



# Funding the Future: A Call to Action for Public Education in Arab Countries

*United Arab educators are actively calling for enhanced investment in public education and its workforce.*

Education International (EI) is committed to transform education in Iraq and across the Arab region. The 'Go Public! Fund Education' campaign is central to this commitment. The campaign is built upon three fundamental principles:

1. **Amplifying public education funding:** Increase investment in public education and the education workforce.
2. **Resisting privatisation:** Actively confront and reverse the trend of education's commercialisation and privatisation.
3. **Advocate for public education:** Reassert the importance and value of public education as a cornerstone for equitable and democratic societies.

## The impact of crises on education in Iraq

Iraq has endured years of crisis, armed conflict, political instability, mass displacement, and economic challenges, all of which have hampered access to quality education. The situation has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and natural and human-induced disasters. Girls and internally displaced children are particularly vulnerable.

Iraq is at a critical point due to the effects of the war and ongoing conflicts. The war in Iraq has caused widespread destruction, affecting not only buildings and infrastructure but also the relationships and connections that hold society together. This includes its education system, which was once among the best in the Middle East.

The current generation of children will shape Iraq's future. It is through education that they will be guided towards a path grounded in human dignity and freedom, ultimately becoming leaders who acknowledge diversity and advocate for democracy.

## The need for a well-resourced and equitable public education system

A well-funded, equitable, public education system must be created that empowers, respects, and values teachers and students in Iraq. This requires investment to ensure access and quality, which are crucial for building a prosperous future.

In Iraq, the Arab region, and globally, the rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively are fundamental human rights that enable others' rights to be exercised, including the right to education. Education workers, united in strong and independent unions, can defend the right to education for all without discrimination and actively participate in shaping the future of education.

## The role of independent trade unions

Representative and independent trade unions are not only institutions for workers to defend their rights and conditions but are also institutions of democracy. Teachers affiliated with independent unions can voice their demands for quality professional development opportunities, decent

working conditions, safety at work, and teacher wellbeing. These and other professional issues are essential if students and society are to benefit from quality education.

### **The threat of privatisation**

Private schools are not the answer to Iraq's education crisis.

The current state of the Iraqi public-school sector is deplorable. Classrooms are overcrowded, school buildings are frequently old and unsafe, and education facilities are insufficient. Up to one-third of schools are compelled to operate on a multiple-shift system, with some even teaching triple or quadruple shifts. A parliamentary committee concluded that over 6,000 additional schools, staffed with trained and motivated teachers and other education staff, are necessary to overcome this situation.

Incorporating private firms into the system would only reduce quality, misuse funds, and limit democratic control. It would undermine public governance and the development of education.

### **Budget allocation for education**

The Iraqi government allocates a mere 5.7 per cent of its total government budget to public education. The lack of resources for education has led to overcrowded classrooms, poorly maintained or insufficient infrastructure, inadequate learning materials and a lack of trained teachers.

While there is no quick fix or magical solution to the financing challenge, there is a dire need for significant short and long-term investment in public education, both in Iraq and globally. This necessitates well-planned structures and strategies. However, investment in teachers is key.

The only sustainable way to achieve fundamental improvements in education, which will enable today's students to construct better, fairer, freer, and more peaceful societies, is by investing in teachers - good teachers.

### **A Call to Action: Go Public! Fund Education**

"Teachers are our future. They need support, value, and the right tools. Our campaign [Go Public! Fund Education does that. It empowers educators and their unions, in Iraq and across the Arab world. It gives them a voice. It gives them strength. It fights privatization. It fights for public funding to achieve quality education for all](#)", said Education International's General Secretary David Edwards.

