



DIMA
Diálogo Intercultural
de México Activo

Annual Report 2016-2017

#AquíNoHayMuros



PROYECTO
HABESHA



“I want to be strong for the people back home. I was a manager at a refugee camp in Iraq. So here I’m going to study management and go back and help make refugee camps more efficient, and just generally help Syrians move forward with their lives. As a refugee, your future is frozen, but as a student here ... anything is possible.”

-Hazem, Al Jazeera-

Executive Summary

About Dima

About Habesha Project

I Reception of Syrian Students at Risk

II Academic Placement

III Advocacy

Conferences / Seminars

Awareness Rising Activities

IV Capacity Building

Opening of Administrative office and guest house in the City of Aguascalientes.

Expansion of Habesha Project to Costa Rica

V Challenges

VI Partners

About DIMA

Intercultural Dialogue for an Active Mexico (DIMA) is a civil association founded in 2015 based on the principle of social co-responsibility, with the objective of promoting and taking solidarity actions towards vulnerable groups, being empathic and caring about humanitarian emergencies or crisis inside or outside Mexico.

About Habesha

The Habesha Project is a neutral, non-profit, non-political, and non-faith based international Mexican-led humanitarian initiative aimed at sending a message of solidarity to the Syrian nation. It does so by making it possible for Syrian students, who had their higher education interrupted because of the armed conflict, to travel to Mexico to pursue higher education in some of the most prestigious Mexican Universities with full scholarships. The Habesha Project undertakes a series of activities to operate the implementation of the program. From the students selection from four countries of the Middle East, (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey) to the visa process and their trip to Mexico. Once in Mexico, the students are given housing and maintenance grant while they take intensive Spanish classes to later join regular University courses.

Furthermore, with the support of the most prestigious academic institutions of the country, Habesha conducts advocacy activities to promote the human rights of refugees and migrants through numerous conferences, workshops and sensitization activities in at least six states in Mexico.

This initiative complements the limited but existing international initiatives that demonstrate a direct link between support for higher education and sustainably rebuilding communities affected by the armed conflict. The Habesha Project facilitates diplomatic efforts undertaken by Mexico and the historical tradition of the Mexican people to promote international solidarity and peace among nations.

In a context of diverse nations, Intercultural Dialogue for an Active Mexico seeks to raise cultural awareness and understanding as a key for achieving global peace.

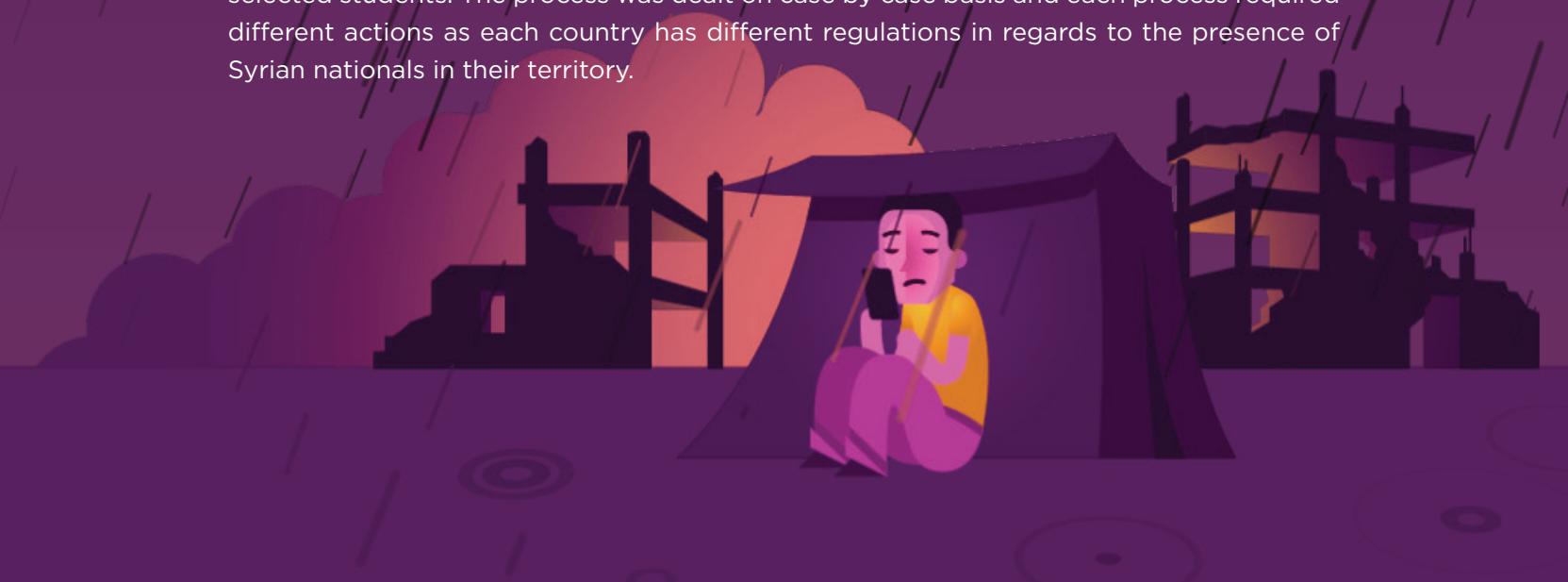
The Habesha Project is implemented through three main components, 1) Selection and reception of Syrian students at risk, 2) Academic Placing and 3) Advocacy. With the support of numerous professionals working on pro bono basis, this initiative is the only program in Mexico that has opened its borders to Syrian citizens affected by the armed conflict in the region, also placing the plight of Syrians in the national map through a wide presence in the media that has published around 500 news articles in national and international media outlets.



Reception of Syrian Students at Risk

In 2016 to the date of the publication of this report, Habesha Project had organized and coordinated the travel of eight Syrian nationals residing in Beirut, Lebanon, in Istanbul, Turkey, in Kurdistan, in Iraq and in Aleppo and Damascus, Syria.

The process started with the selection and interviewing of potential candidates referred to DIMA by diverse organizations in the Middle East, followed by the regularization of the migratory status of selected candidates in order to comply with the requirements needed to obtain the Mexican visa. Once the migratory situation of the candidates was regular, DIMA coordinated with Mexican consulates in the region for the visas delivery to the selected students. The process was dealt on case by case basis and each process required different actions as each country has different regulations in regards to the presence of Syrian nationals in their territory.



In some cases it was required to make the selected students travel to a third country (Ecuador or Iran) when the process of regularization was not possible in the country of residence (Turkey), or there was another pressing situation that required the movement of the student to a safe country, which was the case of Ecuador, a country whose open-borders policies allow Syrian nationals to access to the country without a visa requirement. Once in Ecuador with a regular situation, the student could approach the Mexican consulate in order to obtain the visa and continue their travel to Mexico. In all the cases, Habesha Project has been responsible of the traveling and living expenses of the students wherever they traveled and for all the time they had to stay in a third country until they had the required visa to continue their travel to Mexico.

Until now, the project had organized the following travel operations:

- 1.** During the month of May of 2016 the project organized the travel of Zain A. (last name will not be mentioned in order to protect the privacy of the person) who was residing in Beirut counting on a registration form the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Given the fact that Lebanon is not part of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the migratory situation of Zain A. was considered irregular. Then, Habesha undertook actions to regularize his situation by paying a fine to the General Security of Lebanon. Once his situation was regular, he traveled to Mexico on the 24th of May 2016.

- 2.** The second group arrived during the month of June and included Hazem S., a Syrian resident in the UNHCR Camp of Domiz, Iraq counting with UNHCR certificate and residence permission from Kurdistan Autonomous Region of Iraq. Also in that group traveled Tamer M. who was an irregular resident in Turkey. For the first time the Project faced the problem that Mexico does not count with a consulate in Iraq. Therefore, Hazem S. had to travel to Iran, where he stayed for a month until he received a visa from the Mexican consulate in Tehran. For the second case, it was not possible for the Project to regularize the migratory situation of Tamer M., due to changing regulation for Syrian residing in Turkey. Therefore,

Habesha asked him to travel to Ecuador taking the route Istanbul - Moscow - Havana - Quito, where he could regularize his migratory situation. However, when he arrived to La Havana he was detained and deported back to Moscow where he was in turn deported to Istanbul where he risked a new deportation. With the timely intervention of DIMA and the advice of UNHCR office in Mexico, he was sent to Iran where he met with Hazem S., both stayed around a month in Iran until they finally traveled to Mexico on the 14th of June 2016.

3. A third arrival was planned for the month of February of 2017. This was the case of Samah A., who had a regular migratory situation in Lebanon. This case represented no challenge and Samah was able to obtain her visa with no major delays and travel to Mexico on the 2nd of February 2017.

4. The fourth group included Jackdar M. and Silva N. (two Syrians living in a UNHCR Refugee camp in Iraq), and Ahmed A. who was residing in Aleppo, Syria. For the first two cases DIMA in collaboration with the Global Platform for Syrian Students that provided the funds, organized the travel to Iran where they obtained their visa, and Ahmed traveled from Aleppo to Beirut where he also obtained his visa with no major delays. The travel was coordinated so the three beneficiaries could travel on the same day. They safely arrived to Mexico on the 28th of February 2017.

5. The last arrival was registered with Amer B. Amer was residing in Damascus Syria and was about to start Syrian military service. So, as he was already accepted, Habesha Project had to act swiftly, given the fact that DIMA was not ready yet with the necessary file for his visa, he was sent to Quito Ecuador (via Istambul-Bogotá-Quito). He stayed there for approximately 4 months under the auspices of the Project to finally arrive to Mexico the 3rd of March 2017.

Academic Placement

In Mexico 3 students who had previously arrived and completed the intensive Spanish training had already started their university courses at Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City Campus. Two of them were registered in Master Degree programs and one in the first semester of an undergraduate program. The process had included the translation of Syrian certificates and documents and their revalidation by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the time of writing this report, two of the students registered in Master Degree programs had obtained successful grades in their first semester. This is an important achievement for the Project as it is possible to state that the model of integration and learning proposed by the Project has been successful and beneficiaries are quickly learning and successfully integrating into the Mexican higher education system.



Advocacy

As one of the main and equally important components of The Habesha Project, DIMA had conducted at least 25 conferences, seminars, and workshops in at least 6 states of Mexico, i.e. Mexico City, Aguascalientes, Querétaro, Sonora, Jalisco and Chihuahua.

Conferences / Seminars

Notably, DIMA was invited to present The Habesha Project to the Instituto Matías Romero, school of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico responsible to train diplomats before they are sent abroad.

The project has also participated in the permanent Seminar of Middle East at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in the Science Politics Faculty. In the state of Sonora, DIMA participated at the Permanent Seminar of minor migrants that analyzed the causes and consequences of minor migrants that go and return to the U.S.

DIMA regularly participates in conferences related to human rights of refugees and migrants, Middle East issues, and civil society participation.

Awareness rising activities

In different universities of the country DIMA has raised awareness about the plight of refugees through photographic expositions and documentaries. Also, during the month of August of 2016, DIMA organized the travel of Martina Iannizzotto, head of office from the World Food Program (WFP) in Beirut, to Mexico to participate in two conferences at ITAM and ITESM Querétaro.

Capacity Building

Opening of Administrative office and guest house in the City of Aguascalientes.

During the reported period, DIMA, with the support of UNHCR Mexico had opened an office in the city of Aguascalientes. This office is now the administrative base of DIMA and serves also as a guest house for the Syrians that had arrived thanks to the Project. This is an important step for DIMA, given the fact that in the past it did not count with a formal physical space to organize its administrative work.

Expansion of Habesha Project to Costa Rica.

After over a year and half of collaborating with a group of professionals from Costa Rica, Habesha Project had been officially registered as an NGO in Costa Rica and had signed its first agreement with CENFOTEC, a private university specialized in technology studies. With these steps completed, DIMA plans to receive two Syrian students in that country in 2017.



"Now I can study to be an architect. My city [Aleppo] was beautiful: Now, it's a big mess. I want to help rebuild it. They are going to need us."

-Zain, Al Jazeera-

Challenges

After two years of legal existence, DIMA has been able to open Mexico's doors to Syrian nationals that were not able to complete their studies because of the conflict in the Middle East. DIMA has also a solid network of supporters in Mexico and abroad. Despite the complexity of its operations, it continues facing several challenges for achieving Habesha Project's goal in Mexico.

Candidates are coming from different countries in the Middles East, each country has different regulations in regards to the migratory status of Syrians, furthermore, regulations changed constantly and this pose a challenge to the project. To face this challenge, DIMA plans to consolidate its alliances in the Middle East in order to get advisory and legal support to solve eventual problems in future cases.

With the arrival of new Syrian students, the workload for the project staff has considerably increased, given the fact that DIMA is responsible for all aspects of the residency of the students. The Habesha Project works with 0% admin cost and relies exclusively on pro-bono professionals. It is a pressing question where DIMA will find funds to cover a minimal administrative structure and ensure its sustainability.

DIMA has received large media coverage and has reached around 500 media articles in national and international media. This is important to build support for the Project. Nevertheless, a large exposure has also attracted criticism from skeptical sectors of society that increases due to negative information from western media about Middle East nationals. This obliges DIMA to step up its effort to disseminate its narrative in favor of openness, the virtues of interculturality and shared responsibility.

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