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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES
FOR SYRIANS

INAUGURAL NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Higher Education & Refugees from Syria
Exploring Dialogue Opportunities

Thursday, March 16, 2017

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Inaugural National Stakeholders Dialogues “Higher Education & Refugees from Syria: Exploring Dialogue Opportunities” Report

Date: March 16, 2017

Location: Cairo, Egypt

Within the context of the project **HOPES (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians)** funded by the European Union’s Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the ‘Madad Fund’ and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) together with the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic across Egypt, Northern Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the in-country team of Egypt organized an inaugural National Stakeholders Dialogue on March 16, 2017 bringing together representatives from ministries and higher education institutions as well as key institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis.

This gathering was the first of a series of stakeholders dialogues which seek to provide a platform for discussion and information exchange, leading to greater coordination of initiatives for hosting Syrian students on a national level.

The inaugural national stakeholders dialogue entitled “Higher Education & Refugees from Syria: Exploring Dialogue Opportunities” was dedicated to a needs analysis, an overview of the situation in the country and an exploration of further approaches on the national level.

The dialogue included

- An introduction to the HOPES project and to the National Stakeholders Dialogue by Mr. Harry Haynes, Egypt Country Manager and HEEAP regional manager,
- Welcome Addresses and a presentation of the EU Madad Fund and European Union’s response to the Syria Crisis by **Mr. Ville Suutarinen**, representative of the EU Delegation to Egypt.
- The first session entitled “**Higher Education and Refugees from Syria: Overview of the situation, challenges and various responses – mapping of results**” incorporated presentations from various speakers:
 - 1- **Dr. Ashraf Hatem** (Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Universities in Egypt)
 - 2- **Dr. Khaled Hassan** (Head of Society for Migration Studies)
 - 3- **Dr. Mohammad Chawky** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR)
- The second session entitled “**Higher Education and Refugees from Syria: exploring dialogue opportunities on a national level**” consisted of working groups and discussions facilitated by Dr. Mohammad Chawky and Ms. Nayla Abi Nasr, HOPES Regional Communication Manager, and was dedicated to a discussion between the participants on possible measures for sustainable solutions and an initial roadmap for further activities.

Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the first session

In their respective presentations and speeches, the invited participants highlighted key points and issues to be taken into consideration:

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- > In Egypt, the demand for higher education outstrips supply and it is important that the European Union provides support not only to the Syrian refugees but should take into consideration that Egypt is hosting almost 5 million “guests” or “visitors” from other countries too (Palestinians, Sudanese, Syrians and Iraqis) who also apply to the same Higher Education system.
- > Despite the fact that Egypt is considered as the only country in the region (compared to Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq) who had signed the United Nations multilateral treaty related to the Status of Refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the protocol of 1967, it has to be taken into consideration that the Syria crisis represents a tremendous burden on both refugees and the host community.
- > When competing according to academic standards and degrees, Syrians are in terms of fees since 2015 treated as nationals, when having completed their secondary education in Egypt.
- > According to the survey conducted with refugee students from Syria by Dr. Khaled Hassan, it was found that students and higher education institutions are mainly facing the following challenges:
 - Financial difficulties related to the tuition fees, especially at post graduate level.
 - Language barriers considering that the education in Egypt is mainly in English at universities. Only certain programs are taught in Arabic.
 - Certain differences in the academic curricula between Syria and Egypt.
 - Authenticity of documents and diplomas.
 - The infrastructure of the higher education institutions in Egypt is not able to absorb and support the high influx of refugees.

During the discussion, different solutions to the above mentioned challenges were proposed ranging from

- Online education and modules,
 - Prior learning assessment language courses and placement tests,
 - Rehabilitation courses that allow the students to better integrate into the higher education system,
 - Mobile application to promote learning opportunities to refugee students.
- > The importance of education and providing educational opportunities to the refugees from Syria in Egypt was considered as a priority by all participants.
- In light of the discussion, it was found that local, regional and international institutions should take into account various criteria and key considerations when developing higher educational programs and policies related to refugee students and higher education:
- The refugees’ needs and interests, gender equality as well as proper measures to ensure the protection of refugees.
 - Programs with local universities should not only be designed to better meet the needs of refugees from Syria but also those of the host communities. Further assistance to national education systems should be provided.
 - Another key issue discussed was the management of expectations and prospects after graduation. The legal status of the refugees’ students after completion of their studies is also an important factor to be considered.

Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the second session:

The second session consisted of working groups and discussions amongst the participants to define potential measures for sustainable solutions and the development of an initial roadmap for further activities.



- > The participants agreed that there is a need to launch a dialogue on a national level which would focus on Higher Education and the Syria crisis considering the lack of such initiatives in Egypt.
- > The dialogue should seek the following objectives:
 - Strengthening coordination on a national level between the main stakeholders
 - Developing appropriate and sustainable national solutions and strategies to higher education and refugees. This will require the establishment of a technical working committee and the organisation of regular meetings during which potential initiatives and solutions would be identified. These should then be discussed during national higher level meetings and dialogues to which a large spectrum of key players and decision makers will be invited.
- > The dialogue should include representatives from the Ministry of Education & Higher Education and the Ministry of Social Solidarity as well as representatives from public and private universities, national and international non-governmental organisations and development agencies working in this field, students' unions, research and language centres. The dialogue should also include representatives from the private sector, the international community and the Arab League.
- > The issue of including students' representatives from the host community was deemed of high importance in order to reduce the tension that might arise as well as to facilitate integration and social cohesion.
- > The participants to the dialogue identified the below key priorities and themes to be tackled:
 - 1) Needs assessment to identify practical solutions and the support needed to facilitate access and enrolment to universities
 - 2) Answering the question of why providing education to refugees and what type of education.
 - 3) Residency and legal status.
 - 4) Certification and accreditation.
 - 5) Financial support (incl. regulations for the entrance exams).
 - 6) Better integration of Syrians.
 - 7) Employability and prospects after graduation.
 - 8) Coordinated outreach and better communication of relevant stakeholders.
- > Moreover, participants agreed that there is a necessity to identify alternative pathways for helping students to adapt to the situation when local institutions cannot offer such support. The clear assignment of responsibility and roles between various agencies was found to be an important issue too.