



## **The Education Trust of Lebanon (ETL) – a response to the children’s crisis in education**

### **The education crisis in Lebanon.**

The social and economic crisis in Lebanon is turning into an education catastrophe, with vulnerable children facing a real risk of never returning to school. Since the pandemic, more than 1.2 million children in Lebanon have been out of school. Over the past COVID-19-year, Lebanese children have received an estimated maximum of 11 weeks of education, with an even lower number of weeks in schools for Syrian children. Even before the pandemic, the report shows that rising inequality since the onset of the economic crisis in the country has led to a gap in access to quality learning among Lebanon’s poorer children. 55% of Lebanese families are now living in poverty, with even higher rates among Palestinian (70%) and Syrian refugees (90%). Poverty is a steep barrier to children’s access to an education, as many families cannot afford learning equipment or have to rely on children to provide an income. Many children in Lebanon have been out of school since October 2019, when protests and civil unrest affected many parts of the country. The same year saw multiple teachers’ strikes over delayed salary payments, further disrupting learning. The learning crisis was further compounded by a currency collapse, and the Beirut port explosion and COVID-19 lockdown measures.

About 80% of Catholic schools, which provide education to approximately two-thirds of students in Lebanon’s private institutions, will close for the 2020-2021 school year, due to the lack of government aid. Almost 21% of the Christians schools are semi-private (subsidized by the government), meaning that the poor people can have access to a good education without paying expensive fees. Thus almost 15% of the pupils in Lebanon are studying in semi-private schools, that are mainly Christian. The semi-private schools are not receiving any subsidies from the State since 2015, which should theoretically pay for the scholarships. As a result, the semi-private schools, who are welcoming mostly poor students, become also now a financial burden for the Churches and the catholic congregations who are bearing all their financial costs and who were forced to start to shutting down a significant number of semi-private schools and even some private ones.

In a region marked by inequalities, communitarian violence and under education, Lebanon was always a case apart because of its education system that contributed to a certain social ascension, a conviviality between the religious communities, the reduction of extremism, and an access for everyone, regardless the social origin or the religion, to a greater education. Today, the education sector in Lebanon is in a free-fall, and if no quick measures are taken, Lebanon will lose its role as a beacon of education, culture and diversity.

### **Caritas Lebanon – our response to this crisis.**

**Overall Objective: To ensure 120,000 of Lebanon’s most vulnerable children re-join the school system by contributing to their tuition and supporting 235 Christian schools and 6 universities to remain open.**



This support request is based on a partnership with l'Oeuvre d'Orient (OdO). Through assistance from the French government, OdO initiated a project 18 months ago to support the payment of tuition for the most vulnerable children attending Francophone Christian schools in Lebanon. OdO has a developed database of 300 schools that has been updated for 2021 and includes critical school-level data covering students, teachers, gender statistics, refugee status and types and level of payments provided by students. In addition, there are the notes from face-to-face interviews with school administrators that clearly show the deteriorating situation in the schools over time and the impact on teachers and students. **CL is partnering with OdO to greatly expand the reach of the initiative to a larger number of students and also provide a contribution to school running costs that will enable the schools to open and continue to operate.**

### **Caritas Lebanon Partnership with L'Oeuvre d'Orient.**

L'Oeuvre d'Orient is currently operating a Christian Schools Fund in Lebanon that is dedicated to French-speaking schools in the Near and Middle East. It is dedicated to schools belonging to churches or religious congregations (Catholic, Orthodox) or Protestant associations. It supports schools that have been bringing the French language to the Middle East for several decades and are open to students of all religious denominations, from any social background. This fund, amounting to 1.5 million euros, is managed in collaboration between the L'Oeuvre d'Orient and the French government. OdO developed a database through online questionnaires and face to face interviews. This database contains full information at school level such as school location, number of students, denominations and social background of students, number of teachers, school fees, school fees not received since 2017, staff made redundant in 2019 - 2020, reductions in salaries, amount of cash flow deficit, financial resources of the congregation or the Church, etc. This unique collection of information and contact with directors, ecclesial leaders and teachers, allowed L'Oeuvre d'Orient to understand the reality of these establishments, to refine their study and to provide avenues for reflection in order to limit the effects of the crisis on these schools. CL will partner with OdO to expand the reach of the program to include more children and schools by utilizing OdO database and the deep contextual knowledge gained by its staff that OdO has developed for the 300 Francophone Christian Schools. In addition, CL has developed a four component fundraising strategy that will support the payment of tuition for students and provide a contribution to the operation and maintenance of the schools.

### **How will the partnership operate?**

In May 2021, L'Oeuvre d'Orient selected approximately 115 schools with French government support and CL has selected 235 schools and 6 universities, based on vulnerability criterion developed by OdO. In Phase 1 this will allow CL to reach almost 120,000 students with partial tuition averaging 30 euros per student with a range of 20%-90% of the total tuition. A second component to this support will be to the schools themselves to assist them in payment of fuel for the generators (fuel prices are rapidly increasing and increasingly expensive for the schools. These charges still have to be paid in USD whereas the Lebanese currency is under rapid devaluation), insurance maintenance and transportation. All of these costs have doubled or tripled in cost and valued at international prices. This will be 'loaded' on top of the student support at 35%. The support to the schools is an issue that l'Oeuvre d'Orient desperately recognizes as critical assistance but they have been unable to support due to restrictions on their grant.



### **Specific Objective 1) Get children back in school**

Activity 1.1. MOUs with schools. MOUs with each prioritized school has been designed based on those provided by OdO. Emphasis will be on ensuring children identified for support are those at greatest risk with clear information for each child and their families. A second component will be identification of school operation and maintenance priorities with supporting documentation.

Activity 1.2. Schools identify 120,000 most vulnerable students who are unable to attend school and cannot pay tuition. Based on interview, social assessment and completed survey forms performed by CL, ETL will calculate minimal costs associated with keeping the schools open. At this time this is calculated as 35% on the total tuition % provided to each student.

### **Specific Objective 2) Keep schools open and operating**

Activity 2.1. Provide technical support to schools to ensure a business plan is developed that would allow the schools to remain open this school year.

Activity 2.1. Support some operation and maintenance costs including fuel, insurance and transport based on 35% assistance from the total amount each school is supported for tuition. Total schools supported: 60.

### **Specific Objective 3) Create a sustainable fund-raising scheme – 4 key strategies:**

Activity 3.1. Diaspora database. Meet with each school and university to determine the ability for schools to track alumni and support them to build a viable fundraising strategy.

Activity 3.2. Lebanese corporate database. Most senior managers of large corporations who graduated from the Catholic school system. ETL will meet with the top 50 corporations to seek three-year support for student tuitions.

Activity 3.3. Caritas partnership with CI, bilateral partnerships with Caritas Member Organizations (CMOs).

Activity 3.4 Caritas and CI partnership with L'Œuvre d'Orient to develop long term support to the schools and jointly approach bilateral and multilateral donors and propose consortium projects.

### **Specific Objective 4) Maintain updated database tracking school operation, tuition and families in crisis**

Activity 4.1. Data on enrolment and the state of faith-based schools – disaggregated by gender, age, disability and socio-economic status - is regularly collected and shared to ensure all children in Lebanon, including the most marginalised, are not left behind.

Activity 4.2. Contact Anglophone schools and populate the database with the missing data from these schools.