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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Expanding the dialogue on
Higher Education & Refugees from Syria

Thursday 24 October 2019

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUES and Higher Education Working Group Jointly moderated by HOPES and UNHCR HE and the Syria Crisis: A look back and a view towards the future Turkey Report

Date: 24 October 2019

Place: Ankara, Turkey

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Thursday 24 October 2019, the HOPES project funded by the European Union's Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic, jointly organised together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Turkey, the UNHCR's periodic **Higher Education Working Group (HEWG) meeting as well as the** fourth and final HOPES National Stakeholders Dialogue at the Metropolitan Hotel, Ankara Turkey.

This two-pronged gathering brought together representatives from the EU delegation, governmental representatives, higher education institutions, and other key 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 involved stakeholders.

The morning session was dedicated to the HEWG meeting and to discussing the main achievements on a national level in the scholarship sector, addressing the next phase and moving forward with ending projects. The afternoon session brought key players with knowledge and programs related to the creation of employment perspectives for Syrian Refugees under Temporary Protection (SuTP) as part of the HOPES National Stakeholders Dialogue entitled 'Higher Education and the Syria Crisis A view towards the future, creating employment prospects for Syrians'.

The objective of the dialogue was to explore the future perspectives of refugees from Syria beyond and after higher education by discussing the available employment opportunities for SuTPs within the Turkish context.

Welcome notes were given by Ms. Hande Gürdağ, HOPES Country Manager and Mr. Steven De Vriendt, EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis in Turkey, Delegation of the European Union to Turkey.

Mr. De Vriendt discussed the future of the Trust Fund in Turkey and highlighted the EU Delegation's existing structure in the Higher Education field and their efforts in finding new opportunities for the vulnerable groups. He considered that since the Trust Fund will be fading out in Turkey in 2020, the long-term Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) will be taking place in the EUD's structure and will integrate the Turkish government's requests.

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, recommendations and priorities to improve response mechanisms and interventions in the future.

DIALOGUE REPORT

The dialogue brought together 30 representatives from the EU delegation, higher education institutions, students, organisations and key stakeholders involved in the tertiary education and employment sectors related to the Syria crisis.

The gathering was organised as follows:

- **Session 1: Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A closer look back**

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- > Reflection on the major developments on a national level during the last three years and status quo from different perspectives: International response, government perspectives, non-government organisations and projects (HOPES, UNHCR and SPARK)

- **Session 2: Discussions on Moving Forward with Ending Projects**

- > Formulating full study cycles
- > Innovations in higher education,
- > Follow-up on graduates,
- > The role of vocational Diplomas, bachelors and postgraduate studies.

- **Session 3: Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A view towards the future, creating employment prospects for Syrians.**

- > Job markets needs in Turkey,
- > Identifying solutions and strategies for a pathway of higher education and employment
- > Practical interventions on employment and entrepreneurship of SuTPs,
- > Inter-sectoral cooperation on employment and entrepreneurship of SuTPs.

- **Session 4: Discussion on lessons learned and recommendations to improve response mechanisms and interventions with student communities**

Identification of priorities to be taken into consideration for the future

❖ **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 updates related to higher education and the impact of the Syria crisis in Turkey from different perspectives, including governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The following key points and observations were put forward:

- > There is an increase of interest in Distance Learning programs (especially medical and secretarial sectors). There are currently almost 3000 students enrolled in open learning (Açıköğretim)
- > Turkish universities can accept several certificates (such as SAT or YÖS) to admit international students but most of them only accept YÖS.
- > The Turkish Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) adopted a central mechanism which applies both to scholarship programs and university acceptance, and which allows to facilitate the application process of vulnerable groups in higher education. Housing, social and cultural activities are provided as well during their course of studies. More than 20.000 international students from 146 countries are currently studying with scholarships, 5000 students are granted scholarships every year and the Alumni Network counts 150K members.
- > In 2019, there were 33,554 Syrian students in higher education, which represents a ratio of 21% of the total number of students in higher education (154,446). Approximately 6% of the Syrians students in the 19-24 age group attend higher education.
- > The current numbers related to Syrian students in joint scholarships designed for Syrians are as follows:
 - Türkiye scholarship: 226 PhD, 2278 undergraduates; 56 TVET

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- DAFI: 535 undergraduates; 18 TVET
 - EU (HESP) 139 undergraduate
 - HOPES: 39 undergraduates; 6 TVET
- > During the presentations, the importance of vocational training was put forward as a key step towards the inclusion of more students in educational programs and towards a better access to the labour market. In the programs implemented by SPARK, the number of enrolled and graduated students in Turkey are:
- 483 vocational education diplomas
 - 2042 vocational education certificates
- > It is necessary to encourage further collaboration with government institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Industry in order to provide the best vocational training to beneficiaries and link directly with the labour market.
- > Since 2016, the HOPES project has succeeded in reaching the following in Turkey:
- A total number of 90 students (75 BA and 15 MA) have received scholarship, out of which 35 students (27 BA and 8 MA) have graduated. The current number of students who are continuing their studies is 46.
 - An approximate number of 6,068 info seekers received academic counselling
 - 13 short projects were funded and implemented in Turkey, targeting 5,185 direct beneficiaries, out of which 38% were women
 - 4 National Stakeholder Dialogues have been implemented
 - Through the Higher Education English Access Programme, more than 1,859 university-based English-language and study skills courses were provided and around 61 IELTS courses and tests were given.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the second session “ Discussions on Moving Forward with Ending Projects”**

The following key issues and suggestions were discussed:

- > The issue of the duration of funded projects and joint-scholarships programs being usually shorter than the full study cycle of students was put forward. During the project planning and design phase, it is crucial to consider covering the full study cycles or include study programs with the same duration than projects. Ideally, projects should cover full-time scholarship, language courses and maybe additional soft skill courses as well.
- > The Turkish Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)'s reported that considering that its scholarship provision approach is inclusive, students receiving funds from joint programs should have the same rights than other YTB students – for instance to receive an extension, if needed, to complete their studies. In this context and given the rights agreement, YTB discussed its ability to support the students of some of the joint-scholarship programs.
- > It was also suggested that new projects could be designed as complementary to ending projects. This should help in the sudden discontinuation of projects and will provide a possibility to ensure that the full study cycle is covered.
- > The need was stressed to adopt a systemic approach towards funding more TVETs programs which will ensure covering the full study cycle, increasing the interest in TVETs programs and accessing the labour market.

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- > The necessity to incorporate multi-donors in the funding process and not to only depend on one donor such as the European Union, was highlighted. Multi-donors can support projects to ensure implementation extension.
- > It was also suggested to adopt a more proactive approach in securing funds in which key players in the sector could design projects and ranges of needs, rather than waiting for donors to open calls for funds.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the third session “Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: A view towards the future, creating employment prospects for Syrians”**

The third session included a presentation of all key points, lessons learned and recommendations raised during the previous National Stakeholders Dialogues regional conferences organised by the HOPES project. The overview was followed by presentations from Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey (KOSGEB), the INGEV foundation, SPARK and UNHCR on developing employment prospects for Syrians. To spire up the discussions, the session was concluded with a panel discussion including representatives from YTB, KOSGEB, INGEV, SPARK and UNHCR. Ms. Başak Tüzün from INGEV reported the key figures regarding the Syrian owned companies and the demographics of Syrian business owners according to the data released from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

> **Key Facts about the Syrian Owned Companies:**

- These companies own an average capital of \$50K
- Syrian majority share: 64%
- The average employment is 9.4%, 74% employ below 10 with annual revenue of \$ 246 k, 24% employs 10-49 with annual revenue of \$790 k, 2% employ 50 + with annual revenue of 4,088 k
- The top 7 sectors include: wholesale trade, construction, retail trade, travelling, consultancy, transportation, food and textile.

> **Key Facts about the Syrian Owners:**

- 67% of Syrian company owners have university degrees
- 30% of them do not speak Turkish and 55% of them have very limited knowledge of Turkish for daily conversations
- 71% of Syrian company owners already owned businesses in Syria
- 29% of them started business in Turkey
- 76% intend to continue their business in Turkey regardless of the evolution of the Syria crisis
- Only 3% of Syrian company owners are female

The following key points and recommendations were put forward:

- > Under the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT-I), KOSGEB is implementing the project “Development of Business and Entrepreneurship for Syrians Under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizen”, through which a Call for Proposals was launched to fund entrepreneurship projects. Business development and entrepreneurship training is provided for interested applicants before applying. After the completion of the training, applicants are eligible to apply for the fund. This project is currently being implemented in Gaziantep and under FRIT– II. KOSGEB will be running a project not exclusively for entrepreneurship, in 15 cities in Turkey.
- > There is a definite need for support in terms of information sharing and provision of counselling to new entrepreneurs. INGEV runs the “Syrian Entrepreneurship Center” call center, which consists of a consultancy hotline on legal, financial and entrepreneurial related information for SMEs.

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- > Syrian entrepreneurs face more challenges than any other entrepreneur in Turkey, including the lack of technical knowledge, experience, commitment and informal jobs, as well as the high work permit fees. They also lack knowledge of the Turkish business culture, which may lead to the lack of sustainability for start-ups.
- > Suggestions to overcome these challenges included:
 - The need for further support to the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through Incubation Programs with further coaching and mentoring. In addition, it is necessary to support the expansion of existing MSMEs and to encourage them in hiring Syrian Refugees under Temporary Protection (SuTP) as well as vulnerable youth from the host community
 - The organisation of career days and seminars bringing together employers and job seekers
 - The provision of incentives and awareness raising sessions for employers
- > According to a survey conducted by YTB in collaboration with UNHCR, 74% of the Syrian students living in Turkey consider that language remain the main barrier for their integration into the labour market. The provision of Turkish language courses to Syrian students is necessary to increase their chances of accessing the labour market.
- > New job opportunities could be created, for instance through the work opportunities related to trading between Turkey and the Gulf/Arab region, which requires Arabic language skills.
- > YTB targets vulnerable groups but there should be more efforts made towards including people with disabilities in the labour market.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the fourth session “Discussion on lessons learned and recommendations to improve response mechanisms and interventions with student communities**

The discussion session with Syrian and Turkish university students from the Gaziantep University allowed providing insight into the challenges faced by students during their high education studies and their future perspectives after graduation. Students highlighted the following elements:

- > Language and cultural integration remain the main obstacles faced by Syrian students in Turkey, despite the provision of TÖMER courses and their participation in cultural integration activities. Even though Syrian students receive TÖMER certificates, they are still not fully comfortable with the language and feel intimidated by the native speakers’ opinion of their Turkish skills.
They emphasised the need for additional support and language courses focusing on oral practice and writing.
- > There is a circulation of misinformation between Syrians and Turks creating false stereotypes on both communities. There should be more opportunities for interactions between people from both communities to encourage intercultural dialogue and inclusion.
- > Projects and scholarship programs should include more social activities where both Turkish and Syrian students as well as other international communities come together, in order to foster better inclusion and integration. Such activities would allow students to develop their social life.

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