

The regional open wave for the launching of the regional campaign “Debt Cancellation for Future of Education in the Arab Region”

COVID19 has turned our world upside down

The COVID-19 pandemic is the world's worst shock since the Great Depression of 1929. The IMF expects the global economy to recover in 2021 and record positive growth of 5.8% assuming a pandemic decline, the success of containment and virus control policies, while the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020) expects employment to decline by 10.5%, representing a loss of about 305 million jobs as a result of the economic closure. The World Bank, 2020, expects the world's extreme poverty rate to rise from 8.2% to 8.6% of the world's population, which means that the number of poor people will rise from 632 million to 665 million as a result of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the health, safety and survival of hundreds of millions of people on the planet, as communities around the world are pushed into the deepest of poverty, instability and inequality, due to massive job and business losses, declining livelihoods, and further reductions in access to food and water. Sanitation, adequate housing, education, health services and other basic needs, where it is estimated that an additional 500 million people may be victims of poverty and hunger as a result of the epidemic and economic downturn that has resulted in most countries of the world, as well as the escalation of violence against women, girls and groups most vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.

This is an unprecedented moment of multiple and severe crises that are going through humanity as a result of this global epidemic, circumstances that strongly highlight the continuing debt problem that stands in the way of people's survival, the fight against inequality, the realization of their human rights, the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, economic, gender and environmental justice, and the pursuit of a decent life.

The World Bank, including the Arab countries, spends more than \$300 billion annually on public external debt payments to bilateral lenders, multilateral lenders such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, private banks, speculators and investors in government bonds and securities. The debt problem is exacerbated by billions of dollars in illicit financial flows.

Given the urgency and severity of the crisis we face, governments' response to the debt problem has been extremely inadequate and, in many cases, counterproductive, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced the Covid-19 debt relief package in April 2020 and said it would use \$500 billion to cover several months of debt payments to the IMF by 28 countries.

The IMF says it ultimately aims to cover payments to distressed countries for two years, but that depends on whether it receives additional commitments from member governments for the Disaster Containment and Relief Fund (CCRT).

In the same month, G20 governments introduced the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which is not a cancellation but a mere eight-month delay of \$12 billion in public debt payments, and only 73 countries were considered eligible.

Private lenders have so far refused to cancel or suspend any of the debts they claim. Similarly, multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, have failed to cancel debt.

Meanwhile, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank are providing a total of \$205.5 billion in loans for Covid-19 response measures.

The staggering debt problem goes beyond the bleeding of the public treasury in the face of great need and weaknesses. A large part of this debt is illegitimate, irresponsible and unfairly loaned,

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driven by predatory lending, used to finance harmful projects and policies, non-compliance with legal and democratic requirements, and burdened with burdensome and unfair conditions.

The terms of policies relating to loans and debt servicing have also caused serious damage, which have led to a reduction in the level of public services, social protection, a trend towards privatization and severe austerity programs, and increased suffering of women, girls, and indigenous peoples, the poorest and most vulnerable communities. In addition, social conflict has been exacerbated and poverty, militarization and repression have been criminalized.

Moreover, the debt of the Countries of the South and the "indebtedness" of the Countries of the South are a result and a tool of hegemony, aimed at undermining the ability of countries and peoples to shape their economic programs, undermining sovereign institutions and impeding democratic processes.

Not to mention the fact that the peoples of the South have already paid off their debts many times, through centuries of colonial and post-colonial plunder and the extraction of natural and human resources.

Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on public debt in Arab countries

The situation of the Arab countries is not much different from what is happening in other countries, although their resilience is less, because of their weak economies, although they have not yet spread as sharply as North America and Europe. The number of infections in Arab countries was about 4.7% of the world's total, and the number of deaths was 3% of the total deaths as a result of COVID-19[1] and the population of Arab countries represents about 4% of the world's total population.

Given the impact of the pandemic on global oil and gas demand, Arab states will be strongly affected even in non-oil countries due to the collapse of tourism, services, and remittances from Gulf States and Europe. For example, in the Global Economic Outlook report, the IMF projects a decline in Arab GDP of more than \$334 billion for 2020 and 2021.

The deterioration of growth and budget are balance for the next two years 2020 and 2021 will raise the balance of public debt strongly in all Arab countries, whether oil or non-oil. It is estimated that most Arab countries will suffer from an increase in the budget deficit for 2020-2021 due to a decline in oil and non-oil revenues. The budget balance in the Arab countries is expected to be 10.24% in 2020, - 12.46% in oil countries, and - 7.29% in non-oil countries.

As a result of the decline in Arab economic growth and the expansion of the budget deficit, the public debt rate will rise on average from 68% in 2019 to 84% in 2020 and 91% in 2021 and will be higher in non-oil countries, where it is expected to jump from 99% in 2019 to 116% in 2021. These figures, despite all the reservations about their accuracy, sound a dangerous alarm and warn that many Arab countries will face the issue of the sustainability of public debt in the future.

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The impact of the debt crisis on education

The world was experiencing a crisis of learning, even before the corona pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, 258 million primary and secondary school-age children and young people were out of school. In addition, a large proportion of school enrolments receive little learning because of the low quality of schooling. The rate of learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries has reached about 53%, which means that half of all 10-year-olds cannot read and understand a simple story. Worse still, the crisis was not evenly distributed.

The Corona pandemic now threatens to exacerbate learning outcomes, effectively having profound effects on education, as a result of the closure of schools around the globe and the irregularness of the educational process, which has been the biggest shock to all educational systems over our lifetime. The shock of school closures and the global recession may result in long-term costs for both education and development if Governments do not address them. The shock of school closures can result in a loss of learning, increased drop-out rates and widening inequality; the economic shock will exacerbate the damage caused by declining supply and demand in education, owing to the damage it does to households; both will damage the accumulation of human capital and long-term development prospects and well-being.

It is necessary to move as soon as possible ... Debt cancellation campaign for education and the future

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the Arab Campaign for Education for All -ACEA and its partners have monitored the various impacts this pandemic has had on education in its various dimensions in the Arab region, and has carried out a series of different interventions at the regional and national levels to ensure the right to education under the crisis, but the depth of the crisis is significant and requires interventions of another kind, interventions at the level of states, governments and international organizations, and the best of these interventions at all is to eliminate and transform the external debt of poor countries with low incomes for the benefit of important and affected sectors. One of the pandemics is the education sector, which is at the heart of the development and progress of societies as a whole.

Accordingly, the Arab Campaign for Education for All -ACEA will launch a Regional-Arab advocacy campaign to demand the cancellation of debts to poor Arab countries and countries suffering from conflicts and wars, and to raise the voice of people and civil society organizations and to convey their demands in this regard to international decision makers, especially in international financial institutions.

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The campaign will be launched under the theme “Debt Cancellation for Education and the Future” and includes a series of events, activities and short- and medium-term interventions (1-3) years in order to ensure tangible and real results.

Major campaign claims

The Debt Cancellation Campaign for the Future of Education will adopt a range of core claims that are also in line with other regional and international movements and campaigns, such as the Jubilee [Campaign\[2\]](#) and the Global Action for Debt Cancellation [Network\[3\]](#)

Our demands are directly addressed to the leaders of al-Dal, the heads of national governments and global financial institutions, and we call on them to take urgent and fair action in accordance with their moral, political and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the following are the most important demands:

Our basic demands are:

- 1- All lenders (including the World Bank and multilateral development banks, as well as creditors from the private sector, and participants in the DSSI Debt Service Suspension Initiative) must unconditionally cancel external debts from poor Arab countries, especially those countries whose citizens suffer from low incomes, and crises, for a period of at least 5 years as an urgent step in solving external debt crisis. This should be done within a clear and agreed road map in order to reach a permanent and unconditional cancellation of the outstanding debts, and not only with the G20 debt relief initiative, which postponed debt service payments to mid-2021. The suspension of debt payments is considered as a right of borrowing countries, and these countries should not be subjected to any form of sanctions because of this.
- 2- The lending countries and global financial institutions should start developing a new framework for the country lending process quickly. In addition to open a global dialogue to develop new long-term mechanisms for lending and debt repayment that are more fair, equitable and transparent, and compatible with the ability of poor countries to bear the burden of debt, and not inconsistent with the rights of people to development. They should as well ensure that societies get their basic rights to education, health, work and well-being.
- 3- Ensure the transfer of all amounts of debts released from lenders to meet the emergency needs resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to support education, health and social protection. As well as, ensure the provision of the necessary assistance to those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the groups and regions most vulnerable to death and exclusion. Also focusing on ensuring everyone gets the right to education during and after the pandemic, as stipulated in the fourth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 4- Governments in the Arab region should open a national, internal, democratic, multilateral dialogue in order to review all legislation, laws, policies, procedures and conditions related to external debts and the mechanisms for obtaining them. Moreover, to ensure that citizens' representatives conduct social audits (community accountability)

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accurately about the nature, purpose, terms and conditions of actual use of loans, and the effects of these loans in the medium and long term on the education sector. Yet, to ensure that debt does not accumulate and be able to repay it.

- 5- Lending countries and international financial organizations should increase their contribution to saving education in the Arab region, and efforts to combat the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the educational process (especially in Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon), by increasing the value of donations, grants and non-refundable and unconditional grants to governments, civil society organizations, UN and international organizations operating in the Arab region.
- 6- We call on governments in the Arab region, civil society organizations, and trade unions, to join the efforts of (the Debt Cancellation for the Future of Education in the Arab Region) led by the Arab Campaign for Education and its partners and Arab educational coalitions, and to raise the level of coordination, cooperation and exchange of information between all parties. This is in order to achieve the goals of the campaign that is in the interest of the countries and societies of the region.

In the Arab Campaign for Education for All and as a broad and multilateral regional civil framework and partnerships, as part of the GCE global campaign, we seek a decisive and comprehensive solution to the debt problem as part of the profound transformation of the economic and financial systems urgently required by the current crises, and to direct sufficient resources to save education in the Arab region, which has suffered and suffered from serious and irreversible disorders, not to mention the gaps and flaws that have been exposed as a result of the pandemic in Arab education systems and need to be addressed in the short, medium and long term.

Debt cancellation campaign objectives for education and the future

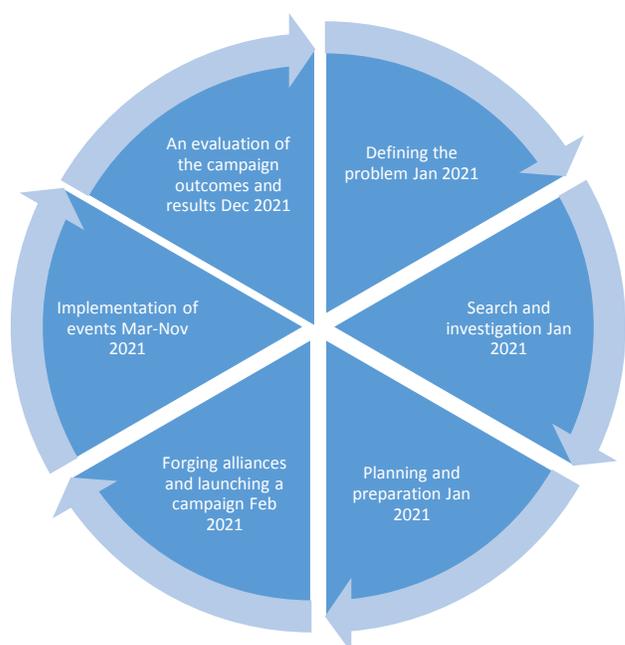
- Contributing with the rest of the parties and relevant parties to stimulate debate, dialogue and national and regional public opinion and raise the voice loudly in order to demand the unconditional cancellation of foreign debts from poor Arab countries, especially those countries whose citizens suffer from low incomes and crises for a period of at least 5 years, as a step A quick.
- Pressure towards improving the quality of education in the Arab region by using and directing debt-free resources to meet the urgent needs of education in all its forms and stages.

Key partners

- Decision-makers and governments
- Coordinators of Arab educational coalitions
- Representatives of the member organizations of the Arab Campaign for Education for All – ACEA
- Human rights activists, academics and educators
- Global Campaign for Education
- Media and journalist

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Stages and steps of the campaign



Campaign Performance (Major Advocacy Events)

#	The name of the tool	Tool description
1	Launch of the campaign through the open media on debt in the Arab region	<p>The Arab Education for All Campaign -ACEA and Arab Educational Coalitions will organize an open address through Facebook Livestream Saturday 30/1/2021, which will start at 11 am and will remain until 4:30 pm.</p> <p>During the open wave, which will be led by the Secretariat of the Arab Campaign for Education for All -ACEA and Secretary General Mr. Rifaat Al Sabah, a series of dialogues and interviews will be organized and a presentation of reports on debt and its impact on education in the Arab region, and to communicate the voice of people, communities and civil society organizations in this direction.</p>
2	Set up an open letter about campaign claims	<p>An open letter will be prepared to the leaders of international financial organizations and institutions and to the governments of the lending countries and to deliver copies of them through official routes (embassies, government offices, regional offices). The message will be launched electronically and on the ground, and one million signatures will be collected</p>

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		in the Arab region in cooperation with all partners, The focus will be on the involvement of teachers, teachers and students and their parents in particular.
3	Call on civil society organizations and Arab educational coalitions to draft and launch national data	We will prepare posts containing the digital visual identity of our partner civil society organizations with advocacy about the impact of debt on education. These posts will be posted through social media.
4	Preparing and launching an Arab regional study	The campaign will prepare an in-depth study on the impact of debt on education in the Arab region with a focus on poor countries and those suffering from conflict and conflict and after the study will be launched through a regional workshop and national workshops at the target country level.
5	Launching advocacy messages in the form of hashtags and posts	A advocacy message on the impact of debt on education will be prepared (20-30) and published in collaboration with partners, at a rate of 3-5 times per month in 2021.
	The launch of the debt counter and an interactive map on debt in the Arab region	The debt meter is a digital counter that shows the size of the debt accumulation in the Arab region and compares these figures with budgets spent on the education sector, and the counter will be published daily on the page of the Arab Campaign for Education for All to show the development of the size of the debt. An interactive map of the target countries will also be prepared showing the size of the debt and its annual interest.
6	Production of short film and video presentations for targeted Arab countries	Short visual videos on the reality of its debt and its impact on education will be produced and disseminated through social networks, and the videos will contain information, statistics and figures on debt in each Arab country targeted
7	Organizing a regional virtual conference	Organizing a regional virtual conference on the impact of debt on education in partnership with the Global Education Campaign, UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education
8	Set up and publish posts(Cancellation)movement(X)using hands 	Launching an invitation for people to portray themselves and their hands in the "X" mode, a silent visual expression of the demand for the cancellation of their countries' debt and their dissemination in the media
9	Production of animated infographic film	This video will be aimed at raising awareness and educating people who are aware of the dangers of debt to their future and the future of their children's

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		education. The Infographic will be widely disseminated on social media platforms, and will be considered to be easy, attractive and its language suitable for the public.
10	Launch the debt challenge	It is an electronic challenge in which people, institutions and young volunteers are invited "Call to Action “in order to do an action, action or activity in which he shows his rejection of debt to his country, and this step comes after the provision of content and clear instructions on how to participate in the challenge, and this challenge helps the public to feel that it is part of the debt campaign.
11	Launch of a special blog on debt and its impact on education	Launch a blog for intellectuals, educators and experts in order to publish their articles and opinions on debt and its impact on education and the dysfunctional sectors this blog will be part of the campaign site and a special framework and the articles will be published through a monthly bulletin

^[1]According to WHO statistics until October 2020

^[2] <https://jubileedebt.org.uk/>

^[3] <https://debtgwa.net/>