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HOPES

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

Wednesday 2 October 2019

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUES

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

Jordan, October 2, 2019

Report

Date: 2 October 2019

Place: Amman, Jordan

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Wednesday 2 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 the Gerasa Hotel in Amman, Jordan.

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 the stakeholders in achieving the 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 33 representatives from 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.**
- **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



❖ **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 Jordan from different perspectives: higher education institutions, international and national non-governmental organisations and projects and students. The following key points and observations were mentioned:

- > During the reflection on the past three years, refugee students from Syria expressed the feeling of loss and helplessness especially at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, as they were unable to find a job, support themselves or pursuing their education. In addition to the financial difficulties related to their studies, students expressed how unfamiliar they were with the Jordanian higher education system since most subjects are taught in English, which was not the case in Syria.
- > Students were not aware of the needs of the labour market or the correlation between majors and job opportunities, especially in Jordan where job opportunities are very limited. For example, students chose scientific majors such as Pharmacy or Engineering, although those majors were already saturated. Today, students are more comfortable in their environment; they are confident and determined. Mohannad Al Essa, one of the HOPES scholarship holders who had also participated in a 2-month course by one of the projects funded by HOPES at Yarmouk University on e-commerce, reported that he managed to create his own business and now earns his own income.
- > Scholarship providers highlighted the large amount of applications they received at the beginning of the crisis, because of the high need for scholarships and opportunities, which most applicants were not eligible for. Refugees from Syria would jump at every available opportunity without doing enough research or linking their interests to the labour market opportunities. In comparison, students are now more aware of the opportunities offered by different organizations, and more knowledgeable of the requirements needed for each opportunity. Scholarship providers noticed a decrease in the number of applications but an increase in the number of eligible candidates.
- > Language teachers who participated in the HEEAP program and university academics noticed that Syrian students were isolated and did not integrate in the host community during the first phase of the Syrian crisis. There is a major difference now in the social interactions of Syrian students towards Jordanian students in university campuses. Students are more sociable and better integrated into the host community. According to them, Syrian and Jordanian students now share information and best practices in small study groups. Teachers highlighted the fact that students developed stronger personalities and more determination and that they socialised with their classmates thanks to their interactions during classes.
- > There is a strong need for scholarship and English learning opportunities for both Syrians and vulnerable people of the host community. Students and teachers suggested that the students enrolled in the HEEAP courses increase their chances of pursuing their studies as their level of English increases, suggesting that continuity provides more motivation for students.
- > The need for more research in the higher education sector related to the Syria Crisis was put forward as essential for systematisation and policymaking.
- > The development of future interventions must focus on building bridges between study opportunity provision and the labour market.

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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”**

The second session included an overview of all 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 in collaboration with the EU DGEAC in Beirut in 2017 and Amman in 2019.

Based on the findings and key recommendations raised, participants were invited to four 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:** Blended learning and Online learning solutions
- **Round table 3:** Language needs of students
- **Round table 4:** 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 strong impact of academic counselling on the students' path and experience was highlighted, especially at the earliest stages when students are considering pursuing higher education,
- > The continuous need for scholarships and opportunities was put forward.
- > In terms of scholarship provision and eligibility criteria, suggestions focused on reducing the limitations and restrictions related to the eligibility criteria (e.g. the age range) as well as increasing the stipends of the students in order for them to focus more on their studies and reduce the stress pertaining to their financial issues.
- > The creation of a mobile user-friendly scholarship portal was suggested for students interested in applying for scholarships. The portal could include information about scholarship providers, scholarship opportunities, and eligibility criteria, as well as the application procedures.
- > The importance of the creation of alumni network to follow-up with the scholarship beneficiaries and for scholarship providers to stay in contact with scholarship holders, was highlighted.
- > The need to increase the advocacy efforts that would lead to policy making.

Round table 2: Blended learning and Online learning solutions

- > The need was stressed to implement a better teacher training system when it comes to online-teaching and learning.
- > It is essential to make sure that venues are well equipped with the proper internet and devices for blended learning.
- > The need to provide students with basic computer skills to prepare them for online courses was put forward.

Round table 3: Language needs of students

- > Language and specifically English was seen as primordial to facilitate the access of students to higher education as well as to job opportunities after graduation. Continuity is necessary when learning a language and it was put forward that students should be able to move from one level to another according to their progression.
- > Language courses need to be tailor-made according to the students' interests or purpose for learning.
- > Offering research courses to master degree students for thesis writing and research is important.

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Round table 4: Response Mechanisms, coordination of interventions on a national level

- > The demand for scholarships and opportunities is still very high. However, opportunities need to be thoroughly studied and researched by donors.
- > Interventions should focus on covering the whole pathway of students. Suggestions to holding job fairs at universities or career days at schools, highlighting the importance of all degrees and careers were put forward. The focus should also be put on rebranding opportunities that students would not normally be interested in, such as diplomas and long-term training.
- > The need for more cooperation between organizations, NGOs, HE institutions, and ministries was stressed to better plan the students' paths, and solve accreditation issues related to blended-courses and diplomas.
- > English learning was again presented as a key priority and of great interest for students of all ages, but there is a lack of resources and proper opportunities.
- > Lastly, stakeholders stressed the importance of research especially on labour market needs and policies, as well as of communicating these findings to policy and decision makers in the country.