

## INTERVIEW WITH ROSE CARDARELLI, FOUNDER OF THE EDUCATION FOR ALL COALITION



*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon  
February 2022*

### EXCERPTS:

- “We are exploring the use of digital records and NFTs to facilitate digital records so refugees will have their school records in their possession for grade placement when they arrive in a new host country.”
- “When I was in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, after being in a classroom for a few hours, I realized the children were so happy; they were learning to write their names in English faster that I could have imagined. All of the sudden, several wrote a note to me: “I love Rose.” I still have that note and think of their smiles in spite of their circumstances.”

### Could you please describe where you currently work and what your responsibilities are?

I am the Founder and CEO of the Education for All Coalition (EFAC). It is an international development and relief services organization with a network of global stakeholders, organizations and individuals dedicated to creating education opportunities, bridging existing gaps and finding solutions to challenging education problems. Its programs are designed to improve the lives and potential of displaced and vulnerable children living in refugee camps, settlements, and marginal conditions around the world, and to help them become thriving global citizens so they can have an opportunity to achieve their potential in a complex world. Our practice areas include capacity building, training, educating, and resourcing programs. Our services address cognitive development, learning, literacy, social-emotional wellbeing, resilience building, healthy life habits, innovation and digital technology and environmental awareness. Our programs provide a network of international educators and experts and tailored curriculum for all grade levels in response to learning, achievement, transition, integration, and agility needs. Our strategies include direct engagement and a virtual community of practice responding to emergencies, disasters, and prolonged crisis.

### Box 1: Interview Series

**What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website?** The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

**Why a series of interviews?** Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

**What is the focus of this interview?** In this interview, Rose Cardarelli, Founder and CEO of the Education for All Coalition, discusses some of her experiences with digitalization in education. The interview is part of a series on that topic.

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Our goal is to strongly advocate in favor of education policies, plans and financing to meet the needs of displaced children through means of instruction, well-being, and social activities. EFAC is affiliated with the Department of Global Communications at the UN, a partner with the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum and the Innovation Academy at the UN. We support Rotary's Guiding Principles and seven areas of focus: Peace and Conflict Prevention/Resolution; Disease Prevention and Treatment; Water and Sanitation; Basic Education and Literacy; Economic and Community Development; and the Environment, in conjunction with the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

**What has been your experience in your organization about digitalization and education? What has worked well?**

EFAC programs are tailored according to the needs of the recipients. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and during travel restrictions, physical programs were difficult, so we had to resort to thumb drives and virtual programming. This is when we became partners with the Innovation Academy so we could help provide a free platform for NGOs around the world to place their programs and to also access courses. Prior to COVID travel restrictions, we provided resources, educators, education materials, training, relief support/services and consultation to organizations supporting refugees, migrants, and IDPs around the world. Some of our past initiatives include: support to the conflict-exposed trauma focused Little Child School in Jerusalem and for students at Bethlehem University in Israel; education and health resources for refugee children transitioning at the US/Mexico border with the La Posada Providencia and the United Methodist Church; education and health resources for the Kino Border Institute in Arizona affiliated with Diocese of Tuscan and the Jesuits; education and health consultation support to OXFAM and the International Refugee Congress in Turkey to contribute to the Global Framework on Education; education program resources with CARITAS in Greece; education collaboration with WAR Child in Lebanon; and educators, materials and staff training for governmental organizations in Jordan, Haiti, and Thailand.

At the Innovation Academy we are exploring the use of digital records and NFTs to facilitate digital records so refugees will have their school records in their possession for grade placement when they arrive in a new host country. We currently provide digital certificates for program completion and have the ability to construct past accomplishments. This also facilitates records for young adults who have acquired vocational skills and are seeking employment in their host country. We are currently working with Resilience, Inc., which is creating an app that will measure emotions through voice

recognition and provide a response grounded in social emotional learning and trauma support.

**What has been challenging?**

There has been tremendous progress in digital technology, but the challenges of inadequate funding, Wi-Fi, electricity, and device availability remains at the forefront. These issues exacerbate the fundamental problem of equity, accessibility, and equality for those that are already disenfranchised.

**What do you think more generally are the opportunities from digitalization for K12 education in the United States?**

During COVID when many students were attending classes virtually, it became clear that while students had access to devices, there were still limitations due to Wi-Fi accessibility in the US. I believe virtual classes are here to stay regardless of a pandemic or weather crisis. Academic infrastructures need to upgrade their facilities and capabilities to ensure digitization of education is possible in conjunction with in-person classrooms.

**And what do you see as the main challenges?**

I have seen time and time again well intentioned organizations and individuals who have offered temporary services to help a population in need. We are witnessing overwhelming crisis, conflict, and environmental issues. It is critical that sustainable digital systems be an integral part of a programming to ensure successful attainable results. There is also a need for a collaborative, predictable and equitable effort to share responsibility and resources so there is equity for all children.

**Do you know of other experiences that were innovative, and which may have inspired you?**

I have witnessed many youth led groups doing great work, such as the O-lab founded by Tania Rosas. They offer a set of digital tools such as a measuring and evaluation learning system for creating, managing and measuring social responsibility projects, a learning management system to create training, and a web and mobile app that can be used in remote areas. Or Thate Pan Hub, striving to provide computer literacy education to all students in Myanmar.

**Do you know of experiences that did not work so well and could provide lessons on what to avoid?**

While the need for digital technology is universal, the means to attain such conditions is fraught with inequities. One cannot take for granted that simply providing a device will always work...we must think in the forms of systems and access.

**Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?**

After a career as a U.S. Army officer with the Medical Service Corps, I transitioned to a senior position as a government civil servant and facilitated strategic security and educational programs for dignitaries from 33 countries. I later reflected on my education in health and service, and my global experiences and felt I was prepared to serve further as a humanitarian to those in need. I realized the world had become smaller in distance, the challenges had become greater and more complex and the only way to ensure stability was to ensure equity and access to basic human needs and rights. It was at that time that I conceived my first NGO to assist refugee children. That decision took me to Chios, Greece where I saw firsthand the plight of refugees.

What affected me the most were the children who just stared aimlessly and the mothers who ached for the basics of food, clothing, and medicine for their children. I saw the conditions that forced different genders, cultures, faiths, and circumstances to live together in cramped Conex boxes with no privacy. I learned of terminal medical conditions that were untreated and simple medical ailments with no relief. I witnessed that we had several generations of refugees that had not received the benefits of an education necessary for employment, for their welfare and for the wellbeing of themselves and their families. It is clear to me that assisting others to become self-sufficient will benefit us all.

**Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?**

I am passionate about dedication to duty, service to others, mentoring those that come behind us, providing compassionate leadership and ensuring the value, dignity and respect of all people and our planet. I believe that education prepares children to reach their fullest potential and support that education is a human right. When I was in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, after being in a classroom for a few hours, I realized the children were so happy; they were learning to write their names in English faster that I could have imagined. All of the sudden, several wrote a note to me: "I love Rose." I still have that note and think of their smiles in spite of their circumstances.