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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES
FOR SYRIANS

NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Expanding the dialogue on
Higher Education & Refugees from Syria

Wednesday January 30, 2019

Gerasa Hotel

Queen Rania Street | Amman > Jordan

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

HE and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES (CfP)

Jordan, January 30, 2019

Report

Date: 30 January 2019

Place: Amman, Jordan

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Wednesday 30 January 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, entitled 'Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES' at the Gerasa Hotel in Amman, Jordan.

Through HOPES, several local and regional education institutions across KRI, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are currently implementing 32 innovative short-term education projects targeting refugees and vulnerable host communities. In Jordan, HOPES is funding 10 projects to ease the access of students to higher education and provide them with capacity building courses and support.

This gathering is part of a series of stakeholder dialogues organised on a national level bringing together representatives from 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 to 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, to strengthen national coordination and explore new approaches benefitting all stakeholders.

Following the welcome notes by the representative of the Delegation of the European Union to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ms. Maria Rosa Vettoreto, and the director of the HOPES project, Dr. Carsten Walbner, the dialogue incorporated various presentations from representatives of the Yarmouk University, the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan, the Arab Open University, Al- Ahliyya Amman University, Jesuit Refugee Service, Safa and Luminus Technical University College.

The dialogue allowed to further explore the main issues addressed by the projects under the grant scheme of HOPES (Call for Proposals) and to develop recommendations and approaches towards helping both refugee and host community students and institutions.

DIALOGUE REPORT

1- Structure of the Dialogue:

- Welcome and introductions
- **Panel Session 1: Higher education and refugees from Syria: Barriers, support, policy recommendations and future strategies** - Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Panel Session 2: Easing access to higher education**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Panel Session 3: Innovative teaching solutions**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges

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- **Panel Session 4: Beyond higher education: entrepreneurship and access to the labour market**
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
- **Recommendations & Closing**

2- Process of the dialogue and issues addressed

The dialogue brought together 25 representatives from the EU Delegation and higher education institutions, projects representatives as well as other key institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis.

❖ Welcome Addresses and Introductory statements

Welcoming remarks were given by **Ms. Maria Rosa Vettoretto**, Attaché, EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad Fund' and Delegation of the European Union to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; and **Dr. Carsten Walbiner**, HOPES project director.

Ms. Vettoretto emphasised the importance of a participatory approach towards the interventions made in the higher education sector. This approach will lead to an adequate presentation of information to students allowing them to make the right choices and complete their higher education studies. Hence, it is important to improve the capacity of the higher education institutions and to strengthen the experience sharing and exchange as well.

It is essential to provide students with information and orientation throughout the whole of their academic pathway. The support has to start at the end of the secondary school and should continue with offering career and job perspectives and opportunities.

She also noted that it is essential to adopt various approaches with students as it is not clear yet if the students and beneficiaries will remain in the country of asylum, move to another country or return to Syria. In designing future interventions, a participatory approach taking into consideration the different needs and expectations of the students as well as engaging the Ministry of Higher Education will allow for more sustainability of the actions.

In his welcoming words, **Dr. Walbiner** reminded the participants that out of 32 short projects funded by HOPES, 10 are implemented by local institutions in Jordan (31.25 %) which clearly shows the need to enable and empower institutions to implement projects that they have designed based on the real needs of stakeholders. He explained that this gathering will not only allow further information exchange and discussion amongst the projects, creating a national network but will also allow to draw lessons for future activities.

❖ Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the first session “Higher education and refugees from Syria: Barriers, support, policy recommendations and future strategies”

This session incorporated presentations by:

- > **Dr. Walid Alkhatib**, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS)-University of Jordan, on the project “**The educational challenge: identifying barriers and seizing opportunities in higher education for Syrian refugees in Jordan - policy recommendations and future strategies**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In his presentation, **Dr. Al Khatib** explained the mixed-methods approach the Center used to provide a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances and conditions of Syrian refugees enrolled in higher education in

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Jordan. He stated that the primary goal is to provide an understanding of the main challenges faced by the target group in their prospects and pursuits of higher education. This involves a research identifying the barriers and obstacles related to access and successful completion of higher education as well as to identify opportunities for increasing access to higher education and better educational outcomes.

The study methodology comprised of quantitatively surveying Syrian refugees as well as qualitatively inquiring into the experiences and perspectives of involved actors (policy makers, education providers, practitioners and eligible youth) through focus groups. This included social survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with a group of academics and administration staff to understand their opinion in the field of research, focus groups with representatives from the Syrian student population and local and international organizations as well as policy makers and representatives from public and private universities.

The survey was conducted with 1,675 students from 18 universities (6 public and 12 private). The main results of the study can be found in the full presentation. The following are only some key figures and remarks:

- > Almost 90 % of the interviewed students live in the Zaatari Camp and more than 40 % got their diploma in Jordan.
- > Recognition is still a challenge faced by Syrian students but the financial situation of the students and their families constitutes in general the main obstacle that prevent Syrian students from joining Jordanian universities with 58 % as a ratio.
- > The students have higher satisfaction in private universities then public universities. This is probably because a higher number of Syrian students are studying in private universities than in public ones. According to the ministry of HE, in 2016-2017, 15,000 Syrian students have been enrolled at Jordanian universities: 10,000 in private and 5,000 in public higher education institutions.
- > With regard to the labour market and through the focus group discussions, it was observed that one of the most important challenges the refugee students are facing is their acceptance to the practical training program required for their graduate studies in the scientific fields.
- > With regard to the social relations the refugees maintain within university, the high majority of students interact with Jordanian and Syrian students.
- > When thinking about the future after graduation, only 5% want to go back to work in Syria and 40 % think of permanently migrating outside of Jordan, while 38% would like to stay in Jordan. Security reasons (60%) are the main reason for thinking about not returning to Syria.

The final project output consists of scientific evidence and policy recommendations needed for the formulation of solid evidence-based policy and practice of invested actors in the region as well as in Europe.

Following the presentation, the following key points were discussed:

- 1- The need to ease the Refugee Security Clearance for Syrians that will allow a higher number of enrolment and would facilitate the procedures. The Centre for Strategic Studies has been in direct contact with the Ministry of Interior to present recommendations and to discuss this particular challenge.
- 2- Reducing university fees: The UNHCR representative indicated that it is easier to discuss with private universities the reduction of fees than with public universities.
- 3- The importance of practical training for the students' future.
- 4- It was found that life skills support provided at university is not sufficient.

> **Dr. Hussen Aburayash**, Arab Open University on the project "**A training of trainers on psychological development of the refugee youth**" ([Link to the full presentation](#))



Dr. Aburayash presented the training project on psychological development of refugee youth conducted with Syrian and Jordanian university students between the age of 18 and 25 years.

The various sessions and workshops conducted for a duration of 5 weeks, each session being for 3 hours, revolved around:

- Developing the psychological personality and self-management skills
- Social and leadership skills
- Logical, arithmetic and innovative skills of refugee youths
- Linguistic and verbal skills of refugee youths.
- Methods and communication and dialogue skills
- Technical and artistic skills

These workshops aimed at enabling students to positively participate in their community. Participants were highly motivated and actively participated in the sessions. They received a certificate of participation from the university. It was found that students have benefited tremendously on a personal level, which spiked the interest of other students to partake in similar future activities.

Following the presentation, the dialogue participants found that this particular project mostly worked on the psychosocial and personal development of students rather than being a training for trainers (TOT). They recommended developing follow up activities for dissemination of the knowledge acquired by the students. They also discussed the importance of setting criteria for psychological assessment of trainees who were traumatized and affected by the war before being able to conduct with them a TOT.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the second session “Easing access to higher education”**

This session incorporated presentations by :

- > **Dr. Fairouz Abousweilem**, Al- Ahliyya Amman University on the project **“Pre-academic programme for Syrian refugees and disadvantaged Jordanian youth”** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, Dr. Abousweilem focused on the importance of providing a pre-academic programme for Syrian refugees and disadvantaged Jordanians, which will enable them to achieve the necessary educational level to enrol in post-secondary academic programs and to increase their future employment prospects. The project targets mainly 40 Syrian refugees and disadvantaged Jordanians between the ages 17 and 38 who lack the necessary credentials, knowledge and skills required for success in higher education.

These young adults are unemployed; they depend on social programs and jobs that are not enough to support their families.

These students usually face the following academic challenges:

- Students have not studied English up to the necessary level
- Students do not have the necessary skills to perform well in examinations
- Students from underprivileged backgrounds lack the necessary computer skills and experience need for the acquisition of higher education or at the modern workplace

The Pre-academic Program (PAP) is one-year program that will mainly provide participants with a second chance to turn from academically deficient and unskilled into confident lifelong learners. It focusses on the following modules and courses:



- **Learning skills** - to help course participants become successful students by teaching them effective learning strategies including reading, taking notes, learning from lectures, exam preparation, exam writing and time management;
- **English language** to bring students up to the level of English needed for academic studies in a variety of disciplines (reading, writing, listening and speaking);
- **Computer skills** to teach basic proficiency in MS Office Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint, as well as email usage and internet skills;
- **Academic writing** to develop the writing skills of course participants in a way that enables them to produce academic work.

When discussing the challenges that the project might face during its implementation, Dr. Abousweilem stated that attendance of potential students on daily basis and drop out is considered as an important challenge considering that students have other responsibilities and jobs. She also discussed the transportation and material fees needed, noting that the university will be providing transportation buses to students. She finally noted that students are interested in pursuing BA scholarships. The university will try to link them to different opportunities and try to secure scholarships and/or reduction of fees.

> **Ms. Insherah Musa**, Jesuit Refugee Service on the project “**JRS Higher Education**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

According to Ms. Musa, the JRS Higher Education project is part of an overall programme implemented by the Jesuit Refugee Service. It aims to improve the access of refugees and vulnerable host community members in Amman to tertiary education by

- Offering access to online educational opportunities via the Online Learning Centres in Jabal Hussein.
- Improving their English language abilities, critical thinking, and other relevant skills via the JRS Higher Education Language Learning Centre.
- Providing advice and support in both their applications for scholarship opportunities as well as stipends for further support of living costs.

Refugees often face a sense of isolation, and mobility is limited, hence online education can help easing access to students.

From September 2018 till December 2018, the following results were achieved:

- **500** students are enrolled in different courses (mainly English and Psychosocial Case Management) as preparation for access to online higher education in collaboration with Georgetown University.
- **75** students are registered for online higher education courses. The cooperation with online education providers like Kiron, Arizona State University, Jamiya and Al-Quds Bard College give the chance for the instructors to enhance their knowledge and skills in understanding education in different contexts.
- **37** students submitted complete applications for international or national scholarships. The scholarship application assistance has given students hope to pursue education at the college level and to be resettled in other countries, such as the WUSC scholarship.

Overall, **1,178** students are enrolled in the Higher Education project with a ratio of **55%** female and **45%** male students.

As fostering a sense of community and social integration is important, students are also invited to the community events organized by the institution such as educational, cultural exchange and dialogue and artistic workshops.

Following the presentation, the participants discussed the challenges faced by the institution:

- Covering the transportation fees, especially for female students.
- Providing the same opportunities for students from different nationalities.

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- The limited funds create a lot of pressure on implementing organisations.
The main challenge is to convince donor agencies of the importance and need of higher education for students.
- > **Dr. Anas Al Sobeh**, Yarmouk University, on the project “**Providing fundamental ICT skills for Syrian refugees (PFISR)**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In his presentation, Dr. Al Sobeh explained the objectives and implementation phases of the PFISR project which comprises three tailor-made training courses: computer networks, computer maintenance, and web design with the following specific objectives:

- To provide refugees from Syria with the fundamental ICT skills that pave the way to pursue ICT-related degrees in higher education (HE),
- To receive internationally accredited professional certificates,
- To establish their own small businesses in the ICT field.

These introductory courses were carefully selected to provide a wide spectrum of skills that help Syrian refugees excel inside and outside traditional HE learning paradigms.

The university has already implemented 2 phases and the third will be from February till May 2019. Courses are implemented over a period of 18 months (9 courses, 45 hours each, and targeting 180 direct beneficiaries). A special condensed set of 9 training-of-trainers (ToT) courses targeting 90 direct beneficiaries are planned to further improve the sustainability of the project. Students are asked to develop their own projects and websites that can be found on the project’s website www.pfisir.info

As a result of the lessons learned from the first phase, courses are implemented on Saturdays to allow the participation of students and limit the dropout. It was found that transportation is a challenge as well for students. According to the students’ registration statistics, 52.8% are Syrian and 45.4 % are Jordanians with a ratio of 56.5 % male and 43.5 % female students. 79.6% are already enrolled at university whereas 93.5 % are interested in pursuing their studies.

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

This session incorporated presentations by

- > **Dr. Ahmed Aleroud**, Yarmouk University, on the project “**Empowering Syrian undergraduates to join MicroMasters Programs (SYMPRO): Towards career-focused and affordable graduate studies**”

Dr. Aleroud was not able to attend the dialogue – all information about the project is to be found in the attached presentation ([Link to the full presentation](#)).

- > **Mr. Nidal Khalifeh**, SAFA for Professional Training & Development on the project “**Teacher training for technology: Opening higher education for Syrians through improved teacher knowledge**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Mr. Khalifeh described the Teacher Training for Technology pilot project, which according to him, transforms teaching and learning by filling a critical gap in the preparation of local educators to integrate education technology into their classroom. The project is a collaboration between Safa (a local educational technology training provider) and EDaura (an education technology provider).



The content of the training program comprises

- **An introduction to Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)**, which attempts to identify the nature of knowledge, required by teachers for technology integration in their teaching, while addressing the complex, multifaceted and situated nature of teacher knowledge.
- **Technology Selection (SECTIONS Framework)**
- **Building Innovation with Technology**
- **An Introduction to Problem-based learning (PBL)** (*student-centred pedagogy in which students learn about a subject through the experience of solving an open-ended problem found in trigger material.*)
- **Leadership Inside the Classroom**

As part of the implementation, Safa will formalize its pilot teacher training curriculum into online and face-to-face packages. These packages are then distributed through the EDaura platform, leveraging both companies' outreach to teachers, education leaders, NGOs, and non-traditional education providers.

The project conducted a campaign on social media targeting 150 teachers of refugees and marginalized host community students to apply for the train-the-trainer sessions. 252 persons applied with a ratio of 85.3 % female participation.

The project's next steps comprise both, a training of trainers and a face-to-face teachers' training and will result in an online development of the program. The main goal is the preparation of teachers to effectively select and integrate appropriate education technologies into their classrooms, resulting in graduates who are better prepared for university research-driven study and the labour market.

Following the presentation, participants discussed the market needs and that many companies have their own assessment criteria, which no longer focus only on university certification but rather give importance to extracurricular activities. Research and extracurricular skills have become the core skills needed for innovation. In its project, Safa focusses on preparing students for their career path.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the fourth session "Beyond higher education: entrepreneurship and access to the labour market"**

The following session focused on the provision of skills to students from Syria to strengthen their chances for successfully accessing the labour market and being entrepreneurs amidst the difficulties and limitations existing in the local Jordanian context.

This session incorporated presentations by

- > **Dr. Anas Al Sobeh**, Yarmouk University, on the project **"Transferring e-business fundamentals to Syrian refugees (TEFSR)"** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In his presentation, Dr. Al Sobeh laid out the objective of the TESFR study program which aims to provide refugees from Syria with the necessary skills to start and operate e-commerce businesses using latest open source tools and web technologies as well as to allow students to pursue several web and commerce related higher education degrees in both ICT and economic colleges and/or start their own businesses.

TEFSR implements two courses that cover web and e-commerce subjects that are tailor-made to ensure the compatibility of the program with the educational and cultural background of the refugees from Syria.

Courses are implemented over the period of 18 months (6 courses, 45 hours each, and targeting 120 direct beneficiaries). A special condensed set of 6 training-of-trainers (ToT) courses targeting 60 direct beneficiaries is



planned to further improve the sustainability of the project. Students are asked to develop their own projects and websites that can be found on the project's website www.tefsr.info

Dr. Al Sobeh mentioned that the WooCommerce blue host domain that was used to allow the students to directly implement their e-commerce business has been purchased for 3 years which means that students can benefit by keeping their e-commerce website online one and half year after the end of the project.

The project spiked great interest of students as it provides opportunities for work. The main challenge are the limited funds to be able to deal with a higher demand.

Training-for-trainers sessions will be given to a chosen group of students to ensure the sustainability of the project. All project material will be available to students and other interested parties through a bilingual website that also advertises the program activities and events. The course will encourage attendees to start e-businesses and collaborate with local communities to market their products and improve their income.

> **Dr. Mohammad A. Alzubaidi**, Yarmouk University, on the project **“ENTREPRENEUR. Building entrepreneurship capacities for Syrian and Jordanian higher education students in northern Jordan”** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

According to Dr. Alzubaidi, the Syria crisis has affected heavily the Jordanian economy and labour market. The idea behind the ENTREPRENEUR project is to strengthen certain skills, mainly the entrepreneurship skills, of Syrian and Jordanian students that may improve their future career opportunities.

The project aims at creating entrepreneurs through building an on-campus innovation platform for Syrian refugee and Jordanian university students in northern Jordan. The project seeks to help refugees from Syria and Jordanians establish start-ups, which will eventually contribute to lowering the unemployment rate.

ENTREPRENEUR consists of designing and delivering training courses on entrepreneurship and relevant cutting-edge technologies, building an on-campus incubator to host innovative ideas and connecting the young entrepreneurs with business acceleration programs to help them start their own businesses.

In preparation for the project launching in January 2019, the project team developed an implementation plan, conducted a needs analysis and set up a website and Facebook page, which allowed launching a call for an innovative ideas competition amongst students. In parallel, an incubator space inside the university has been reserved and instructor assigned. The training workshop material has been developed and will be used to train the selected students.

Dr. Alzubaidi, considers that hosting diverse ideas in one incubator would present the main challenge to be taken into consideration in the project implementation. He also considers that connecting the entrepreneurs, who have innovative ideas, with business acceleration programs is key to helping them start their own business.

> **Ms. Leen Mango**, Luminus Technical University College, on the project **“Customer focus and cashier online simulation training and certification in Arabic/English”** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, Ms. Mango explained that the overall objective of the project is to enhance the customer service and cashier skills of 5,000 Syrian and vulnerable Jordanian students and employees in the retail, hair & beauty and hospitality sectors in Jordan.

The team of Luminus will translate and adapt to the Jordanian cultural context the online simulation, cashier training and customer service training and certification program developed by the Dutch Simulation Crew organisation.



This will allow to train and provide certificates to 1,500 registered Syrian and vulnerable Jordanian students at Luminus, 4,500 employees (70% certified) of companies linked with Employment Hub of Luminus and to provide 50 high performers with a Train the Trainer programme. The latter will allow for further peer-to-peer trainings in the future as a measure for sustainability.

This project seeks to strengthen the link with the retail, hospitality and hair & beauty industry in Jordan in order to increase the job opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian youth.

According to Ms. Mango, 60% of the students in Luminus benefit from scholarships. Therefore, the simulation program has been designed as blended learning courses for reasons of accessibility and affordability. The project will allow developing new innovative approaches to Education for Employment programs, to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process as well as to allow employers to provide their employees with access to training in the work place.

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

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

- > The issue of the contractual limited budget of a maximum of 60,000 Euro allocated to the projects as well as the lack of the possibility for extension of the same project.
- > Further coordination and collaboration between the organisations is crucial, especially to avoid providing services for the same beneficiaries' (duplication of participants) and to benefit from the existing services and experiences.
- > Opening to and linking with the private sector, private institution funding and banks, is necessary for the creation of further sustainability.
- > The gap between academia and the labour market: The importance of providing an extension or finding further funding to the projects to allow students to be able to start their career projects.
- > Online business was found as a good career opportunity for Syrians graduates in light of the labour market restrictions in Jordan.
- > There are many projects on capacity building of students and refugees. It is important that refugees are better informed about these different projects and opportunities available to them.