



National Erasmus+ Office, Lebanon

Funding Source: This Newsletter has been funded within the framework of the European Union Erasmus+ programme which is funded by the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid and the Directorate General for Enlargement.

Disclaimer: This Newsletter reflects the views only of the authors, and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Editorial

National Erasmus+ Office Lebanon

While all nations and societies prepare to exit the COVID-19 forced lockdown with a calculated hope of rebound, growth and recovery, Lebanese society is getting out towards a grimmer perspective tarnished with despair, deadlock and uncertainty.

Sooner or later, the countries will leave COVID-19 behind and look ahead towards drawing lessons and adapting or evolving to new strategies and values, only Lebanon will remain flopping in its own crises out of which the Corona might be the least threatening and worrying.

What prevents Lebanon from transforming its COVID-19 challenge into an opportunity, like many nations across the globe are doing or going to do, is that this pandemic is marginal if compared to the existential crisis through which the country has been going since a long time. Lebanon is a world pioneer in losing chances and missing opportunities.

In this gloomy picture, which is not at all far from reality, education in general and higher education in particular are not exceptions.

Last May, Dr Fadlo Khuri, President of the American University of Beirut (AUB), shared a transparent message with the AUB community stating that it is *facing perhaps its greatest crisis since the university's foundation in 1866, as a result of a confluence of calamities starting with the collapse of the Lebanese economy, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated global recession*. President Khuri predicted that many HE establishments around the globe will not survive the revenue shock that will be projected after the pandemic.

Table of content

Support during COVID-19

Message of solidarity	3
Guide to Online teaching and learning	3

NEO online activities

CONNECTE meetings	4
MED2IaH kick-off meeting	4
MENASAFE impact monitoring	5
LEBPASS preventive monitoring	5
MORALE consortium meeting	5

Articles

How is COVID-19 affecting Lebanese Higher Education? <i>By Diane Nauffal</i>	6
Benefits and Opportunities of ICM: MUBS experience <i>By Bassem Kaissi</i>	8
Role of human development in light of unanticipated crisis <i>By Mohamad Oueidat</i>	10
OTHER NEWS	11

A deficit around 60% of the university revenue is beyond the capacity of the AUB to absorb. This message was followed two weeks ago by a second emotional '*message of hope*' in which painful cuts in the university staff was announced.

Concurrently, Father Salim Daccache, Rector of the University Saint Joseph of Beirut (USJ), launched a more or less alarming message and spelled out similar concerns as those of the AUB mentioning some differences in the resources available to each of these two institutions. He reassured the USJ community of no reduction in the general academic and administrative staffing. He warned that Lebanon would lose much of its openness and cultural diversity.

What has been spelled out by these 2 prestigious universities might represent a pattern of challenges that the whole private sector in HE would face in the future. Nobody can predict how the situation in this sector will develop but definitely tremendous changes are expected.

However, the HE sector comprises another important player, the Lebanese University (LU), which counts nearly 40% of the student population. This huge and centralised institution has its own longstanding problems and issues and will have to face challenges of different types. The main challenge of the LU is that it is financially dependent on a collapsing state economy. If an expected exodus from the private universities to the LU is to take place, then the LU will face a serious problem in adapting to it with its current capacities and human resources while hundreds of contractual professors are striving to be rightfully and properly recruited into the LU teaching system.

Higher education in Lebanon has been in a deep crisis long before the economic collapse and the Corona. What is strange is that the fabrics of the Lebanese society is behind many of the sector's strengths and at the same time behind many of its fundamental weaknesses. It is too naïve to think that the sector can survive a national situation closer than ever to a complete degradation. The expansion that the sector witnessed during the last 20 years was not responding to any need except reflecting the increasing mercantilism and sectarianism. The dissociation between the knowledge produced by the sector and the policy making mechanisms was clear. What was clearer is the absence of a national strategy along which the universities can align their strategic plans and guarantee the relevance of their programmes.

The HE sector in its two wings, public and private, will choose to meet the challenges in their own way. In this regard, many EU-funded programmes are there to help and support. This sector has been benefiting from these EU-funded programmes like Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+, eTwinning+, Horizon 2020 since long time ago. In order to confirm its commitment to support education, the European Union will more than double the budget of Erasmus+ for the next phase between 2021 and 2027 to support the sector in line with national priorities defined by each partner country in consultation with the European Commission.

If any structural change is to be implemented at national level, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has a strategic role to play. It should lead the way for a national strategy, set the reform agenda and coordinate the actions that accompany this agenda. This cannot be done without a structured reform and a new dynamic at the Ministry itself. Very recently, the MEHE has formed a Committee to foresee the issues of education and HE in Lebanon. It is not surprising that more than half of this Committee's members are current or ex-partners in projects funded by the EU programmes Tempus or Erasmus+. If rule is continuity, then there is another team of 10 Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) designated by the MEHE with the support of the EU Commission. This team has gathered a long experience in the Lebanese reform agenda; and with funds provided by Erasmus+ they advised the Ministry over many important issues. At a time where the country is in an unprecedented need to rationalise its resources and federate its efforts, this team can be of great help and support to the newly designated committee in its effort to reform, strategize and modernise

The situation is highly alarming. Can Lebanese ashes allow Phoenician bird to rise?



1- Message of Solidarity

National Erasmus+ Office Lebanon has disseminated the message below:

We, the National Erasmus+ Office in Lebanon and the Erasmus+ team of Higher Education Reform Experts, express our full sympathy with those infected people who have been suffering from the COVID-19 Coronavirus disease. We also express our solidarity with all those who are in the front line in the fight against this pandemic directly across the different health services and indirectly by coping with the economic, educational and social consequences of the disease.

We express our full sympathy with those infected people ... We also express our solidarity with all those who are in the front line in the fight against this pandemic...

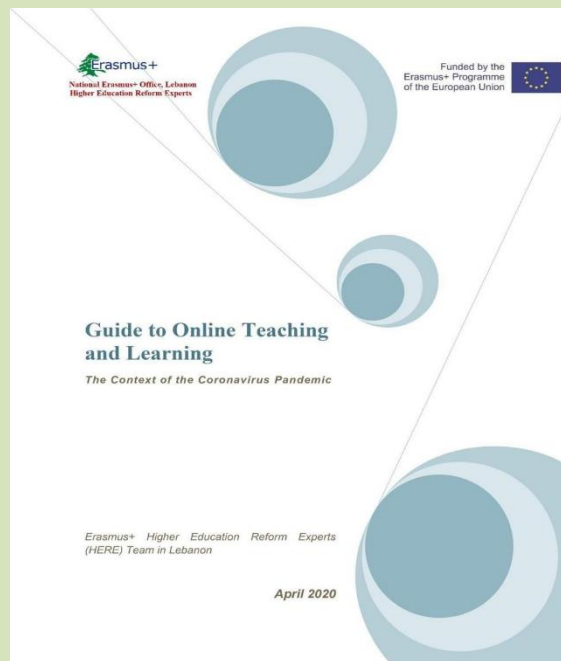
Direct links to the Guide

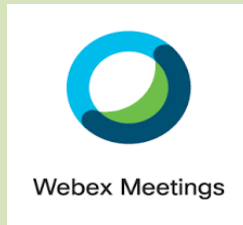
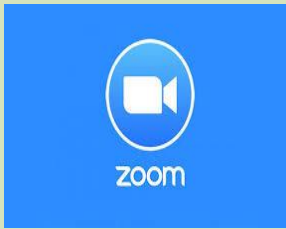
The English version of the guide can be downloaded at http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guide_Online_T%26L_at_Coronavirus_Context_EN.pdf

La version française du guide peut être téléchargée à l'adresse : http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guide_Online_T%26L_at_Coronavirus_Context_FR.pdf

2- Guide to Online Teaching and learning

A Guide to Online Teaching and Learning in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic has been produced by a group of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) - Lebanon.





1- CONECTE CBHE project meetings

The National Erasmus+ Office in Lebanon participated in two online Zoom meetings held by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project CONECTE on the 23rd of April and on the 5th of June, 2020. The first one was a consortium meeting with 19 attendees from Lebanon, France, Austria and Belgium. The second was a Crisis Unit meeting.

The aim of the Consortium meeting was to re-think project activities in the context of COVID 19 pandemic: re-scheduling training workshops, postponing travels, conducting online training, discussing transversal activities, defining teams, developing crisis unit etc. On the other hand, in the Crisis Unit meeting, the team discussed rescheduling all activities and developing a new task list. Activities in the different workpackages were discussed with a temporary shift to online mode.

The main objective of CONECTE project is to improve the employability of students and graduates in the digital market, by identifying future needs of digital sector, and future e-skill shortages, and by offering innovative trainings (online courses and work-based learning) in order to improve future digital skills. The project will introduce a Lebanese framework for work-based learning, for a collaborative Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and will produce a better information system on the labour market.

CONECTE is a national project coordinated by the University Saint Joseph with partners from 7 Lebanese institutions.

2- MED2IaH CBHE project (kick-off meeting)

The Erasmus+ CBHE MED2IaH project has been kicked-off through a virtual zoom meeting on May 5, 2020. At least 45 participants attended the meeting. The aim of this meeting was to focus on the project activities, the content, the management/finance issue, and the planned activities and discuss possible changes due to COVID19. The MED2IaH initiative stems from the necessity to cover an important aspect of internationalisation in Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan) higher education system that has not been tackled adequately until now – Internationalisation at Home (IaH). This project is coordinated by the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), Slovenia.



For More Information

About CONECTE:

<http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/Summary%20CONECTE.pdf>

About MED2IaH:

<http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/Summary%20MED2IaH.pdf>



3- MENASAFE CBHE project (Impact Monitoring)

The National Erasmus+ Office conducted an impact monitoring to the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project MENASAFE that was held online via Zoom on the 12th of May, 2020. The overall aim of the project was to design, develop, adapt and implement a new master curriculum (60 ECTS- ten obligatory and elective courses) in the field of Road Traffic Safety within joint efforts between EU and partner Universities from Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon according to Bologna requirements, EU traffic safety standards and best practices. The developed curriculum is based on market analysis needs and job demands for graduate engineers. It is tailored to the nature, problems, needs and local traffic characteristics in EG-JO-LB. This monitoring visit was an occasion for the team to learn more about the impact and sustainability of the project results at the institutional level, beyond institutions, the continuation of the project beyond its funding period, and the challenges to sustain results.



For More info:
<http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/2015%20MENASAFE.pdf>

4- LEBPASS CBHE project (Preventive Monitoring)

A monitoring visit to the CBHE project LEBPASS "The Lebanese Diploma Supplement" has been conducted on 9 June 2020 through ZOOM. LEBPASS project aims at enabling academic and professional recognition by increasing the transparency of students' qualifications and modernizing the Lebanese HE system.

LEBPASS is a 3-year national project, coordinated by the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik and involves from Lebanon: BAU, LAU, LCU, LU, Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie AUF; and from Europe: Espace Mendes France- Maison des Sciences et Techniques du POITOU-CHARENTES and Université de Bretagne Sud from France, University of Cyprus and FRIEDRICH-ALEXANDER University and EVALAG from Germany.

This monitoring visit was an occasion for the team to meet representatives from the Lebanese partners and from EVALAG and to learn more about the progress made by the project and its results achieved so far. Ms. Cristina MATEU from the European Delegation to Lebanon participated in this monitoring.

For more information about LEBPASS project you can consult its website at <http://www.lebpas.org/>



5- MORALE CBHE project (Consortium Meeting)

First consortium meeting of the CBHE funded project MORALE was virtually held on the 13th of May 2020. Sixteen members from universities in Lebanon and Syria attended the meeting. MORALE aims at providing the sector of NGOs with high skilled professionals trained to effectively manage and operate in NGO environments by means of modernising social and behavioural sciences curricula and by offering Lifelong Learning courses targeting NGOs professionals at partner universities.



The team discussed the progress done so far at the administrative and the financial management level, logo, website and internal dissemination, internal quality control, and surveys/interview design. The team also discussed data collection process which entails conducting interviews and questionnaires with NGOs and academics from Syria and Lebanon.

On the other hand, the team discussed and will draft a dissemination strategy. Other issues were also discussed including the organisation of virtual study visits.

For More Info
<http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018%20MORALE.p>



ARTICLES BY SCHOLARS

Article 1

How is COVID-19 affecting Lebanese Higher Education?

By Dr. Diane Nauffal in collaboration with a group of HEREs Lebanon

Faculty member in the Department of Education

Assistant to the President for Institutional Research and Assessment at the Lebanese American University

It is no longer education as usual for most higher education institutions in Lebanon. It is evident that the impact of COVID-19 will not be short-lived and that its ripple effects will be experienced by future generations of learners beyond the pandemic. While many institutions may have initiated online learning programs or adopted a blended learning approach and many others were using or experimenting with online learning platforms, the COVID-19 pandemic was sure to make the online learning trajectory an inevitable route with institutions transforming almost all learning to the online mode. Both synchronous and asynchronous approaches are being adopted using technologies such as teleconferencing networks to connect instructors with their classes and learning management systems that serve as a repository for course materials. To enhance accessibility to online learning to students across all levels, the Ministry of Communication has doubled the speed and the capacity of the internet at no additional cost during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Lebanon's mobile internet providers are providing free internet for educational apps.

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has not been restricted to students. Faculty have been learning online with institutions providing numerous professional development opportunities to help them adopt instructional and pedagogical strategies necessary for online teaching and learning. They have been forming learning communities that enable them to connect virtually with multiple colleagues from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to collaboratively achieve a common purpose and to share best practices. Some institutions have even produced guides for both faculty and students to help them navigate the various online learning platforms and ensure the delivery of course learning outcomes as they transition from traditional classrooms to virtual classrooms. The HERE team of Lebanon has developed a guide for faculty on best practices to help them better embrace the challenges of online learning.

A major challenge for both faculty and students in all educational settings, whether online or not, is assessment. Faculty express concerns for quality, equity and fairness of assessment. Quality is a prerequisite for the achievement of equity, as low quality assessment will almost certainly lead to inequitable outcomes. To address the challenges of online assessment, faculty have adopted alternative formats of assessment such as project-based assessment, knowledge mapping and literature research among others. For faculty who prefer the traditional form of testing, few institutions have turned to companies providing proctoring services to help them administer

supervised tests for assessment purposes remotely. Still, some institutions have enacted a pass/fail grading policy for equity purposes allowing similarly situated students to be treated comparably. This is true in particular for institutions aiming to end the academic year with little delay to allow students to move forward with career or further education plans. The Lebanese University on the other hand, plans to complete all study programs during the summer if the state of emergency is lifted by the end of June with regular exams scheduled for September and the next academic year commencing thereafter. In most universities, students enrolled in courses that include a field experience may complete the course in the following summer or year. As such, it is obvious that institutions are providing support, flexibility and solutions to overcome academic challenges voiced by faculty and students alike.

COVID-19 has not only forced institutions to abruptly transition to online instruction, many institutional processes and operations are also transitioning online. These online institutional operations may have been in the workings prior to COVID-19, and recently gained urgency. Most processes from admissions and financial aid applications for prospective students, to registration for entrance and placement exams and payment of fees can for the most part now be completed online. It is expected that more and more operations will be transitioned online post the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of this is being done with an eye on AY 2020-2021. Lebanon was facing economic difficulties before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These economic challenges have only deepened with the onset of the global health crisis and enrollments are expected to decrease significantly especially in the private sector. One thing for sure though is that the higher education landscape in Lebanon will change and what was not thinkable before the crisis is now subject to debate. The hope is that state policies will develop to reflect the changes that have emerged due to the combined socio-economic and health crisis.

Article 2**Benefits and Opportunities of the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programme: The Modern University for Business and Science Experience**

By *Dr. Bassem Kaissi*

*Vice President for International Affairs
Modern University for Business and Science
Email: bkaissi@mubs.edu.lb*

Higher Education (HE) plays an essential role in the process of economic and social development. As globalization processes have evolved, the vision, mission, size and focus of universities changed. Internationalization has become a catchword of the times in higher education. Its wide use is due to an increasing interest in the international dimensions of HE.

Over the last two decades, the process of internationalization in HE has encountered a critical shift. From being a topic of unclear, dispensable interest to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), it now represents a topic that is highly prioritized in HEIs strategic plans.

Since its establishment in 2000, Modern University for Business and Science (MUBS) was able to position itself as an institution that strives for excellence and internationalization, taking massive strides every year to maintain a high quality education that introduces the latest pedagogical approaches supported with the trending internationalization activities which are compatible with the changing nature of HE.

M.U.B.S has consistently included internationalization as a main priority in its strategic plan. The latest plan outlines the following ten forms of internationalization in the university strategic goals:

- Student Mobility
- Staff Mobility
- Internationalization of Curricula
- International Branch campuses
- Institutional Cooperation Agreement and Networks
- Virtual Mobility
- Internationalization at Home
- International Research
- International Accreditation
- Double Degrees with International HEIs

The Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) funded by the EU supports the mobility of individuals enrolled (students) or employed (staff) at a HEI, from a program country to a partner country or vice versa. The Erasmus+ ICM program has become very popular at MUBS given its associated benefits and opportunities at both the individual and institutional levels. Accordingly, MUBS has been constantly active in this program. In 2019 for example, M.U.B.S had 12 active

inter-institutional agreements with European HEIs (based mainly in the UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Czech Republic, ...) to promote student and staff mobility. During the same year, 4% of the total student population and 12% of the total staff population benefited from a mobility opportunity to a European HEI supported by the Erasmus+ ICM program. At the incoming level, MUBS received in 2019 48 training/teaching staff from the European partner institutions. The number of incoming students is still extremely low compared to the number of outgoing students and this is mainly due to continued safety and security concerns and perceptions about Lebanon.

Myriad benefits and opportunities for individuals and HEIs are associated with the Erasmus+ ICM program.

At the student level, the benefits can be summarized as follows: Gaining different perspectives, developing language and global skills, improving intercultural competence, enhancing employability prospects, becoming global citizens, in addition to developing personal attributes such as self-confidence, maturity, creativity and problem-solving.

At the staff level and in addition to most of the benefits and opportunities listed above, staff perceived direct and largely positive impacts of the Erasmus+ ICM mobility on their performance. For teaching staff, Erasmus+ ICM mobility has enabled a transformation of teaching style through changing teaching methods, including some changes in attitude. A comprehensive and all-embracing message from teaching staff after the ICM mobility was the need for attentive consideration of cultural contexts when proposing or adopting new teaching and learning practices and strategies. The close interaction with other elite European researchers during ICM mobility periods improved MUBS faculty international research output. This was reflected in a dramatic growth in the number of scientific publications in collaboration with international researchers.

At the institutional level, the benefits and opportunities include: enhanced cooperation and exposure to European HEIs, sharing best practices in teaching and learning, new collaboration with the HEIs mainly in international research and virtual mobility, and internationalization of higher education provision. The Erasmus+ ICM program is contributing as well to intercultural dialogue and connecting to the relevant world issues as raised by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership.

In addition to its positive impact on increasing the institutional capacities and international dimensions of the HEIs, the Erasmus+ ICM program contributes to developing and maintaining an internationalized brand image and global visibility and positioning for the HEI.

There can be little doubt that the future of HE, globally, will be inevitably bound by the process of internationalization. As this article has confirmed, internationalization activities in general and Erasmus+ ICM mobility in particular are largely in place at MUBS.

There are clear wins when it comes to the Erasmus+ ICM program at the individual, institutional, societal, and international levels. Despite the growth in other forms of internationalization including the international branch campus, non-local degree programs, and internationalization at home including virtual mobility, international physical mobility programs such as Erasmus+ ICM will remain essential and in high demand.

Article 3

Role of Human Development in the Light of Unanticipated Crises

*By Dr. Mohammad Oueidat
Institute of Technology, Lebanese University*

The world has recently suffered a setback due to the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, which has confused all sectors of the globe, including all levels of education. This colourless, tasteless and microscopic genie, which bears the name of Covid-19, has laid its impact on almost all countries. On the scale of the Earth's surface, it paralysed movements in all sectors in a frightening epic painting that humanity had never encountered before. In conclusion, this pandemic has become one of the most serious challenges facing the world of our generation, represented by a human crisis that has serious health, economic and social consequences. It has threatened the systems of poor and rich nations equally. There is no doubt that overcoming the pandemic requires time and hard work and it will cast a shadow on all sectors without exception.

Many institutions of higher education in Lebanon have been affected since the beginning of the spread of Covid-19, seemed confused and even unable to keep up with their mission of offering suitable alternatives in light of these emerging conditions. The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals show us that it is no longer sufficient to search for economic growth and compensate with social and environmental policies for the damage caused by unsustainable consumption and production patterns: it is our model of education that must be reshaped in order to become more sustainable.

More than a billion of school, university and professional students in the world can no longer access their educational facilities after the closure of schools and universities in more than 100 countries. This lockdown has led to the vital dealing with the size of this caused crisis with wisdom. This has been an unforeseen challenge for the educational sector, especially since many educational institutions are not equipped with the required tools and practical experience to conduct distance learning systems. Therefore, the question that the whole world has raised and tried to answer is: what should we do in this transitional 6-18-month period?

Unfortunately, countries only had to adopt quarantine as an approach of preventive response in the first stage until adequate medical treatments and effective vaccines are tested and officially used. However, here we question the role of other sectors in supporting the health sector to integrate like a single body. Here, we mention the scientific research sector to play its role in containing the pandemic through scientific and technological solutions that reduce its severity. Accordingly, it has become necessary to reconsider how to monitor and spend funds allocated to scientific research, and to reconsider its current strategy through adopting directed scientific research in harmony with the role, mission and vision adopted by each educational institution.

Answering the two questions posed optimistically, some scientific specialisations that rely on digital tools and applications, robotic devices and artificial intelligence, have played their role in facing the massive spread of coronavirus through research and innovation and through mobilising the resources of global technology community against this pandemic. We have seen the importance of the application model adopted by China in monitoring its citizens using artificial intelligence technology and big data analysis, especially mobile phone data to track the contacts of the infected with a smart information system to contain the disease.

If lessons are to be drawn from this historic experience, societies should return to their authenticity, through:

- Building trust between state institutions and citizens based on the principle of good governance.
- Designing proactive anticipatory policies for the future, based on continuous and sustainable evaluation.
- Implementing the UN 2030 agenda vision for Sustainable Development.
- Making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning.
- Developing digital competences and skills, and improving education through better data analysis and foresight.
- Making a radical change in the way we learn and teach and shift to innovative methodologies.
- Supporting scientific research in higher education towards more relevance to the society's needs in the fields of health, wellbeing, and social development. This will need a better and constructive cooperation with the socio-economic sector in the aim of ensuring a coordinated effective response in the periods of crises and disasters.

Higher education and its research community have a historic chance to prove their real strength and capacities and above all their ability to evolve, innovate and transform to meet the challenge.

OTHER NEWS

For More Info

NEO Lebanon

National Erasmus+ Office
Lebanon,
5th. Floor,
Ministry of Education and
Higher Education,
Habib Abi Chahla Square,
(Unesco Palace Area)
Beirut - Lebanon
Tel. +961-3-654 180
Fax: +961-1-804 310
neo@erasmusplus-lebanon.org
www.erasmusplus-lebanon.org

The National Erasmus+ Office
NEO Lebanon is represented by
Dr. Aref Alsoufi.

HERE Future Activities

The team of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) – Lebanon is working on the following:

- A document aiming to collect all recommendations and conclusions made as a result of many seminars and workshops carried out in Lebanon. It also aims to help Lebanese higher education sector drawing a logical sequence of the issues addressed by these events and capitalise on what was addressed for the national reform agenda. A first draft has been prepared by Dr. Chafic Mokbel and is being discussed by the team members.
- A document on Quality Assurance will update an old document published by the team more than 10 years ago. Dr. Pierre Gedeon and Dr. Rola Boukhozam are working on the production of this updated document.
- Study on the impact of financial crisis on the Lebanese Higher Education sector. Dr. Hana Addam El Ghali collaborates with Dr. Diane Nauffal and Dr. Mohammad Oueidat. The team has launched a survey, ran it and analysed results from up to 151 responses. Results will be out shortly.