Life Skills and Citizenship Education Partners Meeting
30-31 January 2023
Venue: InterContinental Hotel, Amman/Jordan

BRIEF REPORT

The Life Skills and Citizenship Education Partners Meeting of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and UNESCO Arab Region took **place from 30-31 January 2023 in Amman, Jordan** co-hosted by the **UNICEF** Regional Office for MENA and **UNESCO Office in Beirut**, UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States.

The 2022-2023 LSCE Partners Meeting was the first in-person meeting since 2020, and it continued the tradition of in-person annual meetings which started in 2017 when the LSCE initiative was officially launched. Through this initiative, UNICEF and its regional partners aimed at promoting the 12 identified "life skills" [1], grouped into four more categories that follow in the footsteps of the UNESCO'S Delors Report of 1996, "*Learning: The Treasure Within*", namely Learning to learn; Learning to do; Learning to be; and Learning to live (and work) together. [2]

The meeting facilitated the exchange of experiences and peer-learning, and strengthened collaboration across countries in the MENA and Arab regions towards reaching SDG4 targets in accordance with the Transforming Education Summit (TES, September 2022) country commitments (see in Annexes Concept Note of the LSCE Partners Meeting). Its main objectives focused on the following:

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[1] "Life skills" is a generic term used in the context of this initiative for 21st century skills, or soft skills, or transversal/key competencies for learning, life, and work.
[2] See https://www.unicef.org/mena/life-skills-and-citizenship-education.

▪ Re-emphasizing the urgent need for policies and targeted interventions to mitigate learning loss and school dropout, and to enhance the well-being of children, teachers and parents while aiming at improving the overall quality of education inputs, processes and outputs in the context of the TES follow-up;

▪ Providing an overview of mitigation strategies and recovery approaches across countries to consolidate lessons learned to inform the way forward with a view of enhancing education quality for all in an inclusive manner;

▪ Reflecting on the important role of life skills to mitigate learning loss and school dropout, and strengthen the well-being of children, teachers, and parents, as well as the overall education quality and relevance for building back better; and

▪ Discussing the way forward and potential joint regional initiatives to facilitate country-level action, such as generating evidence, joint research and developing regional products and frameworks.

The participants of the LSCE Partners Meeting of 30-31 January 2023 were representatives of ministries of education and other governmental entities from all countries of the MENA and Arab regions, NGOs, INGOs, civil society organizations, academia, education practitioners and UN agencies (for a list of participants see Annexes).

The agenda was organized around the following areas (see in Annexes Agenda):

→ COVID-Response & Post-COVID Recovery – Consolidating Lessons Learned

→ Transforming Education Summit (TES) – Translating Commitment into Action

→ LSCE Joint Regional Products – Supporting Transformative Education

→ Learning Poverty, Recovery & Acceleration

→ Critical Measures to Enhance Learning Quality & The Role of Life Skills

→ Student Well-being & Life Skills

→ Teacher Capacity & Life Skills

→ Learning Assessments & Life Skills

→ Multiple Pathways of Learning & Life Skills

→ Working Together – Joint opportunities for turning commitments into action

UNICEF and UNESCO opened the meeting by emphasizing the importance of the long-lasting LSCE Partnership in responding to the overall learning crisis but also reflecting on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Country responses to sustaining the quality of their education systems and of learning continuity in difficult circumstances are important to capitalize on for further enhancement of teaching and learning practices, as well as for refining transformative education policies. The speakers highlighted the criticality of the LSCE partnership as a platform to share experiences and practices, to learn from one another and to further advance the LSCE agenda in the MENA and Arab regions.

Key highlights and takeaways

COVID-19 Response & Post-COVID-19 Recovery

- LSCE agenda is seen as relevant for countries in the MENA and Arab Regions to adapt their interventions in addressing the immediate needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. **In Egypt** learning loss recovery and mitigation relied on existing digital infrastructure and building on the national Knowledge Bank platform created before the pandemic, benefiting 26 million students from pre-primary to tertiary level. Curriculum review and teacher policies have integrated the development of life skills as a system-wide approach. The **MoE in Jordan** supported by UNICEF developed and implemented Learning Bridges, a condensed curriculum, aimed at addressing learning loss. The new initiative has been mainstreamed across the whole formal education system and was delivered online and offline while also supporting the capacity development of teachers. The **MoE Lebanon** introduced the Learning Recovery initiative to support children to catch up on learning while also addressing their psycho-social well-being and the provision of appropriate learning resources, including e-books. In the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, all 6 million school-aged children were able to access distance education – an accomplishment made possible because of previous investments in skills development for distance education through various media (TV channels, YouTube, etc.), including special channels with sign language interpretation. **UNWRA focused** on teacher training and family involvement of Palestinian refugee children to sustaining skills development for life, work, and sustainable development. Countries faced different types of **challenges** in ensuring their successful coordination of efforts and effective implementation of measures to counter learning loss and to ensure learning continuity. The lack of appropriate digital infrastructure was identified as a shared challenge by most countries. It affected the access of all children to learning, especially the most vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced learners, etc. **UNWRA** focused on teacher training and amid funding gaps managed to deliver programmes by building on the partnership for mobilizing resources in securing digital infrastructure.

- **The role of parents** proved to be crucial in supporting children's learning and their well-being. For instance, the **Egypt MoE** developed guidelines for parents in addressing children's continuation of learning.

- School reopening has brought up increased cases of **violence between students**, especially in secondary schools. School environments must provide space and opportunities to support not only children's learning but also their well-being, to which LSCE approaches are extremely

beneficial. Another example is **Jordan**'s EDRAC platform to support student learning and well-being, including through fighting against bullying and school-based violence.

The importance of research and cooperation with academia was emphasized to ensure that good practices and successful initiatives are documented and made publicly available for further roll out and scalability.

Participants reflected on key takeaways and lessons learnt for building more resilient and crisis-responsive education systems with a view to *building back better*.

Participants' suggestions for improvements needed in the future are summarized in the table below:

Access & Inclusion	Quality & Learning	Relevance & Employability	Enabling Learning Environments
Multiple Pathways of Learning to reach the most vulnerable	**Life Skills imbedded in teaching and learning practices**	**Work Readiness and Market-Relevant Skills**	**Policies, programmes and strategic guidance and support for life skills and citizenship education**
Digital resources should be available and digital skills of students and teachers need to be developed.	*New skills for innovative solutions need to be promoted.*	*LSCE initiatives are important for preparing students for the world of work.*	*Policies are needed to promote the development of skills for life, work, and sustainable development.*
We need to rethink tech solutions (smart learning) and ensure 21st century skills acquisition.	*Life skills need to be integrated into curriculum, teacher training, digital learning, and formal assessment in a coherent manner.*	*It is important to provide multiples sources of and pathways for learning.*	*Reliable data to inform policies and provide evidence of practices and progress made are equally needed.*
Digital learning is an opportunity to reach out of school children through alternative education and self-learning.	*In teaching and learning, the focus should change from "teaching" to "facilitation" of students' self-learning.*	*Skills for independent learning are critical for further learning and transition to work (i.e., learning to learn).*	*Guidance to support social emotional learning (SEL) is of utmost importance.*
The impact of remote learning needs to be measured.	*Life skills need to be developed through project-based learning, and other forms of student-centered learning.*	*Skills development should address future jobs and anticipated trends in the labor market.*	*Schools need to be supported to cater for students' health and well-being, their social and emotional learning and the well-being of teachers.*
Second-Chance Education/ non-formal education needs to be encouraged to prevent learning loss and dropout risks.	*Teachers' skills, including digital skills and overall 21st century skills, need to be developed for quality in-person, online and blended/hybrid teaching and learning.*	*Career guidance must be enhanced.*	*Good/promising practices need to be documented and shared through joint platform/s.*
Recognition & Accreditation of informal/non-formal learning supports the smooth mobility of learners	*Tools are needed for measuring learners' development and the impact of teaching and learning (in-person and*	*It is important to build on promising initiatives and investments made in skills development.*	*Parents need to be trained to support students' learning, the development of their skills and their community engagement.*

from non-formal to formal education.	*remote, or in hybrid modalities) and the acquisition of life skills.*		
Opportunities for learning and support for children with disabilities (resources, approaches, attitudes, etc.) must be considered with a view to ensuring inclusive education.	*Teachers need to be supported in adapting to individual student needs.*		*It is equally important to create/strengthen appropriate referral systems and cross-sectorial work.*
	Peer learning, and the active engagement of learners need to be equally encouraged.		
	As the role of teachers is essential to quality learning, their motivation for teaching and their own well-being need to be considered more effectively.		*Fragile and emergency contexts need special and timely (continuous) support.*
			Enhanced public advocacy is also needed in raising awareness of the importance of skills among the public, particularly parents, learners, and other education stakeholders, including businesses, the media, and community leaders.

Transforming Education Summit – Translating Commitment into Action

The Transforming Education Summit (TES) held in New York in September 2022 gave a new impetus to the Agenda 2030 implementation and its globally-agreed SDG4 targets. One pivotal and inspirational document of TES was UNESCO's Transforming Education document (i.e., "*Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*", 2021) which outlines the education challenges ahead of us all and the ways transforming education could lead to a more just and sustainable world. Ahead of TES, several preparatory meetings were held, such as the High-level Meeting led by UNICEF and the Transforming Education Pre-Summit hosted by UNESCO at the end of June 2022. UN Member States agreed and shared their national commitments towards intensifying their efforts in implementing Agenda 2030 using the TES guidance on the five identified thematic action tracks, namely:

AT1: Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

AT2: Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

AT3: Teachers, teaching, and the teaching profession

AT4: Digital learning and transformation

AT5: Financing of Education.

The session on the TES follow-up emphasized the major persistent inequalities and exclusions in the MENA region (for instance, the fact that 16 million children are out of school; 40% do not finish upper secondary school; 50% of those who finish secondary school do not meet the essential competences in mathematics and reading; and the fact that the MENA and Arab regions face the highest regional youth and graduate unemployment rate in the world). It equally emphasized the national commitments of MENA and Arab countries in follow-up of TES by underlying both important commonalities and outstanding national initiatives.

The different presentations emphasized transforming education by answering the following critical questions:

1. What is it that we need to build upon, continue, strengthen, and protect?

2. What is it that we must abandon and reimagine (i.e., a new social pact on education privileging equitable solutions to enhancing the quality of education for all learners following the new challenges humanity is facing, such as sustainable development, climate change, technological developments, and increased natural and man-made disasters)?

Education can be part of the problem unless we start questioning why we learn, what we learn, and how and where we learn. Our focus should not only be on moving towards more just, more inclusive, more relevant education systems but also on moving towards a different education (Transform is not reform only).

Presentation of UNESCO-Renewing Education to Transform the Future.

Presentation of Regional High Level Meeting on Young People's Learning, Skilling and Transition to Decent Work in MENA.

Learning Poverty, Recovery & Acceleration

The World Bank Learning Poverty Report (2022) confirmed the learning crisis at the global level, including in the MENA and Arab regions, emphasizing that more than two-thirds of children cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10. Due to the pandemic-related disruption of education, it is estimated that 70 percent of children (age 10) are considered learning poor in MENA and Arab countries.

If compared to other regions, the number of years of effective schooling in MENA and Arab countries is substantially reduced. Specifically, some critical information was shared from the World Bank's report "*Advancing Teaching and Learning of Arabic*" (2021). Such information referred also to the consultation process carried out and the journey that followed webinar conversations towards creating a platform for exchanging research outcomes and practical experiences. Outcomes of wider consultations on the topics

will feed into the forthcoming May 2023 regional conference on improving Arabic literacy, including aspects of life skills.

Key highlights for addressing learning poverty and improving Arabic teaching and learning:

- More can be done across the MENA and Arab regions to improve curriculum design, instructional materials, teaching methods, and learning assessment to help children learn more efficiently and effectively.
- The most effective interventions to improve student learning rely on teachers - and a successful teacher can make a major difference to a student's learning trajectory.
- Principles of good practices include professionalizing teaching by using communication strategies; recognizing, promoting, and rewarding effective teachers, school supervisors and leaders; adopting a meritocratic hiring system for teachers and school leaders; training teachers to manage classrooms effectively, including classrooms with students at varied learning levels; and introducing regular teacher coaching, potentially leveraging technology and strong school leadership to do so.
- National partners in MENA are encouraged to revisit Arabic language teacher education programs (pre-service) and teacher professional development programs (in-service) by adding Arabic language pedagogical studies, extensive practical experience with students (including child-initiated dialogue, as an effective teaching method), and effective planning for student learning.
- Teachers need to be supported to improve their understanding of the principles of teaching the Arabic language and effective methods of teaching, and their ability to implement these methods, including phonics methods, plus their skills in managing and planning for learning, including explicit strategies for supporting low performers/struggling children.

Presentation of the WB – Learning to Read, A path to Improving Arabic Literacy in MENA.

LSCE Joint Regional Products – Supporting the Transformation

LSCE 8-skills measurement instrument designed and tested to assess 8 out of 12 life skills of the LSCE framework: creativity, problem-solving, negotiation, decision-making, self-management, respect for diversity, empathy, and participation. A measurement instrument for the remaining 4 life skills of the LSCE Framework – critical thinking, cooperation, resilience and communication is under development. The LSCE Measurement instrument is a combined effort of UNICEF and the WB together with three Champion Countries (Egypt, The State of Palestine, and Tunisia).

LSCE compendium and lessons learnt: Critical review and stocktaking of five years of operationalization of the LSCE framework across countries and partners in MENA, extracting key lessons learned and considerations for operationalizing the LSCE framework in the future, and consolidating a compendium of practices and content.

Presentation on LSCE Measurement Tool and LSCE Compendium.

Critical Measures to Enhance Learning Quality & The Role of Life Skills

Participants exchanged their experiences of using innovative tools and practices of integrating/promoting life skills to enhance the quality of education for all through the following four thematic streams:

Student Well-being & Life Skills

Experiences were shared about mainstreaming life skills into the national curriculum (e.g., in **Tunisia**, **Egypt**, the **State of Palestine**, etc.), as well as the implementation of life skills through various initiatives and extracurricular activities such as youth clubs, environmental clubs, psychological support groups, adolescent centres, skills courses, student parliament, etc., and through parental engagement activities, and capacity development for teachers and counsellors.

Participants emphasized the importance of developing national guidelines and manuals for mental and psychosocial support, and of creating and strengthening referrals for specialized psychosocial services. Among the **challenges faced,** participants mentioned the lack of monitoring and evaluation tools, the lack of capacity of teachers to support the life skills acquisition of students, parental resistance to changes owing to social norms and beliefs, and the limited cross-sectorial coordination and clear common/shared vision.

Way forward:

- o Integration of life skills and citizenship education into the national curriculum at all levels (preschool, primary, secondary and TVET) with a clear implementation strategy, including monitoring of progress in the classroom, at both local and system levels;
- o Awareness-raising campaigns to sensitize the society/parents and leaders on the importance and added value of life skills and citizenship education;
- o Capacity building programs for teachers and education personnel;
- o Better links with higher education/universities, to ensure the meaningful continuum of learning, as well as the appropriate preparation of the teaching force;
- o Exchanging experiences, peer learning and lessons learned among countries;
- o Linking life skills and citizenship education to Life Long Learning.

Presentation of the Group work 1.

Teacher Capacity & Life Skills

Experiences and practices shared on teachers' well-being, motivation, and capacity building referred to developed frameworks of teachers' professional development incorporating well-being issues, skills, and capacity development. Several national initiatives and evidence-based standards for life skills integrated into national teacher training documents, as well as lessons learned from other line ministries and partners have been equally shared. Important elements regarding the support provided for teachers in bridging the learning gaps, especially in emergency contexts, were also shared. The discussion on **challenges** emphasized the gaps in ensuring teacher motivation across many countries in the region,

including limited teacher participation in decision and policy-making. In addition, most of the group members agreed that there had been limited investment in teachers' systemic professional development and professionalization towards improving their economic and social status.

Way forward:

- o Enhancing teacher professional development, including leveraging technology-related skills for teaching online and in blended/remote modalities in teacher training programmes and providing access to technology for teachers.
- o Adopting and encouraging innovative practical training and capacity-building strategies, such as school-based modalities, including peer learning and mentoring.
- o Providing self-paced teacher professional development modalities.
- o Catering for teachers' well-being through support in practice, mentoring, and professional reflections (i.e., turning teachers into reflective practitioners).
- o Reviewing teachers' roles as opposed to creating new roles and allocating new funds, (expert teachers, mentors, coaches) also can be part of teachers' growth and motivation.
- o Linking pre-service and in-service teacher programmes more effectively.
- o Taking into consideration the specificities of the teaching profession in designing support systems.

[Presentation of the Group work 2]().

Learning Assessments & Life Skills

This group's discussion was focused on the importance of learning assessment and specifically the assessment of life skills. The group recommended to prioritize the development and usage of learning assessment frameworks, developing and/or using formative assessment widely, and measuring and monitoring life skills and/or academic learning outcomes by introducing modern assessment approaches, as per below:

- o Summative assessment: record performance or achievement at the end of a cycle of learning (through examination and certification) and link performance evaluation to the overall evaluation of the education system.
- o Formative assessment: include formal and informal activities conducted in class either at the start of or during the learning process to assess if the teaching is at the right level; to assess if students have learnt the planned content and skills – and what is needed to support their learning progression.
- o The scope and purpose of learning assessment should be diversified to include:
  - Academic, traditional, knowledge-based assessment,
  - Life skills, 21st-century skills, higher order skills, etc.,
  - Assessment of learning and assessment for learning,
  - Internal, continuous (classroom- and teacher-based assessment) and external assessment (i.e., tests, high-stake examinations, regional and international testing).

[Presentation of the Group work 3]().

Multiple Pathways of Learning & Life Skills

Participants shared a **wealth of experiences** from different countries on the integration of life skills and citizenship education into multiple pathways of learning, with a focus on best practices. In some cases, such best practices relate specifically to out-of-school children, such as **in Syria**, where life skills were integrated into the national formal education curriculum through the development of new manuals and the integration of entrepreneurial and digital skills into TVET. **In Palestine**, a roadmap was developed on integrating life skills and citizenship education into national education, including the development of experiential learning design in both formal and non-formal education, and the development of "Learning Objects" (i.e., digital learning materials) rolled out in math, sciences, social sciences, and Arabic**. In Jordan**, the Makani project focused specifically on the integration of life skills to support out-of- school children. **In Turkey**, the mapping of curriculum from KG to Grade 12 was conducted to assess the integration of life skills, and their presence in accelerated learning programmes that support the transition of out-of- school children into formal education (the program is accredited). **Iran** is currently embedding life skills training for principals in 2,000 boarding schools and has introduced life skills in teacher training. **Egypt** integrated life skills and citizenship education through the reform of the national general education curriculum, including the development of a teacher training framework. The country is also engaged in the regional initiative to develop the LSCE measurement instrument. **In UAE**, life skills are integrated into formal general education in line with career guidance and counselling provided for children in grade 8. **In Lebanon,** LSCE is embedded in some subjects in formal TVET and has potential for additional integration through the reform of TVET.

Several important **challenges** countries are facing were equally shared, such as the lack of intersectoral coordination between line ministries, the lack of trust in TVET's potential to support a successful transition into good employment opportunities, the mismatch between demand and the actual skills of graduates, and the lack of private sector engagement in second-chance programs offered in some countries.

Way forward:

- o TVET should be led by the public sector based on solid partnership/engagement of private sector partners.
- o Accelerated TVET programs help transition out-of-school children into formal TVET.
- o Solid partnerships between MOEs and NGOs in non-formal education should be encouraged.
- o The regional networking of NGOs and INGOs needs to be strengthened.
- o The partnership among different ministries needs to be strengthened to address/avoid the issue of children dropping out of learning opportunities.

Community outreach needs to be improved to address issues related to out of school children and sustain multiple pathways to learning.

Presentation of the Group work 4.

Working Together – Joint action

This session aimed at: (a) sharing different resources and initiatives that could be used to enhance working together; and (b) discussing the way forward following the 2023 LSCE annual partner meeting.

(a) There have been some critical resources and approaches introduced also during previous sessions to advance life skills into important components of education, such as curriculum, assessment, teacher training, student learning outcomes and enabling learning environments in the region. In this session, UNESCO and UNICEF presented several additional regional resources that could contribute to enhancing joint actions. For instance, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States presented UNESCO's **ICT Competency Framework for Teachers** (2018) aiming to enhance teachers' capacity for digital education, and the shift from knowledge acquisition to knowledge creation. In addition, UNESCO introduced the **Learning Assessment Framework** for the Arab region that pulls together all countries in the region to look at how to improve their national assessment systems (formative assessments, summative assessments, examinations, international testing) and that can be relevant for enhancing the overall quality of education systems and the quality of learning outcomes in Arab countries. Moreover, UNESCO shared a **Repository of promising teacher and learning practices** covering different topics, such as teacher roles in ensuring quality teaching and learning, ICT, and digitalization of education, learning environments, teacher professional development, teacher and learner well-being, and teachers' roles in (grassroots) education research.

UNESCO Presentation regional resources.

UNICEF presented **Learning Projects**, a regional resource available in Arabic that uses project-based learning to support the acquisition and application of life skills and academic learning of learners. There are 50 projects designed based on real-life contexts that are meaningful and enjoyable to work with. Activities require students to actively seek support from parents, teachers, friends, society, and various sources of information. They can be implemented by using available tools and household goods and products. There are guidelines for students and teachers that include self-assessment and evaluation criteria.

UNICEF Presentation Learning Projects.

(b) In the second part of this session, participants were encouraged to brainstorm on follow up options that were then summarized during the closing session.

CLOSURE: The discussions, reflections and shared experiences led to the conclusion that life skills and citizenship education are critical to support students' learning and well-being, as well as their chances to successfully transition from learning to work and life.

The challenges faced with the disruption of education owing to the pandemic have been often turned into opportunities to find innovative solutions that support learning based on the increased engagement of parents and community in education and in students' learning, including youth engagement.

The suggestion to form an advocacy coalition for life skills and citizenship education was well received by participants, and so was the call for joint initiatives of partners for impactful programmes. More work was

suggested towards engaging with national governments in integrating life skills and citizenship education in the curriculum based on aligning curricula, teaching practices, and learning assessment strategies.

The need to work on teachers' digital skills was also seen as crucial for this region. In addition, it was suggested to create an active roster of regional experts and make it available to partners. Participants also recommended exploring the possibilities for developing multi-county proposals and leveraging partnerships for appropriate and effective funding.

Annexes (links):

- **Concept Note**
- **Agenda**
- **List of participants**
- **All Presentations**
- **Lebanon artist demonstrating development of life skills through arts**
- **Pictures from the event**