

THE EU MADAD FUND'S REGIONAL ALUMNI NETWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, the European Union, through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'EU Madad Fund', has been committed to providing youth, refugees and host communities in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey with the necessary support to better access quality further and higher education opportunities.

In this perspective, a unified regional alumni community and network of former and recent EU-funded scholarship holders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey is being developed to facilitate exchange and increase their further educational and labour market prospects at the national, regional and international levels.

The EU Madad Fund's Regional Alumni Network for Higher Education is being set up by the **HOPES-LEB project (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians and vulnerable youth in Lebanon)** implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Campus France and Nuffic, in cooperation with the **EDU-SYRIA project** led by the German Jordanian University, and with the active participation of alumni and students of other higher education projects funded by the EU Madad Fund as well as higher education institutions and organisations in the region.

As a follow-up to two regional virtual focus group meetings organized in September 2020, with 22 alumni students' representatives of the former HOPES regional project, EDU-Syria and SPARK, a needs assessment survey was developed and conducted to further understand the needs and priorities of alumni students in the region and integrate their recommendations in the planned activities of the network. The survey will be followed by further discussions and meetings leading to the establishment of the network.

2. THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The survey consisted of 17 questions, which were divided into three sections:

- > Part 1: general information (questions 1-9),
- > Part 2: current alumni needs (questions 10-15),
- > Part 3: engagement in the Regional Alumni Network (questions 16-17)

The questionnaire was developed in both English and Arabic and disseminated to alumni students of the HOPES project, EDU-Syria and SPARK in Egypt, Iraq-KRI, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey by email and WhatsApp. Participants of the previous focus group meetings helped spread the survey among their alumni friends.

Overall, 482 persons filled in the questionnaire. The below statistics and results are based on their responses.

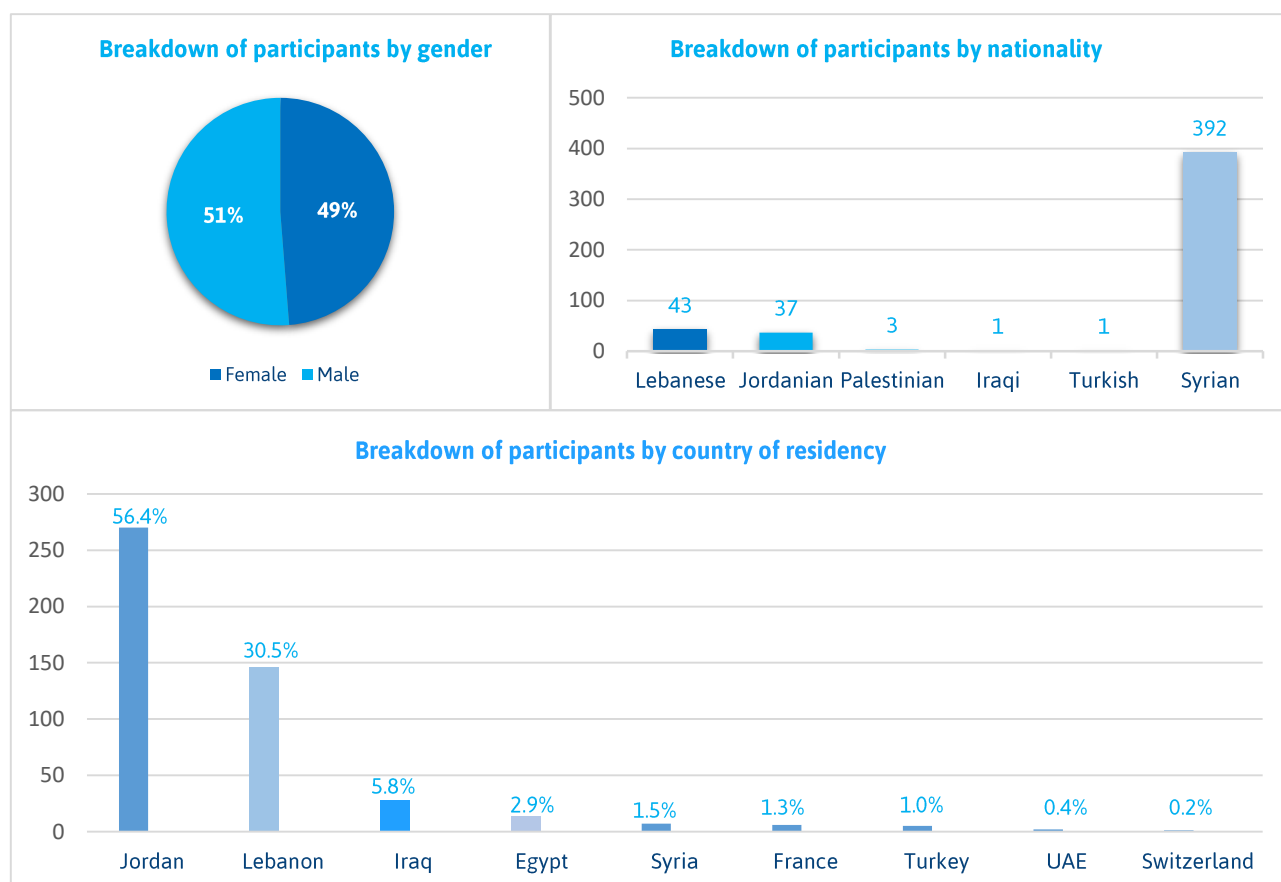
3. STATISTICS & RESULTS

3.1. Profile of the participants

Overall, 482 participants:

- > 235 (48.76%) females and 247 (51.24%) males.

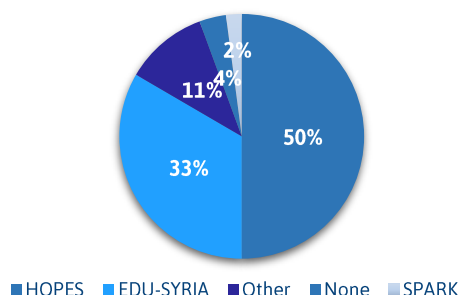
- > Of the 477 persons who answered the question about their nationality, 392 are Syrian, 43 are Lebanese, 37 are Jordanian, 3 are Palestinian, 1 is Iraqi, and 1 is Turkish.
- > The majority of the participants (270) reside in Jordan; 146 live in Lebanon, 28 in Iraq, 14 in Egypt, 7 in Syria, 6 in France, 5 in Turkey, 2 in the UAE, and 1 in Switzerland.



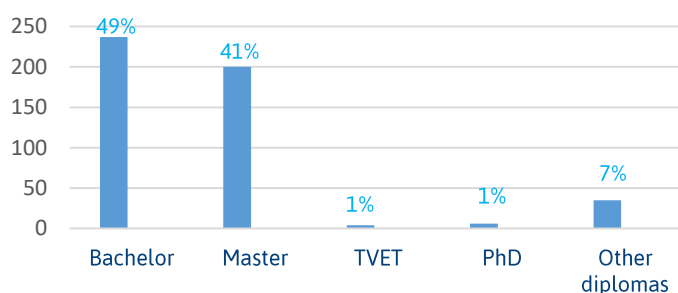
3.2. Educational background & current status

- > All except 17 participants have previously or recently received a scholarship.
- > The majority are HOPES alumni (240 participants); 161 are from EDU-SYRIA (GJU) and 10 are from SPARK.
- > The remaining participants received scholarships that were not funded by the 'EU Madad Fund', such as DAFI (UNHCR) (41), Laser Scholarship (7), Jesuit Worldwide Learning JWL (1), Youth Power (USAID) (1), Karam Scholarship (1), the Jordanian Ministry of Education (1), and GIZ Scholarship-GJU (1).

Breakdown of participants by scholarship

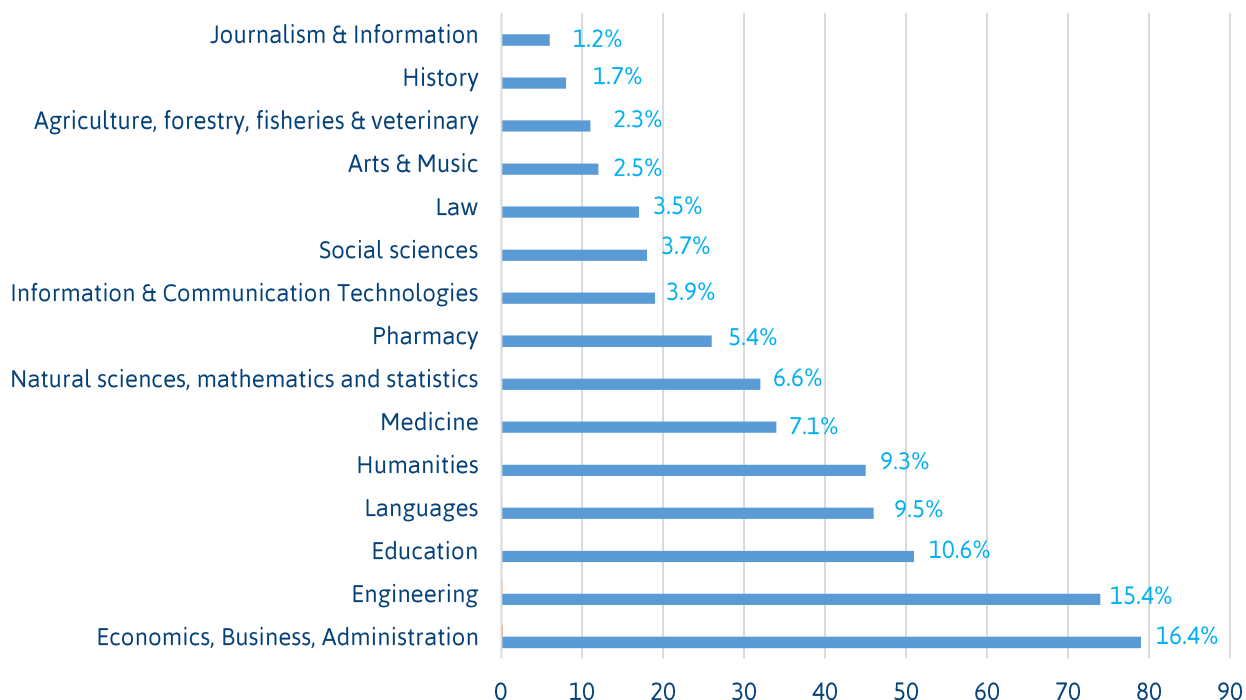


Breakdown of participants by academic level

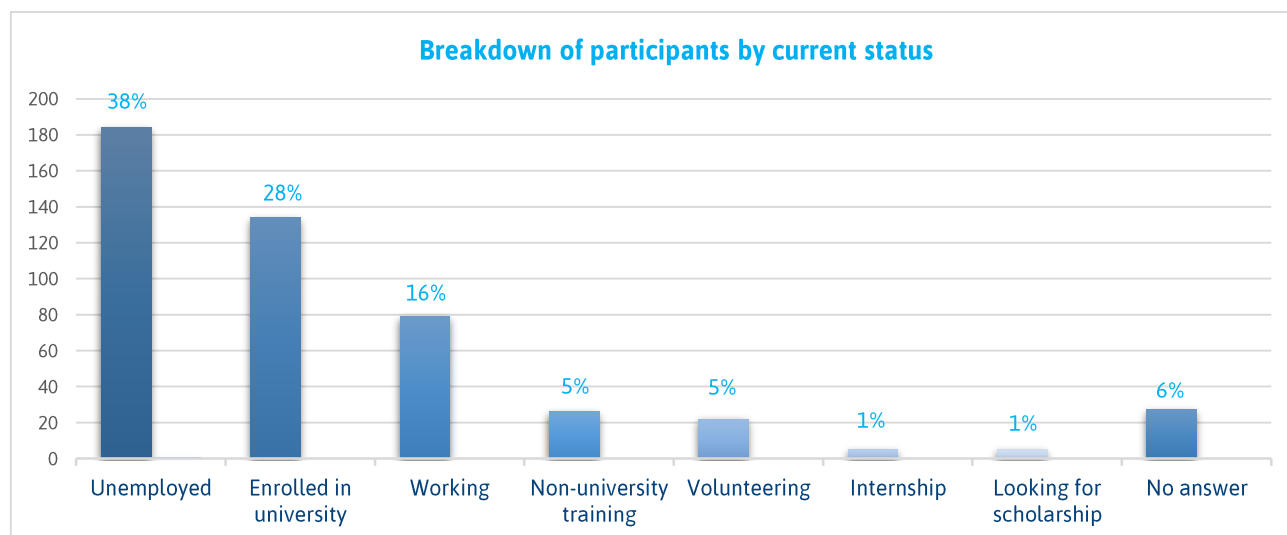


- > 237 participants hold a bachelor degree, 200 a master degree, 4 a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) certificate, 6 a PhD, and 35 other diplomas.
- > Regarding the subjects studied, 79 major in Economics, Business, Administration; 74 in engineering; 51 in Education; 46 in Language; 45 in Humanities; 34 in Medicine; 32 in Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics; 26 in Pharmacy; 19 in Information and Communication Technologies; 18 in Social sciences; 17 in Law; 12 in Arts and Music; 11 in Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary; 8 in History; 6 in Journalism and Information, and 4 persons didn't answer this question.

Breakdown of participants by Major



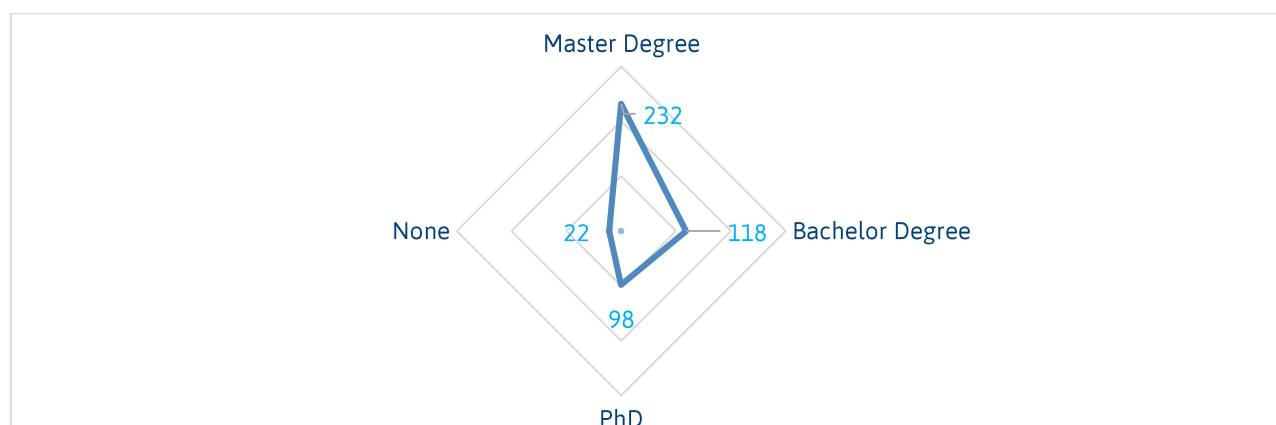
- > Most of the participants have graduated between 2018 and 2020.
- > 184 persons are unemployed (5 of which are taking care of their family), 134 are currently enrolled at a university, 79 persons are working, 26 are participating in a non-university training, 22 are volunteering, 5 are interns, and 5 are looking for a scholarship to continue their master or PhD. (27 persons didn't answer this question.)



3.3. Current Needs

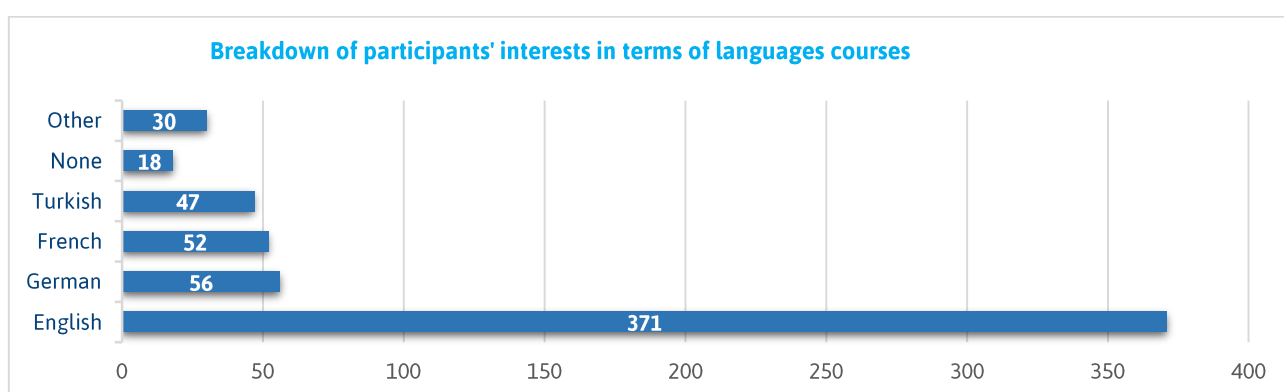
Participants were asked what kind of information would they regard as helpful to improve their situation on the labour market and to have better livelihood opportunities.

- ❖ In terms of **information on higher education study and scholarship programmes** (participants could choose more than one option):
 - > 232 persons are interested in master degrees,
 - > 118 persons in bachelor degrees,
 - > 98 persons in PhD,
 - > 22 persons aren't interested in any of the above.

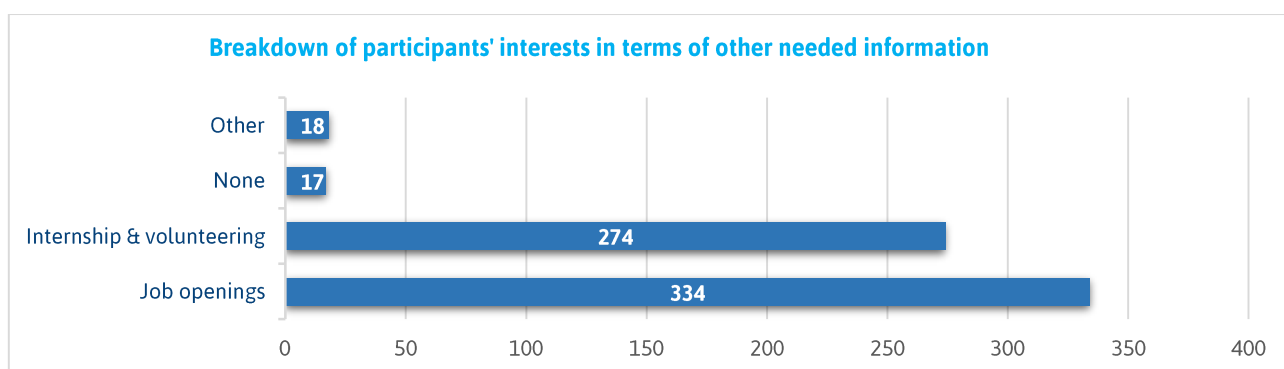


Among those who showed interest in higher education study and scholarships programmes, 73.26% are interested in programmes on an international level, 64.17% in their country of residence, and 38.5% in the region.

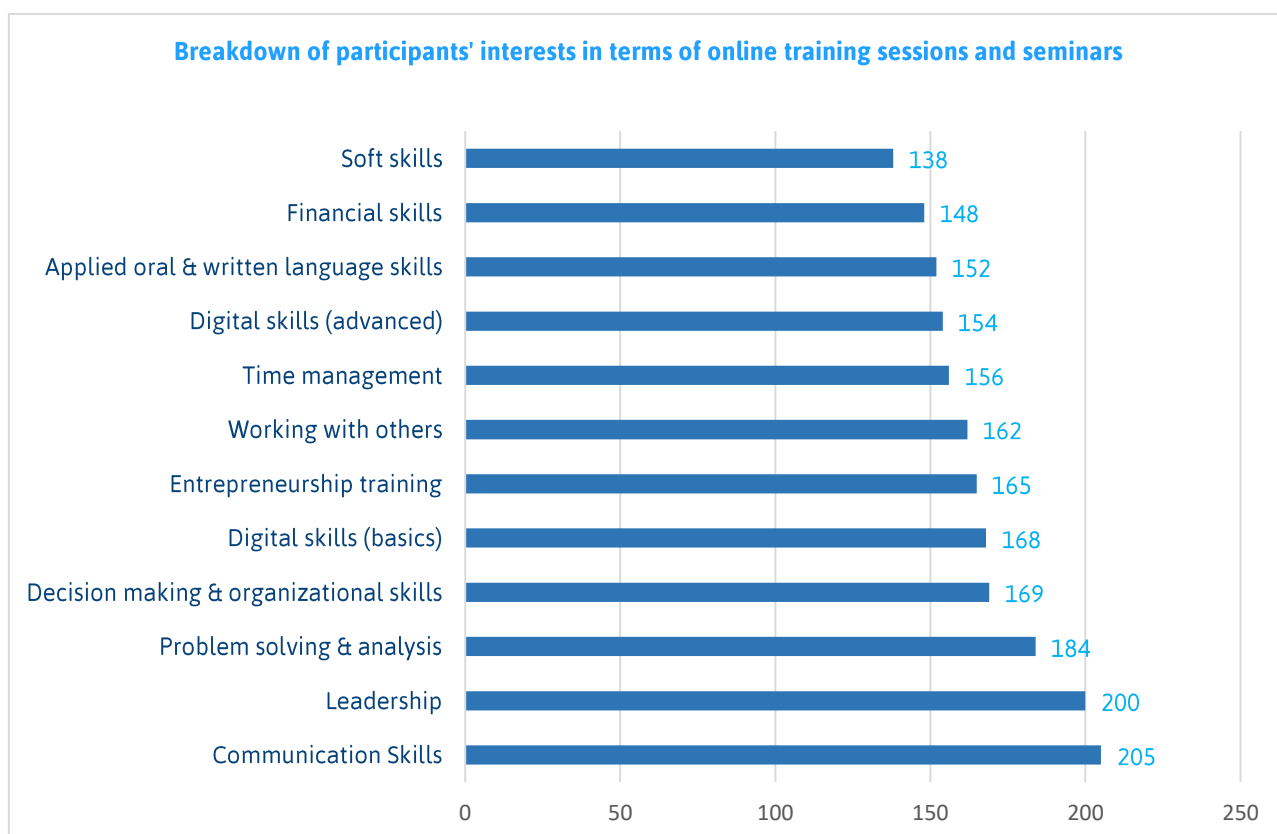
- ❖ In terms of **language courses** (participants could choose more than one option):
 - > 371 persons are interested to learn English, 56 German, 52 French, 47 Turkish, and 18 persons aren't interested in language courses. Whereas 30 persons chose other languages among which 23 Arabic, 2 Japanese, 1 Korean, 1 Norwegian, 1 Kurdish, 1 Russian and 1 Spanish.



- ❖ In terms of **further needed information** (participants could choose more than one option):
 - > The majority of participants (334) are interested to receive information on job openings and vacancies.
 - > 274 persons are interested in internship and volunteering opportunities.
 - > 17 persons didn't show any interest in this kind of information, whereas 18 participants expressed the wish to know more about other areas, such as workshops (1 person), immigration information (1 person), and information on starting their own business (1 person).



- ❖ In terms of **online training sessions and seminars**, the below graph illustrates the themes and subjects that participants find interesting to attend, by order of popularity (participants could choose more than one option):



Other areas of interest were mentioned such as:

- > Programming, artificial intelligence,
- > Modern and contemporary history,
- > Research methodology,
- > Public health issues,
- > IELTS and TOFL Preparation Courses,
- > Cosmetics and any other things related to pharmacy, medical analysis, medical courses,
- > Project management,
- > Human resources (writing reports / social protection),
- > Photoshop, photography, graphic design,
- > Training of Trainers (ToT).



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- ❖ In terms of **topics that participants would regard important to talk over during networking discussions** ("Networking Talks"), the most relevant answers received can be split as follows: (The answers had to be formulated by the participants and could not be selected from a pre-defined list.)

Exchange of experiences:

- > Sharing experiences with experts in various professional fields,
- > Exchange of experience between alumni.

Personal development:

- > Communication skills and working within a team,
- > How to focus on personal improvement and find opportunities for work despite the country's economic and social problems,
- > Development of individual practical life skills,
- > Motivational topics,
- > Mental health and dealing with depression (How to control one's life),
- > How to improve self-confidence,
- > Problems and solutions for working remotely in the current situation,
- > How do develop networking skills,
- > Leadership,
- > Positivity and how to improve oneself / being positive even in negative situations.

Topics related to the alumni majors:

- > Teaching in the era of online learning,
- > Pharmacy related topics,
- > Disabilities and Inclusion,
- > How language and psychology are interrelated,
- > Economic affairs,
- > Digital marketing,
- > Engineering topics,
- > Psychology.

Pursue higher education and be ready for the labour market:

- > How to search for opportunities,
- > Scholarships abroad, how to apply, and how to fill out the application?
- > How to benefit from job opportunities outside the area of residence?
- > The jobs of the future,
- > Developing digital libraries in times of Covid-19, giving students more access to needed sources and resources,
- > Needed skills to enter the labour market,
- > Classroom administration and individual differences at the university level,
- > Dialogue about the obstacles university graduate students are facing,
- > The gap between educational outcomes and market requirements,
- > How to write a CV, prepare for interviews and create presentations,
- > Freelancing and work using global platforms such as shutterstock & freepik,
- > Looking for job opportunities using LinkedIn,

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- > The difficulties faced by Syrian refugees in terms of higher education and the labour market.

Entrepreneurship:

- > Creating sustainable businesses,
- > Entrepreneurship topics,
- > How to start a new business after graduation,
- > How to set up a small business.

Technology:

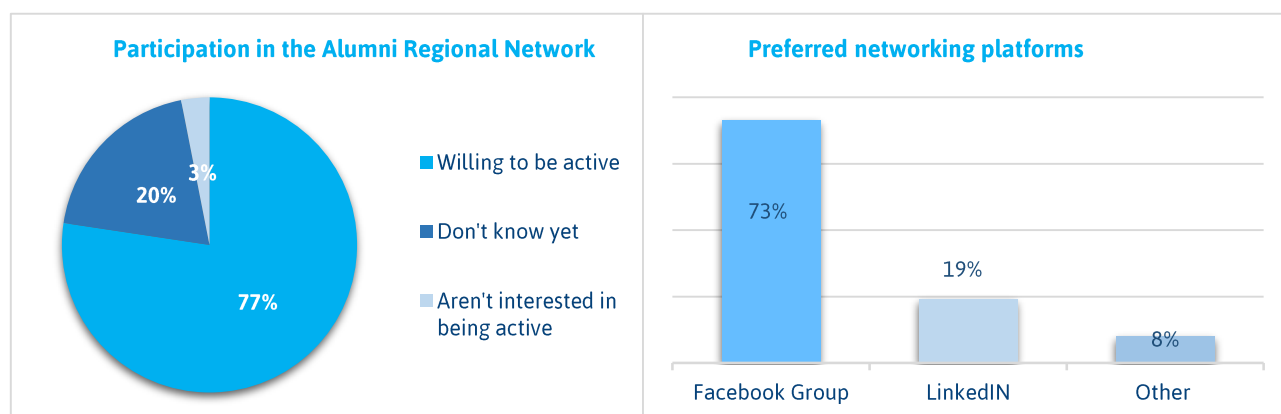
- > Social media and strengthening the ties between civilizations through technology,
- > Ways to benefit from technological development,
- > Networking with the international community.

Other topics:

- > The impact of media on public opinion,
- > Freedom of expression in religions,
- > What's next after Covid-19?

3.4. Alumni Engagement in the 'EU Madad Fund's Regional Alumni Network for Higher Education'

- > 276 participants chose Facebook Group as the preferred networking platform for the alumni network, while 71 participants suggested LinkedIn, and a few opted for other platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Teams, and Twitter.
- > 301 participants are willing to be active members of the network, 292 of whom provided us with their phone numbers so that we can reach out to them by WhatsApp. 12 participants aren't interested in being active members of the network, while 76 participants aren't sure of their answer yet.



4. CONCLUSION

The results of this assessment will be beneficial to better develop the activities and services offered through the 'EU Madad Fund's Regional Alumni Network for Higher Education'.

The remarkable participation rate proves the need of this kind of networking and provision of support to graduates and alumni, the majority of whom are willing to be active members of such a structure.



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Moreover, the high rate of unemployment shows the drastic need for information on potential job opportunities, internships as well as trainings and courses in various fields, potentially increasing the prospects of alumni to access the labour market.

Further meetings with representatives from higher education institutions and alumni will be organised to discuss the results of the survey and the previous focus group discussions which will allow to better respond to the needs and suggestions of the youth.

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