

# Migration from Public to Private Academic Institutions in Lebanon



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The state of public education in Lebanon has been deteriorating since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and this deterioration has worsened with Lebanon's economic and financial collapse. At best, only 40% of students remain, two years later, school sections have been closed, contract teachers have been laid off, and tenured teachers have been distributed across several schools to fulfill their duties, all of which are clear indicators of the reality of the state of public schools. Even in the most popular areas of Beirut, high school seats used to fill up after only two or three days of registration, but enrollment levels today have dropped by frightening proportions, sometimes reaching 60%. In some public schools in Beirut's southern suburbs, the number of students has also decreased from 700 to less than 300.

Children of impoverished Lebanese who could not afford private school tuition remained enrolled. In this context, immigration was not toward private schools with high fees and poor educational quality; rather, most parents tended to enroll their children in any private school, all in exchange for a school year under normal circumstances.

Strikes, the state's inability to secure the funds necessary to operate these institutions, such as providing fuel for heating and electricity, and dealing with epidemics spreading throughout the country, the Internet, and stationery, all contributed to the suffering of public schools. What the state pays only covers teacher salaries, with no funds allocated to basic services.

Before the economic collapse, public secondary schools did not have a financial deficit in terms of operating expenses, particularly large ones. These funds are now worthless due to the depreciation of the national currency. For example, printing exam papers for a secondary school with 500 students used to cost around two million pounds for the entire school year, but the cost has now risen to thirty-five million and must be covered by the secondary fund.

The situation is not much different at the level of higher education, as the state's accumulated neglect of the Lebanese University over the years, in addition to the Coronavirus pandemic and the decrease in the purchasing value of professors' salaries, in addition to their loss of all health and social incentives due to the economic crisis, resulting in a large number of professors and students leaving, particularly in practice-oriented faculties, where its characteristics began to emerge. In some colleges, the percentage of students who took exams has dropped to around 50%.

Despite this, most private universities in Lebanon witnessed unprecedented turnout, particularly at the start of the academic year 2022-2023, even though they "dollarized" their tuition fees at various rates. The expatriates were divided into new students and dropouts, which prompted some universities to set specific conditions and rates for accepting students after they had reached their maximum absorptive capacity.

We are clearly amid a large displacement and migration from public education to private education, both schools and universities, but the magnitude of this massive dropout and displacement raises many questions about the educational stability of Lebanese society, which will leave, at the very least, severe scars in the educational structure that will not be easily treated and will require cumulative work calculated in years to restore balance.

Despite this bleak picture of education in Lebanon, those who believe in the role of public schools and the Lebanese University in first and foremost building human beings and then consolidating coexistence and national values continue to advocate for them. This role is advanced in providing balanced education to various segments of society, and it serves as a breeding ground for both the poor and the wealthy. Private education is viewed as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, formal education in real societies. Education must include both public and private academic institutions to soar in the sky of excellence and creativity and to lay the groundwork for true citizenship.

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