

Part One: Overview of Lebanon's Educational Landscape (National Report)

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This two-part study examines the state of the Lebanese higher education sector, specifically in terms of governance. Any research of the current situation of universities in the country encounters two major difficulties: the multidimensional diversity of the system and the lack of consistent and reliable data that would allow for a precise assessment of the sector. Based on the data gathered, the study asks whether Lebanese universities are prepared to meet the socioeconomic and cultural challenges facing the sector in the context of an expanding market economy, knowledge society, and globalization. Can Lebanese universities successfully prepare their graduates to enter the labor force? And will they improve the quality of education they offer and their research capacities?

Lebanese higher education is rapidly expanding and modernizing. Private education has bloomed over the past two decades and has become a profitable venture, as well as a more attractive employment option for faculty members. At the time of this study, forty-five institutions have been certified by the Lebanese government. Only one of these—the Lebanese University (LU), established in 1951—is public; the rest are private institutions, usually run as family businesses as well as educational establishments that belong to religious communities. Data for the 2009/2010 academic year shows a ratio of 40% of students in LU and 60% in private universities. Currently, many Lebanese universities are in the process of being accredited by international bodies of quality assurance (in the absence of domestic mechanisms and organizations for such accreditation).

Direct government spending on higher education does not exceed 0.5% of the GDP, which is below the average levels for OECD and lower-middle-income countries. Direct government spending is mainly channelled to LU, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS), and to cover Lebanon's contributions to bilateral international programs. Indirect public spending is used mainly for educational allowances to government employees for the tuition of their children studying in private universities. Due to the strong presence and rapid development of private education, household spending on education in Lebanon far exceeds that of government spending at all levels of schooling. External or private grants constitute a third important source of funding; and the majority of universities offer financial aid and scholarships. More recently, the option of instituting a system of student loans through the banking sector and targeted to students from low- and middle-income families has also been explored.

The main law regulating the sector was passed in 1961 and amended by subsequent decrees. LU is governed by special legislation. The 1961 law created the Council for Higher Education with the power to license new private institutions. The MEHE has jurisdiction over non-vocational postsecondary education. In 2002, the Directorate General for Higher Education (DGHE) was established within the MEHE to regulate, supervise, and coordinate private education. Also created were an Equivalence Committee for the recognition of degrees and diplomas and technical committees for university audits. In 2014, Parliament approved new legislation for the reorganization of private higher education.

Although the Lebanese constitution protects the freedom and independence of the sector, higher education remains a public good under the purview of the state. However, the state's power is loose and subject to many political and sectarian constraints. Apart from regulating the licensing stage and approving degrees and programs, neither the national government nor any

local authorities are involved in the founding, the governance, and the operation of higher education institutions. These are in the hands of each institution's governing body. The DGHE requires that each private university has a board of trustees (where two-thirds of members are people outside the owners' circle) as well as an executive and scientific board. University colleges or institutes should be governed by a board of directors; and all institutions should have faculty and departmental councils that include student representation.

The public LU enjoys a clear autonomy with its own system of governance where power is divided between the president, the University Council, and the deans. By law, members of the Council should be the deans of all faculties, one faculty member from each faculty elected by the teaching staff, two student representatives, and two independent experts selected by the government. Many are calling for a reform of LU's structure, but recent attempts by the Ministry to initiate a debate on this issue were faced with resistance.

In Lebanon, no nation-wide student or faculty unions or representative bodies exist. This was not the case before the civil war of 1975 when Lebanese universities had been active and dynamic centers of social and political life and students had formed a considerable pressure force. Elected student unions and other organizations had existed at LU and most of the private universities. After the war, due to the fragile political division that ensued, LU suspended elections for student unions in an attempt to keep peace on campus. This has prevented students from being duly represented in the University Council. Student elections are still held in private universities and unions still have a say in many university issues, but without being integrated as active participants in the governance system.

In terms of reforms, the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies has drafted, upon the request of MEHE, the national strategy for education, pending ratification by the government and parliament. It calls for a greater accessibility to universities; the creation of national modern systems of accreditation, evaluation, and quality assurance; implementation of a national policy for the recognition of diplomas; improved quality of teaching at LU; reform of tertiary vocational education; diversification of programs; promotion of cooperation between universities and businesses; support for research; and reinforcement of the institutional capacities of the public sector. To succeed, this strategy needs to be complemented by a series of timely action plans.

Lebanon's plans for modernization of its education system are also affected by developments in the sector internationally. The country takes part in many cooperation programs, such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus, that have led it to reorient its structures to converge with the latest international trends. Some of the issues that these programs have put forward are quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, governance, university-business cooperation, mobility of students and graduates, and recognition of diplomas. For example, as part of the project TransMedEAST, nine institutions from Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, France, Italy, and Greece have partnered to offer a trans-Mediterranean interuniversity diploma in endoscopy and microsurgery. Furthermore, Lebanese universities have begun implementing some of the Bologna principles, such as the LMD (license-master-doctorate) system, even though the country hasn't signed the Bologna Declaration.

International cooperation and partnerships also play a role in leveraging research opportunities. In general, Lebanon's research capacity is weak and also in need of reform. The CNRS is the only source for public research grants. Research is carried out in doctoral programs or in the framework of exchange schemes or bilateral agreements with international partners. According to a report of the project Estime, Lebanon's publication output is still modest, but has significantly increased in recent years.