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# The Violence Free Schools Initiative: Transforming a culture through schools

**UNDP Lebanon work in peace education**

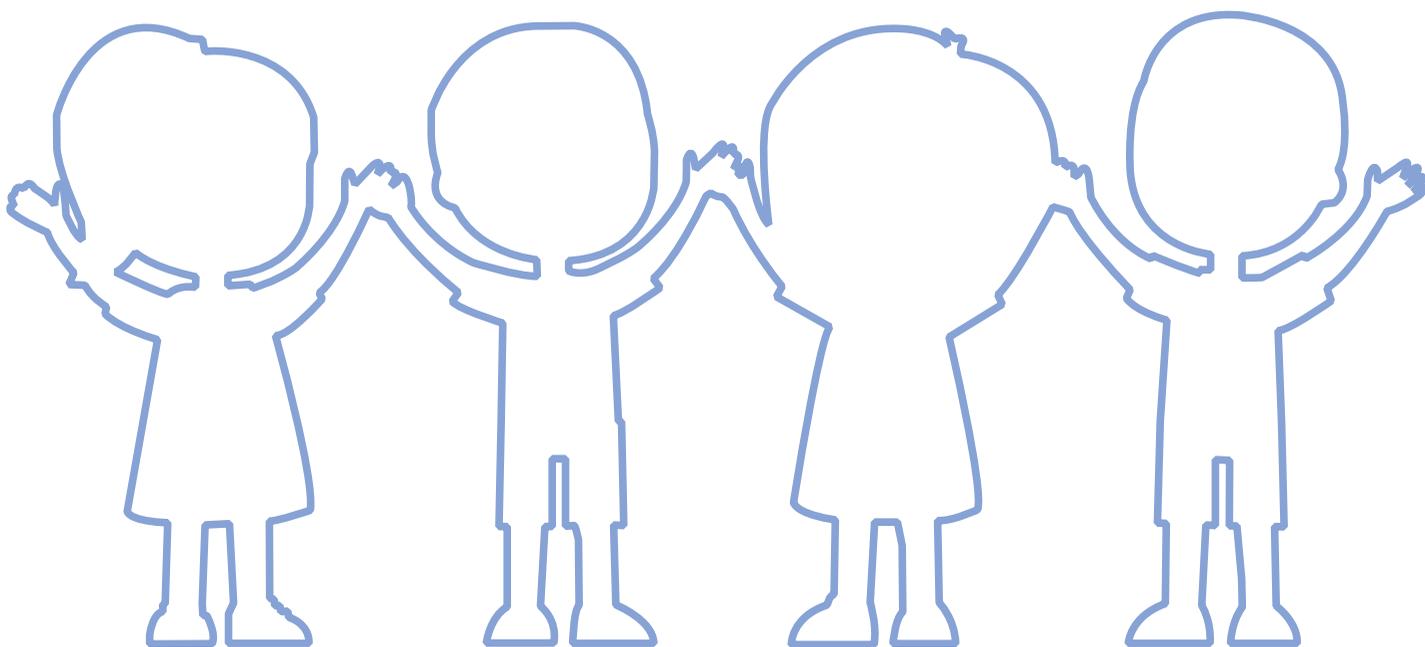


# The Violence Free Schools Initiative: Transforming a culture through schools



**UNDP Lebanon work in peace education**

October 2021



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Front cover: During a Violence Free Schools activity at the Chiyah Public School, November 2016, a student graffiti's "Peace" on a school wall.

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# Acronyms

<b>CAC</b>	Center for Active Citizenship
<b>CCN</b>	Code of Conduct for Nonviolence
<b>DOPS</b>	Direction d'Orientation Pédagogique et Scolaire
<b>MEHE</b>	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>VFS</b>	Violence Free Schools Initiative

# The Violence Free Schools Initiative: Transforming a culture through schools

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Peace building work in Lebanon is set against a context of layered and longstanding violence expressions of conflict. A history of armed and unarmed conflicts has sustained memories of loss and destruction, the normalization of violence at home and within confessional groups and a culture of tensions and conflicts between religious and political groups.

Some of the laws in Lebanon perpetuate forms of structural violence towards women. Forms of violence and neglect are also manifested within the education system and the school culture. Psychological and physical harm is the most common forms of violence in schools in Lebanon affecting boys and girls equally (UNESCO, 2012). Despite the Penal Code article 186 that prohibits the use of corporal punishment at school, a recent report by Human Rights Watch documented testimonies of 51 children in Lebanon who are victims of verbal abuse and corporal punishment (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Most recently, Lebanon has undergone another era of compounded shocks, including the start of the 17 October 2019 uprisings, an economic collapse resulting in a devalued currency by about 90% and the Beirut port explosion on 4 August, 2020 that destroyed 178 schools and displaced over 300,000 people.

*Psychological and physical harm are the most common forms of violence in schools in Lebanon*

UNESCO, 2012

The influx of Syrian refugees after 2011 introduced new levels of diversity. Forms of conflict arose when host, Syrian and refugee communities were competing for limited resources; expressions of prejudice resulted in bullying and attacks against Syrian refugees; and testimonials from refugee parents and children revealed chronic domestic violence at home that children exhibited while playing with friends. Recognizing the multiple layers and forms of violence displayed in virtually all aspects of host and refugee community's social ecology, the VFS initiative aimed to catalyse a school culture

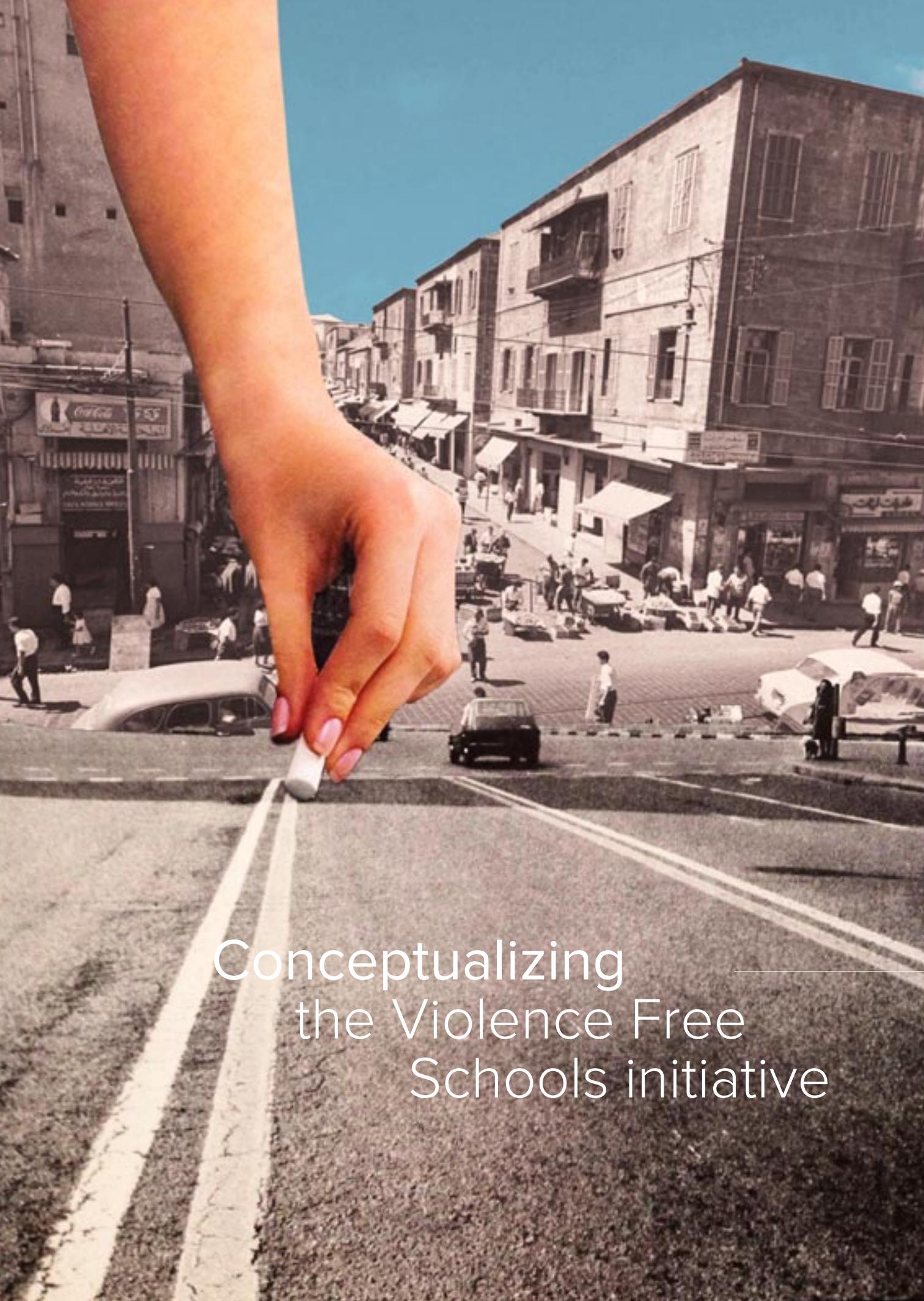
that would change perceptions of violence and provide approaches to addressing them. Hence, the overarching aim of the VFS is to empower school-based actors - principals, teachers, students, parents - to foster peace building by identifying and addressing various forms of violence through sustainable schooling.

Under the UNDP Peace Building work, 56 intermediate public schools across Lebanon participated in the VFS since its launch in 2014. Since then, the VFS has been supported with funds from Germany through the KfW Development Bank, UKaid, Norway and Mexico. Currently, 17 new schools have joined the VFS initiative. The UNDP led this initiative with close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Teachers and principals across the schools engaged children and parents from Syrian and Lebanese communities to create a culture of practice that aimed to identify and act upon various forms of violence. This report collates the key processes, outcomes and reflections of participating stakeholders to highlight how the VFS initiative has contributed to peace education and social stability through formal education.

Information for this report is drawn from published documentation on the VFS work in 56 schools over three academic years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18) and key informant interviews. The UNDP prepared a number of reports and films documenting the training and school activities. Interviews with key informants from the MEHE, UNDP and CAC and a sample of parents and their children provided testimonial evidence on personal experiences and observations. Although school observations were planned, schools remained closed because of the pandemic.

*56 intermediate public schools across Lebanon participated in the VFS since its launch in 2014*

The UNDP Peace Building work



Conceptualizing  
the Violence Free  
Schools initiative

# Conceptualizing the Violence Free Schools initiative

The VFS initiative is part of the UNDP Peace Building work that was launched in 2007. During that time, the UNDP explored with MEHE how peace building can be fostered in schools. From a training workshop that UNDP organized for 100 secondary school teachers, many suggested a toolbox of activities for peace education. Inspired by this, the UNDP in 2010 outlined a Peace Building Toolbox with the technical support of CAC to provide secondary school teachers with tools to use in the citizenship education program, also referred to as social studies: (e.g. civics, history and geography). The Toolbox presented learning activities to support children in defining, examining and dealing with conflict and differences, all within three main themes: “Dealing with differences”; “Conflict concept and tools” and “Skills and tools to deal with conflicts”. The Toolbox was also cross-referenced with the national curriculum so not to join the “many toolboxes out there” that eventually get “put in drawers” (CAC). The team looked at the sociology, economics and civics curricula and chapter lessons in the book for cycle 4 to see how the Peace Building Toolbox activities could support their curricular aims and themes. The Toolbox included a cross-reference map between the Toolbox activities and the school textbooks. Aligning the Toolbox with the national curricular textbooks was seen as essential because of two reasons: One, school visits from the MEHE check to see if teachers observe the sequence of the curricular textbooks and, two, public schools do not typically allocate resources (e.g. time and funds) for extra-curricular activities.

To develop the Peace Building Toolbox, the team established two committees. A consultative committee comprising nine public school teachers periodically reviewed the content and gave feedback on how to best facilitate the lesson plans.

The work was also reviewed by the Citizenship Education Committee at the MEHE. Once the Toolbox was finalised, the team then started planning a pilot phase to take

*“Dealing with differences”;  
“Conflict concept and tools”  
“Skills and tools to deal with  
conflicts”*

Three main themes

place in 12 schools. The Centre for Lebanese Studies was contracted to measure the effectiveness of the Toolbox using an experimental design study by gathering baseline and post-test data.

By 2013, two years had passed since the war broke out in Syria. Lebanon experienced an unprecedented influx of people from Syria seeking refuge, resulting in the highest ratio of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR, 2018). Documented and anecdotal testimonies revealed that tensions grew between Lebanese and Syrian communities and between Syrian refugees and previously settled Syrian communities. These conflicts also manifested in public schools, particularly those that hosted the second shift program for the refugee children, where the two communities of children interacted during the shift transition. A female Palestinian student in the morning shift recalled, “There were lots of fights between Syrian and Lebanese children in the morning. There once was a fight between me and a Syrian girl who cursed my dad.” UNDP seized the opportunity to support schools in developing a holistic approach to identifying and addressing conflict. As a result, The VFS initiative was born, carrying with it the principles of the Peace Building Toolbox for a whole-school approach to peace building.



# Planning, preparation and approaches



# Planning, preparation and approaches

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The UNDP outlined the initiative plan and, with close coordination with MEHE and DOPS, facilitated the activities at the schools. According to a representative at the School Counselling and Protection Unit at DOPS, the VFS initiative was a valuable contribution because it strongly aligned with the Social and Emotional Learning framework at DOPS and the MEHE Child Protection Policy. DOPS has already published a resource booklet of 120 activities for cycles 1 and 2 (20 activities per grade level) and so the DOPS representative saw that the outputs of the VFS can inform an activity resource pack for cycles 3 and 4.

## Selection of schools

The UNDP coordinated closely with the MEHE and DOPS when writing the criteria for selecting schools to participate in the program. A total of 56 intermediate public schools participated in the program: Bekaa (15), Beirut Southern Suburb (11), Mount Lebanon (15) and Tripoli and its neighboring areas (15). The criteria for selecting the schools included the following:

- Schools provided grade levels for cycle 3 (intermediate), an age range of children at risk of dropping out;
- Principal demonstrated commitment to support teachers, students and parents;
- Student population included children from Syria (second or morning shift);
- Community or area was vulnerable to poverty, violence and/or neglect;
- Schools have limited or no past opportunities to participate in peace building initiatives.

Teachers were selected based on their past experiences in organizing activities at the school. Supervisors were also selected based on their role at the school as activity organizers, although some were not very active in the past.

## Theory of change

An initial map of the VFS theory of change outlines underlying assumptions that suggest why this initiative may be effective in fostering new pathways of peace building through formal education (see table 1). Identifying and addressing violence requires continuous exercises of [self-]awareness, a spectrum of definitions of violence and a democratic school climate determined by the inclusion of actors representing the diversity of the school. When school-based actors are involved in this discourse and practices together, they help transform an educational climate from an authoritarian-like culture of practice to a democratic one that upholds principles of child rights and social justice. Indeed, the inclusive dimension to the VFS positions all actors as either potential or active victims and perpetrators. Moreover, the range of definitions, root causes and various expressions of violence has had “teachers reflect how they are [victims] of structural violence” through the limited terms and conditions of their part-time work contract; and the dialogues on violence at school revealed “no justification to use [any kind of] violence against children” and prompted tolerance and care as responses to children who express violence (CAC trainer).

Table 1: Theory of change for VFS initiative

<b>Theory of change</b>
If school-level actors - students, parents, teachers, principals - are provided with support to identify and address violence together, then they can generate a sustainable school culture that fosters a safe and empowering educational climate.
<b>Assumptions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A school climate that includes parents, teachers, principals and students from the different cultural backgrounds in planning, implementation and review processes will generate the democratic culture necessary to identify and address forms of violence</li><li>2. Children and parents from different cultural backgrounds who engage in school-based policy development and extra-curricular activities to address concerns together demonstrate social cohesion.</li><li>3. Identifying and addressing the roots and expressions of all structural and direct forms of violence experienced by school-level actors provides children with a safe and nurturing school environment.</li></ol>

<b>Intervention activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sensitization</li> <li>2. Training</li> <li>3. Creation of working groups</li> <li>4. CCN and identification of soft and hard activities</li> <li>5. Implementation of soft activities</li> <li>6. Implementation of hard activities</li> </ol>
<b>Successful program outputs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of schoolbased actors sensitized and trained</li> <li>2. Number of CCN developed and adopted at school</li> <li>3. Number of rehabilitation projects</li> <li>4. Number of participatory and advocacy activities</li> </ol>
<b>Indicators of change (outcomes)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diverse forms of violence reported and addressed</li> <li>2. Over time, incidents of violent acts at school and home decrease</li> <li>3. Task force groups meet regularly to review CCN and organize activities</li> <li>4. Fewer children at risk of dropping out and retention</li> </ol>
<b>Barriers and threats</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Children's participation is tokenistic</li> <li>2. Resistance from community?</li> </ol>

Implementation activities of the VFS initiative comprised six phases: (1) sensitization, (2) training, (3) creation of task forces, (4) development of CCN and outlining of soft and hard activities, (5) implementation of soft activities and (6) implementation of hard activities. During **sensitization**, students, teachers, principals and parents learn about different forms of violence through workshop activities. Students focus more on discrimination and bullying; parents on discipline and punishment at home; and teachers on anger management, classroom management and school-based violence. Teachers then participate in **training** sessions on theoretical understandings of violence and the role of schooling in fostering peace building. They also look at practical tools that can help them manage tensions, address incidents and reduce violence. Each school then creates a **working group**, or Peace Building Task Force, made up of 14 members: 6 students (gender balanced; from all nationalities present in the school), 4 parents (gender balanced; from all nationalities present in the school), 2 teachers and 2 administrative personnel (e.g. principal, director). Selected teachers typically have a social science background (e.g. sociology, civics).

The working groups then meet weekly with a conflict management expert from UNDP to develop a **CCN and soft and hard activities**. The process involves drawing a conflict map that identifies different expressions of violence in their school, home and wider community and the reasons behind these forms of violence. After many discussions, they write a CCN - Code of Conduct for Nonviolence - that becomes adopted as school policy. They even organize a ceremony for the entire school to welcome its principles and strategies. During this planning phase, they also draw up ideas of soft and hard activities. Soft activities include projects, sports and campaigns that engage parents, teachers, students and other members of the community. Hard activities involve work on infrastructure that can help prevent or address violence, such as improving accessibility or renovating a play area. They then spend the rest of the academic year **implementing the soft and hard activities**.



# The Violence Free Schools in action: Stage 1

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# The Violence Free Schools in action: Stage 1

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During the initial stage of the VFS, 56 schools participated in carrying out these six phases. The descriptions below illustrate how these phases were rolled out in some of the schools across the country. The second stage, which is presented later, introduces how the DOPS at MEHE adopted the VFS.

## Sensitization and training

During the sensitization workshops, activities were created to encourage the participants to identify forms of violence, discuss various positions (bystanders, victims, perpetrators) and, when possible, reconcile by finding common ground. When children, parents, teachers and principals map violence together as a sensitization exercise, they begin to establish a common language that helps them define harm in forms of neglect and violence (direct and structural). They also encounter differences in defining violence, such as spanking; what some may consider to be culturally acceptable or even beneficial, others define as harmful. The processes of sensitization are also critical in establishing new dynamics of talk in a culture where relationships in schooling are hierarchical. Moreover, identifying and addressing forms and consequences of violence requires a degree of openness. This first phase helped sensitize the teachers, students and parents to a new discourse and set of approaches that would help define, prevent and address different forms of violence at school and at home.

Table 2 lists the number of students, teachers and parents who participated in the sensitization workshops over a period of five years. It was typical to see parents question or hesitate before participating. Communicating with leaders in the community, such as religious leaders, local authorities or even other parents have encouraged many of the parents to participate. Without the endorsement of these leaders, the VFS could be seen as a potential threat to conservative values.

Table 2: Population of participating students, teachers and parents in sensitization workshops

	Bekaa - Cycle 1	Bekaa - Cycle 2	Mount Lebanon	Tripoli and neighbouring areas	Beirut southern suburbs
<b>Years</b>	2014 - 2016	2016	2016	2017 - 2018	2016
<b>Students</b>	1021	1746	1567	2191	1109
<b>Teachers</b>	356	210	298	192	243
<b>Parents</b>	588	417	215	520	122

During the sensitization sessions, some who participated expressed shock at some of the terms or descriptions of violence used. Gender and sexuality related tensions arose when discussing early marriage, puberty, sexual assault and sexual identity, which sometimes prompted reactions from parents like, “Are you encouraging my child to be a homosexual?” Other parents and teachers objected to defining some expressions that conceptually relate to verbal and psychological violence such as shouting and using threats and insults as forms of violence. Some of the adults’ participation was described as reserved at times; either they felt “shy” (UNDP) or may not have been as honest and forthcoming as the students (Parent). A few did express feeling threatened by the values promoted. The principals participated, but reportedly with some hesitation at the start. The passive participation and resistance of principals has been observed in previous projects where schools are selected by the MEHE rather than participating voluntarily (Shuayb, Akar, & Makkouk, 2011). However, over time, principals reported that they felt more invested in the VFS initiative as they observed certain changes in the school climate (CAC).

The first set of activities focused on eliciting understandings of violence, particularly in everyday life. The trainers started by asking those at school to individually fill out a survey; “This process alone revealed some dynamics that were harmful” (CAC). Equally important, a wide range of forms of violence emerged:

*Some of the adults’ participation was described as reserved at times; either they felt “shy”*

UNDP

- Parents and students shared testimonials that demonstrated the normativity of **violence at home**. “Parents used to give their ideas and responses when we used to talk about being spanked at

home” (Student). Parents reportedly argued that spanking was a form of protecting their children because they would learn faster this way. A student explained how even the anger expressed at home “makes me angry; I feel that I want to break something but I cannot do anything.” A principal observed that parents - Lebanese and non-Lebanese - who participated in or even witnessed armed conflict have nurtured a climate of violence at home “without noticing it”.

- Degrees of violence manifested in **power relations** between adults and children. “Adults are always shutting us up whenever we want to share our grievances” (Student). Indeed, as one observed, parents appear to show more authoritarian forms of talk when addressing children in intermediate school while feeling more able to reason with their children in secondary school. An imbalance in power relations between children also led to and normalized bullying at school.



- Direct and indirect expressions of **discrimination** against Syrians were released through direct violence. One Lebanese parent reported witnessing a teacher beating up a 10-year-old Syrian child on the playground.
- Children brought to school tensions from religious or political **polarization** in their community. The regular day shift at schools comprises a majority of students from Lebanon among a small population from neighboring countries like Syria and Palestine. Their communities struggle with warring tribes at political and family levels, such as those in Tripoli and the Bekaa. Teachers avoid dialogic pedagogies in fear of triggering verbal and physical conflicts that, as they report, they cannot manage. Even in the second shift, principals reported fights among Syrian refugee students from conflicting communities: rural versus urban, pro-regime versus anti-regime.
- Approaches to managing behaviour at school included the use of direct violence as a form of **disciplining children**. Testimonies of a teacher at school hitting a child or shouting profanity and threats were quite common. In fact, some schools have wooden rulers for capital punishment. One parent felt that “children come to school to learn, but leave as professors of violence.” Teachers, on the other hand, report exhaustion from the efforts in trying to address what they consider disruptive behaviour from students.
- Lebanese adults and children living in areas of protracted conflict and poverty reported the normalcy of **carrying arms**, whether firearms or knives. A student explained, “On my street, people carry blades. Do you know what a blade is? You think that I am a child, but I am a grown up.” Poverty has also apparently pushed some boys to drop out of school to join the army without completing Basic Education (up to grade 9).
- Some Lebanese children fell victim to **substance abuse** and either spent some time in jail or facing legal battles.

When brainstorming soft activities, students suggested many related to the arts, including dramatizations, dances, writing poetry, playing musical instruments and drawing and painting. They found these as opportunities to express their experiences of violence and positions of intolerance towards violence as forms of advocacy and awareness-raising. A student recalled the theatrical activity as effective in communicating perceptions of violence at home and school. “I was the teacher in a theatrical. I imitated an Arabic teacher I didn’t like.” She explained the plot:

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A child was a victim of domestic violence because he had bad grades. He went to school and expressed the pressures he feels from home. The teacher - who also may have similar problems at home - walked in, gave a quick lesson and shouted at the student. A student popped a gum in class, I told her off in front of everyone; I hit a student with a ruler. Then the mother came to talk to the principal. I then walked in to shout at the parents and said, ‘Hey, hey, who’s talking about me?’ and the principal shouted at me saying, ‘My school is free of violence!’

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The testimonies above illustrate only a small array of the violence expressed at and through school. Others include structural violence through policies that marginalize children with special educational needs and disabilities (e.g. limited access to school facilities, keeping children with disruptive behaviour at home) and compromise fair contractual terms with teachers.

# Peace Building Task Forces and Codes of Conduct for Nonviolence

The sensitization and training sessions were concluded with the assignment of a Peace Building Task Force per school. The task forces comprised students and parents from Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian communities, representing the diversity of students in the regular day shift. The first assignment of each task force was to develop a code of conduct for nonviolence (CCN). In some schools, a school psychologist helped in writing the CCN. Below are some examples of codes of conduct developed.

## School Community Charter of Rights and Duties

Table 3: Sawiri Intermediate Public School, El Bekaa

	Rights	Duties
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having access to good education that contributes to students' integrated and holistic growth</li> <li>▪ Having access to a convenient and comfortable learning environment</li> <li>▪ Earning the respect of all school community members</li> <li>▪ Being treated without any form of discrimination</li> <li>▪ Not being exposed to humiliation or violence of any kind</li> <li>▪ Receiving punishment in the event of a mistake (knowing the mistake committed before the punishment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adhering to school rules and regulations after reviewing them</li> <li>▪ Respecting and maintaining the common public space and school equipment</li> <li>▪ Refraining from violent practices and respecting all members of the school community</li> <li>▪ Effectively participating in all school activities</li> </ul>
<b>Teachers and Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Earning the respect of all school community members</li> <li>▪ Teaching in an appropriate school environment, equipped with all supplies that serve the educational process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complying with school laws and regulations</li> <li>▪ Having professional commitment</li> <li>▪ Refraining from insulting the student and from resorting to violence in all its forms</li> </ul>

	<b>Rights</b>	<b>Duties</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respecting their professional and livelihood rights.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Embracing the principle of non-discrimination among students</li> <li>▪ Refraining from violent punishment, but rather resorting to educational alternatives</li> <li>▪ Periodically communicating with parents and consulting with administration</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing their children with quality education and treating them well, without resorting to violence</li> <li>▪ Being aware of the school situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respecting (the administration and school community)</li> <li>▪ Refraining from violent practices against their children</li> <li>▪ Following up on their children's education</li> <li>▪ Raising and guiding their children to accept the other and refrain from discrimination and intolerance</li> </ul>
<b>Follow-up Mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Printing the Charter and distributing it to all members of the school community</li> <li>▪ Committing to the proper application of the Charter by all members of the school community</li> <li>▪ Implementing awareness activities about the content of the Charter</li> <li>▪ In the event of any violation, the procedures stipulated in the School bylaws shall be applied in addition to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing on an educational punishment in case the students violate the clauses (penal clauses).</li> <li>• Warning sent by the administration in the event of the use of violence by the teachers (an administrative procedure against the violating teacher)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Organizing periodic dialogue meetings between the administration and all members of the school community to follow up on the Charter application</li> </ul>	

# Zahle First Intermediate Public School for Boys, El Bekaa

Table 4: Code of Conduct Towards a Violence-free School

<b>Charter Clauses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect for religious diversity, non-discrimination between religions and sects, and refraining from behaviors associated with sectarian discrimination</li> <li>▪ Respect among students, and refraining from physical and verbal violence in conflict resolution</li> <li>▪ Respect of the school bylaws</li> <li>▪ Preservation of school furniture and contents</li> <li>▪ Keeping school clean by throwing waste in the designated places and keeping the bathrooms clean</li> <li>▪ Commitment of parents to communicate effectively with the school administration and respond to it regarding their children’s school affairs, and to respect the appointments and meetings set by the teachers and/or the administration.</li> <li>▪ Commitment to mutual respect between students, teachers, administration and workers</li> <li>▪ Commitment of teachers to Refrain from resorting to physical, verbal or moral violence against students</li> </ul>
<b>Charter Application Mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promotion and mainstreaming               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printing the Charter and hanging it in the classroom, corridors and teachers' room</li> <li>• Printing the Charter and placing it in the agenda at the beginning of the school year and requesting the students and parents to sign it</li> <li>• Discussing the Charter and its application mechanisms in the classroom with the students, before signing it by the students, teachers, director and principal</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Follow up on implementation and supervision                A special committee shall be formed to follow up the implementation of the Charter. This committee shall be composed of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The director</li> <li>• Two teachers delegated by the other teachers</li> <li>• Two class delegates (a male and a female) elected from among the delegates of all classes to represent the students</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Violation of the Charter Clauses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Violations are reported to the committee in writing in a special box and reviewed daily.</li> <li>▪ After verifying the violation and if proven, the following actions are taken, according to the level of violation:</li> </ul>

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**Violation of the Charter Clauses**

**Minor violation** (e.g., littering): an apology or correction of the error  
**Medium violation** (e.g., insulting, swearing, pushing) and major violation (e.g., beating or physical violence): a fine of LBP 1,500 is imposed for each violation committed by the students and a fine of LBP 10,000 for each violation committed by teachers or administration employees

- The money shall be placed in a special fund in the director’s office. The fund shall be managed by the committee that decides how the money will be used, provided it is spent to serve the school public interest and promote peace building

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**Important note:** In the event of major violations involving legal liability on the part of the administration, the latter will resort to applying the clauses stipulated in the school’s official bylaw. **As an additional measure complementing the Charter, the committee prints the official bylaw and distributes to each of the parties in the school the part that concerns them, provided that a full copy is made available to those who wish to have it in its entirety.**

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## School Community Charter of Rights and Duties

Table 5: Kamed el-Loz Mixed Intermediate Public School, Al Bekaa

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	<b>Rights</b>	<b>Duties</b>
<b>Teachers and Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Informing all employees of the school bylaw</li><li>▪ Informing the teachers of all the Memos received from the Ministry of Education</li><li>▪ Providing all supplies that serve the educational process (a good classroom, educational support material, heating, a good salary, and full social and health benefits)</li><li>▪ 4. Appreciating effort and giving reward</li><li>▪ Taking the director’s opinion into account by the educational district. (Not clear in Arabic)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Compliance with rules and regulations, specifically</li><li>▪ Time, preparation, respect, consideration of individual differences</li><li>▪ Committing to the school program, reserve and shift hours, periodic communication with parents, cooperation, and consultation with administration and colleagues</li><li>▪ Establishing clear evaluation criteria</li><li>▪ Providing educational and behavioral follow-up of students</li><li>▪ Establishing a law (rights and duties) for the class</li></ul>

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**Penal clauses:** The procedures stipulated in the school bylaw

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	<b>Rights</b>	<b>Duties</b>
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To have a clear explanation of the lessons</li> <li>▪ To receive respect from all members of the school</li> <li>▪ To obtain proper health care during school hours</li> <li>▪ To wear colored clothes (trousers)</li> <li>▪ Not to be subjected to any kind of violence and from anyone</li> <li>▪ To have clean bathrooms</li> <li>▪ To take advantage of all school activities</li> <li>▪ To be treated without discrimination from anyone (classmates, teachers or employees)</li> <li>▪ To have enough time in exams</li> <li>▪ To eat during school breaks</li> <li>▪ To have heating in class</li> <li>▪ To be sheltered from wind and rain in winter</li> <li>▪ Not to be insulted</li> <li>▪ To exercise my personal freedom without the interference of teachers</li> <li>▪ To have access to good education</li> <li>▪ To have access to water for drinking and usage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect members of the school community</li> <li>▪ Pay attention to the explanation of the lesson</li> <li>▪ Safeguard the cleanliness of the playground (and other school facilities)</li> <li>▪ Do your homework</li> <li>▪ Commit to time</li> <li>▪ Respect school rules and regulations</li> <li>▪ Refrain from scolding, insulting, or beating the classmates, and consider their situation</li> <li>▪ Do not break school objects</li> <li>▪ Pay attention to kindergarten and primary school children while running in the playground</li> </ul>

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**Penal clauses:**

- A fine (to be determined later, to be deducted from the student's pocket money and directly from the teacher's salary)
- A verbal warning, a written warning, a summons to the family, and expulsion
- Requesting for the director's intervention, at the administrative level, against the violating teacher
- Requesting for parent's intervention

<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good treatment of students in school</li> <li>▪ Refrain from resorting to physical violence for any reason</li> <li>▪ Awareness and guidance of students</li> <li>▪ Parents are allowed by the administration to intervene in resolving school conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respecting school rules and regulations</li> <li>▪ Assisting the administration in anything requested from the parents</li> </ul>
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**Penal clauses:** Verbal warning, summoning the parents or legal guardian of the student, then dismissal for a month

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# Al-Nour Mixed Public School, Tripoli-North Lebanon

Table 6: Code of Conduct Towards a Violence-free School

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<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Paying respect to teachers and parents</li><li>▪ Refraining from beating others or using abusive words in dealing with each other</li><li>▪ Refraining from hurting classmates</li><li>▪ Paying attention in class</li><li>▪ Preparing school homework</li><li>▪ Refraining from breaking or damaging school equipment</li><li>▪ Keeping school clean</li></ul>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Refrain from resorting to physical violence (beating) with students</li><li>▪ Refrain from demeaning and insulting students (using degrading words and expressions)</li><li>▪ Respect the feelings of students and refrain from shouting at them</li><li>▪ Guide students in an educational manner</li></ul>
<b>The Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Rejecting violent behavior by adults and children alike and preventing these behaviors in school</li><li>▪ Providing sports activities in an organized and appropriate manner for all students, boys and girls</li><li>▪ Treating teachers fairly</li></ul>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Respecting the administration and refraining from resorting to threats</li><li>▪ Following up on their children's school affairs and cooperating with the administration</li><li>▪ Caring of their children's hygiene</li><li>▪ Refraining from beating their children</li></ul>

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Once the task force finalized the CCN, they organized ceremonies to disseminate and show commitment by, for example, signing it. Figure 1 below shows a CCN presented as a school poster for all students, parents and teachers to sign. In another school, the administration published a reader-friendly visual of the CCN and annex the CCN to the registration form for parents to read and sign when registering their children at the school (see figure 2). In another school, they printed a copy of the CCN on a cake to celebrate with fireworks (see figure 3).

Figure 1: CCN published as a poster at school for all to sign. Students, teachers and parents signed the CCN during a ceremony acknowledging it as school policy



Figure 2: A reader-friendly visual publication of a CCN



Figure 3: A ceremony to celebrate the CCN as school policy



## Activities for peace building

At each school, the task force organized activities that helped improve the physical space of the school and allowed students and parents to express themselves, share and play through art, music and sport. In one school, they created a mini football field. A common slogan was the no-smoking sign on the wall of school playgrounds, but with a wooden ruler in place of a cigarette (see figure 4). One school went as far as collecting the wooden rulers and burning them in a school ceremony to demonstrate their unconditional commitment to non-violence (see figure 5).

Figure 4: Art messages against violence at school, including the use of wooden rulers for corporal punishment



Figure 5: Students and teachers in a ceremony burning wooden rulers used for corporal punishment



In other schools, Lebanese and Syrian students created art exhibits and painted wall murals with graffiti of messages showing zero tolerance to violence (see figure 6).

Figure 6: School exhibition of students' artworks advocating against violence



Writing poetry, performing plays and singing songs were other popular activities that students and parents took on to illustrate different forms of violence such as discrimination, and to demonstrate their commitment to nonviolence. In one school, a student wrote a rap song against war, painting images of the effects of armed conflict on children and homes through his lyrics (see figure 6). A student in another school recalled how she and her three friends wrote a song about the Bible and Qu'rān. In another school, they organized a talent show for parents, teachers and students to sing, read poetry or dance. One student appreciated this experience: "I play many instruments but my teachers don't know that because in class we are always studying and they don't know this side of me". In another school, many teachers, parents and students shared their views and experiences of violence through folkloric performances such as improvisational Arabic poetry (e.g. muwweil) and dabke dance. Writing plays was also popular. Students, parents and teachers of another school wrote and produced a school play about the cycle of violence perpetuating through the home, the school and the streets.

*I play many instruments but my teachers don't know that because in class we are always studying and they don't know this side of me*

One student experience

Figure 7: Student wrote and rapped song against violence



Taking on another bold initiative, schools organized advocacy campaigns with community leaders, including those at the municipality, civil society and religious institutions. They called for these influential individuals and groups to also show solidarity by promoting a campaign against violence. As a result, a municipality posted on its website and social media platform messages condemning violence and updating the public on the VFS in the local school. Also, a Mufti in North Lebanon issued an official decision advising mosques to talk about nonviolence during the Friday prayer. The school principals expressed surprise in how much influence they were able to have and the support they received from influential figures in their community.

## Changes and transformations for peace building and social stability

Testimonials from principals, teachers, parents and students suggested changes and degrees of transformations at various levels. These emerged as key indicators of change for peace building through VFS.

Many experienced new realizations in their **inter- and intrapersonal relationships**. Anecdotal evidence revealed greater self-awareness, self-confidence, knowledge, assertiveness and degrees of tolerance/ understanding to disruptive behaviour. A student reflected on her own personal growth: “When someone comes to me aggressively, I don’t give and take. I didn’t know how to understand other people’s views. I have more confidence now. This was the best experience of my life.”

*When someone comes to me aggressively, I don’t give and take. I have more confidence now*

A student personal growth

For some students, collaborating with teachers whom they struggled with in the classroom created **unexpected friendships**. As one student explained, “After this theatre, the teacher and I became friends. I never liked her, didn’t like the subject and didn’t want to learn.” She recalled that their nature of talk also changed from the teacher shouting, “Where is your mind?!” or “What are you thinking?!” to “How can I help?”

Some expressed a **new outlook towards school**. Recognizing that public schools rarely make time for arts and physical education, “We were always studying. Through VFS, it gave us a new activity; something fun. We loved it” (Student). Adults observed how “a community was growing at school: eating together, talking together, working more together” (CAC). The trainers would monitor children’s views of school. Over time, they would ask them casual questions like “Do you like coming to school?” or “Are you happy at school?” They found that responses started to change over time. The trainers observed positive changes in the tone of the children’s voices and enthusiasm when talking.

*Through VFS, it gave us a new activity; something fun. We loved it*

Student

Incidents of **children taking initiative** showed their capacities of being empowered to make a change. In one school, a religious figure would reportedly sit in the playground to ensure that boys and girls on the secondary school playground do not play together. The children used to report this but the administration would deny this was the case. The children persisted by bringing more people to visit the playground and to observe. The principal eventually spoke to the religious figure. This incident reinforced the authority of principal and the agency of the children. Similarly, children started reportedly telling teachers that they cannot yell at them. Supervisors stopped carrying rulers or sticks after children confiscated and burned them.

Several parents confessed at changes in how they **manage anger and fears at home**. A father of six children said, “I used to hit my kids; but now I only shout”. He feels he shouts out of frustration watching his children distracted from their studies by the TV and their mobile phones. He also reported that his friend, a taxi driver and father of children who go to the school, stopped carrying his pistol outside the house.

*I used to hit my kids; but now I only shout*

A father of six children

A **greater degree of awareness** of forms and incidents of violence were also observed. A parent explained, “Sometimes you’ll be doing things and seeing things that you may not have thought were forms of violence. We realized that we were living in much more violence than we were aware of” (Parent). Through interactions, power struggles among principal, teachers and supervisors were also observed. These power struggles were significant because they appeared to be driven by political affiliation and the influence of other authoritative figures.

# The Violence Free Schools during crisis

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# The Violence Free Schools during crisis

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On 2 March 2020, the MEHE called for schools across Lebanon to close as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened. Adding to the existing crises, the pandemic introduced challenges when new schools joined the initiative and unveiled additional forms of violence.

## Building and sustaining VFS during school closure

Supporting new schools to build the VFS initiative had its own challenges during the pandemic closures. The MEHE allowed schools to open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but for administrative purposes. Hence, the new cohort of 17 schools for the 2020-21 academic year committed to carrying out the phases of sensitisation, planning and implementation of activities online. Facilitating the task force meetings and writing the CCN online, for example, replaced the face-to-face interactions and discussions with unstable internet connections. Participation was also exclusive only to those with devices and access to Internet at home. Trying to work with Microsoft Teams as the official platform provided by the MEHE, issues regarding capacity of hardware devices and internet made the platform more exclusive and unreliable; hence, the facilitators and school-based participants turned to other more familiar applications like WhatsApp. Finding common time schedules was also a challenge with teachers facilitating synchronous and asynchronous learning activities that kept students, parents and teachers busy working on and submitting assignments and providing and receiving feedback and grades up until late hours of the night. Furthermore, teachers struggled with early signs of burnout managing highly demanding teaching schedules with domestic responsibilities and unstable working terms.

At the governance level, the UNDP with support from the CAC initiated the second phase of the VFS initiative: to provide DOPS at MEHE with the framework and approaches for coaches to work directly with schools in building and sustaining a VFS culture. The training took place during September and October 2019, where 92 DOPS coaches were put in four groups and each group participated in a seven-day training program. The coaches were grouped according to the area they provide support in at schools: civic education (n = 22), sociology (n = 19) and educational guidance into two groups (n = 28 and 23). From this cohort of 92, 20 were selected for Training of Trainers. Training sessions focused on dealing with differences constructively, defining and providing a non-violent education, detecting early signs of distress and violence, learning how to approach children who are victims of violence, learning how to provide psychological first-aid and how to make referrals.

## Online learning: A new vulnerability

Expressions of violence surfaced during online learning and teaching in schools that have already launched the VFS initiative in their school. Above, testimonies have illustrated structural violence that teachers face through the terms of their short-term contracts and methods of payment. Students and parents too have shared expressions of violence most relevant to online learning during the compounded crises of a pandemic and economic collapse.

When asked if the VFS work is still relevant during the difficult times of managing schooling online, one female student argued, “Now is the time for VFS.” Students felt anxious and unsafe talking about learning online, which one called “useless”. Testimonies from students uncovered issues in dominant classroom pedagogies - hierarchical and uncritical transference of information from teacher to student - that was amplified during online schooling. One student recalled telling the teacher, “In class I never understood you, now you want me to understand you?” Some of the rigid approaches were highlighted when “We asked to repeat information, some agreed and started from the start while others said they will not.” The students also complained about the constant pressure to pass tests by memorizing information, “In

*In class I never understood you,  
now you want me to understand  
you?*

A student to the teacher

one week, they gave us 12 tests” to memorize for. Also, a teacher’s search for the correct answer was used to manage online classroom behaviour; as reported by a student, the teacher was frustrated at students saying “yes, yes, yes” during a lecture and snapped, “Stop saying yes!” she shouted, “if you know the answer, then reply, if not, then don’t.” Many students shared their grievances with online learning methods, but were perceived as possibly offensive by teachers. One teacher reacted by closing the WhatsApp group when students protested against learning online. In another case, a student felt embarrassed and insulted when she returned to class after fixing her phone that was under repair for two weeks; the teacher sent what the student described as a sarcastic voice and typed message in the online class group, “You’re early! You’ve been away for so long”. Feeling hurt by her teacher’s response, “I wish she asked me if things were ok or why I was away. I said, you probably have me confused with another student.”

Some parents reflected on the increase in the different forms of violence they experienced as parents suffering from the economic crisis and how they cope at home. Fathers were described as victims and perpetrators of violence who enforce

direct violence on wives and children because of their fears and frustrations when paying so much money for groceries and bills. As one mother said, “Waiting three to four hours at the gas station, he’s going to come home to laugh?”

*Waiting three to four hours at the gas station, he’s going to come home to laugh?*

One mother

# Pathways to impact

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# Pathways to impact

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The VFS is a pioneering initiative with much work ahead. So far, it has informed us more about at least two key indicators of change for peace building. Rather than targeting large populations through a roll-out model, the VFS is a unique intervention through its **investment in individuals** over a period of time. Two, the levelling of hierarchies among students, teachers, parents and principals to address social injustices mirrored democratic cultural practices in schooling, which indicates a degree of social transformation in an education culture largely governed by traditional, top-down governance. As all innovations, more work and challenges are waiting ahead.

## Sustainable peace building

Among the strengths of the VFS initiative lies in its inclusive and dialogic structures of participation when launching the phases that aim to empower teachers, parents, principals and students in building a school culture of zero tolerance to violence. Indeed, the VFS work so far has demonstrated the feasibility of peace education as an extra-curricular activity when school-based stakeholders are engaged as empowered individuals and collaborators. The design, however, has a particular timeframe that is dependent on the availability of facilitators from external organizations. Questions that arose included, *How is this initiative going to be sustainable after the project ends?* How does this fit into the existing education system? As one parent highlighted,

*The risk in discontinuity is that the child's life is now potentially even worse because now they know that what they're living is wrong and harmful. When you are aware of the violence around you but cannot change it, the effect is greater.*

Further developing the sustainability of the VFS work requires, per school, a more robust framework defining indicators of change and success, mechanisms of gathering and using information to describe and measure these indicators over time and practice of using these findings to disseminate and review the school-based CCN and planned activities.

## Outreach

The inclusive design of the VFS work ensured representation based on gender, nationalities, grade levels and school-based actors (parents, children, teachers, principals). Schools wishing to advance their activities can work in greater breadth and depth. The participating schools include a second shift for the Syrian refugee children but have yet to explore initiatives that help foster a culture of nonviolence at home and education environments. Schools with an established and growing VFS climate can take leadership in facilitating a similar change in the second shift by extending participation further to Syrian refugee children and their parents at home and to teachers. Initiatives to foster a culture of nonviolence among second shift families and educators should delve deep into understandings and expressions of violence at home. According to a parent,

*We're sitting on the third floor at the school, the Syrian students were beating each other up on the playground. This is a reflection of the violence at home. Violence at home is a problem and if we're to support them, they need workshops twice a day.*

The parent also felt that the Task Forces can extend activities further to the wider public by regularly raising awareness through TV shows and radio programs that air interviews on violence at home and at school. The routine public advocacy of VFS would ensure that addressing issues of violence is not a one-time story.

## Integrity and violence

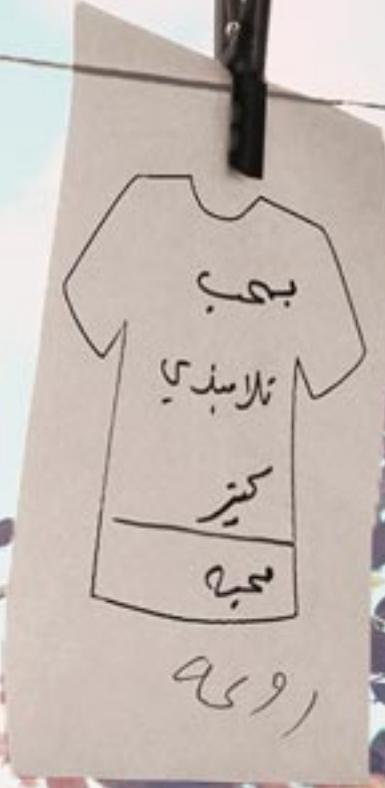
When students, teachers, parents and principals discuss violence-related issues together, they create checks and balances to the integrity of self-awareness, sharing of experiences and reflection on degrees of change. However, a parent explained that two very subtle forms

of violence still loom: dishonesty and submission. "Lies are a kind of violence", a mother argued. After serving on the school's Task Force committee, she observed that some members, perhaps out of fear, have not been entirely honest about sharing forms of violence they exhibit and, possibly, have experienced as victims. Then, the acceptance of the deception or fabrication is also a form of violence; "some call it sacrifice, I call it violence on yourself and someone else." She illustrated, submission is when students make the case to have a teacher removed but no one is removing this teacher, so students accept this.

The vision and labors of the VFS work aim to transform an education climate at school from one that maintains traditional, top-down approaches to learning and social and emotional growth to one that nurtures a school climate where all actors are empowered to collaboratively foster a zero-tolerance form of living and learning. Working towards a violence-free schooling culture will only naturally meet struggles when placed within a context deeply riddled with various forms of violence that threaten gender equality; governance that upholds democratic principles of transparency and inclusion; and children's rights to provisions, protection and participation. The success of the VFS work lies in many factors, one being the support given to actors at an individual level - whether a child, a teacher, a parent, or a principal - in becoming empowered to take leadership to pioneer transformative approaches and discourses that advances peace building through schooling.

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