of the school year, and following an already disturbing previous year with the prolonged closure of schools, in addition to the challenges that have already affected institutions and students; It has exacerbated resource constraints, as funding will have to be allocated for the emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation phase²⁴

Government spending on education was insufficient, at less than 2% of GDP in 2020, well below the OECD average of 4.4%, and among the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The third axis: challenges and obstacles to achieving SDG 4 in countries of conflict

One of the most significant challenges posed by the coronavirus in countries of conflict in recent years is when schools were closed and countries turned to digital learning, technology infrastructure and, especially, the Internet, was not at the level that could support distance and digital education at the national level. This challenge has clearly emerged in a number of the States under consideration. It should be noted, that many other countries in the world are also struggling with similar issues. This challenge is further compounded in conflict States experiencing fragile infrastructure, especially in burning conflict zones. The most prominent of those challenges can be reviewed as follows.

²⁴ World bank, Foundations for BUILDING FORWARD BETTER. <https://bit.ly/3yKNPOB>



A. Afghanistan

Poverty and a poor economy prevent students from accessing the limited technology available in Afghanistan. Personal Internet access is further affected by gender, geography, age and education. Many families do not even have electricity or a TV, a computer, an Internet and smartphones suitable for education.

The vast majority of families also have no basic knowledge of the education system. For them, computers, the Internet and remote learning are unheard of. All their hope and reliance on school, teacher and textbook, and in his absence do not even know how to help their children.

Also, lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities across schools hampers their capacity to follow the Ministry of Public Health's HIV guidelines and children cannot benefit from the non-educational support they receive within schools, such as snacks, mineral supplements, psychological and social support.

B. The Democratic Republic of the Congo

In line with the challenges in Afghanistan, it is not much different from those that have impeded the achievement of SDG 4 in the DRC, which shows the similarity of the outcomes of the conflict and its impact on the education sector in different countries, regardless of their causes. Since 2020, the educational situation in the eastern DRC has faced several obstacles and is linked to children's protection needs, including the repercussions of a new free primary education policy, where, owing to poor planning and management, resources have been exhausted, without significant advances in the Congolese education sector.

Of course, the continuing conflict in several provinces has caused widespread displacement of students and their families, affecting low school enrolment rates, as well as the forced closure of schools nationwide as a measure to contain COVID-19.

These factors have strained an education system that was already underfunded and stretched beyond capacity and have resulted in children struggling to access quality education across the country, and particularly in the eastern region. A review of recent



rapid needs assessments undertaken in four of DRC's 26 provinces (the conflict-affected districts of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika)²⁵

C. Ukraine

In Ukraine, the greatest challenge for achieving SDG 4 was the bombing of educational institutions. The war in Ukraine has forcibly displaced over 12 million people both inside the country and in neighboring countries, including 4.6 million children. A total of 1,888 education institutions have suffered bombing and shelling with 180 of them destroyed completely. Among the affected are more than 7.5 million children, 1.5 million youth, and over 70,000 international students who were learning in Ukraine prior to the war.

D. Lebanon

For Lebanon, the challenge exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic is that 74% of Lebanon's population suffers from poverty. However, the policies of neglecting the education sector over the years in Lebanon and the lack of oversight of public schools, especially in remote towns, have placed formal education in late ranks, but even outside of competition between Lebanon's most important schools and levels of education.

The real and fundamental problem lies in parents' recourse to their children's enrolment in private rather than formal schools so that they can obtain a good level of education at a very high fee required by those schools. Parents have lost confidence in most formal schools due to overcrowded classrooms, neglect and the Ministry of Education's failure to make any attempt to improve their learning conditions by providing more resources, such as websites that allow parents to follow their children's education, smart paintings and so on.

Although formal schools are prevalent throughout Lebanon's territory, mismanagement, the decline in equipment, the degradation of infrastructure and the absence of curricula developed in education, languages and foreign curricula (access to

²⁵ Education & child protection challenges in Eastern DRC: Impact of COVID-19, conflict and policy reform: Thematic series on education – October 2020, OCHA Services <https://bit.ly/3O4MhUE>



modern technology and equipment) have all lost confidence in formal education, despite the high qualifications of formal school teachers.²⁶

It is worth noting that Lebanon's education system is outdated and in dire need of reform, as it continues to rely on old teaching methods. Classrooms in most schools have no Internet access and no interactive teaching and learning methods.²⁷

Distance education has also proved ineffective in this chaos. Due to the current financial situation, not all families were able to afford Internet service charges, which in Lebanon are among the world's most expensive prices. In addition, not every family can buy a computer or laptop. The power outage for a long period of the day, which Lebanon is famous for, must be taken into account.

Certainly, most professors have not been trained in distance teaching methods and have received no assistance or guidance from the Ministry of Education, which has left them to fight this battle alone. Distance education also proved unreliable, with one professor correcting 20 copied tests. Some other students resorted to cheating during the exam or school duty by seeking help from a family member to write correct answers.²⁸

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, children and youth in conflict zones are in the midst of the world's battle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, and are among the most vulnerable groups due to the dire effects of the pandemic.

In this context, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights makes a set of recommendations that can be adopted as follows:

- First: Maat for Peace calls on the current government in Afghanistan to increase the number of schools, include larger numbers in formal education, and provide

²⁶ <https://bit.ly/3ASDMZO> النهار، التعليم بين التحديات الاقتصادية وغياب الدولة! هوية لبنان على المحك، ١١ أكتوبر ٢٠٢٢،

²⁷ المجلة العربية، مشاكل لبنان التعليمية بين أزمة كورونا... والحرمان المالي، ١٧ يوليو ٢٠٢٢، <https://bit.ly/3z5Htdt>

²⁸ المرجع السابق



connectors because they are a major barrier in receiving education for children due to the lack of schools and difficulty in accessing them.

- Second: Maat for Peace calls on international organizations concerned with women's rights in education to pressure the Taliban to reverse the decision on preventing girls from receiving higher education as women face severe difficulty in receiving their learning, which is contrary to SDG 4.
- Third: Maat for Peace recommends that the current government in Lebanon should combine the achievement of SDG 4 & 17 with the allocation of local resources to develop the education sector, improve formal education and its services and restore confidence in it. The Ministry of Education in Lebanon also calls for a strategy to reform the education sector in line with the goals of SDG 4.
- Fourth: Maat for Peace calls on international donors to increase education programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to encourage the current Government to launch national education sector reform programs in line with SDG 4.
- Fifth: Maat for Peace calls on the institutions concerned with improving the situation of education in conflict zones are jointly advocating for the compilation of data that will determine the situation of the education sector in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a view to determining the extent of the current problem and providing such data to international donors involved in supporting education programs and strategies.
- Sixth: Maat for Peace stresses the need to support children's education in conflict zones, by paying attention to the situation and education of children in Ukraine in particular, and to advocate for financial assistance for the rehabilitation of schools and educational institutions affected by Russian attacks.
- Seventh: Maat for Peace recommends that civil society organizations and stakeholders working in the field of sustainable development combine their efforts to find suggestions and solutions to better position the achievement of SDG 4 in conflict zones and pay more attention to marginalized groups. To affirm all Governments' desire to abide by the international conventions for the protection of children and the protocols supplementing them.