



STRIPES

Strengthening T-Vet to foster Relevant and inclusive
Internship Programmes and Employability Skills

1st Newsletter | June 2025



Preface

In times of deep national hardship, education remains the most powerful catalyst for hope and recovery. Lebanon's prolonged economic collapse—intensified by security instability and mounting social pressures—has cast a long shadow over the prospects of its youth. Confronted with limited opportunities and growing uncertainty, young people today are in urgent need of practical, dignified, and immediate pathways to employment. In this context, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET) has emerged as an essential pillar for national resilience and recovery.

T-VET in Lebanon is undergoing a gradual yet significant transformation. Training programs are increasingly aligned with the evolving demands of the labor market, and the overall quality of vocational education is improving to better equip learners with relevant, hands-on skills. Historically burdened by social stigma, T-VET is now experiencing a positive shift in perception.

More young people and their families are recognizing it not as a fallback option, but as a credible, respected, and results-driven pathway to professional success and self-reliance.

This ongoing transformation is the result of a collective national effort—driven by educational institutions, private sector partners, civil society organizations, and international actors—working in concert to elevate the T-VET landscape across the country. Among the initiatives leading this change is the STRIPES Project, a timely and strategic intervention that reinforces the connection between education and employment, strengthens institutional capacity, and introduces forward-thinking practices tailored to Lebanon's complex realities.

I remain confident that T-VET in Lebanon will continue to evolve into a more inclusive, equitable, and respected educational track—one that restores dignity, generates opportunities, and empowers a new generation of skilled professionals equipped to shape the country's future.



Written by **Dr. Abed Al Kader Mikdash** who is the Founder and President of CIS Group, a pioneering force in vocational and technical education across Lebanon and the Middle East. With over 40 years of experience, he has dedicated his career to expanding access to quality education and empowering individuals through practical, skill-based learning.

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Stripes Project



About STRIPES



Launched in December 2023, the STRIPES project is a three-year Erasmus+ initiative that aims to enhance the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET) in Lebanon. The project is coordinated by VU Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and brings together five core partners: INMAA, IRADA, and CIS College from Lebanon, IRI UL from Slovenia, and an associated partner, Berytech (Lebanon).



In Lebanon, where unemployment among young people continues to rise due to ongoing humanitarian, economic and governance crises, the STRIPES project responds with a concrete, opportunity-driven approach. It supports the development of work-based learning programs that provide relevant, in-demand skills for the labour market. These programs aim to improve the responsiveness of T-VET institutions to current economic needs, helping students

and graduates access to meaningful employment opportunities.



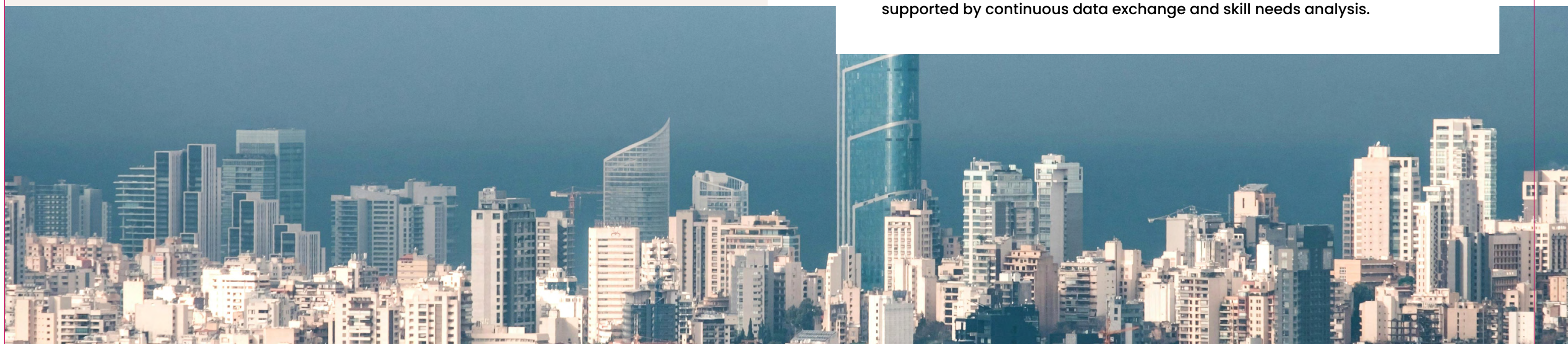
Through tailored training, study visits, co-design activities and training of trainers, STRIPES builds the capacity of local T-VET providers and enables stronger links between education and employment.



At the heart of the project are the STRIPES Centres. These newly established hubs function as bridges between students, graduates, educational providers and the labour market. They are designed to play a key interface role, facilitating internships, employment connections and active dialogue with employers. Their establishment marks a significant step toward a more adaptive, opportunity-focused T-VET system in Lebanon.



The figure above illustrates how the STRIPES Centres serve as central hubs, bridging between T-VET graduates and the labour market through both physical facilities and a digital platform. The physical centres provide career guidance, mentorship, and soft skills training, while the digital platform enables matchmaking for internships and jobs, and offers online courses. It shows interconnected flows between students, VET providers, and employers, supported by continuous data exchange and skill needs analysis.





We spoke with two representatives of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET) sector involved in the STRIPES project in Lebanon. Dr. Wael Mikdash, Vice President at CIS College and Ali Lwies, Program Manager at INMAA, both deeply committed to empowering youth through practical skills and employment opportunities, shared their motivations for joining the project, their passion for T-VET, and their vision for improving Lebanon's vocational education system. Their insights highlight the importance of inclusive, innovative, and market-aligned training in shaping a more resilient and equitable future for Lebanon.



Dr. Wael Mikdash,
Vice President at CIS College



01

What motivated you to join the STRIPES project?

Wael: At CIS College, our mission has always been to empower youth and vulnerable populations through quality, hands-on technical education that translates into real employment opportunities. Joining the STRIPES project was a natural extension of this mission. We were particularly motivated by the project's holistic and inclusive approach addressing not only skills training, but also employability, coaching, and access to income-generation. STRIPES aligns perfectly with our values and practical learning, and it provides us with an

opportunity to extend our reach to all communities across Lebanon. Also, STRIPES project was formulated based on a real evident need in Lebanon which is the driving power of the project. Being part of this initiative allows us to scale our impact, especially during these critical times when Lebanon's economic and social challenges demand innovative and inclusive solutions.

Ali: I was driven to join the STRIPES project because of its mission to bridge the gap between education and employment for youth in Lebanon. T-VET plays a crucial role in equipping young people with the skills they need for the job market,



Ali Lwies, Program
Manager at INMAA



02

What drives your passion for working in the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET)?

Wael: T-VET is one of the few fields that bridges the gap between education and employment, and in a country like Lebanon, this bridge is vital. Our passion for T-VET stems from the direct impact it has on people's lives. Every time we see a trainee find work, start their own small business, or simply gain the confidence they need to change their life path, we are reminded of the power of this field. T-VET is practical, inclusive, and transformative. It doesn't just teach, it empowers. At CIS College, we believe in the dignity of work, and T-VET allows us to promote that belief every single day.

Ali: My passion for T-VET comes from its transformative impact on individuals and communities. Unlike traditional education pathways, T-VET provides practical skills that lead directly to employment, giving young people the opportunity to build stable and fulfilling careers. I have seen firsthand how quality vocational training can empower individuals, boost industries, and contribute to economic growth. What drives me the most is the potential to create real, lasting change

yet it often lacks the recognition and support it deserves. STRIPES offers a unique opportunity to elevate T-VET education, foster meaningful industry partnerships, and create sustainable career pathways. Being part of a project that directly empowers youth and strengthens economic growth made this an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

03

What key improvements or transformations would you like to see in Lebanon's T-VET system?

Wael: There are three key transformations we would like to see in Lebanon's T-VET landscape. First, a national, clear and communicated T-VET strategy that is well-integrated with labor market needs and includes a strong private sector engagement component. Second, greater inclusivity and accessibility, ensuring that women, minorities, people with disabilities, and marginalized youth have equitable access to quality training and job placement. Third, digitalization and innovation, embedding digital skills and emerging technologies into all vocational tracks to keep pace with global trends and unlock remote employment opportunities. Finally, we believe there is a critical need to shift the perception of T-VET. It's time to change the outdated narrative that vocational education is second-tier or only for those not suited for academic paths. T-VET should be seen as a respected, dynamic, and future-oriented career path with endless opportunities. At CIS College, we are actively working to challenge these perceptions and promote T-VET as a base for economic growth and social development in Lebanon.

Ali: Lebanon's T-VET system has immense potential, but several key improvements are needed to make it more effective and aligned with market demands. First,

stronger partnerships between T-VET institutions and the private sector are essential to ensure that training programs equip students with the skills that employers need. Second, shifting societal perceptions of T-VET is crucial – vocational education should be seen as a valuable and respected career path, not just a fallback option. Additionally, modernizing curricula, integrating digital skills, and

enhancing career guidance services can better prepare students for the evolving job market. Finally, improving access to T-VET, especially for marginalized groups, will ensure that more youth can benefit from practical, employment-oriented education. These changes can transform T-VET into a powerful driver of economic growth and social mobility in Lebanon.



We also spoke with two European partners in the STRIPES project, Colette Gerards, Project Finance Manager at CIS-VU and Dr. Gregor Cerinšek, Head of the Department for Applied Social Science Research at IRI UL, who shared what drives their involvement and how collaboration with T-VET institutions in Lebanon enriches higher education in Europe. Their perspectives underscore the power of solidarity, shared learning, and the mutual value of bridging vocational and academic education to build more resilient, inclusive futures—both in Lebanon and across Europe.



Colette Gerards,
Project Finance
Manager at CIS-VU



01

What is your motivation to be part of the STRIPES project?

Colette: My motivation comes from a strong belief in the power of youth as

changemakers, and a commitment to building a future rooted in equity, education, and personal growth. The STRIPES project represents a unique opportunity to collaborate with like-minded partners and create meaningful pathways for young people in Lebanon—including those who have been historically marginalized or underserved. By contributing to this initiative, I hope to help open doors to learning and leadership, and support the kind of transformative change communities need.

A more technical/personal motivation lies in the fact that I have much experience with the Erasmus+ programme and the

CBHE projects group in particular and therefore enjoy expanding this into the T-VET programme.



Dr. Gregor Cerinšek,
Head of the Department
for Applied Social Science
Research at IRI UL



Gregor: Being part of the STRIPES project means much more to me than professional engagement. It is about contributing and standing in solidarity with our Lebanese partners and friends during challenging times of crisis. The opportunity to give, even in small, “virtual” ways to building resilience within their institutions and communities is what truly motivates me.

02

What is the value of working with T-VET institutions in Lebanon for higher education in Europe?

Colette: I think the role and potential role of T-VET is underestimated and that HE can learn important lessons from T-VET’s practical, hands-on approach to learning. T-VET institutions are connected to real-world skills, industry needs, and the day-to-day realities of the job market. That focus on applied learning, adaptability,

and employability is something higher education can benefit from—especially when it comes to preparing students for life beyond the classroom. T-VET also tends to work more closely with local communities and employers, which creates strong feedback loops and a more responsive, relevant learning experience.

I also think there is much potential for shared learning since HE can offer valuable academic resources, updated curricula, and research insights that help strengthen the quality of technical and vocational training. At the same time, partnerships like STRIPES can help bridge the gap between theory and practice—opening up new learning pathways, improving job readiness, and raising the overall recognition of T-VET as a key part of the education landscape. For youth, especially in Lebanon, this kind of collaboration can mean more options, more confidence, and a clearer sense of future possibilities.

Gregor: Working with T-VET institutions in Lebanon through STRIPES offers a powerful contextual example of how education-industry collaboration can be implemented in real-life, especially under challenging socio-economic conditions. These experiences directly enrich our work at the Institute for Innovation and Development of the University of Ljubljana, where we are experimenting with similar models – such as the Real-Life Learning Lab – to connect higher education with societal needs and labour market realities. It is a two-way exchange of knowledge that strengthens innovation on both sides.

Changing Times for TVET in Lebanon

In a country facing economic challenges, vocational education is emerging not as an alternative, but as a vital solution. At STRIPES, we believe that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET) offers a practical, career-focused pathway to employment. The surge in enrollment numbers and job placements over recent years underscores a shifting trend—students and employers alike are recognizing the value of vocational education. Here’s how this transformation is unfolding:

Lebanon’s Vocational Education Boom: The Numbers Speak

Recent enrollment figures from leading institutions highlight an impressive growth trajectory:

CIS Enrollment Growth:

→ 2021–2022: 3,938 students across 13 branches.

→ 2024–2025: 6,719 students across 18 branches—a 71% increase.

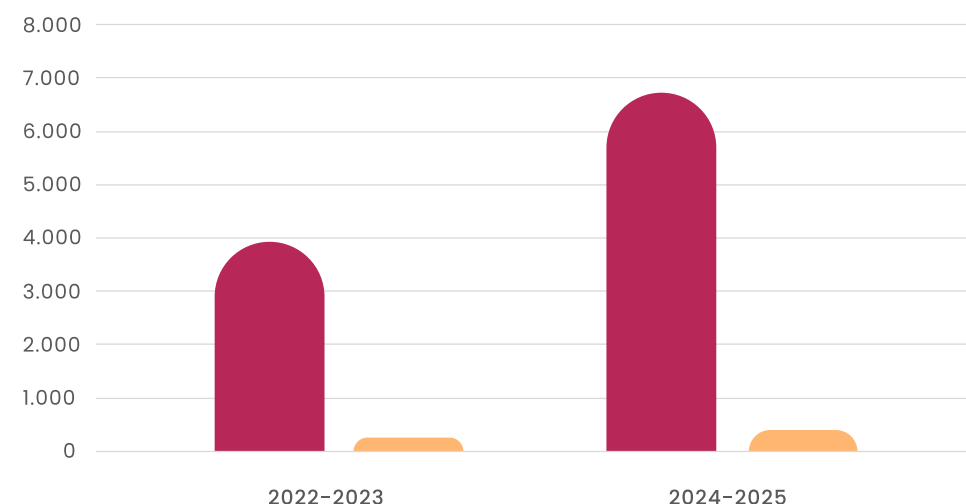
INMAA Enrollment Growth:

→ 2022–2023: 248 students.

→ 2024–2025: 390 students—an increase of 57%.

Vocational Students enrollment numbers

■ CIS Enrollment
■ INMAA Enrollment



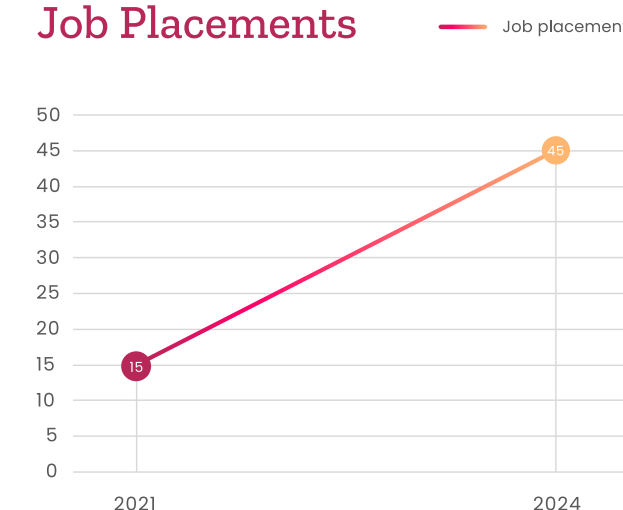
Employment Growth (IRADA Khoubourat HR Program Job Placements for T-VET Graduates):

→ 2021: 15 job placements.

→ 2024: 45 job placements, tripling in just four years.

These numbers confirm that more students are choosing vocational education and that employers are increasingly tapping into this skilled workforce.

Job Placements



Why More Students Are Choosing Vocational Education

Several reasons behind the rising popularity of vocational training:

→ Practical & Job-Ready Skills:

Employers now seek candidates with hands-on experience and industry-specific skills. T-VET programs equip students with the practical know-how that traditional academic courses may not provide.

→ **Faster Entry into the Workforce:** With shorter training programs, vocational students can enter the job market more quickly than those pursuing longer university degrees.

→ **Affordability & Accessibility:** As tuition fees continue to rise at universities, vocational education offers a cost-effective alternative for families seeking quality education.

→ **Evolving Perceptions:** Once considered a “second choice,” vocational careers are now proving to be a strong foundation for professional success, with many graduates securing stable jobs and even outperforming their university-educated peers in certain sectors.

Vocational Graduates Are Finding Jobs—And That’s Just the Beginning

The employment statistics speak volumes about the value of vocational training:

In 2021, based on IRADA Khoubourat HR Program’s achievement record, only 15 vocational students secured job placements. By 2024, that number had tripled to 45.

“We’ve seen a shift in how companies hire. More businesses now actively seek vocational graduates because they have the skills needed for the job from day one,”

says Ahmad Dahrouj, the project manager at the IRADA Khoubourat HR Program.

While this progress is promising, continued efforts are needed to ensure that every vocational student is given the opportunity to succeed in the labor market.

How STRIPES is Supporting Vocational Education & Employability

STRIPES is committed to transforming vocational education in Lebanon by enhancing training quality, strengthening institutional capacity, and improving student employability. Our approach focuses on:

→ Building Stronger T-VET Institutions – Developing the institutional and organizational capacity needed for STRIPES vocational training centers to thrive, ensuring they can provide high-quality education.

→ Enhancing Training for Employability – Strengthening the operational capacity of vocational centers by offering training in employability skills, curriculum development for future labor market needs, and effective internship coordination, mentoring, and coaching.

→ Establishing Cutting-Edge Vocational Training Centers – Setting up two physical STRIPES centers in Lebanon equipped with the latest tools for inclusive digitization, ensuring students receive hands-on, industry-relevant training.

→ Leveraging Digital Solutions for

Workforce Integration – Providing training for course digitization and developing an online STRIPES platform to connect T-VET graduates with employers, aiming for scalability and long-term impact.

Through these initiatives, STRIPES is creating a sustainable, future-ready vocational education system that equips students with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities they need to thrive in the evolving job market.

The Road Ahead: A Future Built on Skills

Vocational education is no longer seen as an alternative—it is the cornerstone of economic recovery and workforce development in Lebanon. With student enrollments rising and employers increasingly valuing vocational graduates, the nation stands at a pivotal moment of transformation.

At STRIPES, we are committed to this vision of a future where vocational skills pave the way to success. Stay tuned to STRIPES initiatives and be a part of this exciting journey towards a brighter future.



Success Stories



Mahassen Builds a Career in Healthcare After TVET Training

Mahassen, a graduate of the Healthcare Assistant programme at INMAA Association, is now working at Andalus School in Bekaa. Her transition from vocational training to employment highlights the role of T-VET in supporting access to the job market.

Her path counters common assumptions about vocational education, showing that it can lead to stable and meaningful employment. Mahassen is now preparing for her next step—training to become a registered nurse.

Aya Applies Beauty Training Abroad After TVET Graduation

Aya, a graduate of the Beauty Center at CIS, has used her vocational training to build a career in skincare. After completing her studies in Lebanon, she secured a job in Saudi Arabia, applying her skills in a new professional context.

Her experience reflects the opportunities that vocational education can offer, both within Lebanon and internationally. Aya's path highlights how targeted training can support employment across borders.



Education Amid Crisis - CIS College



The ongoing conflict in Lebanon has led to a dire humanitarian crisis, significantly affecting the country's most vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). As violence escalates, thousands of families are forced to flee their homes, resulting in an influx of IDPs seeking shelter and basic necessities. This precarious situation not only disrupts the lives of these individuals but also places an immense strain on the country's education system, particularly in the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (T-VET).

While food, shelter, and WASH have received immediate attention, education for displaced students has not been prioritized to the same extent. The lack of resources for educational initiatives threatens the future of thousands of displaced children and youth, who are at risk of falling behind academically or dropping out of school entirely. T-VET education has always fell behind among the priorities of educational support initiatives in Lebanon and has always received little governmental support. For these students, education represents not only a path to personal development but also a vital means of stability and hope amid the turbulence caused by conflict.

Many displaced families lack the means to support their children's continued schooling. Schools and T-VET Institutes, that remain operational are overwhelmed and under-resourced, lacking adequate facilities, teaching materials, and trained staff to accommodate the influx of displaced students. The families fled their houses with the bare minimum of belongings. Many of which their houses have already been destroyed and have nowhere to resort to, leaving them regardless of the projected period of the conflict, helpless, financially unstable and lost. The urgent need for funding to quickly respond to this issue is critical. Without intervention, Lebanon risks a generation of children growing up without access to formal education, which could have long-lasting repercussions on the country's stability and economic resilience. The displaced population which composes a huge percentage of the TVET students, will not be able to sustain an academic year regardless of what the future holds without initiatives focused on alleviating the burden that comes with receiving proper education.

Education in Lebanon has long been a critical pathway for youth to gain skills and improve their livelihoods. VET institutions, which play a vital role in equipping young people with practical skills and competencies, are facing unprecedented challenges. With resources stretched thin and the number of students fluctuating due to the crisis, the continuity of quality education is at risk. Many IDP students may find themselves unable to access vocational training opportunities, which could hinder their chances of building a stable future in a country grappling with economic uncertainty.

In response to this urgent crisis, CIS College is actively working to mitigate the negative impacts of the conflict on education and support IDPs. The college has opened its doors to host displaced individuals, providing them with a safe environment amidst the attacks. To address the immediate needs of these families, CIS College welcomed partner NGOs emergency response initiatives to secure hot meals, food, and clean water, ensuring that basic necessities are met while they navigate this challenging period.

Moreover, CIS College is taking proactive steps to safeguard the educational future of IDPs by drafting concept notes and reaching out to potential donors. The institution is dedicated to securing education funds specifically aimed at supporting displaced students, enabling them to continue their studies and participate in vocational training programs. This initiative not only aims to save the school year for these students but also seeks to provide them with essential skills that can lead to sustainable livelihoods in the long term.

Through its multifaceted approach, CIS College demonstrates a commitment to the resilience of both its students and the broader community. By addressing immediate needs and advocating for educational funding, the college plays a pivotal role in fostering hope and stability amidst the chaos. The path forward for Lebanon's youth lies in education, and with dedicated efforts from institutions like CIS College, there is potential for brighter futures even in the darkest of times.



STRIPES Project Timeline

FEBRUARY 2024

Kick-off meeting

The three-day kick-off consortium meeting of the STRIPES project was held remotely during the third week of February 2024.

MAY 2024

Inception phase completed

The Inception Phase (M1-6) is completed including a needs assessment of the institutional capacity regarding work-based learning.

JUNE 2024

Second Consortium Meeting in Amsterdam

The consortium meets for the second time in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in June 2024.

JANUARY 2025

Official opening of STRIPES Center

The first STRIPES Center officially opened its doors, marking the beginning of its operations in a new physical space.

FEBRUARY 2025

Leadership Development Workshop

STRIPES Leadership Development Workshop held in Istanbul to empower center staff and strengthen T-VET graduates' job readiness through leadership training, collaboration tools, and change management strategies.

JUNE 2025

1st STRIPES Newsletter published

Launch of the first STRIPES newsletter, sharing project updates, insights, and success stories from the field.

STRIPES

Project Partners:

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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Project reference number: 101129181



Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam – Centre for International Cooperation – CIS VU (The Netherlands)

The VU Centre for International Cooperation (CIS) is VU Amsterdam's central hub for international cooperation since 1955. Together with partners globally, CIS coordinates programmes and projects in capacity sharing, education, research and outreach to create value from knowledge, contributing to the sustainable future of planet and people.



Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana – IRI UL (Slovenia)

IRI UL believes innovation stems from uniting diverse perspectives in R&D, project management, counseling, and education, fostering a collaborative, creative environment across multiple disciplines.



CIS College (Lebanon)

CIS College, a leader in Lebanon's vocational education since 1991, serves over 30,000 students across 26 branches. Offering diverse programs and collaborating with NGOs, CIS College links graduates to the job market.



Berytech (Associated Partner, Lebanon)

Berytech fosters a dynamic ecosystem for entrepreneurs in Lebanon, supporting startups and SMEs in technology and innovation. It connects stakeholders, influences policy, and aims to create jobs in the region.



Development & Regeneration Association – INMAA (Lebanon)

INMAA is a Lebanese NGO focusing on healthcare, education, emergency response, and food security. It operates four healthcare facilities, a school, and extends services including vocational training and psychosocial support, prioritizing marginalized groups and individuals with disabilities.



Federation of Businessmen for Support and Development – IRADA (Lebanon)

IRADA, established in 2013, represents 250 Lebanese businesses across sectors, fostering community development through programs like IRADA Khoubourat HR Program, Taalam, and Tafawwaq, focusing on job matching and career support at no cost.





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