

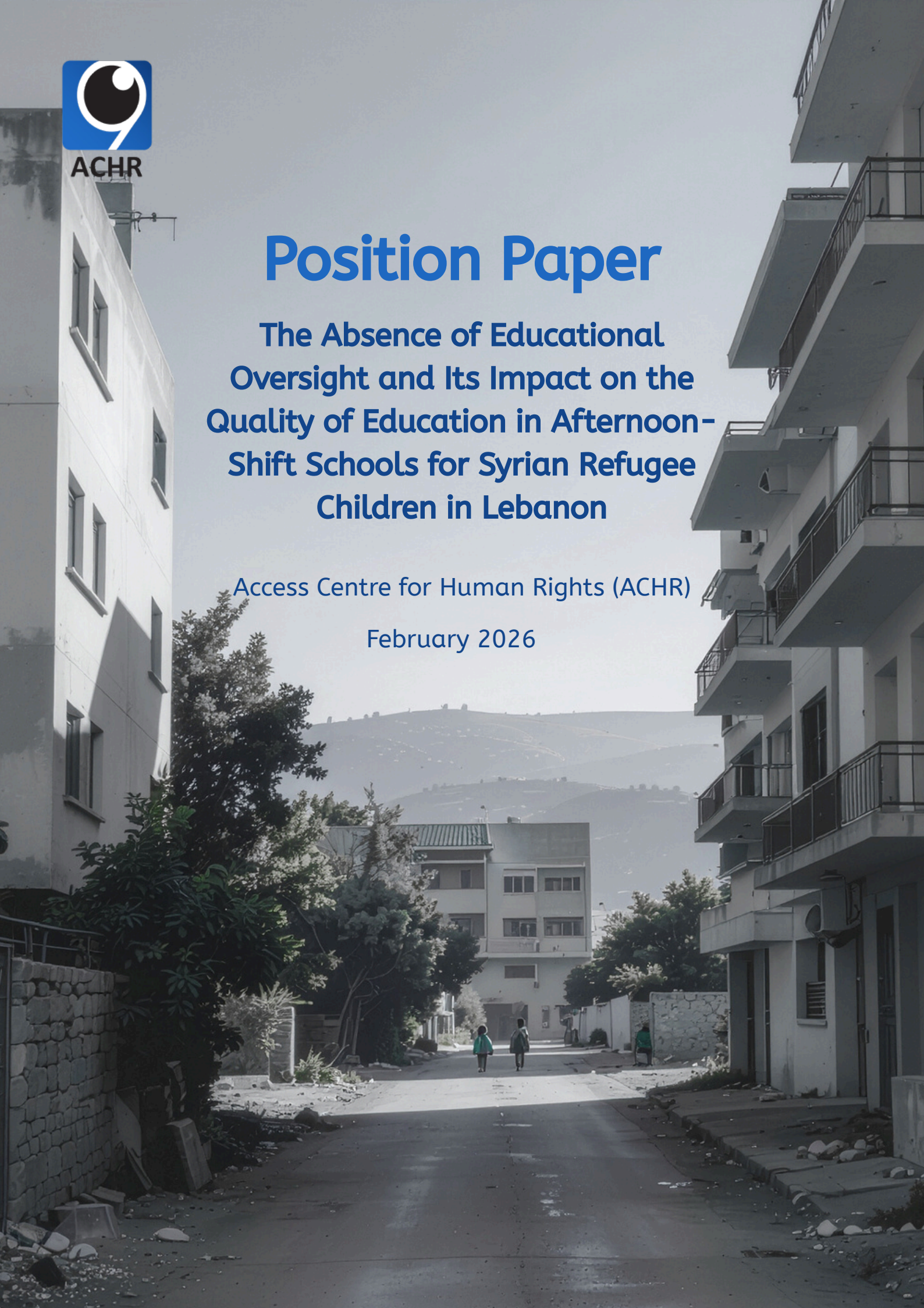


Position Paper

The Absence of Educational Oversight and Its Impact on the Quality of Education in Afternoon-Shift Schools for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon

Access Centre for Human Rights (ACHR)

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INTRODUCTION

Lebanon hosts more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are children of school age¹. Given the large number of Syrian children requiring access to education, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education adopted a double-shift system in Lebanese public schools in 2013, that enabled Syrian refugee students to attend afternoon classes. While this system has allowed thousands of Syrian children to enrol in public schools, it has also created parallel educational framework, separate from Lebanese children, that remains structurally weaker, under-resourced with insufficient qualified staff, as well as weak monitoring and accountability. These shortcomings have directly affected the quality of education and the safety of Syrian students. Syrian children attending afternoon classes face increased human rights violations, with parents reporting serious and documented abusive practices, including physical violence, educational neglect, and discrimination, while also stating that no effective oversight or accountability mechanisms are in place to address the violations their children face. Promoting safe and quality education for Syrian students requires the establishment of an oversight and accountability mechanism for afternoon-shift schools, mandated to monitor conditions, address wrongdoing, and operate with the full support of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Initially, an oversight mechanism in afternoon schools – the Educational Community Liaison (ECL) program², was funded by UNHCR, and constituted a core monitoring and protection mechanism that significantly reduced violations against Syrian children in Lebanese schools. In 2023, UNHCR supported 364 volunteers that were deployed to monitor student attendance and dropout rates, document violence, bullying, and other violations, across 328 afternoon-shift schools. However, funding cuts has considerably impacted the education response and UNHCR no longer funds this program. The education sector in Lebanon is now primarily channelled through UNICEF-led programming³, and while education services continue, there is no clear information about an alternative oversight or accountability mechanism in place to identify, prevent or respond to violations affecting Syrian students in afternoon-shift schools. More importantly, the absence of monitoring and oversight has coincided with increased educational neglect and violations affecting Syrian students, alongside rising reports from parents. This gap has created an institutional vacuum in which no nationally anchored child protection mechanism exists, and Syrian refugees – already facing significant vulnerabilities linked to displacement, poverty, and limited access to basic services and healthcare - are being exposed to further risks within schools.

¹ UNHCR, *Lebanon – Needs at a Glance 2024*, Preliminary Results from the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees , 2024 [At a glance 2024](#)

² UNHCR Lebanon, *Education Programme – Lebanon Fact Sheet: Education Community Liaison Volunteers (ECL)*, 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/lb/sites/lb/files/legacy-pdf/UNHCR-Lebanon-Education-Fact-sheet-Year-End-2023_0.pdf.

³ UNICEF – Humanitarian Action for Children. See: <https://www.unicef.org/media/176991/file/2026-HAC-Lebanon.pdf>

This position paper argues that having and strengthening protection and oversight in schools, particularly those operating a second-shift system for Syrian children is an urgent structural necessity to address violations occurring in these settings. Drawing on interviews with 4 parents of Syrian students and 3 former ECL volunteers, as well as documented patterns of violations in 27 afternoon-shift schools in the Bekaa region (including Baalbek, Hermel, Zahle, and Koura) and Mount Lebanon (including Aley and surrounding areas), the paper demonstrates the nature and scale of violations faced by Syrian refugee children. It further examines how the absence of effective oversight undermines both the quality of education and the safety of students, increasing the likelihood of violations occurring both inside and outside the classroom.

Increase Of Violations Against Syrian Students in Afternoon Shift Schools

Since the end of the ECL program, which previously enabled the monitoring, documentation, and referral of violations against Syrian students, significant gaps have emerged, allowing further violations to occur without oversight or accountability. Parents have reported ongoing issues that have intensified and become more visible, particularly physical violence by teachers, such as beatings with hands and sticks. ACHR documented one case, in which a Syrian refugee mother residing in Lebanon, reported that her child was physically assaulted by a teacher during an afternoon class, who first struck the child with a hand and then with a stick. As a result of the assault, the child fell and sustained an eye injury after hitting a heater inside the classroom. Although the incident was reported to the school administration, the child was not provided with medical support, and the mother was forced to take her child to the hospital herself. Furthermore, the school failed to initiate any investigation into the incident or take disciplinary or preventive measures against the teacher.

Education is a fundamental right guaranteed under international human rights law and therefore human rights violations facing Syrian refugee students during afternoon classes in Lebanese public schools constitute direct breaches of the child's right to education under both international human rights law and Lebanese law⁴ Under the Lebanese Constitution⁵, education is recognised as a public good and is mandated to be free⁵ so long as it does not disturb public order, contradict morals, or violate the dignity of any religion or creed." Article 10 underscores the state's role in regulating public instruction and supports access to education as a fundamental social function. Lebanon has also ratified several international human rights treaties that enshrine the right to education and non-discrimination, including

⁴ Lebanese Constitution, revised in 2004. See: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon_2004

⁵ OHCHR – The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). According to Article 13 of the ICESCR, the State bears responsibility for ensuring access to education without discrimination and for protecting children from violations within its educational institutions⁶. Further, physical violence constitutes a direct violation of Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and contravenes international child protection standards in education⁷. The absence of supervision and abandonment of students also represents a breach of the Duty of Care owed by schools to children, which obligates school administrations and teachers to take all necessary measures to ensure a safe and effective learning environment, including supervision and the prevention of foreseeable physical or psychological harm. ⁷his principle is also ⁸, that affirms the child's right to education within a safe and healthy environment⁹. The Lebanese constitutional preamble affirms that the State abides by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is committed to embodying its principles, including the right to education¹⁰. This incorporation of international norms into national law obliges Lebanon to respect and ensure children's right to education without discrimination regardless of nationality or legal status.

In addition to the above, the lack of oversight or accountability mechanisms has enabled other forms of abuse and neglect to persist, including intimidation, verbal harassment, discriminatory practices and disciplinary measures.

Lack Of Educational Support and Increased School Dropout

Parents reported that classes had become ineffective learning environments, with students attending school merely to pass time without meaningful learning. Syrian children requiring additional support or accelerated learning programs no longer received the necessary follow-up that had previously been monitored and facilitated by ECL volunteers, leading to a noticeable decline in academic achievement. School dropout rates also increased due to the absence of oversight and attendance monitoring that had been carried out under the ECL program, as well as the failure to identify and address individual causes of absenteeism, that stem from fear of violence¹¹ principle is grounded in Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC, which

⁶ OHCHR – Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Lebanese Constitution, rev. 2004. See: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon_2004#:~:text=committed%20to%20its%20Charter%20and%20the%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human%20Rights.%20The%20State%20embodies%20these%20principles%20in%20all%20sectors%20and%20scopes%20without%20exception.

¹¹ OHCHR – Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

affirm the right to education aimed at developing the child's personality, talents, and abilities and preparing children for responsible life in society¹². It is further reinforced by Article 13 of the ICESCR, which requires education to be of sufficient quality to ensure full human development¹³. Lebanon's Child Protection Policy in Schools emphasizes the obligation to provide effective and inclusive education that meets children's needs and reduces educational disparities¹⁴. Consequently, the lack of educational support and individualized follow-up that were part of the ECL program activities, has led to declining academic performance and increased dropout rates and constitutes^{14,15}

Absence of Psychosocial Support and Continued Discrimination

Parents reported that the absence of psychosocial and emotional support became evident following the suspension of the ECL program, as students increasingly experienced fear and anxiety about attending school and began associating the school environment with punishment and violence. As ECL volunteers were responsible for referring cases to psychosocial support services, the lack of there off consequently and negatively affected students' motivation to learn, their sense of safety, and led to gradual disengagement from education. At the same time, discriminatory and unequal treatment by school administrations persisted, with Syrian children facing exclusion from educational opportunities and food assistance compared to their Lebanese peers. Again, the lack of continuous monitoring, previously carried out through the ECL program, allowed these practices to continue unchecked. This situation constitutes a clear violation of children's rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Articles 2 and 3 on non-discrimination and the best interests of the child, as well as Articles 28 and 29 on the right to safe and effective education that fosters human rights and equality¹⁶.

Unequal Treatment and Discrimination

Although discrimination has been an ongoing structural violation severely affecting Syrians in Lebanon more broadly, parents reported an increase in discriminatory practices by teachers and school administrators within schools, directed against Syrian students. Parents identified the lack of monitoring and oversight as a key factor exacerbating these practices. They further

¹² OHCHR – The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

¹³ UNICEF – Ministry of Education and UNICEF launch Child Protection Policy in Schools, 11 May 2018. See: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/ministry-education-and-unicef-launch-child-protection-policy-school>

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNICEF, *Child Protection Policy in Schools* (Beirut: MEHE and UNICEF, May 11, 2018), accessed [date], <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/ministry-education-and-unicef-launch-child-protection-policy-schools>.

¹⁶ OHCHR – Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

cited differential treatment of their children in the distribution of educational resources, food assistance, and opportunities to participate in school activities compared to Lebanese students. Such discrimination constitutes a violation of Article 2 of the CRC¹⁷ and contradicts, as said, with the principle of equality in education enshrined in Lebanese law and international standards. The absence of ECL volunteers allowed these practices to continue without oversight, deepening children's sense of exclusion and negatively affecting their academic and social integration.

At the national level, Lebanon's Child Protection Policy in Schools – issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in cooperation with UNICEF – explicitly mandates the protection of children from physical and psychological violence, adequate supervision during classes and breaks, and the provision of a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environment for all ¹⁸. However, the lived experiences of Syrian refugee children reveal a stark disconnect between these legal and policy commitments and their implementation in practice. This gap has resulted in an educational environment where protection is weakened and the right to education is increasingly subject to politicization, restriction, discrimination and neglect.

CONCLUSION

All documented violations point to a clear need for an oversight and accountability system (like the ECL program) to ensure the safety and educational conditions in afternoon-shift schools. Syrian refugee students face multiple grave violations, severely undermine their' and parents' sense of safety, and directly affect their physical and psychological well-being within an education system where children should be able to learn in dignity and security, as well as their right to education. Reactivating independent educational oversight mechanisms, strengthening accountability, and ensuring the presence of trained monitoring and child protection personnel to document violations and follow up on complaints are essential conditions for guaranteeing a safe and equitable learning environment, and these programs and activities should be funded again.

Recommendations

1. Reinstate independent educational monitoring mechanisms in afternoon-shift schools, including community-based volunteers, to ensure student safety, accountability, and compliance with child protection standards.

¹⁷ OHCHR – Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

¹⁸ UNICEF – Ministry of Education and UNICEF launch Child Protection Policy in Schools, 11 May 2018. See: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/ministry-education-and-unicef-launch-child-protection-policy-school>

2. Enforce the Child Protection Policy in Schools and prohibit all forms of corporal punishment, physical and psychological violence, and discrimination through clear accountability and disciplinary procedures.
3. Ensure safe complaint and referral mechanisms for students and parents, enabling confidential reporting and timely investigation of violations.
4. Restore and sustain funding for educational oversight programs, such as ECL or equivalent models, recognizing their essential role in preventing abuse and school dropout.
5. Improve the quality of education by strengthening supervision, conducting regular learning assessments, and providing targeted academic support and accelerated learning programs.
6. Expand psychosocial support services within schools to address fear, trauma, and anxiety among refugee children and reduce disengagement and dropout.



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