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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
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In collaboration with



Issam Fares Institute for Public
Policy and International Affairs
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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Expanding the dialogue on
Higher Education & Refugees from Syria

Tuesday, February 12, 2019

Issam Fares Institute for Public policy and International Affairs
American University of Beirut | Conference Room | 4th floor
Beirut > Lebanon

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

HE and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES (CfP) Lebanon – February 12, 2019

Report

Date: 12 February 2019
Place: Beirut – Lebanon

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Tuesday 12 February 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 third National Stakeholder Dialogue in Lebanon, entitled 'Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES' in collaboration with Issam Fares Institute for Public Policies and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Through HOPES, several local and regional education institutions across KRI, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are currently implementing 32 innovative short-term projects targeting refugees and vulnerable host communities. In Lebanon, HOPES is funding 4 projects to ease the access of students to higher education and provide them with capacity building courses and support.

This gathering was part of a series of stakeholder dialogues organised on a national level bringing together representatives from these projects, ministries, higher education institutions and other key institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis to discuss the main issues addressed by these projects, their achievements and challenges as well as to further explore approaches which guarantee their greatest possible impact and sustainability.

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

The dialogue in Beirut included welcome notes by Dr. Tarek Mitri, Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policies and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB); Mr. Jose Luis Vinuesa, Head of the Economy and Local Development Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon; Dr. Ahmad Jammal, Director General for Higher Education as well as Dr. Carsten Walbiner, HOPES project director.

The gathering incorporated various presentations from representatives of Ettijahat-Independent Culture, the Centre for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University (LAU), the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policies and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

DIALOGUE REPORT

Structure

- Welcome and introductions
- **Panel Session 1: Easing access to higher education: Preparation, recognition and guidance**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Panel Session 2: Innovative and artistic teaching solutions**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Round Table Discussion: Higher education and refugees from Syria: Impact and Sustainability**
 - > Discussion on the findings and their impact for different stakeholders as well as for the future
 - > Identification of further steps towards more sustainable solutions

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- **Recommendations & Closing**

Process of the dialogue and issues addressed

The dialogue brought together 35 representatives from the EU Delegation, the MEHE, higher education institutions, project representatives as well as other key institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis.

- ❖ **Welcome Addresses and Introductory statements**

Dr. Tarek Mitri, Director of the Issam Fares Institute **welcomed** the participants, considering that the work undertaken by HOPES to help the Syrian students completing their studies is intertwined with the complex situation of the Syria crisis, thus faces further difficulty and intricacy. This is due to the lack of a national strategic governmental policy in Lebanon with regard to the Syrian displaced who are ultimately paying the price.

Although Lebanon is bearing an enormous burden by the influx of refugees, he questioned the commitment of the current Lebanese government to the non-refoulement principle with regard to the 1951 Refugee Convention and considered that the issue of the displaced should be completely separated from the political polarization.

In addition to the key role played by the international community and the commitment of the European Union, he considered cooperation and mutual accountability as primordial. When presenting the research work conducted by the Issam Fares Institute, Dr. Mitri noted that such work includes the obligation and responsibility to do advocacy and straighten false and untrue statements regarding refugees.

In his welcoming words, **Mr. Jose Luis Vinuesa**, Head of the Economy and Local Development Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, highlighted the added value of the HOPES project funded by the EU Madad Fund in responding to the needs of Syrian and vulnerable Lebanese.

He emphasised the importance of secondary and higher education, considering that HOPES has paved the way for small-scale projects which are helping to overcome the bottlenecks and barriers hindering young Syrians to continue or assume studies and make by that a useful contribution to dealing with the consequences of the Syria crisis on the region. The HOPES project has provided a platform for information exchange through the national dialogues as well as through the upcoming regional conference. Mr. Vinuesa ensured that the European Union is committed to providing support to higher education and invited participants to propose approaches to enhancing pathways and strengthening higher education.

Dr. Ahmad Jammal, Director General for Higher Education at the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, emphasised the importance of cooperation and collaboration between higher education institutions and projects especially with regard to the limited prerogatives and means of intervention the directorate possesses. He noted that collaboration and complementarity between all stakeholders is imperative for further success and efficiency. According to Dr. Jammal, the effect of the Syria crisis has been tremendous on the region and despite all efforts and achievements, he considered that the return of the Syrians to their country would be protracted, thus necessitating commitment, lobbying and advocacy to address the issue of higher education in a strategic wider scope.

Dr. Carsten Walbiner, HOPES project director, thanked the Issam Fares Institute for hosting the dialogue. He noted that through the partnership with important key stakeholders including the Directorate for Higher Education and the European Union, the HOPES project and other institutions and projects were able to respond to some of the needs of the Syrian refugee youth as well as disadvantaged members of the host community. He added that further exchange and collaboration between key players is paramount to strengthening the collective response of dealing with the effect of the Syria crisis.

- ❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the first session “Easing access to higher education: Preparation, recognition and guidance”**



This session incorporated presentations by

- > The Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) - American University of Beirut (AUB) on the project: **Science Education: A Key to University Access for Refugee Girls.** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The presentation was conducted jointly by representatives from the Center for Civic engagement, professors from AUB, and a teacher and student beneficiaries from the Kayany Foundation. The project aims at easing the way to higher education for more than 300 Syrian female refugees between the age of 14 and 25 years through the establishment of two science labs in the all-girls Ghata intermediate schools operating in informal tented settlements and the PADILEIA college-readiness program. The project furthermore provides capacity building for science and math educators addressing language-related barriers to educational success.

In her presentation, **Mrs. Brooke Atherton El-Amine**, Civic Engagement Programs Administrator, explained the project objectives and achievements stating that the two science labs, constructed and equipped in Bar Elias and Saadnayel schools in the Bekaa valley are utilised to deliver, on a weekly basis, accredited science education tailored to the needs of the 7th, 8th and 9th grade students. In addition, the Summer Science Reinforcement Program organised in 2018 allowed to prepare 59 nine graders to present the Lebanese official exam 'brevet'. According to Mrs. El-Amine, the project is keeping refugee girls on the pathway to secondary and higher education and dramatically increasing their future eligibility for higher education enrolment.

In a survey conducted with students, 87% of the beneficiaries considered that they had benefited from the laboratory sessions while 90% stated that Lab work is helping them retaining information better. These results were confirmed by the testimonials of both **Ms. Lubna Karbooj** and **Ms. Rama Rajab**, grade 9 students at the Kayany Foundation schools. They said, "Conducting experiments in the labs was very useful as it allowed us to put into practice the theory and to understand more." They added, "that they discovered that learning is fantastic and that they wanted to keep on learning".

The project incorporated a teacher training capacity building program to increase the capacity of science educators for teaching the Lebanese curriculum to Syrian refugees with a focus on language barriers and critical thinking. From **Ms. Hanadi Al Khatib's** perspective (Biology and Chemistry teacher, Kayany Foundation Malala 2 School), students have a weak background in English and this particular training has helped her to use English as well as Arabic while teaching chemistry. The main challenge was to bridge the gap between the curriculum taught and what students deal with in their daily life.

By addressing the key barrier of the language of instruction, the project helped improving the college readiness and success of refugee high school graduates. **Dr. Tamer Amin**, associate professor and chair of the department of education at the American University of Beirut, explained that science and mathematics are taught in English or French in Lebanon. This causes a big challenge for students, refugees and increasingly Lebanese in public and private schools, who do not have the necessary language proficiency.

When explaining the training content design, Dr. Amin stressed on the importance of analysing the features of the language of science and mathematics and the correlating language demands with an emphasis on non-technical words in sciences rather than the technical words that are usually easy to learn by students. He highlighted the need to create meaningful contexts when teaching lessons such as simulation experiences and lab work. Contrary to the common beliefs, immersing students with a language will not help them learn faster or encourage their participation. Rather using Arabic as a tool and integrating it strategically in the lessons will allow students to learn effectively. The intervention of **Dr. Rabih El Mouhayar**, associate professor at the American University of Beirut, focused on the training of teachers. The latter consisted of a needs analysis (focus groups, class observation), training of teachers and follow up. This teachers training can be considered a pilot to help teachers recognize the value of non-technical term and genre analysis of the content they deliver and the importance to integrate these into their lesson plans.

When discussing the project's challenges, the following key issues were mentioned:

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- The variability in students' English language proficiency and the need for strategies to encourage and support their participation in class.
 - Strategies for reducing language demands in classroom were not taken up. Further training and tools development are needed.
 - The strategies for language allocation (English and Arabic) need more training and practice.
 - Longer term planning at the level of units and school year is a necessity.
 - A stronger involvement of school leaders and instructional supervisors is needed (e.g. to support the strategic use of Arabic).
- > **Dr. Hana Addam El Ghali & Ms. Fida Alameddine**, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policies and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut on the project: **Integrating Syrians into Lebanese Higher Education through Recognition of Qualifications** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, **Dr. El Ghali** explained that the institute has conducted throughout the nine years of the Syria protracted crisis, various researches on the challenges and obstacles hindering the access of Syrians to and integration into higher education. This project addresses the issue of recognition and missing documentation and aims at developing a comprehensive, functional and tailor-made recognition tool for Lebanese higher education concerning Syrians with documents that need to be validated and more specifically Syrians without proper documents, in other terms, recognizing the prior learning achievements and experiences of Syrian refugees in Lebanon through the testing and adaptation of the "Qualifications Passport for Refugees" developed by NOKUT of Norway to fit the Lebanese context. The recognition tool will not only serve Lebanese higher education institutions but also the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), namely the Directorate General of Higher Education in charge of equivalency, and the UNHCR which is responsible for registering Syrians under temporary protection.

Ms. Alameddine highlighted the implementation stages of Nokut's "Qualifications Passport for Refugees" which comprises adapting the tool, a five-day training and testing phase with university students from AUB, LIU and AL-Jinan University and the MEHE, and introducing all needed modifications according to the context and finally the implementation with universities across Lebanon.

Research has shown that only 6% of the university-aged Syrians in Lebanon are currently enrolled in universities. Both, refugees as well as many Lebanese, are struggling in their higher education studies due to a lack of proper preparation. This project also seeks to further understand the coping and integration mechanisms of Syrians and refugees in general into the higher education system through an evidence-based academic research and the transformation of the study's findings in a guideline for the Lebanese higher education system.

The research comprises institution surveys and interviews conducted with admission and student affair's officers as well as surveys with Syrian students enrolled at different universities in Lebanon.

Ms. Alameddine presented the preliminary findings of the institutional surveys and interviews.

- In general, the ID or passport and the Grade 12 equivalency or Lebanese Bacculaureate are the most required documents from Syrians when applying to a university.
- 66.70 % of the applications presented by Syrian students were easily processed.
- Admission Officers faced the following challenges when processing the applications of the Syrian students:
 - Transferring courses and credits from an Arabic educational system
 - Different grading system
 - Difficulty in obtaining equivalency of documents
 - Weakness in English language (resulting in an unclear application)
 - Missing documents or incomplete files or delay in submission
 - Seeking university acceptance with the aim of securing a residency permit
- The main complaints received from the Syrian students were
 - Financial issues (tuition fees)
 - Language differences during transfer of courses or applying for a major



- Getting the required documents, attestation, and certification of documents
 - Finding residential accommodation
 - Weakness in English language (resulting in difficulties in filling/preparing the application)
 - Time management and meeting deadlines of enrolment and submission.
- In general, and regardless of nationality, all prospective students are treated equally during the admissions process.
 - In all universities, conditional approval is given to the students to obtain their missing documents such as equivalency or transcript.
 - When interviewing the admission officers in universities with high tuition fees considered as less accessible to Syrian youth, it was found that most of the Syrian students are self-paying and are enrolled in bachelor program. Whereas for universities with lower tuition fees, there are special programs and diplomas for Syrian students. The application form is translated to Arabic and the Student Affairs Officers assist the students in filling it. They also provide the students with an overall description of the university and discuss with them the most suitable major they ought to pursue.
 - With regard to the student affairs, Syrian students participate more in university-wide activities than clubs. Getting counselling is perceived by the students as a taboo, and therefore not actively sought. Cases of anxiety, relationship issues, and depression have been reported among Syrian students, and faculty members try to assist students in solving their issues and sometimes refer them to the appropriate department/unit.
 - In universities with high tuition fees, the structure of the Student Affairs Office and counselling department are independent. Trauma cases have been reported and there is a low participation in the student clubs, but individual Syrian students hold high-ranking positions such as VP of a club. Whereas in the universities with low tuition fees, it was found that many Syrian students study and work and almost 30% of the student club members are Syrians.

Dr. El Ghali stated that despite of the challenges faced regarding the reach out to Syrian students as well as the lengthy process of recognition, this project can facilitate on a longer term the pathway of refugees in Lebanon to higher education through the recognition of previous learning.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the second session “Innovative and artistic teaching solutions”**

This session incorporated presentations by

- > **Dr. Maha Shuayb**, Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and & **Dr. Mai Abu Moghli**, University College London (UCL) on the project **Online and Blending Learning: Support to teacher professional development in Lebanon** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, **Dr. Shuayb** focused on the importance of empowering and providing capacity building training for teachers and education practitioners in the formal and non-formal sector within the refugee contexts. The project implemented by CLS in partnership with UCL seeks to develop a certified Teacher Professional Development (TPD) course that combines face-to-face learning and a MOOC, which will help developing the capacity of educators in providing quality teaching and learning for children and youth, both refugees from Syria and Lebanese students, who attend public schools.

She also highlighted the need for training for the counselling department at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. This co-designed blended learning course using digital technology can both enhance learning and bring learning to many people. It will also allow scaling up teacher training and other forms of professional development in Lebanon.

Dr. Abu Moghli highlighted the importance of conducting a community-based research and involving partners from the community such as teachers, schools and organisations as well as local universities when designing the course.

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This will allow further acceptance and integration of the new approach in the partners' programs. The co-design process includes visits and workshops with stakeholders and community members and filming of material for the MOOC. The project comprises a series of three two-day pilot workshops with 20 teachers (formal and non-formal, MEHE, UNRWA, Syrian NGOs), reflections and final adaptation of the course.

Through the close collaboration and partnership with the MEHE and key stakeholders, the project team seeks to bring this innovative tool to scale through an integration into the regular teaching program of LAU and having a recognised blended learning diploma.

Following the presentation, participants discussed the importance of blended learning and online teaching for the future.

- > A design of the MOOC in Arabic, as it was considered that teaching in native language is essential, would allow the use of this online tool in Syria and other countries of the Middle East too.
 - > Dr. Ahmad Jammal highlighted that online teaching is very developed and sometimes better in certain disciplines than on-campus teaching. He emphasised the need to overcome political issues in Lebanon regarding the acceptance of e-learning and the need to develop a higher education strategy that includes lobbying with public and private universities.
 - > In his opinion, universities are still not well prepared in terms of training of the teachers and staff and they are afraid to lose students when offering courses online.
 - > With regard to accreditation and quality assurance of blended learning diplomas and courses, Dr. Jammal explained that a dedicated draft of law was developed two years ago but was not discussed yet due to political interests and polarisation. Only a close collaboration between universities in Lebanon and their joint lobbying will lead to pushing things forward.
- > **Ms. Joya Sfeir**, Ettijahat-Independent Culture **on the project "AJYAL" An Initiative to support Art Education ([Link to the full presentation](#))**

In her presentation, **Ms. Sfeir** highlighted the main challenges faced by Syrian artists and art students and the reasons behind the AJYAL project implemented by the Syrian organization Ettijahat. According to her, the deterioration of the overall quality of Arts education and the diminishment of the space for freedom of opinion has led to an increased risk of losing an entire generation for art and culture if no sufficient attention is given to younger artists. She added that there is a need for finding the means to return to the fundamental role of art of provoking free thought and for knowledge transmission between established artists and the next generation.

AJYAL seeks to develop the skills and reshape the ideas of Syrian artists and practitioners and to empower them through educational approaches so that they can adapt to the realities and challenges of their work in Syria while addressing the knowledge deficit hindering those who conducted their studies in past years.

The project will contribute to the creation of fair and varied educational opportunities as well as the preservation of work produced by a generation of experienced Syrian artists so that they can sustain their activity and feel simultaneously that they are part of a larger generation of young artists.

The project comprises the provision of scholarships to 10 Syrian new generation artists and the development of academic resources available online free of charge (e-ARTing).

Through an open call and announcements, Ettijahat will receive applications from students. A selection committee will nominate the scholarship holders based on a set of criteria including their commitment and seriousness and the need for competence in the field of study. A continuous follow up with the students will be conducted and further partnerships with institutions interested in the initiative will be sought to ensure the sustainability of the action.

Ms. Sfeir also introduced the online academic resources that will be produced throughout the project: A web-series of 8 episodes of approximately 22 minutes length containing interviews with and, narration and explanation by experts. These educational resources are accompanied by optional Arabic subtitles and audio descriptions for students with hearing or visual impairments. The first pilot produced was a piece by the famous director Roger Assaf on the history of directing.

When discussing challenges, Ms. Sfeir highlighted the following:

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- The launching of the open call during the academic year 2018-2019 excluded participants already registered and is challenging to those willing to register to the coming one.
- It was found that the licensed material in Arabic was of poor quality, and there is a need to recreate resources with intellectual property.
- In reference to the evaluation criteria, grades may not be necessarily relevant and there is a necessity for a new support model in the field of arts including an adapted selection committee structure and redefined criteria.
- It is of great importance to support undergraduate and post-graduate studies also outside of Syria.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the final round table discussion session “Higher education and refugees from Syria: Impact and Sustainability”**

During the final session, the following key points and recommendations were discussed:

- > The local response and solutions concerning refugees and higher education are developed individually by organisations. The government has to play a significant role in developing strategies and approaches that would address higher education for this particular target group.
- > Primary and Secondary education for refugees in Lebanon is managed by the government under the RACE initiative (Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon) with the support of international agencies. In opposition, the higher education initiatives developed in response to the Syria crisis were able to capitalize on the flexibility due to the late involvement of the Ministry of Education and Higher education to develop innovative approaches. The moment tertiary education for refugees is managed by the government, such initiatives will all have to be run under RACE.
- > The importance of the key role that could be played by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in lobbying for non-academic issues such as wavering of the legal residency of students.
- > The importance to take into consideration the needs of the host community and specifically addressing the tension between refugees and host community.
- > It was found that innovative approaches developed within the context of the Syria Crisis could also benefit on the longer term the host community, especially vulnerable Lebanese.
- > Participants also raised the “What’s next question” for the Syrian students after graduation in the context of the prevailing situation in Lebanon and the labour market restrictions. It was found that this question is not discussed in-depth and being delayed until refugees leave.
- > The importance of finding further funding for these small-scale projects under the grant scheme of HOPES, possibly with the EU / Erasmus+, considering their immense potential as pilot projects calling for continuation and duplication.
- > In terms of impact and sustainability, it is necessary to follow up on students and beneficiaries after the completion of the project and to demonstrate further the lessons learned and impact of these projects within the scope of the grant itself.
- > It is also important to lobby for a change of the donors perspective in terms of achievements and impact. Organisations are all stuck with numbers and quantitative indicators whereas the impact should be measured and reflected in relation to the youth and beneficiaries themselves with rather qualitative criteria.