Building a Resilient and Responsive Education System in Jordan: Strengthening Evidence-Based Crisis-Sensitive Planning and Governance

Evidence and Learnings from Jordan on Building Resilient Governance and Monitoring Systems for Effective Crisis Response and Evidence-Based Planning in the Education Sector

Focusing on: Enabling environment

Students in a classroom in Jordan

PRACTICE PROFILE

Access to quality education for all in Jordan has been impacted by several crises in recent years, including the Syrian refugee crisis, global economic instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2019, UNESCO is supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and national institutions to improve the responsiveness and resilience of the education system to crises through strong governance and information management systems, by strengthening evidence-based planning, monitoring, and decision-making. This case study provides valuable evidence and learnings from the process of building a strong enabling institutional environment necessary to strengthen evidence-based crisis and risk-sensitive planning and monitoring.

Contexts and needs: Impact on Jordan's education system

The Ministry of Education has embarked on the implementation of an ambitious reform agenda, with improvements in access across the education system. Long term national priorities and developmental goals are articulated in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2025, derived from the National Strategy for Human Resources Development (HRD) 2016-2025, and grounded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG4. They are also articulated in the newly launched Economic Modernization Vision (EMV) 2023-2033, under the auspice of His Majesty King Abdullah II, in which education, from early childhood to higher education, is a key pillar. The transformative Vision recognizes education as a key driver to ensuring economic growth, and important socio-development milestones in the Kingdom.

Despite the very clear commitments Jordan made to prioritize education, the Kingdom is still facing major challenges to accommodate current education priorities and needs to deliver quality education for all.

Jordan has been one of the countries most affected by the Syria crisis, hosting the second-highest share of refugees per capita in the world. More than 760,000 refugees are registered with UNHCR, predominantly from Syria, with large groups from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. This is in addition to the 2.2 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Jordan.

The Syria crisis has placed significant strain on the public education sector. Yet, despite limited resources, Jordan has welcomed Syrian refugees in its public schools since the start of the crisis. To address the increasing demand for education and prevent any child from being left behind, a double-shift system and remedial education programmes were implemented to absorb refugees and mitigate the issue of overcrowded classrooms in the education sector.

Vulnerabilities across the country further increased due to COVID-19, impacting the education sector and hindering achievements, progress and reforms initiated over the past years. Schools in Jordan fully or partially closed in March 2020 and reopened in September 2021, with one of the longest school closures globally, at 323 days, impacting 2.37 million learners from pre-primary to tertiary.

The Government of Jordan responded quickly to the pandemic to ensure continuity of learning, rapidly putting in place an online learning platform. Jordan was also a regional leader in effectively preparing schools for reopening, with guidance and training for teachers; hygiene and sanitation materials; and physical distancing and rotation. However, the educational development and psychological well-being of millions of children have been impacted by the pandemic, with vulnerable children such as refugee children or children with disabilities being among the most affected, and e-learning loss observed nationally through a National Diagnosis Assessment.

Following the Covid-19 crisis, more than 200, 000 students have transferred from private to public schools putting an additional pressure on an already strained system, resulting in more overcrowding of schools, and an increased number of double-shift classes.

Jordan has renewed its commitment to the right to education through the *Jordan Declaration on Inclusion and Diversity in Education[1]*, as well as through the National Statement of Commitment shared at the UN

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[1] Endorsement of the Jordan Declaration on Inclusion and Diversity in Education | United Nations in Jordan.

Transforming Education Summit in September 2022. It was an opportunity for Jordan to highlight key priorities such as addressing the learning crisis, focusing on foundational learning, and on crisis sensitive planning to support a resilient and evidence-based education system, flexible to transform and adapt to national and local challenges.

The approach:

UNESCO Jordan focuses on supporting national institutions and stakeholders to transform and strengthen their education systems to be more resilient and responsive to crisis, while building strong governance and education management systems for evidence-based planning and monitoring. Data driven education policy and planning also support Jordan's education system as it recovers from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic and responds strategically to emerging challenges such as learning and equity losses.

Since 2019, UNESCO has been supporting Jordan's Ministry of Education in enhancing its core policy, planning, coordination, and monitoring functions and capacities linked to the ESP through the System Strengthening Partnership Programme, under a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) with Canada, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland. This includes ensuing that an enabling institutional environment is further strengthened for crisis-sensitive planning in Jordan. UNESCO's work in Jordan focuses on extensive technical support and on the job capacity development to support the MoE in the implementation and monitoring of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2025, including the Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Education (SMGEE). In this context, the Ministry of Education conducted a mid-term review of their Education Strategic Plan in 2021 to assess progress and the impact of Covid-19, as well as outline recommendations for needed adjustments to respond to some urgent needs and prioritize again some key education reforms.

UNESCO's technical support to Jordan, under the MPTF and through additional and complementary support from the EU and GIZ, includes also strengthening the MoE's capacity for data collection, utilization, and analysis, through the enhancement of the MoE's Education Management Information System (EMIS), and its Geographic Information Systems (WebGIS) resource platform.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The ESP, which was developed during the Syrian crisis, represents a good practice of transition process between humanitarian and development priorities, proposing a system-wide approach to meet the education needs of all children and youth in Jordan, with no distinction of status nor nationality in the spirit of leaving no one behind.

As a result of the technical assistance and capacity development provided by UNESCO, the following key milestones have been achieved by the Jordan's Ministry of Education to strengthen evidence-based crisis-sensitive planning and governance to implement their ESP and further achieve SDG 4 goals and targets. By investing in system strengthening, the MoE addresses different key aspects at the heart of crisis and risk management, such as data management and data use, the needed enabling environment, the

governance structure, including at decentralized level and the overall planning and monitoring chain of the system.

Development and implementation of the national EMIS operational plan through 2025, including technical support for the development of the EMIS system (via OpenEMIS), capacity strengthening, and joint strategic planning. The exercise marks an important step in enhancing the quality of the system, and the data produced by OpenEMIS. The Jordan's Ministry of Education has developed an integrated, comprehensive, flexible, and trusted Educational Management Information System (EMIS) using OpenEMIS which provides a system accessible country-wide, covering over 2 million students, 7,300 schools, and 170,000 educational staff. The system provides timely, accurate, and comprehensive data on the education system that is analysed and presented in reports and dashboards to be easily leveraged to inform decision-making and planning for the sector. The most recent example is a monitoring tool within the OpenEMIS system supporting data collection and analysis by ESP domains, which is then used to generate annual MoE report on key results and analyzing data for follow-up recommendations. The system is also flexible and adaptable, allowing it to respond to urgent needs such as the COVID-19 crisis. Currently, UNHCR and UNRWA data on refugee is being aligned and integrated into OpenEMIS, so that the system further reflects all learners in Jordan, regardless of status or nationality, but also provides disaggregated data for informed policy decisions and implementation of targeted interventions towards vulnerable groups.

Development and launch of Jordan's EMIS Policy: Jordan launched its EMIS policy in June 2022, which was a crucial step towards strengthening the enabling environment for EMIS. The Policy clearly delineates key roles and responsibilities, as well as outlines the necessary resources, governance mechanisms, and procedures needed for the efficient and sustainable management of the MoE's EMIS, including Disaster Recovery. This will in turn ensure quality assurance, accountability, inclusion and resilience for the entire education system in Jordan. The Policy also provides a framework that mandates the integration of different datasets and software across different MoE departments allowing the Ministry to consolidate its digital ecosystem for education. Once the policy is fully implemented, it will transform the way the Ministry works, increasing efficiencies, and solidifying best practices, as well as enhancing the governance and resourcing for all of Jordan's Education Information Management Systems, most notably OpenEMIS and WebGIS. This will enable better targeted policies and resources and ensure data-driven education policy and planning. It will also improve data collection and monitoring at school levels, with the objective that school data analysis can also be done and used directly by teachers and school principals to address issues such as retention and drop out or learning recovery of students.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Education Strategic Plan: The Ministry of Education conducted a mid-term review of the Education Strategic Plan, which culminated in a two-day policy dialogue with partners and national stakeholders. The ESP mid-term review process conducted throughout 2021 assessed the progress of the ESP, including the impact of Covid-19, lessons learned, and the impact on the plan implementation, leading to the extension of the ESP until 2025. As a direct follow-up to the ESP mid-term review process, UNESCO supported the MoE in updating the ESP M&E framework including ESP indicators, M&E structure and calendar and defining key roles and responsibilities. The updated ESP indicators were automated into the OpenEMIS Monitoring Tool.

Development of a Crisis and Risk-Management Strategy: The Ministry of Education (MoE) is working to strengthen crisis-sensitive planning in Jordan's education system, including through the development of the Strategy for Crisis and Risk Management (CRM). It aims to ensure the optimal use of resources in prevention, preparedness, and mitigation to reduce risks through coordinated and integrated participatory efforts and to enhance capacity in ensuring the sustainability of education. Based on extensive nationwide consultations, and school visits, the CRM Strategy outlines concrete programmatic interventions notably to build an enabling system and management through the institutionalization of crisis and risk management within all levels of Jordan's MoE including information management system, strengthening the education system resilience to crises and risks related to natural and human-made hazards. In the process of operationalizing this strategy, data will be at the heart of strengthening prevention and response by the education system to be more resilient.

Mainstreaming Inclusion and Diversity in Education: The Jordan Declaration on Inclusion and Diversity in Education was endorsed in June 2022 by MoE, the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and partners. The Declaration, which includes a definition on inclusion and diversity in education and the 10 groups of children most at risk of being excluded from and withing education, also outlines nine areas of action to achieve greater inclusion and diversity in Jordan, specifically through system strengthening; operationalized legal frameworks; better data collection and access; improved equitable funding and sustainable programming; systematic capacity and professional development; better and safer learning environments, coordinated advocacy and planning; removing barriers and mainstreaming inclusion; and better and more relevant learning. The Declaration constitutes a crucial step in Jordan's commitment to ensure quality education for all. Inclusion and diversity is also at the heart of risk related data and evidence-based planning and an opportunity to focus on most vulnerable groups such as refuge children or children with disabilities.

KEY LEARNINGS AND EVIDENCE

➢ **Three learnings to strengthen crisis and risk-related education data within national education systems:**

- **Processes are as important as the outcomes.** In strengthening crisis and risk-related education data within national education systems, setting up effective, sustainable and inclusive processes from the beginning, in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, is essential to allow for in-depth and meaningful system transformation. Focusing on decentralization throughout processes is also critical to reach schools, teachers and students.

- **Building an institutional enabling environment is the key factor** to improve institutional education information systems (including EMIS). Technology alone cannot drive progress, but an enabling environment that combines strong governance, effective policy and legal frameworks, capacitated human resources, and sufficient long-term funding is critical to achieving successful implementation.

- **Prioritizing sustainable financing mechanisms for education system strengthening efforts** is crucial to ensure their long-term success. Strengthening education systems takes time and

effective and flexible funding can enhance evidence-based policymaking, making education systems more resilient and better equipped to address crises and risks. The Multi Partner Trust Fund established in Jordan to fund the System Strengthening Partnership Programme with the Ministry of Education is a good example of successful use of pooled funds, that pave the way for more strategic partnerships and enable technical and financial resources to be better spent, investing in national institutions and systems for longer-term sustainability, but also flexible to crisis and changing needs as it was the case during Covid-19.

➢ Four ways for education actors to strengthen the use and sharing of relevant crisis and risk-related data

- **Mainstreaming of crisis and risk-related education data in institutional information systems is essential** for making evidence-based decisions to improve education system resilience and inclusivity, particularly in contexts such as Jordan, with large refugee populations and complex education responses involving multiple partners such as UNRWA and UNHCR. The EMIS policy also gives the framework to identify capacities and resources needed to institutionalize, produce and use data.

- **Developing specific indicators and data needs as part of a risk matrix is essential to guide the mainstreaming of relevant crisis and risk-related data into the EMIS**. This tool, used by the MoE's to develop the CRM strategy, helps to identify, assess, and prioritize potential risks for the education system in consultation with all key stakeholders. By institutionalizing such tools into the CRM strategy implementation, education authorities can better plan for and respond to these risks, ensuring the safety and continuity of the education system.

- **Prioritizing the "why" data is produced over "how"** it is being collected, particularly within the context EMIS. While technology provides numerous solutions for data collection, the focus should be on the importance of the data itself, and how it can be used to improve evidence based strategic planning, policy and decision-making. The purpose for collecting EiE data should always be clearly defined and aligned with the overall objectives of the EiE response. This ensures that the data collected is relevant and can be used to make informed decisions.

- **Investing in longer term system and capacity strengthening to enable national institutions and education stakeholders to use high-quality data available in advance of crises is key to inform preparedness strategies response** planning, implementation, and monitoring to ensure continuity of learning. Ensuring data availability is one thing, having the sufficient capacity and skills to analyse the data and know how to use it for evidence-based policy making is another. Building these capacities at all levels of the system takes time and investment but can significantly enhance the ability of education systems to plan for and respond to crises and emergencies. **Continued allocation of dedicated human resources with specialized expertise and the capacity** to support and maintain the system at both the technical and policy levels is therefore critical for an effective implementation, sustainability, and ownership of the EMIS by national authorities. Adequate medium- and long-term human and financial resources must be planned and mobilized to sustain ongoing work and prevent potential setbacks.

➤ Three ways to support system strengthening within national education systems and across the humanitarian-development nexus through crisis and risk-related data:

- **Foster a high level of alignment, coordination, and information sharing within and between relevant ministries, education partners, and private sector actors**. The MoE's partnership and coordination structure under the ESP includes strategic, planning, and technical coordination mechanisms/working groups that provided a platform for key stakeholders to engage in policy dialogue towards mainstreaming CRM across the education sector. For instance, the Policy, Planning and Coordination Committee (led by the MoE) brings together partners from across the nexus (Education Development Partners Group and Education Sector Working Group[2]). It is a structure dedicated to improving overall planning and coordination and is critical to ensure meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in the operationalization and sustainability of institutional policies and strategies (notably the CRM Strategy), to improve education data and strengthen institutional education information systems. The Ministry of Education (MoE) will be taking steps to further operationalize its Partnership and Coordination structure, including the establishment of a High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) which will serve as a valuable platform for inter-ministerial dialogue and coordination. Through the HLSC, the MoE can leverage partnerships and coordination efforts to effectively operationalize the CRM Strategy and enhance crisis and risk management in Jordan's education system.

- In the development phase of a CRM strategy, it is essential to work **on alignment and coordination with different existing policy frameworks - within the education sector** (e.g., EMIS Policy) **and with other ministries and government entities** (e.g. National disaster risk reduction strategy). This approach allows for a more comprehensive approach to the issue and increases system readiness and resilience to crises and risk-related data.

Using available quality education data for effective crisis response: Jordan's response to the COVID pandemic is a successful example of how quality education data can inform crisis response. With the wide range of quality education data collected by OpenEMIS and other sources, the Ministry of Education was able to respond quickly to the impact of the crisis on education by implementing alternative learning solutions. The integration of reliable data into the e-learning system ensured uninterrupted access to education, underscoring the critical role of quality data in promoting effective crisis response in education systems.

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[2] The ESWG was established in 2008 in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis in Jordan and continued its mandate with the Syria crisis response. It is an important body to ensure engagement with NGOs and civil society. Both the ESWG and EDPG work to ensure coordination among its members, and with government authorities. Their participation in the PPCC also brings humanitarian and development approaches in discussion led by the MoE.

✦ **The Ministry of Education of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (MoE)** is committed to provide equal opportunities to high quality education that enables learners to apply scientific, creative, and critical thinking, and work in a team spirit. In addition to fostering lifelong learning and strengthening of skills and values necessary to become active belonging citizens who contribute to the world and humanity.

✦ **UNESCO Jordan Office:** As the global lead for SDG 4, UNESCO's priority is to ensure that all children and youth in Jordan, regardless of their status, nationality, background, abilities, or gender, have access to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. UNESCO focuses on supporting national institutions and stakeholders to transform and strengthen their education systems to be more resilient and responsive to crisis, while building strong governance and education management systems for evidence-based planning and monitoring. Through policy support, system strengthening and capacity development, UNESCO is working at all levels of education to provide knowledge, training and skills enabling all learners to reach their full potential and contribute to the economic development and growth of the Kingdom over the coming years.

Evidence and Learning: Strengthening Evidence-Based Crisis-Sensitive Planning and Governance