

Children are our Future

Every child has the right to an education. All parents – including myself – have one major wish: to give their kids a chance to learn, to play and to discover the world – and in the end to create a better future for them and for all of us.

Unfortunately still many children in Lebanon are not attending school and have no access to formal education. This remains a challenge for all of us – we owe it to the children and to the future of this country to improve this situation! The international community has therefore pledged to improve education worldwide. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments has the objective to «ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all».

In the past years we managed to bring more children into school and to improve the quality of education. In the past four years German support helped educate more than half a million kids in Lebanon. More than 150 Lebanese public schools were rehabilitated, with our support. Another EUR 50 million will be committed by Germany to the Lebanese Programme «Reaching All Children with Education» (RACE), bringing the total German contribution to this project up to EUR 250 million since 2014. This is an impressive joint achievement which we should be proud of.

Germany stands ready to support Lebanon – not only by contributing to the RACE programme but also by investing into the infrastructure of Lebanese public schools and by supporting the Ministry of Education in strengthening their capacities to ensure quality education for all.

Dr. Georg Birgelen
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Lebanon

Education, a Weapon for Peace

As Lebanon marked the somber anniversary of the beginning of Lebanon's civil war, this supplement will examine and reflect on how education can sustain peace, and the deliberate policies and strategies that need to be put in place to maximize the positive effects of education on peace. Specifically, it will seek to tackle the complex issues that affect education across the Lebanese society – from administration to culture, from child protection to curricula. It will do so by focusing the various articles on and giving voice to the teachers, academics, those working in agencies supporting education, and most of all the children and students who long for learning. As we look to the issue of education and peace, three main elements have globally been highlighted in the last decade. The first area relates to concerns to the protection of children in situations of crisis, and the response to the negative impacts that conflicts will have on their education. A second focus prioritizes “do no harm” to ensure that education does not reinforce inequalities or fuel further divisions. A third area relates to education and peacebuilding more specifically, with a focus on reforms to the education sector itself and its contributions towards broader

political, economic and social transformations in post-conflict settings.

The focus of our supplement is both important and timely globally and in Lebanon, as further emphasis is being placed on the achievement of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The role of education in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals is clear, as outlined in Goal 4 with a focus on ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all, and imparting knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Just like for previous supplements, we hope that it will stimulate dialogue on collective approaches and strategies to strengthen the contribution of education towards long-term peace building in Lebanon, where an important alternative to violence lies in a vibrant classroom.

Celine Moyroud
UNDP Resident Representative a.i.

A Forced Marriage

One of many legislative aberrations in our country has been to couple the salaries of private sector teachers with those of the public sector. Thus, under the pretext that at one time their Union did not have enough influence to negotiate the sector's demands, the government at the time decided to hitch their fate to the caravan of the public sector. Meanwhile, the great advantage of having their salaries raised regularly along with those of civil servants was dangled before private-sector teachers.

However, over the years, the number of civil servants has almost quadrupled. It thus became practically impossible to revise their remuneration without further widening the public deficit and increasing public debt, with all that comes with it in terms of threatening the stability of the national currency. The latest salary scale for civil service, arduously pushed through Parliament last year, has had serious repercussions on the government budget because of the huge gap between

appropriations and the amount that must actually be disbursed, hugely inflating the government's wage bill. Added to this is the recruitment of thousands of additional public servants, uncontrolled as much as it is illegal, as a result of corruption and political clout.

What has become of the teachers' rightful demand? The part that concerns them in the new salary grid is so vague that it ended up creating an inextricable muddle of the relationship between the private school administrations, employees and parent committees, with the looming specter of rising tuition fees.

The urgency today for private teachers is to regain their union's autonomy by quickly extricating themselves from this forced marriage with the public sector, to try as much as possible to recover their rights, away from government mismanagement and cobbled-up approach.

Gaby Nasr
Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

Political Exploitation Hurts Refugees

There is talk of a new wave of refugees from Syria to Lebanon. This time the reasons are economic and related to living conditions. The Syrians are suffering from extreme poverty in many regions, especially areas remote from the capital Damascus, as they lack the basics following the destruction of infrastructure, factories and plants, and agricultural land.

The news—the expected inflow of refugees spread by politicians close to Damascus and not the opposite camp—does not serve, in any case, the interest of Syrian refugees coming to Lebanon, because it fuels the fears of the Lebanese of a new wave of refugees that the small country cannot accommodate at any level, whether in terms of living conditions, finance or security.

Some politicians manipulate the refugee card for political pressure. They accuse others of not wanting to send them back to their country, and then promote figures of new refugees as a means of fearmongering to push the other toward political options they may not want.

They take the refugee card out of its humanitarian context to the political, and instead of empathizing with refugees, who are not to blame, promote a state of hostility that balloons to the point of revenge and intimidation. And with it the hostility between the two peoples deepens.

Politicians should stop exploiting the issue of refugees to personal ends and for personal interests, upstaging one another and continuing to try to impose duties of obedience and loyalty. Leave the issue to those directly concerned to be dealt with within the legal and official frameworks adopted in similar cases. The Lebanese State, through a meeting of the Council of Ministers, should set its policy and convey it to the world in a unified letter and project to exert pressure effectively, instead of appearing divided internally, in a way that neither the State nor refugees-victims benefit.

Ghassan Hajjar
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