

Press Release

Strengthening Lebanon's Education Reform through Strategic Partnership: Marking a Milestone in Educational Advancement

Paris, 10 November 2023

UNESCO hosted an event focused on "Strengthening Lebanon's Education Reform through Strategic Partnership" during the 42nd General Conference of the Organization.

In a momentous gathering with Lebanon's partners and stakeholders, this occasion served as a platform for high-level discussions, idea exchanges and the exploration of strategic collaborations that can drive positive transformations in Lebanon's education system.

The session demonstrated the strategic partnerships among UNESCO, Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Education Cannot Wait (ECW), by showcasing the joint ventures especially the UNESCO Li-Beirut Flagship Initiative. The dialogue also shed light on the progress achieved in realizing the vital Education Reform Agenda by MEHE in partnership with the multiple stakeholders in Lebanon.

The panel discussion, moderated by UNESCO Beirut Office Director Ms. Costanza Farina, featured four prominent speakers: Mr. Ziad Makary – Minister of Information in Lebanon, Ms. Yasmine Sherif – Executive Director of Education Cannot Wait (ECW), Ms. Stefania Giannini – UNESCO Assistant Director General for Education and Ms. Elian El Haber - representative of the UNESCO SDG4 Youth and Student Network. All reaffirmed their robust commitment to supporting Lebanon's education reform through strategic collaboration to ensure a more sustainable path moving forward.

In her opening statement, Farina spoke about the challenges faced by the education sector, highlighting the critical role that partnerships play in advancing quality education in Lebanon.

Farina: "We are all aware that the education sector in Lebanon faces a myriad of challenges that underscore the urgency of reform. Ongoing economic instability, coupled with political and social unrest has placed immense strain on the system, resulting in limited access to quality education for many students."

Lebanon's education has been severely disrupted by the multiple crises, including COVID-19, Beirut Port explosions and an economic collapse:

1. 1.2 million students including 460,000 students in 1235 public schools were affected.
2. 5% drop-in public-school enrolment in Year 2022 to 2023 with 10% decrease in Lebanese students AM shift and 7% increase Syrian students PM shift.
3. 25% of students under 10 achieve Arabic literacy, but two-thirds lack basic literacy.
4. Learning loss from 2019 to 2023 could reduce future earnings by 13.2% to 13.8%.
5. School closures in 2022 to 2023 may cost Lebanon economic loss from 217 million to 253 million dollars.
6. **55,000** public school teachers' salaries drop from \$2,000 to less than \$100 per month.
7. 23% decline in civil servant staff and increased reliance on contractual staff.

Amplifying Lebanon Youth Voices

The panel discussion highlighted the voice of youth which gave an insight on the necessity for collective action in shaping a resilient and inclusive educational environment in Lebanon.

El Haber:” A better Lebanese education is a dream that we hope will wash away our nation’s nightmares. In the name of my people and the students and youth of my country, I am sitting in front of you today to say that **we need quality education, we need education reform, we need our education back, we need our rights back, we need our lives back, and we need your support.** I came here with words and a cause, and I wish, hope, and pray that I leave with actions.”

An Education Reform Roadmap Towards Educational Transformation

His excellency Mr. Ziad Makary extended his sincere appreciation on behalf of the Lebanese government and Minister of Education Mr. Abbas Halabi, to everyone who attended the event and acknowledged the consistent and invaluable support of partners for Lebanon’s education sector.

The discussion touched upon a wide range of strategic initiatives driven by the Ministry of Education with support from strategic partners namely: UNESCO and ECW.

On June 8, 2023, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched the Education Reform Road Map in three key clusters with the support of UNESCO: Cluster A Teaching and Learning Reforms; Cluster B Governance Operational Reforms; Cluster C Core Efficiency, Cost Saving Reforms.

Makary:” Today, we stand before you with the educational reform roadmap, which serves as our guide in the journey towards a more inclusive, equitable, and accountable education system. We have collaborated with the international community and partners to develop this reform roadmap, aligned with the Five-Year Plan spanning from 2021 to 2025. This Education Five-Year Plan, formulated with the support of UNESCO, is rooted in a shared vision for the development of the education sector.”

The Five-Year Plan for General Education was developed with extensive technical expertise extended by UNESCO in a context characterized by crises. It has been serving as an overall guide and strategic reference to all other programmatic frameworks and plans initiated or planned within the Education Partners in Lebanon. UNESCO granted its specialized assistance for efficient coordination of ongoing projects and through a comprehensive M&E plan with a clear results framework.

The Power of Partnerships in Realizing Quality Education: UNESCO and ECW in Lebanon

With a shared engagement for excellence and a mutual commitment to driving positive change, UNESCO and ECW’s joint effort marked a significant milestone in the journey towards achieving common transformative educational goals in Lebanon. Through working on the Francophone Teaching and Learning in Lebanon, as well as the school rehabilitation in response to the Beirut Port explosion, UNESCO and ECW have achieved the following:

- 1- 40 schools affected by the Beirut Port explosion (20 public and 20 private schools) were rehabilitated.
- 2- 26 schools affected by the Beirut Port explosion were provided with facilities, supplies and equipment.
- 3- A total of 435,490 girls and boys (50% girls) were reached at pre-primary and primary education through the provision of educational materials and learning equipment.
- 4- 28,050 students were provided with stationery kits to go back to schools.



- 5- 525 French schools were equipped with 1000 e-learning materials.
- 6- 1,044 teacher coaches were capacitated to support teachers in French schools.

The Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Multi-Year Resilience Program (MYRP) for Lebanon 2022-2024, titled “Securing the right to free education for crisis-affected girls and boys in Lebanon”, is a joint program implemented by UNESCO, UNICEF, and Save the Children. It aims to address the compounding education crisis caused by ongoing regional conflicts, widespread poverty and domestic issues that affect the education system. Sherif said: “We do not want to lose the brain power and the talents of the Lebanese youth and children. We want them to stay in Lebanon! With all the crises Lebanon is passing through, it is our moral duty to come in and support Lebanon right now.”

MYRP works to strengthen the resilience of the education sector, to ensure that crisis affected children have access to school and to build frameworks for long term investments and partnerships between the government and civil society.

Sherif added: “It is our responsibility to step up support for Lebanon, a country where +40% of its population are refugees. The funding gap to implement the reform is 38M\$; Education Cannot Wait already committed ¼ of funds needed and calls on donors to contribute to fill this gap.”

Sherif issued a call to action to everyone who is concerned about investing in Lebanon stating: “We have a top-notch audit report in ECW. You can see the results coming out from investments which are implemented by UNESCO and MEHE, the results are there, it is not about saying maybe we should give them a chance. No! If You want to be part of success and making a difference, then join this group.”

A joint Call to Action

Speaking at the event, Giannini stressed on this visionary endeavor that MEHE has achieved in the reform agenda arriving at a pivotal moment, a time when the advancement and transformation of education are paramount for nations’ future, “We are thrilled to be an integral part of this momentous reform movement. Our unwavering commitment stands firmly alongside the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) as we collectively steer education in Lebanon towards a brighter horizon. Central to our involvement is the provision of continuous strategic and technical support to MEHE, to implement the General Education Five-Year Plan of Lebanon, which would reflect some of the reforms.”

Giannini underlined the importance of collective partnerships and support for the Lebanese education sector: “Today, I stand here along with my colleague Ms. Yasmine Sherif, to issue a collective call, inviting all partners, both domestic and international, to join hands in supporting Lebanon's education reform roadmap. Your collaboration is nothing short of essential to the success of this groundbreaking initiative.”

Perspectives from Partners

The event provided a platform for sharing perspectives, ideas, and reflections of Member States, collaborating organizations and partners who brought valuable insights to the table, addressed the educational progress in Lebanon and showcased the diversity in partnerships.

Closing Statement

In her closing statement, Director of Beirut Office, stressed on the joint commitment to partnerships as the driving force behind a brighter educational future for Lebanon.

“The strength of our partnerships will determine the success of Lebanon's education reform. Let us continue to collaborate and work together towards a brighter future.” – Costanza Farina



About UNESCO:

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030.

About ECW:

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is the United Nations global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. We support quality education outcomes for refugee, internally displaced and other crisis-affected girls and boys, so no one is left behind. ECW works through the multilateral system to both increase the speed of responses in crises and connect immediate relief and longer-term interventions through multi-year programming. ECW works in close partnership with governments, public and private donors, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and other humanitarian and development aid actors to increase efficiencies and end siloed responses.

ECW urgently appeals to public and private sector donors for expanded support to reach even more vulnerable children and youth.