

**Lebanon's Cultural and
Creative Industries:
How to Thrive in an
Ailing Economy?**

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Lebanon's Cultural and Creative Industries: How to Thrive in an Ailing Economy?

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Executive Summary

Lebanon's Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs)—ranging from media and performing arts to publishing, architecture, and design—have historically contributed significantly to national identity, economic growth, and social cohesion. Accounting for up to 5% of GDP and employing tens of thousands, CCIs are vital to Lebanon's socio-economic fabric. However, the sector is now under severe stress due to compounded economic collapse, political instability, and absence of coherent cultural policy.

Key Challenges

- **Financial and Institutional Weaknesses:** The sector faces high taxation, lack of subsidies, and minimal public investment. Fragmented governance has left CCIs without a clear legal framework, structured support, or social protections for artists.
- **Brain Drain and Talent Flight:** Creative professionals are leaving Lebanon in large numbers, contributing to a weakening of local cultural production and loss of regional leadership.
- **Decline in Cultural Tourism and Events:** Once a regional hub for festivals and international performances, Lebanon now struggles to attract global acts and audiences due to security concerns, bureaucratic barriers, and prohibitive costs.
- **Underdeveloped Infrastructure:** Museums, publishing houses, and creative spaces suffer from lack of funding, logistical access, and modern technologies—especially in AI and digital transformation.
- **Lack of Data and Cultural Strategy:** Policymaking is hindered by the absence of reliable statistics and a central authority to coordinate sectoral planning.

Opportunities and Strategic Recommendations

- **Establish a National Authority for CCIs** to centralize governance, develop cultural policy, and coordinate inter-ministerial efforts.
- **Promote Festivals and Cultural Tourism** by extending seasons, reducing taxation, and facilitating public-private funding partnerships.
- **Support Artists' Rights and Job Security** through social protections, tax exemptions, and international mobility frameworks.
- **Advance Digital Transformation** via AI training, tech grants, and university collaborations.

- **Expand Education and Vocational Pathways** in cultural management, media, design, and tourism.
- **Strengthen International and Regional Collaboration**, especially with GCC countries and European partners, to tap into funding, co-productions, and cultural exchanges.
- **Upgrade Public Infrastructure** and ensure greater accessibility to cultural sites, especially through improved transportation and logistical support.

Despite its decline, Lebanon's cultural sector retains immense potential. Targeted policy interventions, regional partnerships, and digital modernization can help reposition CCIs as a dynamic force in Lebanon's economic recovery and global cultural footprint. A revitalized CCI ecosystem will not only preserve Lebanon's rich artistic legacy but also generate inclusive economic growth and youth employment in a country urgently in need of both.

Introduction

Lebanon's Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) represent a crucial sector with the potential to drive economic growth, cultural resilience, and international collaboration. Encompassing a diverse range of fields—including media, publishing, performing arts, festivals, architecture, design, music, cinema, jewelry, and digital creative industries—CCIs have historically played a vital role in shaping Lebanon's cultural identity and contributing to its GDP.

The economic contribution of CCIs in Lebanon is substantial. The sector accounted for approximately 4.75% to 5% of the country's GDP, generating around \$1 billion USD in annual revenue from formally recorded activities between 2016¹ and 2019². In terms of employment, CCIs provide job opportunities for approximately 13,000 individuals in artistic professions. However, broader estimates suggest that up to 75,000 people, or 4.5% of the active workforce, are engaged in creative and cultural work³.

Beyond economic contributions, CCIs play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and regional development. Unlike other economic sectors, creative industries enable artists and entrepreneurs to operate from diverse locations, bridging the gap between urban and rural areas. This decentralization is particularly important in Lebanon, where opportunities outside of major cities remain limited.

¹
<https://www.seenplatform.com/ar/KnowledgePortal/Details/1da15bc2-5272-4c4f-2441-08dbc4a3f49d>

²
<https://institutdesfinances.gov.lb/sites/default/files/2024-06/ICC-Résumé-Exécutif-Jul21-EN.pdf>

³
<https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Lebanon-Final-Report-CRP.pdf>

Furthermore, CCIs encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, allowing individuals to leverage digital technologies and global markets to establish sustainable careers. By recognizing and supporting the economic and social value of CCIs, Lebanon can harness its creative talent to drive long-term economic resilience and cultural sustainability.

However, recent years have seen a sharp decline in investment, production, and market sustainability, largely due to economic instability, financial constraints, and a lack of strategic policy interventions. Lebanese CCIs face major hurdles, including brain drain, weak government support, high taxation, and fragmented industry networks. The country's cultural tourism sector has declined, while the creative workforce struggles with limited market opportunities and an exodus of talent to regional and global markets. At the same time, technological innovation, digitalization, and international collaborations offer pathways to revitalization. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive national strategy that enhances institutional coordination, financial incentives, and legal protections for creative professionals.

By leveraging regional and international partnerships, fostering entrepreneurship, and modernizing digital infrastructure, Lebanon's CCIs can regain their competitive edge and contribute meaningfully to economic recovery. This policy paper, based on a closed expert roundtable discussion, key informant interviews, and secondary data analysis, explores the current state of CCIs in Lebanon, identifies key challenges, and proposes actionable policy recommendations to revitalize the sector. The goal is to empower policymakers, cultural stakeholders, and international partners to take concrete steps in fostering a thriving, resilient, and globally integrated creative sector in Lebanon.

Key Challenges for Cultural Industries

Lebanon's CCIs have long been a source of artistic excellence and economic opportunity. However, each creative sub-sector faces unique challenges that threaten its sustainability and ability to compete regionally and globally.

Entertainment and Media: A Fading Spotlight or a Sector Poised for Revival?

Findings from the LCPS expert roundtable discussion highlighted several pressing challenges facing CCIs in Lebanon, particularly in

the entertainment and media sector. One of the primary concerns is the financial sustainability of creative enterprises, which had already been deteriorating before the onset of the country's economic crisis in 2019. As early as 2017, a decline in advertising expenditures—from \$200 million to \$180 million annually—indicated deeper financial instability. Because many creative industries rely on advertising revenue and sponsorships to fund their operations, this reduction severely impacted their ability to sustain themselves. The economic downturn further exacerbated the problem, limiting financial resources available for cultural production and artistic endeavors.

Another major challenge is the ongoing brain drain, which has seen a significant number of talented professionals leaving Lebanon in search of better opportunities abroad. Many of the country's top executives and creative talents, once integral to Lebanon's entertainment sector, have now relocated to countries such as the United States and various parts of Europe. This exodus of skilled professionals not only weakens the local industry but also hinders the potential for innovation and international competitiveness.

The loss of talent means that many of the most successful cultural and entertainment events in the region—particularly in cities like Dubai and Riyadh—are now being led by Lebanese professionals who have migrated, rather than being developed within Lebanon itself. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018, Lebanon ranked 105th out of 137 countries in overall competitiveness. For talent competitiveness, the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) 2018 by INSEAD placed Lebanon at 60th position out of 119 countries⁴.

The high costs associated with cultural production and event management present yet another obstacle. Roundtable participants described the significant financial burden required to organize large-scale events, particularly in the music and performing arts sectors. Hosting a major cultural production can require substantial upfront investment, with fees for musicians and dancers alone reaching tens of thousands of dollars. While such events are essential for showcasing Lebanon's rich cultural heritage and artistic talent, the financial risks are immense. In the absence of strong institutional support and funding mechanisms, many cultural entrepreneurs and organizers face the difficult choice of either losing money on major productions or seeking opportunities abroad.

⁴
[jsf.org+1insead.edu+1](https://www.jsf.org+1insead.edu+1)

Local Festivals, Tourism, and Cultural Activities: Lebanon's Creative Pulse

Lebanon's cultural festivals and tourism sector has long been a driving force for economic growth and cultural exchange. However, in recent years, the role of Lebanese artists in major cultural events has diminished, with local talent facing fewer structured opportunities to perform alongside international acts. In the past, festivals served as a platform to showcase local talent alongside international artists, fostering both cultural exchange and national identity. However, due to political instability, security concerns, and financial constraints, this emphasis on local artists has weakened. The absence of structured opportunities for Lebanese creatives to perform on an international stage has made it increasingly difficult to promote the country's rich artistic heritage.

Another critical issue is the decline of cultural tourism. Festivals and cultural events once attracted international visitors, who planned their trips around these experiences, bringing revenue to local businesses and strengthening the tourism sector. However, Lebanon has struggled to maintain its reputation as a cultural destination due to instability and lack of government support. The government is losing significant economic opportunities, as potential visitors now seek cultural experiences in other regional hubs.

Financial and regulatory burdens further exacerbate these challenges, making it increasingly difficult to sustain large-scale cultural events. High taxation on international performances and ticket sales places a significant financial strain on festival organizers. Regulations require prepayment of taxes, amounting to nearly 37% of total budgets, before obtaining necessary permits. This upfront cost discourages investment in international acts, further diminishing Lebanon's appeal as a cultural hub. As other countries in the region continue to invest heavily in their cultural industries, Lebanon risks falling further behind, losing not only its creative talent but also its historical position as a leader in Middle Eastern cultural production.

The Decline of Lebanon's Festivals: What's Holding Them Back?

Lebanon's artistic and festival sectors face significant structural and financial challenges, with taxation and government policy playing central roles in shaping the industry's struggles. One of the main concerns is the 10% tax imposed on foreign artists, which was introduced to support the Unified Devotional Fund for Artists. This

fund provides financial assistance, health insurance, and pensions for Lebanese artists, who often lack social security and financial stability.

Despite its importance, this tax has been subject to calls for removal, with some arguing that it deters international artists from performing in Lebanon. However, proponents stress that this tax is among the lowest in the world, significantly less than the 30% or more imposed in other countries. The enforcement of this tax is also inconsistent, as many event organizers underreport artist earnings to avoid full payment. For instance, if an international performer is paid \$300,000, organizers may declare only \$170,000 to the fund to reduce tax liabilities. This lack of transparency further weakens the effectiveness of the fund, leading to financial instability for local artists.

In addition to the tax on artists, festival organizers and event promoters face multiple layers of taxation, which significantly increase the financial burden of hosting cultural events. Apart from the 10% artist tax, additional levies include an income tax on foreign performers, a 7.5% tax on international contracts (by 2023), and an 8% services tax. This complex taxation system discourages investment in Lebanon's festival industry, making it increasingly difficult for promoters to sustain operations. Many have stopped organizing events altogether, as the cost of taxation and regulatory hurdles outweigh potential profits.

A related issue is corruption and bureaucratic obstacles in contract enforcement. There have been attempts to introduce stricter oversight mechanisms, including requiring customs officials to verify artist contracts before performances. This disparity fuels frustration within the artistic community, as foreign artists benefit from Lebanon's market without contributing their fair share to the local creative ecosystem.

Beyond taxation, festivals play a crucial economic, social, and cultural role in Lebanon that extends far beyond simply hosting performances. Festivals revitalize entire regions, fostering economic development, tourism, and cultural education. In some areas, the presence of festivals has led to the establishment of conservatories, dance schools, and photography programs, creating long-term educational opportunities. Festivals also contribute to heritage preservation, as seen in Beiteddine, where festival organizers have taken on the responsibility of restoring and maintaining the historic palace. Meanwhile, in countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, governments actively incentivize cultural productions by offering tax breaks and financial support, further positioning them as more attractive locations for international events.

Another major issue affecting Lebanon's festival sector is the lack of a clear classification system for festivals, which has led to politicization and unequal distribution of state funding. Historically, Lebanon's most renowned festivals—such as Baalbek, Beiteddine, and Byblos—received targeted government support due to their international prominence and contribution to cultural tourism. However, recent funding practices have diluted resources across a growing number of festivals, many of which are relatively new and lack the same cultural significance. This has resulted in a situation where a five-year-old festival receives the same level of state support as a 70-year-old international festival, undermining Lebanon's cultural legacy. Some regions have politically influenced the designation of 'international festival' status to gain access to state funding, even when these festivals lack the required impact or audience reach.

This misallocation of funding has had serious repercussions. Established festivals that once brought global artists to Lebanon and contributed to tourism now struggle to maintain their standards due to reduced financial backing. Event organizers argue that the government should set minimum eligibility criteria for festivals to receive international status and funding, such as requiring at least 10 years of operation before a festival can qualify for state support. Without such measures, Lebanon risks losing the prestige of its long-standing cultural institutions, which have historically positioned the country as a creative and artistic leader in the Middle East.

Another major obstacle is the absence of high-spending international tourists, particularly Gulf Arab visitors, who previously played a crucial role in supporting Lebanon's cultural economy. The Lebanese diaspora and domestic tourists still sustain some level of cultural activity, but they cannot compensate for the financial impact of lost Gulf tourism. The combination of security concerns, travel bans, and economic instability means that even if major festivals and concerts were organized, the target audience for these events—regional tourists—would not be able to attend. The loss of Gulf tourists has significantly reduced the profitability of Lebanon's hospitality, entertainment, and cultural sectors, making it even harder to justify large-scale festival investments.

The overarching problem remains the absence of a coordinated cultural policy that balances artist protection, taxation, festival funding, and Lebanon's role in the regional cultural economy. The current fragmented system discourages investment, burdens event

organizers, and weakens the country's competitiveness in the international cultural scene.

Graphic Design and Publishing: Sustaining Creativity in an Unstable Economy

Lebanon's graphic design, publishing, and cultural preservation sectors are facing mounting challenges that threaten their sustainability and growth. While there has been a notable increase in demand for graphic designers, many professionals find themselves working for international clients rather than contributing to Lebanon's local creative ecosystem. The shift toward remote work and online employment has allowed Lebanese designers to sustain their careers, but it also reflects the broader issue of talent export rather than domestic industry growth. The country's economic challenges, coupled with the lack of structured support for creative professionals, have limited the ability of these industries to thrive locally.

The economic crisis continues to pose a major challenge for cultural practitioners across various sectors. Currency devaluation, banking restrictions, and the shift toward a cash-based economy have significantly altered business operations. Many service providers now demand payments in cash and in US dollars, making it difficult for cultural institutions and creative businesses to sustain long-term partnerships. This financial strain has also impacted Lebanon's ability to host international cultural figures, as high travel costs and security concerns discourage international jurors and professionals from participating in local initiatives. This has weakened the country's cultural exchange and limited opportunities for international exposure.

A critical issue raised by experts is the lack of governmental support and policy frameworks for CCIs. Unlike many other countries where cultural institutions receive state-backed funding and policy-driven support, Lebanon's creative sector relies almost entirely on private and international funding. However, external funding often comes with political and policy-based restrictions, limiting artistic freedom and shaping cultural programming in ways that may not always align with local needs. Without a structured cultural policy, Lebanon's creative industries remain vulnerable to shifting donor priorities and lack the institutional stability needed to flourish.

Cultural Spaces and Cultural Consumption/Participation

Many cultural spaces in Lebanon lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to operate effectively, making audience engagement

increasingly difficult. The economic crisis and political instability have led potential audiences to prioritize basic needs over cultural activities, affecting attendance at both physical and virtual events. While cultural initiatives continue to emerge, there remains a lack of widespread appreciation for the role of arts and culture in societal development. Many still perceive cultural engagement as a luxury rather than a necessity, further weakening public investment in the sector.

Another key challenge is the fragmentation within Lebanon's cultural and creative industries. Many artists, cultural organizations, and creative enterprises operate in isolation, often due to budget constraints and limited networking opportunities. While some collaborations do occur, they are usually short-term and lack the structural support needed for sustained partnerships. This lack of cooperation hampers joint projects, resource-sharing, and collective industry growth. Additionally, restricted funding prevents participation in regional and international cultural exchanges, which are crucial for fostering innovation, expanding market reach, and strengthening Lebanon's position in the global creative economy.

In addition, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the sector presents both opportunities and challenges. Despite its potential to revolutionize creative processes, enhance marketing strategies, and streamline operations, the adoption of AI in Lebanon's cultural industries remains limited due to economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of technical expertise. There is also a general lack of awareness or understanding of how AI can be beneficial in the arts, leading to resistance or slow adoption. Without the necessary investments in digital transformation and capacity-building, Lebanon's creative industries risk falling further behind in an increasingly tech-driven global landscape.

The Sad Truth ... A Decline in Media Production and Television

Lebanon once stood as a regional leader in media production, television, and large-scale cultural events. This status was not only due to the country's exceptional talent but also because of its strong infrastructure and cost-effectiveness. Even today, many institutions in the Gulf region look to Lebanon for cultural expertise, seeking partnerships to help launch their own initiatives. However, Lebanon has lost much of its competitive positioning due to persistent economic and political instability, leading to a severe loss of confidence in the country. As a result, international production

companies, media firms, and investors have redirected their attention elsewhere, further exacerbating the brain drain as Lebanese talent follows job opportunities abroad.

The lack of political stability and security in Lebanon remains the overarching issue affecting these industries. Without a stable political and economic environment, no sector—including media production and live events—can function properly or attract investment. This instability has led to the relocation of major media and production companies, such as MBC moving its studios from Lebanon to Riyadh, and the departure of several Lebanese production houses to more secure markets. However, despite these challenges, there is still strong talent within Lebanon, which continues to attract production work from international companies. The cost-effectiveness and skill level of Lebanese professionals make it possible for some businesses to retain at least part of their operations in Beirut, despite the difficult conditions.

A major obstacle facing these subsectors, in addition to economic and security crises, is the lack of a clear and coordinated government vision for them. While CCIs are often grouped together under a single category, industries such as media and the arts operate under distinct business models and require different types of support. Instead of fostering growth, the government has imposed unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, taxation policies, and regulations that have hindered the sector rather than enabling it. There is no structured policy approach to incentivizing investment, reducing financial barriers, or facilitating international collaborations.

Publishing and Printing: Another Struggling Industry

The publishing sector in Lebanon faces severe challenges, many of which, again, stem from both political instability and economic decline. While publishing plays a critical role within CCIs—serving as an intermediary for various cultural expressions—the sector has suffered from a lack of official recognition and support within Lebanon. Publishers in the country rely almost entirely on exporting books and printed works to international markets, particularly within the Arab world.

However, political restrictions and trade barriers have severely disrupted this process, with book shipments to the region now facing outright bans. Even when attempting to reroute shipments through third countries, Lebanese publishers encounter additional restrictions, effectively cutting off a major revenue stream. The

publishing sector, which should have been resilient given its external market orientation, has instead suffered from Lebanon's deteriorating political relationships, leading to a near-total absence from the regional and international publishing industry.

In addition to trade restrictions, Lebanon's economic collapse has further eroded the publishing and printing industries. The rising costs of importing raw materials, coupled with banking restrictions and a cash-driven economy, have made it increasingly difficult for publishers to sustain operations. Investments in new printing technologies or equipment are nearly impossible, while institutions abroad are rapidly modernizing with substantial resources. Today, regional competitors have far surpassed the country in terms of technological advancements, infrastructure, and market expansion. The publishing sector has effectively lost its ability to compete, pushing many businesses and professionals to relocate or invest abroad rather than in Lebanon. The shift toward digital platforms has provided some opportunities, but it has not been enough to offset the sector's overall decline.

Despite these challenges, there remains a strong cultural and historical commitment to publishing in Lebanon. Many institutions and professionals continue to operate within the country, even as they seek investments and market opportunities abroad. The cultural legacy of Lebanon's publishing industry, as well as its role in intellectual and literary production, remains significant. However, without major policy reforms—such as lifting trade restrictions, providing financial incentives, and modernizing infrastructure—the sector risks further marginalization.

Lebanon's Cultural Policy Gap: What's Stalling Progress for CCIs?

One of the most fundamental challenges facing Lebanon's CCIs is the absence of a clear definition and structured policy framework. Unlike many other countries, Lebanon does not have an official cultural policy that defines what constitutes CCIs or how they should be supported. This lack of a legal and institutional framework leads to fragmentation in governance, with multiple ministries handling different aspects of the sector. For example, taxation issues fall under the Ministry of Finance, social security concerns under the Ministry of Social Affairs, and certain cultural initiatives under the Ministry of Culture. Without a centralized cultural authority, CCIs operate in an uncoordinated policy environment, making it difficult for artists, institutions, and businesses to access necessary support.

In countries with structured cultural policies, governments provide tax exemptions and financial incentives for CCIs, facilitating their growth. France, for instance, has a 'cultural exemption' system that allows artists and cultural enterprises to benefit from tax reductions, import exemptions on materials needed for production, and specialized social security schemes.

Lebanon lacks such measures, leaving cultural practitioners without defined legal rights regarding taxation, employment benefits, and medical coverage. There is no official recognition of an 'artist status,' meaning creatives have no designated system through which they can claim social protections or financial benefits. This lack of recognition leaves many professionals in precarious employment conditions, often working informally without contracts, insurance, or financial security.

Another critical issue is the lack of official data and statistics on CCIs. Without clear figures on employment rates, economic contributions, or the sector's growth potential, it becomes difficult to advocate for policy changes or attract investment. The only available estimate—a 2019 report suggesting that culture contributes 5% to Lebanon's GDP—was based on approximate calculations rather than comprehensive research. This lack of reliable statistics weakens the sector's position when seeking funding from international donors, such as the European Union and UNESCO, as there is no concrete evidence to demonstrate its economic impact. Without robust data, Lebanese authorities themselves may not fully recognize the importance of CCIs to economic and social development, further limiting the sector's access to financial and policy support.

Preserving Lebanon's Heritage: The Struggles of Museums and Cultural Institutions

Lebanon has a diverse range of museums, with over 20 institutions across the country, each offering unique insights into Lebanon's history, culture, and natural heritage. This sector faces significant challenges, many of which stem from financial instability, understaffing, and structural limitations. Unlike larger institutions abroad, most Lebanese museums operate as small, nonprofit entities with minimal resources.

Many of these do not have dedicated staff for communication and outreach, making it difficult to promote exhibitions or attract visitors effectively. Likewise, few museums employ full-time grant writers or funding specialists, leaving directors and small teams to

handle financial sustainability alongside other responsibilities. This creates a vicious cycle—museums strive to remain active and relevant by organizing events and educational programs, yet they struggle to secure stable funding, preventing them from achieving long-term sustainability.

One of the main issues is that available funding opportunities are often not tailored to the needs of permanent, nonprofit institutions. Many grants focus on short-term, project-based initiatives, which, while valuable, do not address the core financial needs of museums or help them maintain their operations over time. This leads to a situation where museums can occasionally secure funding for temporary exhibitions or specific programs but lack the financial stability to ensure ongoing preservation, staffing, and infrastructure maintenance. Without structural support, many museums risk shutting down or reducing their activities, despite their crucial role in preserving Lebanon's cultural heritage.

Another major issue is limited accessibility and transportation, which has a direct impact on visitor engagement. Museums often rely on school visits and educational programs to promote cultural awareness among younger generations. However, Lebanon's lack of reliable public transportation makes it difficult for schools to arrange visits, significantly reducing the number of students who can benefit from these programs. The same issue affects domestic tourism, as many potential visitors from different regions cannot easily access museum sites. In a country already struggling with economic challenges, this further isolates museums and limits their ability to reach a broader audience.

Despite these obstacles, Lebanese museums continue to play a vital role in preserving national history and culture. However, without targeted policy support—such as dedicated funding structures for permanent institutions, improved infrastructure, and public transportation solutions—the sector will continue to face financial instability and accessibility barriers.

Architecture: Industry Decline

The field of architecture in Lebanon is facing a severe brain drain, as many architects leave the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This trend is fueled by economic instability, which has significantly impacted the construction sector—one of the first industries to suffer during financial downturns. With construction

projects halted or dramatically reduced, architects have little to no work in Lebanon, pushing them to seek accreditation and secure jobs overseas. The fact that some architecture programs, such as those accredited by Namm (National Architectural Accrediting Board), are attracting more students is seen as a pathway to migration, as graduates view this accreditation as a means to build careers abroad rather than remain in Lebanon.

Despite these difficulties, remote architectural work has seen some growth since COVID-19, as architects based in Lebanon take on international projects. However, this positive shift is hindered by severe infrastructure issues, particularly electricity shortages and unreliable internet access. Furthermore, while the lack of large-scale construction projects has led young architects to explore innovative materials and experimental design approaches, they struggle with funding shortages, lack of proper spaces for research, and ongoing infrastructure limitations.

The construction labor market is also in crisis, as skilled workers continue to leave Lebanon, leading to a decline in the overall quality of craftsmanship and construction work. This highlights the need for vocational training programs to improve the skills of the remaining workforce and ensure higher construction standards. However, the technical schools meant to provide this training are underfunded and lack proper educational programs, leaving a critical gap in construction industry labor needs.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Institutional Coordination and Governance for CCIs

A major issue highlighted in this policy paper is the absence of institutional coordination for CCIs in Lebanon. There is no central authority to regulate, support, or define the sector, leading to fragmented efforts and a lack of strategic vision.

Policy Actions

- Establish a national authority for CCIs to centralize support mechanisms, policy development, and statistical data collection for the sector. This body should coordinate with ministries of culture, tourism, economy, social affairs, and finance to ensure streamlined support for cultural industries.

- Develop a national cultural policy that clearly defines what falls under CCIs and outlines a vision for their development, including financial incentives, employment rights, and international partnerships.
- Create a 'one-stop shop' for CCIs where cultural actors can access information about funding opportunities, regulatory requirements, taxation, and social security benefits.

Enhancing Data Collection and Sectoral Planning

The absence of regular, reliable statistics on the cultural sector's contribution to Lebanon's economy makes it difficult to advocate for its development. Without data, policymakers struggle to measure the sector's growth or needs.

Policy Actions

- Conduct annual economic impact assessments of CCIs to track their contribution to GDP, employment, and tourism, using methodologies aligned with UNESCO's frameworks.
- Develop a public platform or database where cultural institutions, event organizers, and policymakers can access up-to-date statistics and trends on the sector.
- Encourage research partnerships between universities and CCI actors to collect, analyze, and publish data on creative industries' economic and social impact.

Promoting Festivals as Economic and Cultural Assets

Festivals play a crucial role in Lebanon's cultural identity and tourism sector, yet they suffer from high operational costs, lack of government support, and excessive taxation.

Policy Actions

- Extend the festival season beyond summer to distribute cultural events across the year, particularly in Beirut and coastal areas from September to March.
- Create a national events and tourism calendar that integrates cultural festivals, religious heritage sites, and creative industries, making it easier for domestic and international visitors to plan their trips.
- Reduce taxation on cultural events and international performers to attract global artists and reinvigorate Lebanon's festival scene. A tax

relief or partial subsidy for major cultural events could encourage organizers to host international-standard festivals.

- Facilitate funding mechanisms for festival organizers, including sponsorship incentives, public-private partnerships, and grants through cultural diplomacy initiatives with the EU and Arab world.

Supporting Artist Rights and Professionalization

Artists and cultural workers face unstable employment, lack of social security, and limited legal protections. Lebanon has not ratified UNESCO's 1980 Recommendation on the Status of the Artist, which provides a framework for improving working conditions in the sector.

Policy Actions

- Introduce social security and health insurance schemes for freelance artists and cultural professionals.
- Provide tax exemptions for cultural workers to encourage investment in artistic professions.
- Join UNESCO's framework on artists' rights to align Lebanon's policies with international best practices.
- Ease visa restrictions and international mobility constraints for Lebanese artists to access global markets and participate in international collaborations.

Encouraging Digital Transformation and AI Adoption in CCIs

Lebanese creative industries risk falling behind due to technological gaps, digital infrastructure weaknesses, and a lack of AI integration.

Policy Actions

- Develop AI training programs for cultural entrepreneurs in partnership with universities and tech companies to equip artists with skills to integrate AI into design, publishing, and media production.
- Create digital infrastructure grants to help cultural organizations upgrade their technology, transition to digital platforms, and use AI for marketing and content creation.
- Facilitate collaborations between cultural institutions and tech companies to promote the use of AI in music, publishing, film, and design.

Developing CCI Education and Vocational Training

Lebanon lacks formal educational pathways for cultural management, arts administration, and event planning, limiting young professionals' ability to enter the industry.

Policy Actions

- Introduce CCI-related courses in Lebanese universities at the MBA level and as elective courses for business, arts, and hospitality students.
- Develop vocational training programs for creative sectors such as media production, cultural tourism, publishing, and design.
- Promote apprenticeships and mentorship programs to help young artists and cultural workers gain practical industry experience.

Strengthening Regional and International Collaboration

Lebanese creative industries have the potential to integrate into Gulf, European, and regional cultural markets, but lack the institutional support to do so.

Policy Actions

- Expand bilateral cultural agreements with GCC countries, the EU, and international organizations to facilitate funding, exchange programs, and co-productions.
- Create a networking platform for Lebanese cultural professionals abroad to connect them with institutions in Lebanon, fostering investment and collaboration.
- Encourage cultural diplomacy initiatives by integrating Lebanese creative industries into international fairs, film festivals, and book expos.

Improving Public Infrastructure for Culture and Creative Activities

Public infrastructure challenges, including lack of transportation, high operational costs, and power outages, hinder cultural production and accessibility.

Policy Actions

- Expand public transportation options to cultural sites and festivals to boost domestic tourism.
- Develop co-working spaces and shared resources for cultural entrepreneurs to reduce operational costs.

- Encourage municipalities to support local cultural events through infrastructure development, tax incentives, and logistical support.

Thus, policy interventions should focus on incentivizing investment and reducing financial burdens on cultural institutions. Talent retention and development programs are critical, as Lebanon lacks structured initiatives to support creative professionals. Bilateral agreements with the EU and GCC countries could provide opportunities for funding, training, and cultural exchange programs, helping to bridge the gap in institutional capacity. Above all, the government must recognize that the value of CCIs extends beyond direct tax revenue—it drives employment, tourism, and economic activity, creating widespread benefits across multiple sectors.

While Lebanon faces significant challenges, opportunities exist in the GCC's expanding cultural sector. Gulf countries offer stability, financial resources, and a clear strategic vision for developing their creative industries. However, they lack local talent and established institutions, leading them to seek expertise from regional partners. Rather than approaching these opportunities on an individual basis, Lebanon's cultural institutions must develop the structure and scale to engage in institutional partnerships with GCC counterparts. Strengthening Lebanese institutions and positioning them as capable partners in cultural and media initiatives would open new avenues for collaboration, allowing Lebanon to reclaim its influence in the region's creative economy.

CCIs stand at a critical juncture, facing both immense challenges and untapped opportunities. While economic instability, political uncertainty, and weak institutional support continue to hinder the sector, the resilience and creativity of Lebanese cultural actors demonstrate that with the right interventions, CCIs can play a transformative role in economic recovery, social cohesion, and global cultural exchange. The future of CCIs in Lebanon depends on bold, coordinated, and forward-thinking policy measures that recognize the sector not only as a cultural asset, but as a driver of economic and social progress.



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