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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION  
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES  
FOR SYRIANS

# NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Higher Education & the Syria Crisis:  
A look back and a view towards the future

Tuesday 15 October 2019

ERBIL INTERNATIONAL HOTEL

Barzani Namir | Erbil > Kurdistan Region of Iraq

For more information:

[www.hopes-madad.org](http://www.hopes-madad.org) | [hopes@hopes-madad.org](mailto:hopes@hopes-madad.org)

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## NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUES

### HE and the Syria Crisis: A look back and a view towards the future

#### Iraq-KRI, October 15, 2019

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#### Report

**Date: 15 October 2019**

**Place: Erbil**

#### BRIEF SUMMARY

On Tuesday 15 October 2019, the HOPES project 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), the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic, organised its fourth National Stakeholders Dialogue, entitled '**Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A look back and a view towards the future**' at Erbil International Hotel, the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI).

This gathering is part of the fourth and final series of National Stakeholders Dialogues organised on a national level bringing together representatives from ministries, higher education institutions, and other key institutional stakeholders as well as students to take stock and evaluate engagements and achievements in this sector and to explore further approaches and imminent priorities based on the needs of all the involved stakeholders.

The National Stakeholders Dialogues provide a platform for discussion and information exchange on higher education and the Syria crisis, to strengthen coordination on a national level and explore new approaches benefitting all stakeholders.

Welcome notes were given by Dr. Abdel Nasser Hindawi, HOPES deputy director and Scholarship and Counselling who presented the latest achievements of HOPES on a regional and national level throughout the past three years and highlighted the added value of the collaborations with all stakeholders in achieving the HOPES project's objectives.

The dialogue included reflections on the major developments and achievements on a national level in the higher education sector related to the Syria Crisis. The gathering also allowed deepening the reflection on lessons learned and recommendations to improve response mechanisms and interventions in the future.

#### DIALOGUE REPORT

The dialogue brought together 18 representatives from the higher education institutions, students, organisations, partners and key stakeholders involved in the tertiary education sector related to the Syria crisis.

The gathering was organised as follows:

- **Welcome and introductions.**
  - **Session 1: Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A closer look back**  
Reflection on the major developments on a national level during the last three years and status quo from different perspectives
  - **Session 2: Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A view towards the future**
    - > Overview of recommendations raised during previous dialogues and regional conferences
    - > Round table Discussion on lessons learned and recommendations to improve response mechanisms and interventions
    - > Identification of priorities to be taken into consideration for the future
- Recommendations & Closing:** Concluding remarks

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### ❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the first session “Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A closer look back”**

The following session addressed the major developments related to higher education and the Syria crisis in KRI from different perspectives: higher education institutions, international and national non-governmental organisations, projects and students. The following key points and observations were put forward:

- > There was an increase in the scholarships provision. Before 2015, education opportunities were lacking for both refugees from Syria and the host community students.
- > On a national level, the Ministry of Higher Education undertook changes in terms of rules, regulations and procedures to help facilitating the students’ access to higher education.
- > Through a number of initiatives undertaken by various stakeholders, many of the challenges identified in 2016 regarding access to higher education were tackled, including:
  - Residency issues and the legal enrolment of Syrian students into universities through the facilitation of application procedures.
  - The provision of the needed documents for equivalency and certificates,
  - The discrepancy between demand and supply caused by the increasing number of refugees from Syria
- > A great focus was made by programmes to find solutions to the language needs of students. The priority was given to the development and promotion of online and blended learning solutions including discussions on recognition and accreditation issues.
- > Despite the efforts of national authorities and higher education institutions in responding to the needs of both refugees and host communities, major bottlenecks to young refugees’ access to higher education were highlighted:
  - The lack of English language courses in KRI
  - The lack of support from families to help the students continue their studies, especially for women.
  - The high drop out of students. For instance, for marriage related reasons for women or for work related reasons for men.
  - The need for further coordination between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education as well as between the various programs offering scholarships to students.
  - Shifts in the international organizations’ focus in supporting refugees to support IDPs.
  - The lack of funds from UNICEF to build schools in the camps and support the existing camps.
  - Another issue was highlighted concerning the students’ application to scholarships. In fact, some students consider scholarships as a job opportunity rather than a study program.
- > The need to further increase the scholarship provision was discussed with the UNHCR- DAFI program, foreseeing granting 350 scholarships in 2019-2020.
- > There is a need to focus on the provision of scholarships for short term TVET programmes to increase the chances for students to find employment and support their families. These programmes should also help them master a profession that could be useful for the reconstruction of their country, once the condition are fulfilled. It was also suggested that short-term courses could reduce the dropout of students.



- > The situation on the ground in Syria was as well discussed as KRI continues to welcome more refugees in the region.
- > There is a great need for further collaboration between the ministry of higher education and international organizations in terms of statistics sharing.
- > Furthermore, it was highlighted by a number of participants that the situation in 2006 was better than the current one, since the number of student refugees in need for education has increased while schools in the camps deteriorate because of the lack of funds.

#### ❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the second session “Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A view towards the future”**

The second session included an overview of the key points and recommendations raised during the previous 15 National Stakeholders Dialogues held since 2017 and the two regional conferences organised by the HOPES project. Based on the findings and key recommendations raised, participants were invited to three round tables to discuss lessons learned, identify tangible recommendations and key priorities for the future.

- **Round table 1:** Scholarships: Access, Recognition of Qualifications, Criteria of selection, legal residencies, student pathway.
- **Round table 2:** Language needs of students
- **Round table 3:** Response Mechanisms, coordination of interventions on a national level

#### **Feedback from the round table discussions: Group Findings and recommendations**

The following key points and recommendations were presented:

##### **Round table 1: Scholarship provision**

- > The need for organisations to increase the provision of scholarships was put forward.
- > It was suggested to update the criteria included in the scholarship applications in order to increase the chances of a wider range of eligible students to get scholarships.
- > The increasing transparency in students’ acceptance and scholarship granting.
- > The need was stressed to increase the support from the Ministry of Higher Education in lowering tuitions fees for Syrian refugees, which would allow granting scholarships to a higher number of students.
- > Students suggested strengthening the relationships between the granted students themselves through the creation of a strong regional network to make them feel part of a group. The network would allow enhancing and putting forward the student perspective
- > The need was stressed to increase financial support for the scholarships holders considering that the monthly allowances are not fulfilling their needs, each according to the countries they live in.
- > The priority should be given to diploma and short term studies as they create better chances for students to find jobs after graduation. Participants pointed out that graduating in KRI offer better chances of employment than graduating in Syria.
- > The need to adopt easier rules for Diploma studies to encourage more students to apply was put forward.
- > The provision of short-term professional development, soft skills and livelihood programmes was put forward, considering the lack of programs and projects in these fields.

##### **Round table 2: Language needs of students**

In this round table, the target group beneficiaries were divided into three groups.



*Refugees between 10 and 17 years old*

- > Further support for the students and their families to avoid school drop out
- > Further provision of language courses and training of teachers.

*Undergraduate refugee students who soon will enrol in higher education*

- > The provision of 3 to 6 months English language courses
- > The provision of short-term preparatory programs and courses based on society needs and on their field of study
- > Providing guidance for scholarship application programs to universities.

*Refugee students who graduated in Syria*

- > The provision of short term English Courses
- > The development of partnerships with high quality universities to deliver language courses.

**Round table 3:** Response Mechanisms, coordination of interventions on a national level

- > It was highly recommended that all organization and scholarship programs should have a field office to easily reach stakeholders and partners in different cities as well as to provide the needed support for registration and follow-up.
- > There is a need for orientation sessions and training people in charge of registrations as well as for providing support when needed.
- > Coordination and collaboration with other organizations to provide further support in terms of livelihood and internship programs is a key necessity
- > It was also recommended to launch business projects and employ the newly graduates in these businesses.
- > Supporting graduates to submit their proposals to launch small businesses and provide them with seed money is an important way of providing them with more opportunities.
- > Cooperating with big companies and the private sector is necessary to provide graduates with job opportunities after graduation.