

PRESS RELEASE

UN supports education authorities in Lebanon to ensure continuity of education, inclusion and equity for children and young people

Beirut, Lebanon

Friday, 24 April 2020 (United Nations) – The COVID-19 outbreak has translated into a major education crisis. Nearly 190 countries have imposed school closures, affecting 1.5 billion children and young people, according to a UN report launched by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last week. While many countries, including Lebanon, switched to distance teaching and learning to mitigate the effects of such disruption, challenges related to preparedness, infrastructure and capacity, as well as the digital gaps, have put additional strains on students, parents, teachers, principals and the educational authorities.

School closure has widened learning inequalities, affecting the most vulnerable children and youth disproportionately. In this context, the UN urged collective action to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children and youth and is providing support to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Ministry of Agriculture, among other partners in Lebanon, by developing alternative solutions to school closure to ensure that learning never stops.

In close collaboration with MEHE, UN agencies are assisting in preparing and deploying inclusive distance learning solutions, utilizing hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches. Distance learning support includes activities for the production of pre-primary and basic education lessons, as well as well-being materials, the Gender-Based Violence approach and health awareness for students and parents.

The UN is also providing assistance for developing communication learning materials and special TV episodes, targeting teachers and parents, to raise their awareness on addressing the stress and psychosocial needs of children during remote learning.

UNESCO's Regional Director for Education in the Arab States, Dr Hamed al Hamami, said: "Never before have we witnessed educational disruption at this scale. Despite the crisis, learning should never stop. While Lebanon is developing alternative solutions for school closure, we have a special responsibility to ensure inclusion and equity for all learners, so that no one is left behind. Our collective actions not only can help ensure continuity of education but can also contribute to building a more resilient education system for the future".

"From school closures, to isolation, to a persistent sense of fear and anxiety, the effects of this pandemic are impacting children worldwide", said Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon. "We need to come together and explore every avenue to keep children learning and help them through this difficult time. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has been



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able to swiftly deploy innovative, scalable solutions for children and youth. The adaptations made are a powerful reminder of what we can achieve together for children as the crisis is far from its end”.

The school closures have also affected youth enrolled in vocational and technical education and training. The UN in Lebanon, with its partners, is supporting the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in upgrading the agriculture education system in Lebanon, which offers Lebanese and displaced Syrian youth the opportunity of acquiring necessary technical skills to access improved career opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness in Lebanon or Syria upon their return. The assistance provided by the UN and its partners also includes distance online learning for students enrolled in the Technical Baccalaureate programs (BTA) at the seven agricultural technical schools in Lebanon. Teaching Programs are posted on the Ministry’s website for students’ access at this [link](#) and taken further with schoolteachers through virtual education.

“FAO has always played an important role in the production, and dissemination of knowledge and technical educational materials to face the challenges of food security, sustainable agricultural and rural development,” said FAO Representative in Lebanon, Dr. Maurice Saade. He underscored FAO’s commitment for continued support to the Ministry of Agriculture in upgrading the agricultural education system and in expanding distance learning opportunities for both Lebanese and Syrian students enrolled in agricultural schools.

UN support to school children includes the extension of distance learning to the second shift and non-formal education programmes, aiming at reaching the most vulnerable communities, including the refugee communities. UN teams in the Bekaa developed remote learning solutions and created a virtual learning community (WhatsApp, Skype) contributing to guarantee children’s continued access to education.

In Palestinian camps, UN-paid teachers and education cadres are currently implementing a Self-Learning Programme and using educational materials that the UN developed specifically to support student learning during this COVID-19 emergency.

A Learning Readiness Rapid Assessment has been completed with the UN support and the participation of over 10,000 Syrian families with children enrolled in suspended non-formal and formal education programs. This assessment provides critical information to determine the ability of these families to access and manage distance learning opportunities. With this information, education providers will be able to tailor content and implementation modalities given the current lockdown.

The UN has also developed a series of regional webinars to strengthen teachers’ capacities in distance/online teaching and build their skills to use ICTs in education.

Several awareness raising information materials, including flyers and infographics have been prepared targeting teachers and parents.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the UN has been monitoring the impact of the crisis on the sector and providing MEHE with technical expertise, sharing of information and good practices. Monitoring support is also focused on the progress of remote learning, identifying gaps and providing technical support.



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With a chief aim to keep children and their families safe and informed about how to protect themselves, the UN engaged in a series of preventative actions that included the development of Cleaning and Disinfection Protocol for schools, the provision of hygiene and medical kits to schools and health clinics. As schools are expected to re-open at one point, the UN is providing advice and recommendations for education planners and decision makers who are anticipating the reopening of schools after lockdown measures are lifted.

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