

**Lebanon needs new education framework: World Bank**

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BEIRUT: Lebanon's education framework should focus on real-life skills sought by employers, reduce the gap between top and bottom performers and better integrate refugees, a World Bank report released in Cairo Thursday suggests. Education systems across the Middle East and North Africa region are leaving the young generation unprepared for competition in the labor market, according to the World Bank's report, titled "Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa."

Lebanon tops the ranks for a variety of criteria identified by World Bank experts as drivers of successful education, including teachers' autonomy in picking course material or enrolment in preprimary education.

Still, the authors of the report cite the 2015 results of the Program for International Student Assessment to show that over 60 percent of Lebanese students lack basic proficiency in mathematics, reading and science, with the proportion of students reaching the lowest proficiency benchmarks for science and mathematics shown to have decreased between 2011 and 2015.

The 65-page report makes it clear Lebanon's education system is prone to an overemphasis on lesson memorization, and provides insufficient provisions to students coming from economically and socially disadvantaged households.

The relatively few working hours demanded of teachers "less than half of those observed in top-performing countries," the report claims as well as teachers' regular absence at some schools are also mentioned by the report.

The high turnover rate of education ministers has made reforms of the sector hard, the World Bank said.

The organization made a specific note of the effect of displacement provoked by violent conflicts, especially the Syrian war.

"In 2017-18 Lebanon absorbed almost 214,000 non-Lebanese students in public schools, the majority of whom were accommodated by opening second shifts in 349 public schools across the country," the report says, citing Education Ministry numbers.

While the number of refugee students in Lebanon is the highest in the Middle East, the country also fails to enroll the most Syrian refugees who are school-age children: 43 percent, compared to 35 percent in Turkey and 31 in Jordan.

Only a small minority of Syrian refugees attend higher education, with tertiary education not being a priority of emergency assistance programs, the World Bank reported.

"Any reforms of their education systems must consider the need to accommodate refugee children in the system and the associated constraints," the report said.

The World Bank's suggested framework includes provisions for making schools in the region tech-savvy and skills taught in class aligned to the priorities of employers.

To modernize education in the Middle East, countries like Lebanon must prioritize "inquiry," which "allows students to understand their surroundings or contextualize concepts through questions and experimentation," over discipline, and address the gap between modern standard Arabic and the Arabic spoken by students, the report also said.