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National Erasmus+ Office, Lebanon

HIGHER EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COLLAPSE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
THE PROVISION OF IMMEDIATE
SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

November 2022

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National Erasmus+ Office, Lebanon

HIGHER EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COLLAPSE

Recommendations for the Provision of Immediate Support for the Lebanese Higher Education System

November 2022

This document was developed by **Ms. Rima Rassi**, Research Development Manager at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, as part of the “**Higher Education in times of collapse**” series of stakeholder dialogues organized by the **HOPES-LEB project** funded by the European Union and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Campus France and Nuffic, in partnership with the **National Erasmus+ Office of Lebanon**.

This paper was drafted based solely on the content of the dialogue sessions organised between January and May 2022 and the follow-up meetings organized during June and October 2022.

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	- 3 -
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	- 4 -
The Recommendations	- 5 -
INTRODUCTION	- 9 -
"HIGHER EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COLLAPSE" STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUES	- 10 -
OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER	- 10 -
OVERVIEW - THE SITUATION IN LEBANON	- 11 -
The Higher Education Sector in Lebanon	- 12 -
The Lebanese University (LU)	- 13 -
Contextual Constraints of Lebanon's Overlapping Crises	- 14 -
RECOMMENDATIONS	- 18 -
I. Higher and Further Education Institutions: Universities and Technical and Vocational Institutes	- 18 -
II. HE Programme and Project Implementers: Universities and National and International IOs and NGOs	- 24 -
III. The Lebanese State and the International Community/Donors	- 25 -
ANNEXES	- 28 -

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Acronyms

EU - European Union

HE - Higher education

HEI(s) - Higher Education Institution(s)

HOPES-LEB - Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians and vulnerable youth in Lebanon

IO(s) - International organisation(s)

LBP - Lebanese Pound

LU - Lebanese University

MEHE - Ministry of Education and Higher Education (Lebanon)

NGO(s) - non-governmental organisation(s)

TVET - Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UAOLB - Universities Association of Lebanon

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

USD - United States Dollar

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, Further and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Lebanon have played and continue to play an important role in Lebanon and for society as a whole, creating added value for both Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents. These institutions have been central to improving governance in the country, upholding the right of students for a better education, and key to helping students of all backgrounds realize their aspirations and become socially engaged agents of change. Students and families have invested heavily in education to strengthen human capital, enhance social mobility, and prepare students for the economic growth and stability of the nation. Unfortunately, the repercussions of Lebanon's recent overlapping crises have had a detrimental effect on Lebanon's educational sector. Financial uncertainty, the sharp devaluation in Lebanon's national currency, the Lebanese Pound, the decline in the purchasing power of Lebanese and refugee families, and the loss of human resources are but a few significant constraints resulting from Lebanon's overlapping crises. This situation has been further intensified by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the devastating August 2020 Beirut blast. Consequently, the Lebanese government, educational institutions, international organisations (IOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been facing exceptional challenges when navigating the provision of access to quality further and HE opportunities for Lebanese youth and refugee communities.

In response to these complex and multifaceted challenges, the **HOPES-LEB Project** (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians and vulnerable youth in Lebanon) funded by the **European Union (EU)** and implemented by **the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**, **Campus France**, and **Nuffic**, in partnership with the **National Erasmus+ Office of Lebanon**, launched a series of stakeholder meetings addressing "**Higher Education in Times of Collapse**". Launched in January 2022, the "Higher Education in Times of Collapse" series of dialogues brought together various stakeholders to further discuss the implications of the current situation on the HE sector in Lebanon and its impact on both students and education providers. The significance of these dialogues lies within its adoption of a participatory and inclusive approach, wherein all parties working within and constituting part of the higher and further education sector were invited "to the table". These stakeholder dialogues, which took place between January 2022 and May 2022, sought to understand and engage with the varying perspectives within the sector.

These dialogues focused on three main aspects: 1) the perspective of higher and further education institutions; 2) the perspective of project implementers and organisations; and 3) the perspective of students. As such, dialogue participants included professionals and academics, representatives of institutions and organisations, as well as students from all backgrounds. During these meetings, participants each identified, shared, and discussed the challenges to the higher and further education sector as well as recommended mitigation measures. More importantly, participants contributed to the development of recommendations to address the difficult situation at hand.

Based on these dialogues, a follow-up gathering organized during June 2022 helped define the way forward for the development of this **paper and list of recommendations**, addressed to relevant national and international stakeholders to define priorities for action and better guide future interventions.

The central aim of this paper is to provide recommendations for the immediate response to the complex, multi-layered crises affecting the further and higher educational sector in Lebanon. The enclosed list of

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recommendations outlines the emergency help required to address problems of imminent importance for further and higher education institutions and the overall system in Lebanon, based on the outcomes of the stakeholder dialogues. While this paper addresses short-term emergency plans - i.e., over the forthcoming two years - the list of recommendations is nevertheless complementary to existing initiatives of a more far-ranging character. More significantly, this paper is an affirmation that maintaining the availability and quality of further and higher education in Lebanon is a paramount priority to prevent the emergence of a "lost generation". It should be noted that, as these recommendations address short-term, emergency support measures they cannot in any way substitute plans for structural change and development within the overall higher education sector, which has been suffering from fundamental issues prior to the emergence of the country's current crises.

The Recommendations

The list of recommendations within this paper was jointly developed with participants of the dialogue sessions, and directly stem from the ideas and suggestions raised during the rich deliberations that took place during the dialogues. They are listed in no particular order of importance, as the situation differs from context to context.

I. Higher and Further Education Institutions: Universities and Technical and Vocational Institutes (including targeted recommendations for the Lebanese University and Technical Institutes)

1. Financing, Administration, and Operations

- Immediate funding to support urgent administrative and operational needs to maintain business operations and ensure the delivery of teaching/learning.
- Immediate funding to support fuel costs/purchase of private generators; operational and material support for alternative energy sources.
- Immediate financial support for the purchase of lab materials, equipment, hardware, and the costs for repairing equipment.
- Gifts in-kind to strengthen academic practices and research output, enhance facilities, and support institutional operations.
- Financial support to secure access fees or fee waivers for e-resources.
- Diversification of sources of funding and linking to an output-based model.
- Intrinsic incentives for faculty and staff retention.
- Collaborative processes to develop centralised databases (institutions and funding) in addition to a repository of researchers/experts.

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2. Pedagogical and Research Practices

- Organisation of regular meetings, trainings, and joint initiatives between public and private institutions.
- Strengthening cooperation via the Universities Association of Lebanon (UAOLB), joint initiatives, and inter-university partnerships, to collaboratively face the repercussions of Lebanon's crises.
- Strengthening/initiating practical and creative collaborations across a spectrum of stakeholders.
- Developing a national system for libraries and a common solution for e-resources.
- Prioritizing evidence-based research and studies to better understand the impact of student, faculty, and staff migrations on the mid- and long-term.
- Capacity-building for HEIs and faculty members to find flexible pathways to deliver online and blended learning to ensure the inclusion of the country's most disenfranchised, marginalized, and vulnerable communities, as well as students with disabilities.
- Establishing institutional research units within universities to support policy formation, planning, and evidence-based decision-making.
- Imminent financial support for vocational and educational training, as well as support for the establishment of short diplomas focused towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

3. Student Support

- Urgent assistance for scholarships covering tuition fees and restructuring scholarship criteria beyond tuition fees to include micro-assistance.
- Prioritization of mental health support strategies and initiatives.
- The integration of internships and practical experience into higher education, technical, and vocational programmes, schools, and institutes to ensure students are fully prepared for integration into the labour market and to increase their chances for employability across various sectors.
- Providing students with resources such as trainings that teach them how to seek online resources or libraries to complement their studies.
- Emergency funds for the fellowships and the stipends of graduate students (specifically for PhD students).
- To ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion, provision of students with online resources which they may access offline.

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II. HE Programme and Project Implementers: Universities and National and International IOs and NGOs

1. Financing, Administration, and Operations

- Immediate financing and programmatic support is needed to better serve the underprivileged regions of Lebanon and refugee communities, and for infrastructural needs (similar to HEIs).
- Knowledge exchange on best practices/experiences and collaborative work as well as intensified networking across stakeholders to receive additional funding to sustain programme/project implementation efforts.

2. Pedagogical and Training Practices

- Additional funding to provide more practical training to students (competency-based funding addressing Lebanon's labour market needs, especially in underprivileged areas, to bridge the gap between education services and the labour market, and serve underprivileged communities and regions of Lebanon).
- The provision of more practical training for project implementers and small-size NGOs.
- Plans for online and blended learning should be designed to be more inclusive and accessible to all. Additionally, staff and students should be trained on equity and inclusion within the educational setting.

3. Student Support

- Additional support for the provision of career guidance and skills building as well as support for universities to become more inclusive.
- Special scholarships dedicated to students with disabilities should be established to support their inclusion, correlating funding opportunities with disability inclusion.
- University readiness programmes for students with disabilities need to be long in duration (around 90+ hours) to be able to create a sustainable impact on students and ensure they are equipped for work and university life.

III. The Lebanese State and the International Community/Donors

1. Recommendations for the Lebanese State/Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE)

- Further collaborations between the Lebanese state, MEHE, and HEIs and cooperation with policymakers including regular meetings and continuous communications between all relevant stakeholders.
- Regarding governance of the higher education sector, there should be efforts to promote a culture of reform for systemic change in the sector rather than a culture of resilience.

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- A very clear legal stance to be issued, on the part of MEHE, with respect to online learning and blended learning needs. MEHE can create a committee to advocate the accreditation of online learning on a national level.
- The Lebanese state and MEHE should support the creation of a National Qualifications Framework and the creation of a Quality Assurance body or agency, as well as a national database for HE Institutions to centralize all available data on these institutions.
- Enhance the capacity of the state in managing international funding with more transparency and accountability.

2. Recommendations for the International Community/Donors

- Involvement through direct financial and material support and funding or through international projects programmes for the development of response interventions that would mitigate repercussions on the short-term.
- A special window of funding should be opened by the European Commission for Erasmus+, and Erasmus+ mobility from and to Lebanon should be maintained to strengthen international exchange and cooperation.
- Easier procedures for funding applications and increased flexibility from donors (e.g., with respect to timelines, reporting, allocated budgets).
- Consideration and sensitivity to the current context and the provision of support and responsiveness from donors within this context.
- The relaxation of financial policies for externally funded programmes and projects.
- Strategically readdressing the barriers of access for local and small NGOs.
- Urgent injections of funds into the further and HE sector to help maintain the continuous delivery of teaching and learning for students from various backgrounds in Lebanon, including students from refugee communities, students from marginalized and vulnerable communities, and students with disabilities.
- Specific financial and programmatic assistance, including funding and gifts-in-kind, as well as knowledge and experience sharing from the international community.
- Only through practical and financial initiatives supported by the international community and their assistance in helping with the creation of initiatives and collaboration can the scale of the challenges be effectively addressed through a strategic and holistic approach on the short-term.

Annex 1 to "The Recommendations" contains proposals for concrete support measures submitted by Lebanese institutions reflecting the current needs.

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Recommendations for the Provision of Immediate Support for the Lebanese Higher Education System

Introduction

Since October 2019, Lebanon has been dealing with the consequences of a series of overlapping socio-economic and political crises. These multi-dimensional crises have exacerbated the country's long-ailing economy and have led to the devaluation of the national currency, the Lebanese Pound (LBP), which has ultimately impacted the quality of life of Lebanon's approximately 6.8 million residents. In addition to Palestinian refugees, which reside in twelve camps scattered across Lebanon, Lebanon is also host to approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees, as estimated by the Lebanese authorities (UNHCR, n.d.)¹. These refugees entered the country starting 2011 with the advent of the Syrian civil war and remain to this day, making Lebanon the country with the highest per capita refugee population in the world (UNHCR, n.d.)². While Lebanon continues to struggle with its turbulent history and a complex geopolitical context, the country's current overlapping crises have been further intensified by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the devastating August 2020 Beirut blast, which resulted in the tremendous loss of lives and billions of dollars in damage to the country's capital. The volatile situation, the rapidly deteriorating economic meltdown, and the uncertain political crisis resulting from decades of political negligence and corruption have aggravated what referred to by the World Bank as Lebanon's "deliberate depression", otherwise known as the country's "collapse" (World Bank, 2022)³.

Amidst these growing predicaments, and despite enormous efforts made on the local and international levels, Lebanon's economic collapse - one of the largest in modern history - has had a detrimental effect on Lebanon's higher and further education institutions. These institutions have been struggling to preserve the continuity and quality of higher education (HE) in Lebanon, a long-standing priority for residents of the country. For decades, higher and further education institutions in Lebanon have been central to improving governance in the country, upholding the right of students for a better education, and helping students of all backgrounds realize their aspirations and become socially engaged agents of change. While the HE sector in Lebanon has been suffering from fundamental issues prior to 2019, amidst the crises that have engulfed Lebanon - more specifically, the economic collapse and the hyperinflation resulting from the sharp and continuous drop in the value of the national currency - access to higher and further education in Lebanon has become far more difficult. Lebanon's economic instability, its unpredictable and precarious political situation, and growing social tensions have made it exceptionally challenging for the government,

¹ UNHCR (n.d.). *UNHCR Lebanon at a Glance*. Accessed September 1, 2022, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance>

² Ibid.

³ World Bank (2022, January 25). *Lebanon's Crisis: Great Denial in the Deliberate Depression*. Accessed September 1, 2022, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/01/24/lebanon-s-crisis-great-denial-in-the-deliberate-depression>.

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educational institutions, international organisations (IOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to navigate the provision of access to quality further and HE opportunities for Lebanese youth and refugee communities. Resultantly, and as of today, only a small percentage of Lebanese youth and refugees have the financial and technical means and/or pathways for institutional access to pursue and complete their HE studies.

"Higher Education in Times of Collapse" Stakeholder Dialogues

In response to these complex and multifaceted challenges, the **HOPES-LEB Project (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians and vulnerable youth in Lebanon)** funded by the **European Union (EU)** and implemented by the **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**, **Campus France**, and **Nuffic**, in partnership with the **National Erasmus+ Office of Lebanon**, launched a series of stakeholder meetings addressing "**Higher Education in Times of Collapse**". Launched in January 2022, the "Higher Education in Times of Collapse" series of dialogues brought together various stakeholders to further discuss the implications of the current situation on the HE sector in Lebanon and its impact on both students and education providers. The significance of these dialogues lies within its adoption of a participatory and inclusive approach, wherein all parties working within and constituting part of the higher and further education sector were invited "to the table". A participatory approach ensures a broader and more comprehensive representation of perspectives and ideas, giving everyone involved an opportunity to be heard, and also best captures the realities of the problem to be addressed, providing a solid basis for future planning and recommended strategies for intervention.

These stakeholder dialogues, which took place between January 2022 and May 2022, sought to understand and engage with the varying perspectives within the sector. These dialogues focused on three main aspects: 1) the perspective of higher and further education institutions; 2) the perspective of project implementers and organisations; and 3) the perspective of students. As such, dialogue participants included professionals and academics, representatives of institutions and organisations, as well as students from all backgrounds. During these meetings, participants each identified, shared, and discussed the challenges to the higher and further education sector as well as recommended mitigation measures. More importantly, participants contributed to the development of recommendations to address the problematic situation at hand. Based on these dialogues, a follow-up gathering organized during June 2022 helped define the way forward for the development of this **paper and list of recommendations**, addressed to relevant national and international stakeholders to define priorities for action and better guide future interventions.

Objective of the Paper

The central aim of this paper is to provide recommendations for local and international stakeholders for the **immediate** response to the compounded and complex crises afflicting the HE sector in Lebanon. Based on the outcomes of the stakeholder dialogues, this paper outlines recommendations for the **emergency help** required to address problems of imminent importance for HE institutions and the HE system in Lebanon. It should be noted that while this paper complements existing initiatives of a more far-ranging character - such as the strategic "Lebanon Five-Year Higher Education Plan, 2022-2026" developed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) National Strategic Framework 2023-2027 - the recommendations within this document

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address **short-term, emergency support** measures. As such, these recommendations cannot in any way substitute plans for structural change, development, and reform within the overall HE sector in Lebanon.

While it remains impossible to anticipate long-term solutions given the rapid escalation of the situation in Lebanon, this paper affirms that maintaining the availability and quality of education and HE is a paramount priority. If the HE sector were to collapse, then the system in Lebanon is due towards an overall collapse. As such, support for this sector is particularly important to prevent the emergence of a "lost generation" of students, a phenomenon that will have lasting implications on the future of students and that of their countries.

Within this scope, this paper prescribes recommendations on what possible avenues there are to support the various stakeholders in the HE sector for the **short-term i.e. over the forthcoming two years**. The list of recommendations within this paper was jointly developed with participants of the dialogue sessions, and directly stem from the ideas and suggestions raised during the rich deliberations that took place during the dialogues. They are listed in no particular order of importance, as the situation differs from context to context. These recommendations are categorized thematically according to three overall groups, with additional targeted recommendations for particular sub-groups of stakeholders involved in the HE sector, as follows:

- I. **Higher and Further Education Institutions: Universities and Vocational and Technical Institutes**
 1. **Financing, Administration, and Operations**
 2. **Pedagogical and Research Practices**
 3. **Student Support**
 4. **Other Recommendations for Public Institutions: The Lebanese University and Technical Institutes**

- II. **HE Programme and Project Implementers: Universities and National and International IOs and NGOs**
 1. **Financing, Administration, and Operations**
 2. **Pedagogical and Training Practices**
 3. **Student Support**

- III. **The Lebanese State and the International Community/Donors**
 1. **Recommendations for the Lebanese State/MEHE**
 2. **Recommendations for the International Community/Donors**

Overview - The Situation in Lebanon

This section provides an overview of the stakeholders involved in the HE sector in Lebanon, demographics, and institutional operations in light of the country's current contextual constraints. In addition to highlighting the critical role HE plays in Lebanon, this section also details some of the significant challenges faced by the sector, which existed prior to the current crises, and which are inherent to the structure of the HE sector in Lebanon. Special attention is given to the sole public/state university in Lebanon, LU, the largest university in the country in terms of its admitted students with faculty and administrative staff. LU has consistently struggled with chronic underfunding, which has predated current crises. Unlike private universities in Lebanon, LU is not a revenue-generating institution, and as such, relies on government

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funding to operate. While some private universities have relied on endowment and emergency funds to sustain their operations, as well as generous grants from donor countries, IOs, and university trustees, the economic crisis and devaluation of the Lebanese Pound have led the Lebanese government to reduce significantly funding allocated to this university. This has left LU unable to cover its operational expenses, burdening this already-struggling university with unique challenges.

The Higher Education Sector in Lebanon

The Lebanese HE sector has played and continues to play an important role in Lebanon and for society as a whole, creating an added value for both Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents. Education has long been a priority for residents of this country, who invest heavily in education to strengthen human capital, enhance social mobility, and prepare students for the economic growth and stability of the nation. The vital significance of the HE sector in Lebanon lies in the crucial role of higher and further education institutions in improving governance and upholding the right of students for better education, enabling them to realize their aspirations and to become socially engaged agents of change.

Lebanon's HE system consists of a sole public/state provider, LU, as well as more than forty-five private universities. These private universities include older institutions founded in the 19th century, and many other recently established universities, which emerged due to the explosion of licensing for the creation of new universities following the Lebanese Civil War. These universities attract a large number of students who are unable to enrol in neither the older institutions nor the public/state university, for many reasons such as socio-economic standing, the proximity of the universities to home, the absence of public loans for students, etc. As such, there are stark differences within the HE institutional ecosystem in Lebanon: universities do not have the same access to resources, nor the same quality standards, and varying capacities to respond to challenges and requests. These universities cater to both Lebanese and non-Lebanese: Lebanese citizens in addition to refugee communities residing in Lebanon (predominantly refugees from Syria, followed by Palestinian refugees) and people with disabilities from various backgrounds.

It should be emphasized that the HE sector in Lebanon has been suffering from fundamental issues prior to the emergence of the country's compounded crises. Many of the sector's short-term problems are deeply rooted in these issues, arising from difficulties inherent to the structure of the sector in Lebanon. Examples of these challenges, which predate Lebanon's current crises, include (to name a few): historically limited political and state commitment to the enhancement and support of higher education; sluggish education policy development processes, with legislations on education taking lengthy to develop, enact, and implement (if conceived of at all); inequality in HE financing between LU and Lebanon's private universities (one of the main challenges faced by the country's universities during the collapse; drastically varying pedagogical and structural practices; geographic limitations and an inability to provide equity in access to higher education for students present in rural areas (far from the central areas in which most universities are located); and the absence of a national quality assurance agency for higher education. A significant issue faced by the sector is the relevance of programmes offered by Lebanese higher education institutions to the labour market and societal needs. This may perhaps be due to an unorganized labour market, and to the fact that these institutions were graduating students to work outside Lebanon, particularly in the Gulf States. More importantly, there is a long-standing stark and noted absence of any national strategy or

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policy plans for this sector, noting that the expertise provided by the HE sector as potential contributors to mitigating these aforementioned challenges was often neglected or overlooked.

More recently, and in response to the challenges faced by Lebanon's HE sector, MEHE, with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regional office in Beirut and Lebanese experts, developed an ambitious five-year strategy (2022-2026) to strengthen the tertiary education sector and establish a comprehensive and holistic vision for HE in Lebanon. This long-term roadmap is currently under discussion with various stakeholders and will be presented to the Higher Education Council and then to the Council of Ministers. The significance of this strategy is paramount as it was developed within the current context of Lebanon's socio-economic and political crises, and builds on the strengths of both the system and the readiness of Lebanon's residents to invest in education. However, as the country's dire situation continues to deteriorate, access to HE and the ability of Lebanon's residents to finance HE studies has drastically decreased. With the fall of the Lebanese Pound and the decline in purchasing power, access to HE is transforming in Lebanon. HE is now perceived as a luxury, as many students are unable to pay their registration fees or their tuition - even at LU, where registration and annual fees are considered nominal. Ultimately, and considering extenuating circumstances, inaction towards or limited support to the HE sector in Lebanon essentially means the deterioration of this sector, which will have severe long-term social repercussions on generations of students to come.

The Lebanese University (LU)

Established in 1951, the LU is the only public university in Lebanon. It is a multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual university with sixteen faculties and institutes, and three doctoral schools. It has seventy-six branches geographically distributed across the country, which is one of the university's most important characteristics: it is readily accessible to all students in Lebanon, regardless of their location. During the academic year 2020-21, approximately 86,000 students were enrolled in LU, including more than 3,500 non-Lebanese students from 115 different countries. According to the World Bank's public financial review of the education sector, approximately 36% of Lebanon's students who are enrolled in HE in Lebanon are enrolled at LU. Approximately 5,000 faculty members ranging from full-time to part-time/contracted faculty are employed in the university, along with those employed in several public service centres connected to the university⁴. Prior to the crises, LU's registration and annual fees were nominal, which made the university affordable to both Lebanese youth and refugees from various socio-economic backgrounds.

It should be noted that LU had been struggling with financial difficulties before 2019, related to the governance structure of the university and the influence of repeated political impasses over the past decade. These financial challenges were heightened with the advent of the economic crisis and the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, which made the situation at the university impossible to manage or mitigate. Before 2019, the annual budget of LU was 365 billion LBP (equivalent to 243 million USD at the official exchange rate of approximately 1,505 LBP per USD). Of this amount, 311 billion Lebanese Pounds

⁴ Abd El-Galil, Tarek (2022, July 23). *Lebanese University in Crisis: 10 Takeaways from its President's Remarks*. Al-Fanar Media. Accessed October 17, 2022, available at <https://al-fanarmedia.org/2022/07/lebanese-university-in-crisis-10-takeaways-from-its-presidents-remarks/>.

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were dedicated to salaries and 54 billion LBP were earmarked for operating costs. LU's expenditures took a severe hit due to Lebanon's crises and the devaluation of the national currency, with LU's annual budget slashed by the Lebanese government, dropping from the previous 243 million USD to approximately 10 million USD at the USD parallel market rate of 37,000 LBP to the Dollar. This resulted in a loss of more than 90% of the value of salaries paid to LU faculty, and affected the continuity of onsite research and education at the university. The drastic cut in financial resources by the government has also significantly impacted university operations such as campus maintenance and have led to a reduction of operations to the bare minimum to ensure funds are available for basic needs (e.g. paper costs for the printing of exams and other administrative purposes). Furthermore, the university is unable to purchase and secure products to ensure the smooth running of its laboratories for either teaching or research or pay the costs necessary for maintenance, both priced at the USD parallel market rate. Considering exorbitant costs, most of the university's employees are limiting in-person, on-campus work to two days a week. This has resulted in significant delays in the processing of administrative tasks, especially those related to students (e.g. the issuing of certificates, student registration, and the administration of exams...).

As a result, during academic year 21-22, the resumption of classes at LU was significantly postponed, in comparison to private universities which were able to begin the academic year more or less on time. In addition to the challenges LU is facing due to the economic collapse, LU has also had to cope with current and previous strikes by teaching faculty (which also predate the crisis), as well as the added pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrary to private universities, which were readily able to switch to online education throughout Lebanon's successive national lockdowns, considering the aforementioned extenuating circumstances and the lack of resources, some of the faculties at LU faced problems related to online learning. Nevertheless, and even working within significant financial and political constraints, LU is one of the top three Lebanese universities in terms of research delivery, publications, and research production.

Contextual Constraints of Lebanon's Overlapping Crises

While the LU and other state-funded technical institutes have felt the pressures of the country's overlapping crises at a more amplified rate than private universities, Lebanon's accelerated economic and financial collapse has caused an existential threat to the entirety of the education sector, one of the nation's most vital sectors. The intertwining nature of these crises has made the delivery of quality education and the maintenance of operations exceptionally difficult. Beginning with the October 2019 protests, which brought the country to a complete standstill for over a month, universities found themselves forced to shift rapidly to online learning to continue with programme delivery and the academic year. Just a few months later in 2020, Lebanon witnessed the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, successive national lockdowns, and a concurrent rapid deterioration in the value of the Lebanese Pound. This all led to the exacerbation of the country's socio-political and economic crises and had a severe direct impact on the capacity of higher and further education institutions to maintain business as usual and meet the needs of students, staff, and faculty members. Later that year, the catastrophic August 2020 Beirut Blast brought further tragedy to an already struggling nation, resulting in a tremendous loss of life as well as billions of dollars in damage to the country's capital. Many of the capital's universities were damaged by the blast, adding an additional layer of challenges to the HE sector.

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In the face of these challenges, higher and further education institutions applied varying strategies and modalities to respond to the deteriorating situation. These included adopting a flexible approach and adaptation to situational constraints (the most common measure undertaken); the provision of incentives to staff and faculty members; pursuing funding opportunities; the reduction in and freezing of budgets; the implementation of targeted emergency administrative and financial actions; modifications in teaching and administrative operations; and transitioning to remote work and virtual teaching and learning. Despite significant efforts by all institutions and stakeholders in trying to find appropriate mitigation measures to these multi-layered crises, critical challenges still face higher and further institutions in Lebanon and impact university administrators, faculty members/teaching staff, university staff/administrators, and students. The continuous difficulties faced by the HE sector can be divided into three categories:

1. Financial uncertainty and business continuity:

Except for the LU, Lebanon's universities depend on tuition fees to sustain their operations. In private universities, there is a heavy reliance on student fees with little to no diversification of revenue streams. Lower student enrolment due to the country's economic collapse, the subsequent liquidity crisis, and the decline in the value of the national currency led to limited revenues from tuition collections. This resulted in a money shortage and a reduction in and freezing of budgets due to the scarcity of resources, with institutions entering into so-called "survival" mode.

With the decline in the value of the Lebanese Pound, the value of annual university budgets plummeted, and financing with multiple exchange rates - including the parallel market rate - became a daily challenge. In light of Lebanon's unofficial capital controls set by the Lebanese banking sector, private universities with foreign currency endowments dating prior to 2019 were left unable to access their funds, making operational spending difficult. Many universities had to resort to large-scale budget freezes and emergency budget limitations in order to sustain their operations. Furthermore, with the decrease in the purchasing power of the Lebanese Pound and the emergence of the parallel market rate, running and operational costs of universities skyrocketed, making it much more difficult to purchase and maintain equipment (made in foreign currency). In addition, the purchase of equipment and materials for research laboratories has become complicated and expensive, as well as the purchase of access to e-resources, digital libraries, and databases for peer-reviewed journals and e-books. Even the purchase of necessary, daily materials to ensure smooth operations (such as paper, toner ink, etc.) has become costly. Subsequently, it is not surprising that, according to an anonymous survey administered in April 2022 in preparation for the students' dialogue to approximately 774 HE students across Lebanon from various backgrounds (including Lebanese citizens and refugees), around 46% of students reported a decrease in the availability of study resources (library access, laboratory space, access to computers, and internet access).

HE programmes and project implementers also faced significant financial problems, especially concerning funding being blocked at the level of the banks, impeding all kinds of transfers within the country and to international partners abroad. Reimbursable staff and travel costs are paid back to implementers with a significant loss in value due to the discrepancy in exchange rates between the banks and the parallel

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market. Furthermore, and similarly to universities, projects were also unable to purchase equipment indispensable for project activities, which caused additional delays to project implementation.

The deterioration of public services in Lebanon has also significantly impacted the performance of Lebanon's HE sector. First, the lack of state-provided electricity and the increase in the cost of private generators result in extended blackouts, which affect the daily operations of the HE sector. Furthermore, the increase in the price of fuel and successive fuel shortages directly impacted the ability of faculty, staff, and students to commute to and from their respective institutions. More significantly, limited and spotty access to the internet continues to negatively affect the effectiveness of virtual work and studying. During and throughout the shift to online learning, the lack of proper infrastructure had a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning process. For programme and project implementers, working virtually from underprivileged areas where electricity and internet access are almost inexistent caused several delays, threatening the successful accomplishment of relevant outputs and objectives and hindering the effectiveness of the quality of the work delivered. Considering these circumstances, it has become exceptionally difficult to ensure the equitable access to and inclusion of students with disabilities in the HE sector, as well as students located in underprivileged and marginalized areas. This is especially concerning as the demand for education is exceptionally high in underprivileged areas in Lebanon, where NGOs face an additional set of challenges to implement educational projects. On top of the difficulties related to the inclusion of people with disabilities as well as the lack of infrastructure in schools and educational institutions, NGOs operating in underprivileged areas also have to deal with a myriad of issues related to low-capacity building for teachers, legal issues related to Syrian and Palestinian teachers, and the lack of conducive conditions for inclusion (to name a few).

2. Faculty, staff, and student attrition (loss of human resources - past and forecast):

Over the past two years, higher and further education institutions in Lebanon have witnessed high levels of faculty and staff attrition, which significantly hindered the ability of these institutions to continue with operations as planned. An increasing number of faculty members have been seeking unpaid leave to take up opportunities abroad for a short-period, and many other faculty members have chosen to leave Lebanon altogether for opportunities abroad. According to the results of the Dialogues' survey, 59% of students considered that the departure of faculty/teaching staff has considerably affected the quality of teaching. Furthermore, the departure - whether inside Lebanon or abroad - of university, programme and project implementation staff such as key administrative and IT personnel caused significant hurdles, particularly during the shift to online learning. Faculty and staff attrition is particularly difficult for further and higher educations during this period as the cost of replacing teaching and administrative staff is too high, particularly with the decline in the purchasing power of the Lebanese Pound and employees seeking better paid opportunities to account for increased living costs in the country.

With respect to student attrition, it should be noted that, during 2020, there was a dip in enrolment across all universities. In the period immediately following the August 2020 Beirut Blast, there was a significant migration of students and their families abroad which impacts the long-term quality of research and higher education in Lebanon. Fortunately, with the advent of the 2021 academic year, there was a partial recovery in student enrolment across universities. However, this is no indication of any relative amelioration of the

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current situation, which is heavily felt by students. According to the April 2022 Dialogues' survey, a whopping 93% indicated their feelings of concern or fear for their own future, and 80% of students expressed their intent to leave Lebanon. In their responses to the survey, students were found to be extremely apprehensive of current circumstances in Lebanon, with 79% seeing no prospects for solutions to the country's compounded crises or a better situation in Lebanon. As such, the loss of human resources is forecast to continue with the deterioration of the situation and the continuous economic collapse of the country, resulting in a continuous exodus/brain drain.

3. Devaluation in local currency and the impact on HE students from all backgrounds:

The rapid devaluation of the Lebanese Pound had a tremendous effect on the purchasing power of Lebanese and refugee families alike. Families not only found themselves almost instantly locked out of their savings, but also, having to deal with a substantial loss of more than 90% of their salaries' value. This led them to prioritize basic needs such as food and medicine over education. Out of the 774 students who participated in the April 2022 survey, approximately 60% of students reported major financial constraints in the pursuit of their studies. Of these students, 41% reported their need to work to earn a living and support their family while simultaneously pursuing their studies, and 34% reported an inability to cover their tuition fees. This is particularly significant when considering the unique circumstances of the LU. While government spending on higher education has historically been very low, the absence of any sort of public loans for students has made it much more difficult for students to continue their studies at LU - even with the university's nominal fees. At the parallel market rate, the current fee LU students are expected to pay amounts to approximately 8 USD, yet many students were unable to secure this amount resulting in an exodus of students from this university. This is all on top of the inflationary cost of books and resources grappling the economy and the country. The high cost of transportation has also become a significant challenge for students, with approximately 30% of student respondents in the Dialogues' survey reporting a difficulty in covering transportation costs. Furthermore, 23% of the students indicated that they face issues in securing internet as well as the necessary hardware (laptops, tablets, etc.) to support their studies. As such, it is not surprising that the number of students with financial and technical means or the institutional access to continue higher education has decreased.

In addition to the aforementioned contextual constraints, one specific constraint should be given special importance, as it has contributed to the aggravation of the country's compounded crises on the HE sector - namely, the lack of a collective response to the crises afflicting this sector. In response to the rapid economic collapse of the country, and in order to ensure the maintenance of operations, the smooth delivery of teaching and learning, and overall institutional continuity, each institution has prioritized its own cause. In other words, there has been an overarching sense of individuality in addressing the effects of Lebanon's collapse, wherein each institution has been seeking its own solutions in response to the repercussions of the country's compounded crises. This is an important dilemma that is part and parcel of the structure of the higher and further education sector prior to 2019. For instance, an inter-university cooperation initiative to submit and support proposals for funding across multiple institutions has only recently started to materialize. This is a direct reflection of the structure of the sector in Lebanon, which ought to be addressed collectively as part of a longer-term vision to support higher and further education in Lebanon, as well as the strict requirements stipulated by international programmes.

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Recommendations

In light of the context of the higher and further education sector as well as the significant and heavy challenges faced by Lebanon, one of the central contributions of the "**Higher Education in Times of Collapse**" stakeholder dialogues was the discussion and deliberation of a number of mitigation measures as well as various recommendations to address this difficult situation. Organized between January and May 2022, these stakeholder meetings, which involved participants from all parties with the sector - higher and further education institutions, project implementers and organisations, and students - resulted in recommendations addressed to relevant national and international stakeholders to define priorities for action and better guide future interventions.

It should be noted that important long-term recommendations were discussed at length during the dialogues. The need for responsibility sharing, cooperation, and collaboration between all key stakeholders to develop and implement long-term strategies and interventions was considered crucial. Emphasis was placed on the need for dialogue, close partnership, and cooperation between the national government at state bodies, research and academic higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations, as well as the private sector, to support integrated qualitative and participatory approaches to easing the effects of Lebanon's complex and multi-layered crises. Indeed, further enhancement of response mechanisms is needed and requires the development of a long-term, integrated strategy centred on quality higher education, resilience, monitoring and evaluation, and responsibility sharing between stakeholders. However, considering the urgency of the current context and the continued collapse of Lebanon's economy, this section lists recommendations arising from the dialogue discussions addressed to local and international stakeholders for the **immediate** response to the compounded and complex crises afflicting the HE sector in Lebanon. These recommendations are centred on the provision of **emergency help** required to address problems of imminent importance for HE institutions and the HE system in Lebanon. These recommendations constitute possible avenues to assist the various stakeholders in the HE sector **over the forthcoming two years**. To reemphasize, while these recommendations fall within the scope of **short-term, emergency assistance**, these suggested measures cannot in any way substitute for long-term collaborative plans for structural change and development within the overall HE sector in Lebanon.

Below is a list of recommendations categorized thematically and in no particular order of importance according to three overall groups, with specific recommendations aimed at particular sub-groups of stakeholders involved in the HE sector.

I. Higher and Further Education Institutions: Universities and Technical and Vocational Institutes

1. Financing, Administration, and Operations

- Considering the volatile situation in Lebanon and the lack of basic infrastructure as detailed in previous sections, immediate funding to support urgent administrative and operational needs is necessary to maintain business operations and ensure the continuous delivery of teaching and learning.

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- To mitigate the incidence of critical and catastrophic scenarios such as the closure of HE institutions and technical and vocational institutes in Lebanon, urgent and immediate funding is required specifically for fuel costs and/or to support the costs of purchasing private generators, which would be able to provide electricity to maintain operations during nationwide blackouts.
- Alternatively, and in light of the possibility of fuel shortages and the rapid rise in its cost, operational and material support towards seeking alternative sources and means of energy to support university operations are crucial (e.g., the installation of batteries and solar panels).
- To maintain high levels of academic production, research, and teaching within laboratories, immediate financial support is needed to support the purchase of laboratory materials, consumables, equipment, and hardware as well as the costs for the reparation of current equipment. These funds would ensure the continuous production of innovative research as well as maintain quality in teaching and learning for disciplines and programmes requiring a lab component.
- Gifts-in-kind to higher and further education institutions would also help strengthen academic practices and research output, contribute to the enhancement of facilities, and can be used to support institutional operations. As opposed to monetary donations and cash gifts, gifts-in-kind may take the form of tangible property, goods, and professional services and support. Gifts-in-kind would help preserve efforts to provide students with the best educational experience, and would also allow for money earmarked by these institutions to be spent on other urgent priorities. Examples of in-kind donations required by further and HE institutions include computer hardware and software, laboratory supplies and equipment, book collections to be donated to libraries, stationary supplies, the donation of facilities, buildings, and spaces, help with the disposal of toxic chemicals and waste from laboratories, and other types of resources and services that these institutions would otherwise have to purchase to remain operational. This should be accompanied with an assessment and evaluation of the impact of these gifts-in-kind and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to ensure the efficient and effective use of these gifts.
- For institutions that are unable to pay to maintain access to e-resources, digital libraries, and databases for peer-reviewed journals and e-books, financial support to secure access fees or fee waivers from international institutions are of crucial importance. Universities are also encouraged to make use of open resources. Capacity building on the use of open resources is essential as such resources can expand access to learning and serve as supplemental or enhancement to course material.
- To secure the retention of faculty members/teaching staff and administrative staff, it is crucial that further and HE institutions diversify sources of funding, especially considering the lack of other means to secure financial support (even private sources of funding are specific to certain channels). A more structured and organized strategy of funding model linked to criteria of quality of education and serving labour market needs is of utmost importance in order to attract funding from benefactors, donors, and the diaspora to support universities in their mission to provide the best educational experience to students. The key to allocating funds to support universities is linking this funding to outputs and results - i.e., an output-based financing model, rather than the input-based financing model which has been the trend in Lebanon, and which leaves little room for institutions to grow and influence other institutions.

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To understand relevant best practices and implementation processes for such financing models, further research on the diversification of revenue streams for Lebanese HE and further education institutions is a necessity.

- HEIs should consider intrinsic incentives for faculty and staff retention, and more inclusive plans to ensure job satisfaction such as extended contracts, enhanced roles and revised job descriptions, career development opportunities that can be provided at little to no-cost within the university (workshops and trainings, access to courses, degree programmes, etc.)
- The creation of a national centralised database of all higher and further education institutions is important. This would serve as a reliable source of data on Lebanon's educational sector, listing information such as the list of higher and further education institutions in the country, programmes offered and admission requirements, accreditations, relevant associations, figures on students and faculty members, etc. Such a national information centre on higher and further education institutions would provide helpful orientation for students to-be about study programmes and conditions but would also be a useful tool for the cooperation among institutions and the further internationalization of the Lebanese HE system.
- There should be a collaborative process to develop, perhaps as part of the proposed national information centre, a central higher education database for funding opportunities and further training opportunities on fundraising, including searching for funding and application procedures according to international standards.
- Furthermore, there should be a database or platform that serves as a repository of researchers and experts in different fields of knowledge. This will serve to map expertise for research purposes and capacity building to funding opportunities provided through government and non-governmental institutions and industry. This platform can also serve NGOs to find institutions that have the extensive expertise and experience to collaborate with and increase their chances of securing substantial funding.

2. Pedagogical and Research Practices

- To ensure continuous learning and experience/knowledge exchange, further and HE institutions should initiate and organize regular meetings, trainings, and joint initiatives between both public and private institutions. This is crucial to help improve the Lebanese academic and research community during this challenging period.
- Through these meetings, further and HE institutions should actively work to strengthen cooperation, as far as possible. Ensuring the activity of consortiums such as the Universities Association of Lebanon (UAOLB) is a necessity, but is not enough. Joint initiatives across universities and inter-university partnerships with the aim of mutually collaborating with organisations and institutions outside Lebanon are critical not only to diversify funding opportunities, but also, to supporting knowledge exchange on pedagogical and research practices.
- Higher and further education institutions should prioritize the strengthening and initiating of practical and creative collaborations with a large spectrum of stakeholders. In addition to regional and

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international institutions as well as the international community, higher and further education institutions should seek partnerships with municipalities, civil society organisations, and more importantly, the private sector such as industrial and commercial companies. The strengthening of collaborations and widening the scope of partnership would help ensure further channels of donations and aid opportunities.

- To maintain and increase access to library resources to support pedagogical and research practices, universities should actively seek collaborations with regional and international libraries. A consortium of Lebanese libraries should be formed among Lebanese universities to allow for cost sharing and the spreading of costs among a wider spectrum of institutions when purchasing online databases and to enhance negotiating power with international publishing houses and providers of online databases. This consortium could also work to establish collaborations with library networks regionally and internationally to enhance access to library resources. It is recommended to build and expand on the existing library consortiums (the Lebanese Academic Library Consortium and the Lebanese Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Service) which already include several universities in the country. In addition, universities should collaborate to develop a national system for libraries, where students and faculty members can easily access resources from other university libraries across Lebanon. This can be done in a very limited period and would be helpful for students and faculty members in universities that do not have the capacity or capability to secure subscriptions.
- To address the lack of statistical data on the exodus of faculty members and the loss of students, universities should prioritize evidence-based research and studies to better understand the impact of these migrations on the mid- and long-term. More importantly, this research should address the implications of losing high-skilled and research-productive faculty members on the quality of teaching and in-person research and education. Universities should also consider opportunities of establishing extended networks and opportunities of collaboration and exchange of expertise in pedagogy and research among those who have opted to leave the country during these challenging times.
- The UAOLB should continue pursuing its proposed joint initiative to find a common solution for the high cost of e-resources, and negotiate together with e-resource providers to secure special fees for HE institutions.
- Capacity-building for HE institutions and faculty members to find flexible pathways to deliver online and blended learning is an immediate priority. Online learning is a key component of modern higher education and therefore needs to be further developed and promoted. Taking stock of recent experiences with online and blended learning, HE institutions should reorient their approach to teaching and learning by making use of these innovative educational initiatives, beyond considering them simply emergency measures for the delivery of education. This includes measures such as the development of professional teaching material and the training of teachers to use e-learning methods appropriately. Utilizing blended and online learning in universities as well as in vocational education would not only improve the learning experience of students, but would also emphasize the importance of these tools for the equitable access to education. This is of utmost importance to ensure the inclusion of the country's most disenfranchised, marginalized, and vulnerable communities, as well as students with disabilities, in the HE sector. This includes additional training for faculty members on 1) embracing

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methods of teaching centred on technology and 2) employing adaptive learning to enhance teaching and learning.

- While it is important to establish a national database for further and higher education in Lebanon (see Recommendations for the Lebanese State/MEHE), it is also important to establish institutional research units within universities. Data is considered an asset. Information generated from data supports policy formation, planning, and evidence-based decision-making. This will facilitate system and institutional capacity building simultaneously.
- System and university representatives could conduct workshops during which they get together and identify important data points that will help generate information to develop a comprehensive overview of the further and higher education system in Lebanon. Important information would include student success data (e.g. retention, graduation, employability rates, financial aid and at-risk students, etc.). These workshops will lay the foundation for the establishment of the national database (see Recommendations for the Lebanese State/MEHE), which will help establish a common language among institutions.
- Imminent financial support is required for vocational and educational training. In light of this, universities should also consider supporting the establishment of short diplomas focused towards TVET.
- Universities should work towards diversifying their degree programs to emphasize outreach, skill-building, and community engagement, which would ultimately support engagement with the labour market.

3. Student Support

- To prevent student dropout and ease the financial situation of students, urgent assistance for scholarships covering tuition fees is a necessity. However, scholarship criteria should be restructured and enhanced to move beyond tuition fees and accommodate work-study stipends, transportation costs, internet access, and other forms of micro-assistance to help students complete their studies smoothly.
- To assist students through the difficult times the country is facing, higher and further education institutions should prioritize mental health support strategies and initiatives. If necessary, HEIs should seek the expertise of local scholars as well as local and international IOs and NGOs to provide resources and avenues for mental health support.
- Universities and TVET schools and institutes should integrate internships and practical experience into higher education, technical, and vocational programmes to ensure students are fully prepared for integration into the labour market and to increase their chances for employability across various sectors. This would also help in mitigating their fear and worry with regards to future employment prospects and access to the labour market. In addition, HEIs should also introduce capacity-building trainings and workshops that teach students essential skills prior to their entry to the labour market such as the development of CVs, conducting job interviews, and the enhancement of soft and interpersonal skills such as communication and leadership skills.

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- Students should be provided with resources such as trainings that teach them how to seek online resources or libraries to complement their studies.
- Emergency funds should be created and directed specifically for the fellowships and the stipends of graduate students (specifically PhD students).
- To safeguard the equitable and inclusive access of students from marginalized and vulnerable communities, as well as students with disabilities who may otherwise find it difficult to access campus, pending funding opportunities, students should be provided with online resources which they may access offline (for example, asynchronized SD cards with course materials already downloaded, or, if funding is available, tablets with pre-downloaded curricula which can be given to students).

4. Other Recommendations for Public Institutions: The Lebanese University and Technical Institutes

In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, specific short-term recommendations for LU and technical institutes that rely solely on governmental funding include:

- Considering the economic collapse and the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, the LU and technical institutes require an urgent and imminent injection of funds and in-kind donations of all kinds to cover operational expenses and maintain the provision of teaching and learning.
- Urgent infrastructural support (securing power alternatives, internet, fuel, etc.) is required to mitigate the large challenges faced by publicly funded institutions.
- There is an urgent need for direct salary support for institutions that rely on governmental funding. This may be in the form of monetary injections for employees and professors from national productive projects, to mitigate the professional exodus from these institutions.
- Financial assistance through scholarships, loans, or emergency funds should take into consideration stipends, transportation costs, and costs of living for students, academic staff, and PhD students. Indeed, financial support is critical for LU students. These funds should be sent directly to students, teachers and professors, and not through government bodies.
- There is an urgent need for the LU to engage with European or American research programmes to assist in connecting them with scientific research universities and diversify their funding opportunities. This will help maintain the significant role LU has in academic research production in Lebanon. This does not discount the importance of ensuring Lebanon's universities collaborate together to enhance the academic research production of Lebanon as a country overall. Institutions should no longer operate as silos of knowledge, but rather, come together to promote the knowledge production of Lebanon.

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II. HE Programme and Project Implementers: Universities and National and International IOs and NGOs

1. Financing, Administration, and Operations

- Immediate, additional financing and programmatic support from relevant IOs is needed to better serve the underprivileged regions of Lebanon and refugee communities. Additional funding is also needed for infrastructural needs similar to those detailed in the HEI section.
- Similarly to further and higher education institutions, knowledge exchange on best practices and experiences is paramount to enhancing the capability of project and programme and project implementers to successfully complete their mission. In addition, working collaboratively may provide easier accessibility to high-level decision makers at the national and institutional levels, ensuring that all voices are heard.
- Intensified networking is recommended between universities, IOs, NGOs, labour market representatives and think tanks to exert collective pressure on international donors to receive additional funding to sustain programme and project implementation efforts.

2. Pedagogical and Training Practices

- Additional funding is necessary to provide more practical training to students. As such, competency-based funding is crucial. This type of funding supports the development of pre-defined and assessed competencies at the core of Lebanon's labour market needs, especially in underprivileged areas in Lebanon. This would eventually bridge the gap between education services and the labour market, and would also serve underprivileged communities and regions of Lebanon.
- The provision of more practical training for project implementers is necessary to build capacities in different areas including comprehensive training on project implementation; risk management and preparation of contingency plans; knowledge of the different tools to search for funding; specific trainings to support rejected projects; and targeted information campaigns on funding opportunities. Small-sized NGOs can also benefit from trainings to help them target large funding opportunities.
- Plans for online and blended learning should take into account students from all backgrounds and abilities, and should therefore be designed to be more inclusive and to be accessible to all. Additionally, staff and students should be trained on equity and inclusion within the educational setting.

3. Student Support

- In order to ensure the inclusiveness of students at the university level and promote their work readiness, support is needed for the provision of career guidance and skill building, as well as support for universities to become more inclusive.

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- Students with disabilities have additional challenges while navigating education. Considering their enormous needs, this group should be considered as a target group of their own and not as part of greater entities, and as a target group deserving greater attention which is often not provided. Special scholarships dedicated to students with disabilities should be established to support their inclusion at the level of higher education, thereby correlating funding opportunities with disability inclusion.
- University readiness programmes for students with disabilities need to be long in duration (around 90+ hours) to be able to create a sustainable impact on students and ensure they are equipped for work and university life.

III. The Lebanese State and the International Community/Donors

1. Recommendations for the Lebanese State/MEHE

- Partnership with the government and government support for higher education is crucial to all aforementioned short-term recommendations in order to mitigate the challenges faced by the further and HE sector. The Lebanese state must play a pivotal role by providing guidance and creating necessary frame conditions, as well as in securing part of the international support. This effort should be spearheaded by MEHE in coordination with other governmental and non-governmental entities.
- Further collaborations between the Lebanese state, MEHE, and higher education institutions at the local level and cooperation with policy-makers is crucial. This includes regular meetings and continuous, regular communications between all relevant stakeholders. Communication between the MEHE and universities must be improved. Therefore, a clear communication framework has to be established.
- At the level of governance of the HE sector, there should be efforts to promote a culture of reform for systemic change in the educational sector, rather than a culture of resilience. Taking stock of the past few years, the sector should build towards reform and lessons learned.
- There is an urgent need to support the MEHE and its overall structure through the provision of continuous further qualification and training of its staff and helping to manage the needed digital transformation.
- It is recommended that a very clear legal stance be issued, on the part of MEHE, with respect to online learning and blended learning. Recognition of online and blended learning through appropriate legislation from policymakers will ensure that students have access to a framework of support measures and different learning modalities that builds on best practices and meets their needs, particularly for students from vulnerable communities. In this scope, MEHE can create a committee to advocate the accreditation of online learning on a national level.
- The Lebanese state and MEHE should support the creation of a National Qualifications Framework and the creation of a Quality Assurance body or agency, as well as a national database for HE Institutions to centralize all available data on these institutions. This information will prove

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fundamental to all stakeholders involved in the sector, and increase channels for data sharing and transparency in communication. The National Qualifications Framework and the Quality Assurance Body will also be responsible for tracking quality in the provision of higher education and responsible for ensuring a better reading of student qualifications vis-à-vis the labour market.

- There is a need to enhance the capacity of the state in managing international funding with more transparency and accountability, as well as a need to establish a national strategy for research. This strategy would identify national priority areas and ensure that the research conducted serves the societal and sustainable development needs of Lebanon. These identified priority research areas could also span the region and may attract external interest, expanding collaborations beyond Lebanon's borders, leading to expanded networks and enhancing funding opportunities.

2. Recommendations for the International Community/Donors

- The involvement of the international community through direct financial and material support and funding or through international projects programmes is central to the development of response interventions that would mitigate repercussions of Lebanon's crises on the short-term. Indeed, current initiatives funded by international donors have an increasingly important role in dealing with the current crises.
- A "special window" of funding should be opened by the European Commission for Erasmus+ as has been done with other countries in the region. Furthermore, Erasmus+ mobility from and to Lebanon should be maintained to strengthen international exchange and cooperation.
- Easier procedures for funding applications are central to fundraising efforts and should be implemented by international donors and funding agencies. Barriers of NGOs to apply for funding such as extensive applications processes are counterproductive to fundraising efforts. In addition, once funding is granted, and considering the current context, easier and less time-consuming procedures for documentation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting are crucial to ensure that adequate time is devoted to the implementation of programmes and projects rather than paperwork.
- Increased flexibility from donors with respect to extending project timelines is a necessity, especially for projects that were first implemented during the pandemic and which subsequently incurred serious delays.
- Flexibility and consideration of the current context in Lebanon is of utmost importance with respect to financial practices, and more specifically, the relaxation of financial policies for externally funded programmes and projects. Such one-size-fits-all policies can no longer serve programme and project implementation strategies and planning in the midst of times of crises. Accordingly, more discretion, particularly with respect to allocated budgets, should be allowed to project implementers in response to the challenging context and emerging issues.

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- Funders should be exceptionally responsive and provide the required support needed to programme and project implementers, particularly relating to concerns or questions raised by project implementers while implementing project activities.
- The barriers of entry for local and small NGOs to benefit from large grants must be strategically dealt with and readdressed. Criteria that hinder access to NGOs seeking funding to implement projects include previous years of experience in dealing with large funds. However, most local NGOs do not fulfil this criterion. In addition, there is a need to redefine the criteria of selection of NGOs at the international level (such as specified years of experience and knowledge in the field, specialized training, etc.) A special strand should be introduced including small-scale projects targeting newcomers. Additionally, NGOs should partner with organisations that have experience when applying for grants. This will contribute towards capacity-building and address criteria related to experience.
- Urgent injections of funds into the further and HE sector are of paramount importance to help institutions maintain the continuous delivery of teaching and learning for students from various backgrounds in Lebanon, including students from refugee communities, students from marginalized and vulnerable communities, and students with disabilities. A disruption to the delivery of teaching and learning would be detrimental to the lives of these students and the continuity of the sector as a whole. As such, specific financial and programmatic assistance, including funding and gifts-in-kind, as well as knowledge and experience sharing from the international community is needed for:
 - The creation of additional scholarship programmes for students across the sector.
 - The safeguarding of equity, inclusiveness, and diversity across all institutions in the sector.
 - The sustainability of institutional operations.
 - The establishment of institutional collaborations between local further and HE institutions and international institutions, to promote academic production, share resources for teaching and learning, provide training opportunities across the sector, and promote knowledge exchange.
 - The provision of salaries for faculty members and staff, and stipends for students, as well as support funds to ensure basic amenities such as internet is accessible to students from all backgrounds.
 - The maintenance of high levels of academic production, research, and teaching.
 - The support of digital transformation - one of the EU's priorities - and the development of curricula inclusive of online and blended learning.
 - The prevention of a mass exodus of academic/teaching staff, administrative staff, and students.
- Only through practical and financial initiatives supported by the international community and their assistance in helping with the creation of initiatives and collaboration can the scale of the challenges presented by these enduring crises be effectively addressed through a strategic and holistic approach on the short-term.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Further Proposals for Concrete Measures in support of Lebanese Higher Education Institutions and Organisations

As a follow-up initiative to the dialogue sessions, this annex highlights on-point proposals developed and submitted by Lebanese institutions of higher and technical education that are seeking support from possible donors/aid agencies and other institutions that would be willing to help.

This initiative was developed to encourage the creation of potential links between institutions and providers of support, as well as with possible donors and aid agencies. In this perspective, institutions and organisations are invited to submit their ideas for proposals and interventions which will be promoted on the Higher Education in Times of Collapse dedicated website page:

<https://www.hopes-madad.org/higher-educationin-times-of-collapse/>

Annex 2: The results of the Higher Education in times of Collapse Survey, which was administered to higher education students in Lebanon (April 2022)

<https://www.hopes-madad.org/app/uploads/2022/11/Survey-Results-HE-in-times-of-collapse-.pdf>

Annex 3: List of institutions/organisations that participated in the dialogue sessions

<https://www.hopes-madad.org/app/uploads/2022/11/List-of-Registered-institutions-1-1.pdf>

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