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HOPES →

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES
FOR SYRIANS

INAUGURAL NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Higher Education & Refugees from Syria
Exploring Dialogue Opportunities

Thursday, April 6, 2017

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

Report

Date: April 6, 2017

Location: Beirut, Lebanon

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 Lebanon organized an inaugural National Stakeholders Dialogue on April 6, 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. It aimed at the development of mechanisms to better meet the needs of the respective students and of the hosting higher education institutions and to guarantee the greatest possible impact and sustainability.

The dialogue included

- Welcome Addresses and a presentation of the EU ‘Madad Fund’ and European Union’s response to the Syria Crisis by **Mr. Abel Piqueras Candela**, representative of the EU Delegation to Lebanon.
- An introduction to HOPES project and to the National Stakeholders Dialogue by HOPES project director **Dr. Carsten Walbiner**
- 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- **Professor Ahmad Jammal**
(General Director of Higher Education Ministry of Education & Higher Education)
 - 2- **Dr. Hana Addam El-Ghali** (AUB for refugees’ initiative and the American University of Beirut)
 - 3- **Professor Asma Chamli** (Lebanese University)
 - 4- **Ms. Agatha Abi Aaad** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR), co-chair of the HE round table committee for Lebanon jointly coordinated by UNHCR and UNESCO)
 - 5- **Dr. Abdel-Maoula Chaar** (École Supérieure des Affaires - ESA Business School)
 - 6- A brief welcome and situation analysis by **Professor Edmond Chidiac** (Saint Joseph University; host of the event).
- The second session entitled “**Higher Education and Refugees from Syria: exploring dialogue opportunities on a national level**” was moderated by Dr. Walbiner and was dedicated to a discussion between the participants on possible measures for sustainable solutions and an initial roadmap for further activities.

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More information on the Brief and Programme (Link)

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

- > In Syria, the total participation from Syrians aged 18-24 in tertiary education was at 20% before the war and less than 5% in 2016. The Influx of registered refugees from Syria in Lebanon has increased sharply since the beginning of the war with Lebanon having received the highest number of refugees per capita in comparison with other countries. The situation is dense and compounded with other issues related to the host community as well.
- > Latest governmental statistics show that the number of Syrian students enrolled at universities in Lebanon has decreased from 7,072 in 2014-2015 to 5,860 in 2015-2016. These statistics take into account Syrian students but not necessarily refugee students. The reason for this decrease deserves to be further explored.
- > The question of the students' identity and who is regarded as a refugee has also been raised during the discussion with participants considering that there is no way to determine whether a Syrian in Lebanon is refugee or not. But categorizing a person as a non-refugee does not mean that he/she is not affected by the crisis. And a presence in Lebanon before the conflict does not necessarily mean that a person is not a refugee.
- > Refugee students from Syria are mainly facing the following challenges:
 - Financial difficulties due to various reasons:
 - (i) The structure of the Higher Education system itself with only one public university offering HE at relative affordable costs while all other HE institutions are private and dependent on tuition fees which are often tremendous and cannot be afforded by students.
 - (ii) Limited resources and support to tertiary education – priority is often given to primary and secondary education.
 - (iii) Male students at university age are often the sole breadwinners of their families. Going to university reduces the time they can allocate to earning money and by that their income. Scholarships are too low to be able to substitute the loss of income accordingly.
 - Access and academic documentation ; authenticity and equivalency.
 - Language barriers considering that the language of instruction in Lebanon is mainly in French or English at universities, including the Lebanese University. Only certain programs are taught in Arabic
 - Research showed that it's not only a problem of language: insufficient cognitive preparedness to engage in discussions and learning within the institution is also a key issue.
 - Residency permits and fees/legal status - required for admission at tertiary education institutions.
 - Access to the right information and lack of information about blended learning.
 - Future prospects: Employment and labour market conditions in Lebanon are causing a unsolvable dilemma for both the Syrian students and the Lebanese host society.
- > Many policy issues and above-mentioned challenges create bottlenecks and problems for students to access higher and vocational education in Lebanon: This has led to a drop in the number of Syrian students enrolled in Lebanese universities despite the availability of a relatively high number of HE institutions, the increased number of refugees and the provision of education programs at primary and secondary level.



- > There is no real policy discussion on a national level about how to manage the situation and how to create a concrete, comprehensive and coordinated process of handling all issues concerning Higher Education and the Syria crisis. Nonetheless, since 2016 a Higher Education Roundtable, initiated by UNHCR and UNESCO, is in place to facilitate coordination between main scholarships providers which focuses on data sharing, non-duplication of scholarships, and further collaboration. A mapping of different scholarships opportunities in Lebanon has been conducted and a joint Q & A document has been developed.
- > The intensified collaboration between the main stakeholders is deemed necessary to ensure better coordination and clearer streamlining of instruments. A multi-level collaboration is needed among government entities (Ministry of HE, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour), among donors, scholarship programs, international organizations and tertiary education institutions.
- > The need to find integrative solutions that take into account the needs of students and academics coming from Syria but also those of the host communities affected by the Syria crisis with a keen eye on reducing social tension that is visibly on the rise.
- > The necessity to take into closer consideration refugee protection and future prospects of refugees when discussing refugees and Higher Education. The failure to do so, will increase the risk of student exploitation and the establishment of an informal labour market which is already happening.
- > The prerequisites for sustainable solutions also include the necessity to provide students with legal, academic and career guidance as well as psycho-social counselling. Moreover, discussions should focus on future prospects of graduates when addressing alternatives to mitigate the crisis.

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

During the second session, participants discussed the need for further national stakeholders dialogues that would take into consideration existing initiatives and coordination efforts and would tackle issues that the existing HE round table is not able to address.

Various themes were highlighted:

- > **The creation of certified HE short circle study modules and programs** tailored to the needs of the students. These modules would address the specific situation of refugee students (including employment and mobility) and should incorporate certificates of professional proficiency. They need to be developed taking into consideration the labour market situation and needs.
Within this context, two main challenges will be faced:
 - Ensuring the quality of this new form of education.
 - The perception of these short cycle programs by the prospective students (acceptance compared with “regular” education offers).
- > The need for a centralized HE monitoring and information system which would allow the tracking of the academic progress of students at the various higher education institutions.
- > The establishment of preparatory courses prior to HE enrolment.
- > Livelihood and job provision for refugee students.

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- > Institutional capacity building and support for institutions hosting refugee students. This will provide sustainability and decrease the tension.
- > The alarming drop of the number of Syrian students enrolled in higher education institutions.

Attachments

- [Presentation of Dr. Hana Al Ghali: "Tertiary Education for Syrian Refugees Policies, Practices and Perspective"](#)
- [Presentation of Professor Asma Chamli: "Presentation of the Lebanese University and the Syrian Refugee Students at LU"](#)
- [The Scenario Factory: "Lebanon with a view. A 2030 vision of the refugee crisis", study by Professor Karim Medjad and Dr. Abdel-Maoula Chaar](#)
- <http://esainfo.esa.edu.lb/docs/Lebanon%20with%20a%20view%20%28ESA%29.pdf>