



National Erasmus+ Office, Lebanon

#EUERASMUSPLUS

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Editorial

by Dr. Aref Alsoufi

Before the global outbreak of COVID-19 coronavirus, the Lebanese higher education had been going through crucial days since the beginning of 2019.

Following the nightmare of the discovery of fraudulent diplomas issued by a few Lebanese higher education institutions and the vacuum that resulted at the Directorate General of higher education, a popular uprising swept the country when the Lebanese people took to the streets on 17 October 2019 to protest against longstanding government policies in the field of economy and finance, clearly marked by oligarchy, corruption and sectarianism. As a result of this uprising, the Lebanese banks, which are part of the Lebanese political establishment, started to impose severe measures on their depositors by enforcing non-legal capital control endangering the whole national economic activities that had always been benefiting from an easy and flexible management system of capitals.

Actually, higher education had been struggling for a long time to face important challenges of universal nature. Some of these challenges are:

- Relevance of the university programmes and research to the socio-economic needs and demands.
- The rapid expansion of the sector pushed by commercial and sectarian considerations.
- Lack of organisational and legislative frameworks that govern the higher education sector in terms of quality, services and continuous education.

The European Union Erasmus+ programme, like Tempus before, has been trying to support Lebanese Higher Education to face some of these challenges by funding Capacity Building projects based on cooperation between universities from Lebanon and EU and by opening the way for exchange projects allowing thousands of students and staff from Lebanon and Europe to move and conduct mobilities.

Needless to say, that these actions have impacted the sector at individual, institutional and sectorial level. These Erasmus+ projects have developed curricula in areas like gas and oil, road safety, renewable energy and biosphere reserves. They created capacity building in areas like Quality Assurance, employability, recognition and refugees. Mobilities have offered thousands of opportunities to students and staff to learn and work in new contexts and different environments.

More in-depth analysis should be conducted to give more insight on the long-term impact that this EU intervention has been making so far on the Lebanese higher education sector and the sustainability of this impact.

At the moment of writing this article, 12 Erasmus+ capacity building projects are being implemented in Lebanon and more projects are expected to be added to these when the selection results of the current call for proposals will be published hopefully by next July 2020.

COVID-19 and the severe measures taken by the Lebanese banks are putting a huge pressure on the implementation of the projects' activities. Many of these activities have and will have to be rescheduled and revised.

As international projects funded by EU grants, the need for a flexible approach in the bank transfers to fund travel costs, subsistence costs and staff costs is crucial to this implementation. If the Lebanese banks allowed themselves illegally to put their hands on the savings of the Lebanese citizens, they surely do not have the right to steal grants offered by the EU taxpayers to support the sector of higher education in Lebanon.

Advisory monitoring visit to capacity building project HEBA

A monitoring visit to the CBHE funded project HEBA "High Level Renewable and Energy Efficiency Master Courses" has been conducted on 12 February 2020 at the faculty of Engineering of the Lebanese University.

HEBA project gathers 10 partners : 2 partners from Lebanon (Lebanese University and the American University of Beirut), 2 partners from Jordan (The University of Jordan and Jordan University of Science and Technology), 2 partners from Egypt (Helwan University and Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport) and 4 European partners (University of Innsbruck - Applicant, Università Degli Studi Di Roma La Sapienza, Hamburg University of Technology, and University of Cyprus).

HEBA is a 3-year project which started on October 15, 2017 and funded by the European Union through Erasmus+ programme. The project aims to reform and improve existing master programs in Energy Efficiency (EE) and Renewable Energy (RE) on single technology and energy systems



level, improving existing or establishing Centers/Laboratories of EE+RE in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt.

This second monitoring visit to the project enabled the monitoring team, which included Ms. Cristina Mateu from the EU Delegation to Lebanon, to learn more about the progress made by the project and its results achieved so far.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the project you can consult its website at : <http://sites.ju.edu.jo/en/heba/Home.aspx>



Monitoring visit to StEER-Leb capacity building project

A monitoring visit to the CBHE funded project StEER-Leb "Student Empowerment Engagement and Representation in Lebanese Universities" has been conducted on 25 February 2020 at University Saint-Joseph, Beirut.

The StEER-Leb project's objective is to boost student empowerment, engagement and representation infrastructure in Lebanese universities. Within the frame of this project, European and Lebanese universities will exchange their experiences and share good practices in order to enhance student empowerment, engagement and representation in USEK, USJ and LAU. In this context, the StEER-Leb project is specifically conceived to comply with the national priorities for Lebanon as outlined by the

European Commission and the democratisation of higher education in general.

StEER-Leb is a 3-year national project, it involves 3 universities from Lebanon: USEK (coordinator), USJ and LAU plus the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. From Europe the project involves Université de Rouen, Universidad de Cadiz, Università di Bologna and UNIMED.

This monitoring visit was an occasion for the team to learn more about the progress made by the project and its results achieved so far.

The team had the opportunity to discuss with the President of USJ Fr. Salim Daccache and with staff and students from the different Lebanese partner universities the impact the project and the sustainability of its results.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about StEER-Leb project you can consult its website at <http://www.steer-leb.eu/>

Monitoring visit to EduBioMed capacity building project

A monitoring visit to the CBHE funded project EduBioMed "Capacity Building for Education and Applied Research in Mediterranean UNESCO's Biosphere Reserves" has been conducted on 26 February 2020 at Saint Joseph University.

The EduBioMed project aims to strengthen, foster and upgrade academic activity at four Moroccan and Lebanese universities in the context of Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves.

'Biosphere Reserves' (BRs) is a UNESCO label for territories that compromise with the sustainable development goals. The designation falls under the auspices of UNESCO's "Man and Biosphere" (MAB) program, which aim is to explore solutions for the improvement or relationships between people and their environments on a multidisciplinary scientific basis. BRs are supposed to be 'science for sustainability support sites': places where to test and apply solutions to face the socio-ecological crises of our days

At the premises of EduBioMed, there is the recognition of three shortcomings:

(i) The 'sectorialization' of knowledge within universities. In socio-environmental studies, it is important to overcome the mono-disciplinary traditions and make experts from different disciplines to communicate

(ii) The lack of knowledge transfer between Universities and territories. From one side,

academies produce useful knowledge about sustainability issues, which usually stagnate within the walls of the campuses. From another side, sources of knowledge comes from territorial realities

(iii) The lack of communication between academies and policy makers. Not always universities assume the role of policy advisors, despite their knowledge would be useful to orient the work of legislators.

After an in-depth analysis of the inertias at the intersection of (i) knowledge fragmentation between and within HEIs, (ii) needs and demands from BR citizens and management staff, and (iii) policy frameworks, the Consortium will gather to set the work agenda by means of thematic workshops.

The idea is to build an infrastructure for the flow of knowledge made of IT systems for data management and sharing; 'citizen science' tools to engage civil society as co-producer of knowledge; training for teachers and researchers; international mobility and internship schemes for teachers and learners to conduct collaborative case study research in BRs; scientific and education materials –including a MOOC course; curricula upgrading; and policy recommendations.

The initiative will align the academic activity with territorial needs; innovate the research capacity of universities; promote internationalization and openness; enrich staff's expertise; enable mutual learning between stakeholders; enhance the interdisciplinary character.

EduBioMed is a 3-year project, it involves from Lebanon: USJ, AUB and Jabal Moussa Protection, from Morocco: Université Cadi Ayyad and Université Mohamad V and from Europe: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (coordinator), MAB France, Université d'Aix Marseille and UNIMED.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about EduBioMed project you can consult its website at <https://www.edubiomed.eu/>

This monitoring visit was an occasion for the team to learn more about the progress made by the project and its results achieved so far and to discuss the impact of the project and the sustainability of its results.



INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Grantholders' Meeting, Brussels

A team from the National Erasmus+ Office Lebanon participated in Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education Grantholders' Meeting held on 27-28 January 2020, the Square, Brussels.

The aim of this meeting was to provide detailed information on practical management of the grant agreement such as rules, reporting requirements and information on improving the implementation of CBHE project.

During these 2 days there were organized Workshops on Financial management and parallel bilateral meetings with EACEA, NEO and project representatives



VISIBILITY

Information session at LAU

The Lebanese National Erasmus+ Office conducted on 21 January 2020, at the Lebanese American University an information session on Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects. The session was attended by academic and administrative staff from the LAU Beirut campus. LAU staff from Byblos campus took part via visio-conference. Ms. Cristina Mateu representing the EU Delegation to Lebanon also attended the information session.



Workshop at BAU

NEO participated in a workshop organised by the Beirut Arab University for 45 participants from universities in Lebanon and Syria on innovative digital skills and teaching methods in the field of health science in the two countries, within the framework of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project "DIGIHEALTH".

The project aims to foster creative and innovative digital and learning methods through information technology to improve the quality of education in the field of health science in order to prepare advanced qualified graduates who are able to adapt with any variables in the healthcare environment and meet societal expectations and preserve the healthy environment.

The Dean of Students, Professor Sobhi Abou Shaheen, said that "raising the digital capabilities of graduates shall increase their scientific knowledge in the future in the field of health science according to the available

techniques which will contribute to enhance these sectors in our countries that goes in line with the goals of Beirut Arab University in stimulating and providing the necessary capabilities of its students.

Professor Abou Chahine presented at the beginning of the workshop an overview of the project assessment needs survey results and showed the online learning activities and e-learning methods at the university.

During the three days training workshop various subjects were presented where Dr. Alastair Creelman from the Swedish LINNÆUS University spoke about the different adopted teaching methods via internet. In addition, Dr. Fawzi Baroud from Notre Dame University- Louaize presented a session about "Open Education for Health Professions: Access to Information and Equality for all".



ERASMUS+ HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM EXPERTS (HERE)

Enlargement of the Erasmus+ HERE team

Upon the request of the Executive Agency, Brussels and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the EU Delegation to Lebanon, the team of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) has been reshaped for the year 2020 to include 10 members. Four new members have joined the team including one student from the Lebanese University. Information about the list of the team HEREs and their activities can be found at the aforementioned address.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about HERE team you can consult NEO Lebanon website at <http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/content/26>

BAU Experience in European Projects

By Prof. Sobhi Abou Chahine, Dean of Student Affairs

Beirut Arab University (BAU)

Beirut Arab University (BAU) is one of the top private higher education institutions and one of the prominent universities in Lebanon. Founded in 1960, the university includes 4 campuses, 10 faculties with 45 undergraduate and more than 95 postgraduate academic programs distributed across many disciplines.

As mentioned in its strategy 2013-2020, one of the major goals of BAU is to promote effective interaction between the university and its environment on the national, regional and international levels. This includes facilitating the procedures for credit transfer, strengthening the academic cooperation with international institutions, Enhancing funding from international organizations. Encouraging the participation in international projects.

Since 2007, BAU has been working actively in European funded projects including on Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ capacity building as well as Mobility projects. Most of the projects are in line with BAU strategic objectives. This article includes mainly projects in numbers, covered areas and impact of the projects on BAU.

Projects in numbers:

A- Tempus projects and Erasmus+ capacity building projects:

Project	Number of projects	Number of Arab partner institutions	Number of European partner institutions
Tempus projects 2006 -2014	11	45	33
Erasmus+ capacity building projects 2015-2020	9	65	38

B- Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ mobility projects:

Mobility Numbers							
Project	Number of projects	Number of partner universities	incoming academic staff members	outgoing academic staff members	outgoing nonacademic staff members	incoming students	outgoing students
Erasmus Mundus 2011-2017	3	19 EU and 16 Arab Universities	-	-	2	4	26
Erasmus + mobility 2015-2020	18 agreements	9 Universities	25	23	21	21	12

Tempus projects and Erasmus+ capacity building projects covered areas:

These project covered a wide spectrum of relevant topics to the reform of higher education including: Quality Assurance, Engineering accreditation, Internationalization, Leadership in Higher Education Management, Institutional and Financial Autonomy, Entrepreneurship, Academic-Industry Partnerships, student services, Lebanese Professional Standards in Teaching and Learning, curriculum programs in in the field of Traffic safety, Gas and Oil, qualification framework, diploma

supplement, Digital skills & teaching methods for effective health education, NGOs management and operation, Industry cooperation with University Centres of e-health Innovations, Graduate Employability, University-Enterprise Cooperation

Impact of Tempus projects and Erasmus+ capacity building projects:

BAU is involved in such projects and it has established a wide cooperation network with partner institutions. This cooperation helps in enhancing the recognition of BAU by these institutions and facilitates future cooperation. BAU has gained benefits from these projects in building and enhancing its relevant activities.

The main outcomes of these projects are:

The development of three quality assurance guides, proposing accreditation criteria and procedures for engineering programmes in Lebanon, publication of a guide on the promotion of institutional quality assurance as well as a guide for the management of international relations offices in the MEDA region, establishing a network of University Presidents, enhancement of finance management, development of a research industry database, development of Lebanese Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning, Establishment of two master degree programs in traffic safety and petroleum engineering, Quality assurance criteria for some academic programs, new agreements with partner universities.

These projects led also to create new units, centers and labs: Quality Assurance Center, International Relations Office (IRO), entrepreneurship Center, research office, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence for academic staff development, Drill Simulation Lab used by petroleum engineering students, Transportation and safety Lab used by civil engineering students. Five projects are still running and future outcomes will be achieved.

In addition, in the framework of these projects, BAU hosted many workshops and conferences, which led to enhance management of international activities.

Impact of mobility projects (Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ mobility):

The mobility projects are in line with Beirut Arab University strategy, which encourages student and staff mobility to promote learning and research experiences overseas. The projects have supported the IRO at BAU in sharing best practices and promoting new mobility exchange programs among students and staff. The projects offered opportunities to sign new agreements with partner institutions. BAU has gained experience for the procedures for credit transfer between the ECTS and the American credit hour system.

BAU as project coordinator:

With the large experience of Beirut Arab University in more than 20 Tempus, Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ projects, BAU continued its efforts and has won the MORALE project (2019-2022) as grant coordinator, "Capacity building for curricula modernization of Syrian and Lebanese HEIs and lifelong learning provision, towards sustainable NGOs management and operation with special focus on refugees". Its main objective is to modernise Social & Behavioural Sciences related curricula and by offering LLL courses targeting NGOs professionals. It includes 4 European, 3 Lebanese and 5 Syrian institutions. The project will share EU best practices, innovative experiences and knowledge to support the development of new/existing courses, capacity and knowledge building in relevant topics at the partner universities. This project will permit to enhance BAU capacity building in project management on the administrative and financial levels. BAU will provide all efforts and resources to achieve the intended outcomes and deliverables in updating relevant curricula as well lifelong learning courses.

Conclusion:

As mentioned in the introduction, we will continue to implement our international strategy by providing all resources and by encouraging our staff and our students to participate in such projects. Finally, BAU would like to thank the European Union for its efforts to support and finance these projects.

#COVID19: Is Lebanon Ready for Online Higher Education?

By

Dr. Hana Addam El-Ghali; Issam Fares Institute (IFI), American University of Beirut (AUB)

Dr. Diane Nauffal; Lebanese American University (LAU)

The AY 2019-2020 surely has been an unusual year for higher education in Lebanon. A series of events have had both direct and indirect consequences on the present and future of the sector in the country. It is important to consider that the 50 institutions of higher education currently in Lebanon may drop notably soon, not because of a policy implementation to govern quality, but because of the socio-economic situation that may lead many institutions to reconsider the business of higher education. The rapidly deteriorating social situation in Lebanon began a while back, and escalated in October 2019 after a popular uprising erupted demanding better standards of living with equal opportunities for all. Most universities were closed during these times. However, soon after they opened, the country underwent an accelerating inflation fueled by the ongoing sharp depreciation of the Lebanese pound. This new socio-economic situation led to the foreseen increase in the poverty rate to 45%, with 22% of the Lebanese population expected to be living in extreme poverty. Universities were able to salvage the Fall 2019 semester making up for lost classes and administering examinations on time. However, the global pandemic COVID19 that slowly swept into the country sent home over 190,000 university students in Lebanon. Well, one would think that this surely should not be a problem for higher education institutions, as it may be for K-12 schools across the country, because universities are ahead of the game and at pace with advances in technology. Besides, a number of universities already had experiences with online learning or a blended format of the latter before COVID19. However, any effort of institutions to pursue further exploration or experimentation with online learning had been discouraged by the Government of Lebanon (GOL) that insisted on recognizing degrees with up to only 25% online components. It is important to understand that the government's position maybe seen as one that attempts to safeguard higher education in the country particularly in the absence of any quality assurance mechanisms for a sector that now has over 50 institutions of higher education and was grappling with the issue of fraud degrees just last year. It is only rational that the government is careful with what it accredits and recognizes, given that online learning in the context of higher education in Lebanon may be used for quite different purposes. Well, the current circumstances forced universities to close their campuses and seek alternative



ways to yet again salvage the Spring semester. Most universities in Lebanon already have existing Learning Management Systems (LMS) and already employ various platform to deliver *some* online content to their students. However, "most" universities were not ready for the sudden and total shift to an online teaching and learning modality. The units supporting online education are usually either non-existent or underresourced in the best times. Therefore, institutional capacity became exhausted because the resources fall far short of the need to develop plans to move teaching immediately online and to directly make it happen. As many of our private universities struggle to convene students online, it is important to understand

what the Lebanese University (LU) did to reach over 80,000 students in all the different majors and across the country. Did the public institution of higher education manage to make it online, while struggling to respond to some key governance issues at one of the most critical schools, its Faculty of Medicine? And how did the administration ensure that all students were reached? Well, a simple answer is that reaching all students online is not a struggle that the LU faces alone, students from low-income backgrounds consistently underperform in online learning modalities and are usually left-out. With close to half of the population today living in poverty, it is expected that quite a number of students in higher education may be already struggling economically. A number of local universities had already announced after the October uprisings an increase in the scholarship offerings in order to support their students and to continue to attract new students. The impact of the economic distress in the country will be quite dire on universities, particularly ones that are high-fee paying institutions. In order to mitigate the economic crisis in the country, many universities already took austerity measures such as budget cuts, reduction in staff, freeze on wages, curb on facilities and equipment. As universities now transition to online teaching and learning, there will be budget changes ahead that the institutions will have to address. For one thing, if cost is

reduced through digital learning, universities may have the opportunity to attract more students, given that the online learning experiences are enhanced and prove successful to both students and their families. So, if universities think that they have financial problems now, it is important to consider what will happen if students decide not to come back the next semester.

Therefore, universities in Lebanon should be ready for a number of scenarios for the AY 2020-2021, particularly in light of the unpredicted and unprecedented situation we live in today. It is likely that the health crisis will end over the summer and classes resume on campus in the fall. However, it is equally likely that the health crisis persists and universities are forced to continue online learning. Therefore, it is critical that universities develop robust plans they can implement in the event of continued interruptions. It is equally important for the government to consider equivalency measures that may need to be introduced so that students can move through the system, particularly secondary school students who consist the new cohorts of higher education 2020-2021. Alternative assessments and accelerated learning programs may also be required to ensure adequate learning. Finally, in times of crises such as we are now witnessing, universities need to reconsider the existing curriculum and work towards making sure that students receive the foundational information which they can later build in for future courses.

As soon as the universities in Lebanon overcome the health crisis, they will have to address the impact of the financial crisis on the sector, which has been exacerbated as a result of the health crisis. Too many crises, right? Well, we can always think of the opportunity gained: technology has the potential to increase access to education. Therefore, with digital learning, we can reach more learners. However, digital learning also has equity implications as not everyone can access specific technologies, and some learners have special needs which can be difficult to address through distance learning. In any case, it is important to continue to support efforts of universities in Lebanon to pursue digital learning, and perhaps encourage institutions to share good practices. It is equally important that institutions build the capacity and resources needed to develop effective, equitable and quality online programs and that policymakers develop policies that acknowledge and recognize online learning. Quality remains central to higher education, whether delivered online or face-to-face. Institutions need to build on student feedback in order to improve online performance. Universities have to remember, if they want students to continue to show up (even online) and pay tuition, then they have to offer them a better experience than what they are doing now.



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