

## REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER MEETING

21 January 2021

### REPORT

**Date: 21 January 2021**

**Place: Virtual Meeting**

#### BRIEF SUMMARY

On Thursday January 21, 2021 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 and in cooperation with **EDU-SYRIA** project led by the German Jordanian University, both funded by the European Union, through the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, the 'EU Madad Fund' organised the first Regional Stakeholder Meeting.

This gathering brought together more than 36 representatives from the EU Delegations in the region, Ministries of Education and Higher Education, higher education institutions, alumni representatives, organisations and key stakeholders involved in the tertiary education sector related to the Syria crisis to discuss the current needs and priorities of alumni students of higher education projects and the establishment of a unified regional alumni network of former and current EU-funded scholarship holders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

The meeting incorporated welcome notes by **Ms. Orla COLCLOUGH**, International Aid Cooperation Assistant - EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis and Higher Education focal point at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon as well as **Dr. Carsten WALBINER**, HOPES-LEB Project Director who welcomed the participants and emphasized the European Union's and HOPES-LEB's endeavour in investing in higher education, and in enhancing support to alumni of the EU Madad Fund projects through the Regional Alumni Network and the continuation of collaboration on a regional level.

The sessions included the presentation of the results of the Needs Assessment Survey conducted in 2020 with former and current scholarships holders of the higher education projects funded by the EU Madad Fund as well as the planned Regional Alumni Network of scholarship holders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Furthermore, representatives of the alumni from HOPES-LEB, EDU-SYRIA and SPARK shared with the participants their opinion about the benefit and importance of the creation of such a network. Presentations were followed by a discussion on recommendations to improve the implementation of activities, the identification of priorities and possible activities and exploring how institutions can contribute on a regional level.

#### MEETING REPORT

The gathering was organised as follows:

- **Welcome addresses and brief introduction**
  - > Ms. Orla COLCLOUGH, International Aid Cooperation Assistant - EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, Higher Education focal point at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon
  - > Dr. Carsten WALBINER, HOPES-LEB Project Director
- **Session 1: Alumni needs and Priorities**
  - > Presentation of the results of the Needs Assessment Survey conducted with former and current scholarships holders of the higher education projects funded by the EU Madad Fund
- **Session 2: The Development of a Regional Alumni Network**

- > Presentation of the planned Regional Alumni Network of scholarship holders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey
- > The added value of the network (by representatives of the Student Alumni Board)
- > Discussion on recommendations and identification of priorities and possible activities
- > Level of involvement of the institutions

- **Outlook and closing remarks.**

- ❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the first session “Alumni needs and priorities” (Annex 1 - Power point)**

> The first session emphasized the commitment and support of the European Union through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the “EU Madad Fund” 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 through the funding of higher education projects such as HOPES, EDU-SYRIA and SPARK. In this perspective, a unified regional alumni network of former and current EU-funded scholarship holders in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey is being developed by the HOPES-LEB project in cooperation with the EDU-SYRIA project implemented in Jordan under the lead of 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.

The unified regional community seeks to facilitate exchanges and the building of relationships and connections between alumni and to provide potential educational and labour market opportunities at national, regional and international levels.

The activities of regional network will include:

- The provision of information on study and labour market opportunities through a dedicated webpage and networking platform, such as scholarships, volunteering and internships opportunities, online and face to face courses and training sessions (languages, entrepreneurship and other), and links to career and orientation and job platforms etc.
  - Online activities, events, seminars, information sessions and discussions in particularly linked to skills and access to labour market opportunities
  - The development and dissemination of communication tools and campaigns to promote the network and success stories of the students.
  - Coordination and networking between alumni, HEIs, and projects in the region to ensure a better implementation and sustainability of the network.
  - Organisation of coordination and consultative meetings.
  - The development of a Student Alumni Board with representatives of the EU funded projects which will contribute to fine-tuning the approach, assist with outreach and dissemination activities and facilitate student discussions, initiatives and events.
- > The session focused on presenting the results of focus groups and the **Needs Assessment Survey** conducted with former and current scholarships holders of HOPES, EDU-SYRIA and SPARK in October 2020 to further understand the needs and priorities of alumni students in the region.

General findings can be summarized as follows:

- Overall, 482 participants filled the survey with 235 (48.76%) being female and 247 (51.24%) male.
- Of the 477 persons who answered the question about their nationality, 392 are Syrian, 43 Lebanese, 37 Jordanian, 3 Palestinian, 1 is Iraqi, and 1 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.

- **In regard to their educational background:**

- 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'.
- 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.
- Participants were from various majors (economics, business, administration, engineering, education, language, humanities, medicine, natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, pharmacy, information and communication technologies, social sciences, law, arts and music, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary, history, journalism and communication studies)
- Most of the participants have graduated between 2018 and 2020.
- **In regard to their current social and employment status**
  - 38 % persons are unemployed, 28 % are currently enrolled at university and only 16 % have stated that they found job opportunities and are currently working.
  - The rest are either volunteering, doing internships, following non-university trainings or looking for a scholarship. It has to be mentioned that 6 % preferred not to answer the question.
- When asked about defining helpful **action fields and information where support is needed** to improve the alumni situation on the labour market and to have better livelihood opportunities, the survey participants indicated the following:
  - **Information on higher education programmes and scholarship offers:** the majority are interested in Masters & Bachelors study programmes and the rest in PhD studies. Regarding the preferred place of study, international offers (275 votes) and opportunities in the countries of residence (242 votes) were equally favoured, while programmes in the region met with less interest (145 votes) but were still regarded an option.
    - In terms of **language courses**, English was by far the favoured choice of 371 persons out of 398 respondents.
  - **Information on Job openings and vacancies** (334 votes) and **internship and volunteering opportunities** (274 votes).
  - **Online training sessions and seminars** around communication skills, leadership, problem solving & analysis, decision making & organizational skills, digital skills, entrepreneurship trainings, working with others.
  - **Networking discussions** to enhance experience sharing, getting ready for the labour market, technology, personal development, entrepreneurship and topics related to the alumni majors.
- **Preferred networking platform:** Facebook Group (73%) while 19% suggested LinkedIn, and a few opted for other platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Teams, and Twitter.
- **In terms of alumni engagement:** The remarkable participation rate clearly 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.

> The follow-up discussions on the results of the survey and the previous focus group meetings will allow to better respond to the needs and suggestions of the youth. Further surveys will be conducted throughout the implementation of the network to monitor the activities and enhance responsiveness to the needs.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the second session “The Development of a Regional Alumni Network”**

> The second session of the meeting reflected on what has been achieved during the preparation phase in regard to:



Funded by the European Union



HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION  
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES

IN COLLABORATION WITH

**EDU-SYRIA**

A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- Coordination meetings held in the first half of 2020 with representatives of HE projects funded by the EU Madad Fund.
- Focus groups conducted with 22 alumni students.
- The development and dissemination of the above mentioned needs assessment survey.
- The establishment of the Student Alumni Board with 31 alumni from projects funded by the EU Madad Fund in the region as well as the creation of working committees. The Alumni Student Board is a core component of the alumni network and will contribute to the dissemination of activities, participate in coordination meetings and facilitate student discussions, initiatives and events. Members will be trained to become moderators and facilitators.
- The development of a distinct visual identity and communication tools (in progress).
- The preparation for the development of a web platform (in progress).
- Based on the needs identified in the survey and focus groups, the identification of potential subject and themes that can be translated into online activities such as seminars, workshops, training sessions, networking discussions / podcasts, and events. The focus will be on :
  - > **Labour market context & regulations**
  - > **Searching for a job / internship**
    - Job opportunities & building a professional network.
    - Importance of internships / volunteering and where to find them.
    - LinkedIn course (what is LinkedIn? How to create your profile? How to search for a job? Etc.).
  - > **How to get ready for the labour market**
    - How to prepare a good CV, cover letter, job interview.
  - > **Needs of the labour market**
    - Understanding the needs of the labour market.
    - Career orientation.
  - > **Going digital**
    - Digitalization of the labour market in times of Covid-19 / post Covid-19.
    - Basic and advanced digital skills (e-commerce, SEO, etc.).
    - Online teaching training for teachers.
  - > **Personal development**
    - Problem solving techniques.
    - Conflict management and teamwork.
    - Time management / planning skills
    - Communication skills.
    - Leadership training.
    - Stress management.
  - > **Innovation & entrepreneurship**
    - How to turn your idea into a business?
    - Entrepreneurship & incubation.
  - > **English language courses**
    - IELTS / TOEFL preparation courses.
  - > **Moderation and online facilitation (for the Alumni Student Board members)**
- It is planned to launch the network during the spring of 2021.
- > Three representatives of the Alumni Student Board presented their recommendations in regard to the added-value and benefits of the establishment of a regional alumni network.

IMPLEMENTED BY

**DAAD**



**nuffic**



Funded by the European Union



HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION  
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES

IN COLLABORATION WITH

**EDU-SYRIA**

A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

According to **Mr. Louay Haji**, alumnus of the HOPES project living in Iraq-KRI, this alumni network will fill in the gap between HEIs and the labour market and will provide support and guidance on how to deal with administrative procedures and education requirements. The network will provide heavily requested information on post-graduation activities and opportunities to increase the alumni's prospects on the labour market.

**Mr. Ibrahim Al Hariri**, alumnus of the EDU-SYRIA project, living in Jordan, considered that the benefit of the network lays in its regional structure. Establishing a network with alumni from different countries in the region will allow them to share their experience and help each other.

**Ms. Nawar Rahmouni**, alumna of SPARK, living in Lebanon, stressed on the importance and the accuracy of the needs assessment conducted. She considered that the latter reflects the needs of the student and the alumni network will allow to respond to those needs.

> During the ensuing discussion between the participants, key points and recommendations to be taken into consideration for the establishment of the network were put forward:

- The employment findings in this needs assessment as well as in other ones conducted in HOPES-LEB and by other institutions, with 15-18 % graduates having found job opportunities, raise the question about the nature and relevance of these jobs in comparison with the field of studies.
- Considering that the EU Madad Fund Trust Fund is only a tool which will end in 2024, it is essential to strengthen the role and active participation of alumni graduates in the network itself and to prepare them to manage it after the end of the HOPES-LEB project in 2023.
- While considering that alumni participation and ownership are crucial for the network's sustainability, the provision of necessary skills and finding appropriate mechanisms are important for the follow-up of the network.
- Strong connection with EU countries in terms of study and labour market opportunities not only with neighbouring countries should be sought.
- Both national coordinators of the Erasmus+ offices in Lebanon and Egypt explained the challenges they encountered in establishing and the complexity of maintaining alumni networks. They shed light on the importance of defining the institutional status of the network, its governance and management, the needed financial and human resources to be considered, and most importantly membership criteria to be adopted. They considered that there is a necessity that the network not only covers refugees but also other nationalities and students from the host communities. They also expressed their readiness for further collaboration in terms of dissemination through social media and in ensuring exchange of practices with existing structures such as the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and with the NEO contacts in local HEIs as well.

The Lebanese International University (LIU) which is about to launch its alumni network page (hosted by at the LIU office of alumni relations), also expressed its readiness for collaboration.

- More cooperation with existing structures and programs is necessary to ensure complementarity of the actions and projects and avoid duplication. The importance of linking higher education programs and trainings with other national and regional programs pertaining to the labour market was also encouraged to enhance support for refugees and host communities.

#### ❖ Attachments:

> [Link to the full presentation](#)

IMPLEMENTED BY

**DAAD**



**nuffic**