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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

Thursday 19 September 2019

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUES

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

Egypt, September 19, 2019

Report

Date: 19 September 2019

Place: Cairo, Egypt

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Thursday 19 September 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 the Hilton Residence Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt.

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.

The dialogue started with welcome notes by Ms. Elizabeth White, Director of the British Council Egypt, as well as Mr. Harry Haynes, Regional Higher Education English Access Programme (HEEAP) Project Manager. The event continued with preliminary reflections from key speakers from the Ministry of Higher Education, the UNHCR, the Centre of Migration Studies and St Andrew's Refugee Centre (StARS) on the current situation of Syrian refugees in Egypt as well as round table discussions on lessons learned and future priorities. The dialogue allowed the identification and exploration of recommendations and approaches to enhance educational and training services offered to refugees specifically in the public sector.

DIALOGUE REPORT

The dialogue brought together 34 representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education, higher education institutions, students, organisations and key stakeholders involved in the tertiary education sector related to the Syria crisis.

The gathering was organised as follows:

- **Welcome and introductions**
 - Ms Elizabeth White, British Council Director-Egypt.
 - Mr Harry Haynes, Egypt Country Manager and HEEAP Regional Manager provided a brief about the HOPES project accomplishments up to date in Egypt and the prior National Stakeholder Dialogues
- **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 Egypt from different perspectives. This sessions incorporated reflections by:

- > **Governmental and Higher Education institutions perspective: Dr. Mohamed El-Shinawi**, Advisor to the Minister for International Cooperation and Relations, Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Dr. El-Shinawi highlighted the current trends in Egypt, related to the higher education sector:

In June 2019, the Central Department for International Students’ Affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education of Egypt, announced the launching of an application system under the Initiative “Study in Egypt”. This application targets international students wishing to study in Egyptian universities and institutes by simplifying procedures and overcoming difficulties faced by non-Egyptian students. The application is managed electronically through the following websites: www.wafeden.gov.eg and www.mohe-casm.edu.eg. The process supports freshman and transfer students who are intending to continue their education in Egypt. It was indicated that this should facilitate the application process for foreign students and encourage the flow of international students at Egyptian academic institutions.

Dr. El-Shinawi also addressed the question of the internationalization of Egyptian campuses. He mentioned the International Branch Campus Law (IBC’s law) which was initiated in August 2018. This law enables international universities to establish independent, single-institution and multi-institution branch campuses that offer programmes from a number of international providers. The law also enabled the establishment of branch campuses in partnership with Egyptian universities to offer joint awards. From a ministerial perspective, this improvement will serve to accommodate the increasing number of students, undergraduate and graduates.

Regarding Syrian students, he mentioned that currently 700 students are enrolled in graduate studies.

> **Non-governmental organisations and projects:**

- **Dr. Ahmed Zohry**, Founding President of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies (EGYMIG) and Adjunct Professor, Center for Migration and Refugees Studies (CMRS), American University in Cairo
- **Dr. Khaled Hassan**, Vice President of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies (EGYMIG)

Dr. Hassan and Dr. Zohry, reported that as of December 2018, Egypt has hosted around 244,918 refugees and asylum seekers, out of which 132,871 are Syrian nationals representing 54% of the total refugees and asylum-seeking population.

In regards to their socio-economic status, refugees from Syria are clustered in Greater Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta. Similar to Egyptians, they have full access to services offered in Egypt from which health, transportation as well as nutrition.

This has added an extra burden on the Egyptian government already affected by the current economic changes.

According to Dr. Zohry, there is a need for sustainable programs targeting refugees from Syria to make them able to fulfil their daily needs. This could be done through empowering them with means for earning a living especially as it is expected that there will be further increases in the cost of living within the coming two years.

Concerning the educational sector, more than 30,000 students have enrolled in primary and secondary education, out of which 95% in public schools and the rest in private schools.

The majority of Syrian children are enrolled in Syrian educational centres in parallel to Egyptian national schools. The former provide tutoring by Syrian teachers to help students overcome dialect and integration barriers, while the latter provides national examinations for certification purposes.



Additional constraints on Syrians enrolled in school in Egypt were highlighted: On one hand, the high number of students per class (80-100) and the difference between dialects especially in the first and second primary school years. In addition, and due to the war in Syria, a large number of school-aged students had to quit their education and were mainstreamed in Egyptian schools years later after they had settled in Egypt. This interruption of studies affected their integration in the Egyptian curriculum and education system.

On the other hand, the rising in tuition fees represent a major challenge for graduate students. There are approximately between 3,000 and 4,000 unemployed Syrian teachers and academics in Egypt who are unable to work within the national employment system. The need for these teachers to be integrated in the job market was put forward.

- **Mr. Mohamed Shawky**, Associate Educational Officer, UNHCR.

Mr. Shawky praised the efforts of the Ministry of Education to provide access to refugee children living in Egypt to public schools on an equal footing with nationals. He stated that the UNHCR works closely with the Ministry of Education and Technical Education and provides support to public schools hosting refugee children through capacity-building and material support to ensure a successful mainstreaming of refugees and asylum-seekers of all nationalities into MoE schools.

He also explained some of the barriers faced by refugee families in finding suitable education opportunities for their school-age children. Mr. Shawky also stressed the UNHCR's role in advocating for the inclusion of young refugees in higher education institutes to equip them with the required skill sets and enable them to rebuild their countries upon return, once the conditions are fulfilled.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, and in addition to the DAFI scholarship for undergraduate students, the UNHCR provided education grants to undergraduate students to facilitate access and retention of children in schools. The grant partially covers school fees, transportation, uniforms and school supplies of refugees and asylum seekers.

- > **The Community's perspective:** Ms. Oula Dayeh, Syrian and Yemeni Community Outreach Coordinator, St Andrew's Refugee Services.

Ms. Dayeh underlined the importance of integrating more women in capacity building programs to increase their chances of employment.

Financial support should be provided to Syrians to renew their passports. This measure was found essential for employment opportunities since the current fees are USD 300, which is beyond the means of the majority of the Syrian refugees in Egypt.

She also highlighted the challenge of maintaining educational quality within community centres, considering that capacity building is essential. This requires the identification of each target group to provide tailored services. She identified the various group segments as follows:

- The first group includes Syrians seeking higher education opportunities who have achieved secondary school in Syria.
- The second group includes Syrians who are looking to improve their skills in order to compete in the Egyptian market.

Providing professional capacity building courses or vocational trainings with recognized certificates can create a huge difference within the various segments in Syrian community in Egypt. She suggested representatives from both groups should be included in any needs assessments conducted.

Ms Dayeh highlighted that vocational training targeting Syrian women have positive impacts on Syrian families in Egypt. In fact, programmes should ensure that those training opportunities result in empowering women, making them well equipped to carry out their own business and be financially independent. She added that INGOs should be encouraged to hire Syrian staff.

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

During this session, participants joined four group discussions to analyse further lessons learned, recommendations and priorities to be taken into consideration for the future. The discussions evolved around:

- Socio Economic needs and employment opportunities for refugees in Egypt (Barriers, opportunities, innovative solutions)
- Higher Education, Scholarship and Training: Barriers, alternative solutions, shortcomings in language training programs for refugees, scholarships
- Programmes’ and NGO’s response and role and community impact

From the feedback presentations, the following recommendations and observations emerged:

- > Overall, participants felt that there is a need to bridge the gap between the labour market and course offerings.
- > The necessity to expand and decentralize geographically the provision of vocational courses to prepare refugees from Syria for employment. In other words, a wider range of programmes and trainings should be proposed.
- > Further networking and liaising between refugees with local NGOs is necessary to allow the students to find internship opportunities.
- > There is a great need for further provision of language courses, and not only limited to English, but also German for example as it was brought up by several speakers.
 - The need for academic Arabic writing classes was also highlighted for those who have been out of education for some time.
 - Language courses should begin from high school as a pre-requisite for university enrolment.
 - Certification upon completion of these training programs is seen as essential for job placement purposes and further education.
 - It was also said that there should be funding for refugees to take international language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL.
- > Blended education was put forward as a solution for students who are geographically located far from institutions and schools, and have other commitments. It will give them the opportunity to strike a balance between their education and other work and family related responsibilities.
- > Equipping refugees with laptops and technical training is essential to ensure their educational success.
- > Rising tuition fees have deterred many refugees from pursuing post-graduate education. Therefore, there is a need for further scholarship programs to support their enrolment in MA and Doctorate degrees. These scholarship programs should take into consideration the geographical clustering of refugees in Egypt and provide equal chances especially to women, who are reluctant to travel far to study.
- > Providing financial support to Syrian community centres will allow pipelining the students into formal university education; this could consist in Syrian teachers delivering training and facility enhancement.
- > There was a general agreement that in Egypt, projects on facilitating higher education access should not be limited to targeting Syrians only, but should target all refugee groups.
- > Counselling should be developed to adequately prepare refugees for the labour market and to enhance scholarship awareness and provide support with application procedures.
- > The development of livelihood projects and the utilization of internet for marketing purposes could help in promoting products developed and created by refugee students.
- > There is a need for further collaboration between NGOS working with refugees in terms of strategic planning, needs assessment, evaluation and implementation, in order to better serve the needs of the refugees.



- NGOs and programmes should be more closely linked with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to better reach the community.
- The age limits in programmes should be revised to include older people
- Programmes should also take into account high fees to access programmes (e.g. fees related to passport purchase, 300USD), and include it in their planning.

It was concluded that the issues related to accessing higher education for refugees in Egypt do not end with the closure of the HOPES project. Refugees, both from Syria and other countries, will still need support to access higher education in Egypt and to succeed. Further efforts in that direction need to be made.