



HOPES

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES
FOR SYRIANS

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NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Expanding the dialogue on
Higher Education & Refugees from Syria

Wednesday & Thursday, February 20 & 21, 2019

Metropolitan Hotels Ankara
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TWO-DAY NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE HE and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES (CfP)

Turkey Report

Date: 20 & 21 February 2019

Place: Ankara, Turkey

BRIEF SUMMARY

On Tuesday and Wednesday 20 and 21 February 2019, the HOPES project funded by the European Union and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic, organised a two-day National Stakeholder Dialogue, entitled 'Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES' at Metropolitan Hotels Ankara, Turkey.

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 Turkey alone, HOPES is funding 13 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 these projects, ministries, higher education institutions, 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.

In his welcoming notes, **Mr. Steven De Vriendt** representing the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis and the EU delegation to Turkey highlighted the high value of the small-scale projects implemented by local organisations in filling the gaps in the higher education field. **Dr. Carsten Walbinder**, HOPES project director assured that the partnership with Turkish Institutions allows to address problems on local level and to focus on the specific needs of beneficiaries.

The dialogue incorporated various presentations from representatives of Bursa provincial Directorate of Education, İstanbul University, Yasar University, İnsani Gelişme Vakfı (Human Development Foundation), WATAN Foundation, Yuva Association, Abdullah Gül University, Nişantaşı University, Hasan Kalyoncu University, İstanbul Aydin University, Türkiye Mülteci Konseyi (TMK) as well as İltica ve Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi (Research Centre on Asylum and Migration).

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

DIALOGUE REPORT

Structure of Dialogue

Day 1:

- Welcome and introductions

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- **Panel Session 1: Easing access to higher education: Preparation, recognition and guidance**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Panel Session 2: Integration of refugee students and vulnerable youth into higher education**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges

Day 2:

- ❖ **Panel Session 3: Beyond higher education: entrepreneurship and career guidance**
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- ❖ **Round Table Discussion: Higher education, vulnerable youth and refugees from Syria: Impact and sustainability**
 - > Discussion on the findings and their impact for different stakeholders as well as for future activities
 - > Identification of steps and measures towards more sustainable solutions
- **Feedback from the round table discussions**
- **Closing:** Concluding remarks

Process of the dialogue and issues addressed

The dialogue brought together 33 representatives from the EU Delegation, Turkish Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), and project 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 **Mr. Steven De Vriendt**, EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis in Turkey, Delegation of the European Union to Turkey.

Mr. De Vriendt noted that the thematic of higher education within the context of Syria crisis is very important to the EU. The EU's Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the Madad Fund is regionally funding five projects such as HOPES, GJU, Laser, SPARK with an overall amount of 40 million Euro and another additional project will be granted 10 million Euro in Turkey. The HOPES project's component of the Call for Proposals allows the funding of additional small-scale projects implemented by local organisations. These small-scale projects are of high value and allow more flexibility to fill the gaps in the higher education field.

The National Stakeholder Dialogue as another component of HOPES is a platform to discuss the implementation of the projects under the grant scheme of HOPES, to understand the challenges encountered, the lessons learned and the recommendations made for the future.

Dr. Carsten Walbinder, HOPES project director, noted that while the HOPES project does not revolve only around scholarships and incorporates different other components such as the Higher Education English Access programme, National Stakeholder Dialogues and the Call for Proposals, the partnership with Turkish institutions allows to address problems on local level and to focus on the specific needs of both beneficiaries and host community.

Within the Call for Proposals, the numbers show that our expectations and objectives were reached. In Turkey the highest number of applications for the CfP was received which lead to the selection of 13 institutions for sponsorship. This is a clear sign of commitment and quality of these institutions.

❖ 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

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> **Mr. Mehmet Saraç**, Bursa provincial Directorate of Education, on the project: **The pass to the higher education for refugees (The P.A.T.H)**. ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The **P.A.T.H** project deals with two main problems Syrian students are facing in Turkey: the high number of drop out for various reasons on the one hand and the linguistic barrier on the other.

The project seeks to increase the number of refugees from Syria in and out of formal education in Bursa and enrolling and training them in high and higher education by:

- Setting up flexible procedures
- Streamlining the process for the refugees' entrance to university
- Improving the refugee students' Turkish language competences for university entrance
- Improving the skills of the high school staff working with refugees to support the refugees on their way to higher education.

In Turkey, refugee students have to apply to the University Entrance Exam for Foreign Students (YÖS), which consists of a Basic Learning Skills Test and a language test. In addition, every institute and university has different registration requirements for the acceptance of international students. It was also found that students face difficulties in learning the Turkish language.

The YÖS and Turkish language courses are considered necessary for the preparation of refugees for higher education.

The **P.A.T.H** project offered YÖS () preparatory courses, Turkish language courses, teacher training programmes and seminars. At the end of the process, 48 students received at least the B2 level Turkish language certificate. Out of these 48 students entitled to pursue higher education, 30 were able to enrol into various departments of different universities.

According to Mr. Saraç, the rest of the students did not opt for pursuing higher studies for financial and family reasons. In addition and although some of the students had good scores in the entrance exam, they preferred to have further preparation to be able to enrol in their fields of choice.

240 hours additional YÖS courses were also provided for 120 Syrian and foreign students in 11 and 12 grades in 6 classes and in 3 different schools from November 2018 until April 2019.

The Turkish language teacher training to foreigners allowed more than 26 Turkish and English teachers in public secondary schools and the R & D unit of Bursa Provincial Directorate of National Education to acquire the necessary skills to provide such courses to Syrian students.

Video recordings of special subjects during the language and YÖS courses were produced and will be available for students on the project website in addition to the dissemination of results through conferences and seminars.

> **Dr. Ayselin Yıldız**, Yasar University, on the project **Integrating Syrians into Turkish higher education through recognition of qualifications (REFREC-TR)**. ([Link to the full presentation](#))

According to Dr. Yıldız, the REFREC-TR revolves around two major components:

- Developing a comprehensive, functional and tailor-made suggestion of a recognition tool for Turkish higher education for Syrians with documents that needs to be validated and more specifically Syrians without proper documents.
- Publishing a comparative research report and a guideline for the Turkish higher education system by conducting an evidence-based academic research on how to better cope and integrate Syrians and other refugees into the Turkish higher education system.

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The first component comprised a training programme on the recognition processes and a testing phase of NOKUT's "Qualification's Passport for Refugees", benefiting from the interview technique and the recognition experience of their European partner NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education).

The training programme targeted 44 participants from universities, policy institutions and NGOs who were trained on the procedures, prospects and challenges on Syrians' access to Turkish higher education.

During the testing phase of NOKUT's "Qualification's Passport for Refugees", it was found that out of the 11 students interviewed, 8 were eligible.

This testing phase was challenging considering the short time allocated to conducting the interviews and the confusion of some participants on the main objective of the interviews, which necessitated a lot of explanation from the interview experts.

- The process highlighted a divergent refugee profile of students in Turkey with undergraduates admitted in Syria but not yet enrolled, graduates from Syria and students with high school diplomas.
- It emphasized the need for an academic evaluation and assessment of qualifications of students.
- It allowed to show that the procedures related to access to higher education are clear and flexible within the university's competence area.
- The main challenges would evolve more around the recognition of prior courses and the equivalency of competences.
- This technique can be used by the advisory boards at universities when conducting a verbal evaluation and interviews and might benefit as well the private sector, companies as well as civil society organisations, when working with refugees.
- This project allows to draw a path to understanding further, how students with no documents or missing documents, can be helped to accessing higher education considering that universities usually have different divergent mechanisms and approaches, which sometimes result in conflicting and unfair outcomes. Though the results of the interviews are not binding for the higher education institution, they nonetheless can give a chance for the candidates to confirm their previous diplomas.

It has to be noted that students were interested in further guidance and advice during the interviews which could not be given by NOKUT's experts as they did not know the Turkish context and details of the higher education system in Turkey.

Interviews with various universities were conducted to better understand how they handle recognition and integrate Syrian and refugee students into higher education. This allowed to develop a comparative research report "Refugee Students in European Higher Education: comparative country cases" and guideline for Turkish higher education system which discusses the integration of refugees in the HE systems in Norway, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom and Turkey.

Following the presentation, the participants discussed the issue of the non-recognition of **prior learning** in Turkey. Considering that the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has its specific technical recognition process and that universities have developed their own mechanisms, a suggestion to develop a common database for Turkey and/or a platform where these various experiences can be shared was raised.

> "**Education is a Must**" Call Center project implemented by İnsanı Gelişme Vakfı (Human Development Foundation) ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Ms. Başak Tüzün, coordinator of the project 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. Aws Orabi**, WATAN Foundation on the project **Qualifying Syrian youth to enter higher education** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The project aims to support Syrian youth in improving their key and transversal competencies in languages and IT, which will enable them to continue their education at university level and increase their chances of integration in the Turkish Labour market.

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According to Mr. Orabi, the project was able to reach the following target group and outcomes:

- 12,000 applications from all over Turkey including 3,500 applications from Gaziantep Governorate were received after launching the announcement.
- The interviews conducted with the applying youth allowed to select 55 young Syrians (initially planned were only 40) between 18 and 32 years to pursue the Turkish and English language as well as IT courses.
- 15 students out of 20 completed all stages of the C1 level in the Turkish language, and all of them applied for the TÖMER test.
- 16 students out of 20 completed the preparatory course for the TOEFL examination, and 10 of them applied for the TOEFL test.
- 15 students completed the preparatory course for the ICDL certificate.
- 11 students completed a professional course in MS (Excel - Word - PowerPoint).
- 14 of these students were trained to conduct volunteering workshops on the basics of IT, English and Turkish with more than 50 orphan children up to the age of 12 in Al-Sham orphanage.

The two main challenges faced during the project implementation were the retention of students and students' absenteeism due to their commitment to university studies or work.

The project team discussed these issues directly with students in order to try to find practical solutions together with them.

The project implementation allowed to draw the following lessons learned

- There is a great need to implement such projects with Syrian students considering the number of applications received (12,000).
- Necessity to take into consideration the financial needs of students and their conflictual working schedules when addressing attendance and dropouts issues and when scheduling courses.
- Providing incentives for students (i.e. transportation) would have helped to enhance students' attendance and commitment.
- The importance of volunteering in refugee and host communities and its positive reflection on vulnerable people.

> **Ms. Gülistan Koç**, YUVA Association on the project **Improved access to education of Syrian post-secondary age young people in urban settings in Turkey** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The objective of the project implemented by YUVA Association is to provide safe, participatory and inclusive learning spaces and learning support through high-quality education to young Syrian students and disadvantaged members of the local community in Istanbul.

In her presentation, Ms. Koç highlighted the importance of providing a comfortable learning environment for both male and female students. The project comprises of the following activities:

- TÖMER Language preparation courses to youth between 17 and 26 years.
- Study Support to Examination for Foreign Students YÖS Preparation Program with youth between 16 and 26 years.
- In-kind educational support covering TÖMER and YÖS Exam Fees.
- Counselling and mentoring including the provision of information about the various educational opportunities and support for the application to continuing high school, open school and higher education.
- Organisation of Career Days.

Within the project's lifetime (until April 2019), various documents and tools such as Academic Achievement Chart, Orientation Program Tendency and Expectation in Education Questionnaire, Multiple Choice Pre-Post Tests for the Programs, Mid-term exams, and road Map of Access to Higher Education for Syrian Youth Booklet have been developed and disseminated to students.

- 91 participants received TÖMER certificate including C1 level certificate.

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- 85 participants are currently enrolled in the Public Education Center (PEC) database within the framework of a Protocol between YUVA and the General Directorate for Life Long Learning.
- 17 participants accessed higher education.
- 26 Syrian youth are currently benefitting from an additional TÖMER support program to be able to raise the Turkish language level of the participants to B1 level.
- YÖS exam fees for 59 participants were paid and 127 participants benefited from in-kind payment of the TÖMER exam fees.
- More than 400 beneficiaries received counselling. In total, 2,400 repeatedly counselling sessions were provided.

According to Ms. Koç, focus groups with students are necessary and helped to plan, monitor and evaluate the study programs and to better integrate the recommendations of students accordingly.

After following the preparatory courses, the students struggled mainly with the payment of the exams fees as well with finding scholarships to pursue their higher education.

> **Ms. Yeser Yesim Özer Yürür**, İstanbul University , on the project "**Supporting refugee application and admission to higher education institutions in Turkey**"

Ms. Özer Yürür, coordinator of the project 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](#))

Recommendations and Remarks from the session:

At the end of the first session, participants discussed the following key points:

- > The small projects can be considered as pilot projects and have potential for upscaling and continuation.
- > The issue of the contractual limited budget (60,000 Euro) allocated to the projects has been also discussed.
- > The lack of infrastructure and stipends were not foreseen in the first place, but transportation in remote areas has been a major issue in all projects.
- > The necessity to collaborate with governmental structures and the key role the latter can play in facilitating and bridging gaps. The municipality of Istanbul was for instance a key player in one of the projects and its collaboration was essential to secure sufficient reach out to and transportation of students.
- > The importance of reporting the outcomes of the projects and adding them to UNHCR's activity info tool which will allow having a clear overview of what has been achieved by all key institutions when it comes to HE and the Syria Crisis. This measure can highlight the total contribution to the overall picture but most importantly will help further on for lobbying for funding and will emphasize the remaining gaps.
- > The necessity to convince decision makers about the importance of investing in higher education rather than only prioritizing primary education and the basic needs of the refugees. Further lobbying is needed and it is the responsibility of the funded projects to highlight not only their achievements but also the need in this sector.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the second session**
"Integration of refugee students and vulnerable youth into higher education"

This session incorporated presentations by

> **Ms. Ayça Bağcı**, Abdullah Gül University on the project: **Path of Hopes** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Ms. Bağcı presented Abdullah Gül University, which was founded in 2010 as Turkey's first foundation supported state university in Kayseri. She described the mission of the Youth Factory and their focus on the non-formal education of the youth aiming at their empowerment to become active and creative citizens and to enhance their engagement in civil society.

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Path of Hopes is a recent project under the grant scheme of HOPES. It aims to both increase the number of "immigrants" and vulnerable youth enrolling in higher education programs or further opportunities as well as to facilitate their transition process by enhancing their personal and professional competences. Through that, the project seeks to break the stereotypes, the two communities Syrian and Turkish have about each other and to support their social integration, which will lead on a longer term to the strengthening of the capacity of the organization to approach immigrants more effectively. The project includes conducting a needs analysis with 92 Syrian students in 2 secondary schools in Kayseri. The findings will be published and used as a basis to adapt and provide guidance lessons to more than 90 Syrian and Turkish students. These lessons evolve around regulations, recognition of past experiences and information on study opportunities available to them.

According to Ms. Bağcı, this outreach will be expanded through social media and will allow reaching more than 500 Syrian and 10,000 Turkish youth. 80 vulnerable youth will attend training workshops on intercultural living, 'Learning to Learn', social entrepreneurship and conflict transformation. These learning-by-doing workshops will help students to develop their key competences and will facilitate their integration and employability.

The project also comprises a 5 days training of trainers with 3 universities and 20 organisations to strengthen their understanding of the needs, constraints and potential of the target group as well as peer support activities such as 'Tea Talk' sessions and orientation days in universities. Alumni from other projects will be invited as speakers to share their lessons learned and experiences. This will help to develop a networking platform between 180 students strengthened by various community and cultural events, "What's around?" and ICL events as well as "Global Issues" classes hosting immigrants as guest speakers to share their stories with the host community.

Ms. Bağcı considered that the main challenge of the project would be breaking the stereotypes towards refugee students, enhancing the understanding of the schools, teachers and peers and facilitating the integration of Syrian students into the Turkish community.

> **Prof. Dr. Resa Aydin**, Istanbul University, on the project **Bring future back: Disability based experience of Syrian students in the higher education system in Turkey (UDISES)** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Prof. Dr. Resa Aydin presented the 'Student Support Unit for Students with Special Needs' established at Istanbul University. This unit's mission is to follow up with students with disabilities, developing empowering programs and studies to raise the awareness on the importance of an inclusive society.

With the UDISES project, the Student Support Unit seeks to cross over migration and disability studies within the unique case of Syrian students with disability in the higher education system in Turkey according to the theory of intersectionality developed by professor Crenshaw. Disability is an invisible issue in immigration. A person with disability has various problems. Being a Syrian refugee, this person will face different forms of combined discrimination and problems.

According to the Directorate General of Migration Management in the Turkish Government, there are 18,511 Syrians with disability in Turkey out of 3,644,347 Syrians under temporary protection. The percentage of Syrian students with special needs represents a small ratio of the overall 0.5 % of students with special needs in the Turkish higher education system (Turkish Higher Education Institution Statistics conducted in 2017-2018). This means that in the Turkish higher education system, Syrian students with special needs are almost invisible and their cases are overlooked.

The UDISES project seeks to challenge the second barrier that disability raises in the front of Syrian students by investigating disability experience and problems of Syrian students involved into the higher education system. It aims to involve Syrian students with disability (SSD) in developing solutions for their problems and enabling them to take part in the university and national disability system and networks. This is done through visits to associations, raising awareness, experience sharing and participation in panels and conferences.

In addition, a workshop entitled "Obstacles, Experiences and Solutions in Higher Education of Syrian Students with Disability in Turkey" was held at Istanbul University in January 2019 and aimed at exploring challenges and collect information from different partners, which will lead to elaborating strategies to help Syrian students with disability to overcome difficulties during their education.

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Students will further spread their success stories as a nationwide model via booklets, web, and a short documentary on 'Bring future back'.

According to Dr. Aydin, the main challenges faced by the project are inaccurate data on impairment and disability, especially that people often hide their problems not wanting to be stigmatised as disabled. This is due to the lack of understanding and definition what disability means, a lack of awareness on the subject and cultural differences.

> **Ms. İrem Aynagöz**, İltica ve Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi - IGAM (Research Centre on Asylum and Migration) on the project **My first day on campus is the best day at my university: A comprehensive pilot project on social cohesion and support for academic success of Syrian refugees** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, **Ms. Aynagöz** explained that most of the student refugees living out of the city face discrimination and feel isolated when they enrol at Karabük University. My first day on Campus project aims at both ensuring the social cohesion and integration of 150 Syrian refugee university students and improving their academic success in Karabük University through complementary support activities targeting also 50 Turkish students and 50 from other nationalities.

The project incorporates an Orientation Week for students including university system introduction, campus tour, informative conferences and trips. These activities help new students to adapt to the city and the university.

Through buddy mentoring activities, with 50 Turkish students providing academic support, Syrian refugee students improved their Turkish language skills and were encouraged to socialize. These activities helped to increase the students' belonging to the university, their language skills and their commitment to the coursework.

Museum cards were also offered to students to help them access museums in Turkey and be familiar with Turkey's history and traditions.

The project also incorporated Tandem-Story Telling aiming at increasing social cohesion among Syrian students and youth from the host community through building common stories and telling them in two languages. These activities allowed increasing the self-esteem of students, reducing explicit and implicit prejudice and to strengthening the students' social network by increasing openness to other cultures and respect for both languages.

The project seeks to set a good practice example of integration, building bridges, connecting and bringing people together and to gather valuable data on challenges that impede integration between refugee students and Turkish students.

> **Prof. Dr. Murat Erdoğan & Ms. Tülin Güvel**, Türkiye Mülteci Konseyi (TMK), on the project **Elite Dialogue II: Dialogue with Syrian refugees in Turkey through Syrian academics and postgraduate students** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Ms. Güvel presented the Elite Dialogue II project, which aims at identifying and highlighting the problems and challenges faced by Syrian postgraduate students studying in Turkish Universities and the Syrian Academics in Turkey. She explained that the project was developed as a continuation to Elite Dialogue I and the endeavour of TMK to understand further the situation of the Syrian students, graduates and academics in Turkey. This will help to develop sustainable strategies and policies for their integration, welfare and employment and to enable them to act as mediators between the Syrian refugee community and the Turkish society and institutions.

The project included workshops in Karabük, İstanbul and Mardin to discuss the legal and academic status of the target group, issues related to their academic experience, social problems they are facing as well as challenges of accreditation and equivalency. These interactive and inclusive workshops incorporated recommendations and suggestions related to the career planning and unemployment of the Syrian academics and postgraduate students. The latter are considered as a potential to bridge between the two communities and the Syrian university students in Turkey and to measure the internationalization of the higher education system.

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Elite Dialogue II included conducting a survey with 1,058 participants from 48 districts in Turkey using a comprehensive approach in order to analyse information, issues and attitudes of the undergraduate and graduate students regarding education, livelihoods, economic and future prospects and social integration,

The main findings of the survey were presented by **Prof. Dr. Erdoğan**, who highlighted the background of the target group participating in the survey.

Overall, it was found that male participation was higher than female participation and that less than 10% were pursuing their Masters and PHD degrees. This is due to the difficulties in reaching this particular group due to their commitment of work and studies. In general, Syrian students seem to be satisfied by the university education in Turkey.

Prof. Dr. Erdoğan laid out the challenges faced by Syrian academics:

- The strong competition between academics when applying for a teaching position in Turkish universities, especially that according to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), no difference between academics can be made. In addition, when being granted the Turkish citizenship, Syrian academics can lose their international positions and stipends.
- The non-existence of a contact person in (YÖK) dedicated for accreditation process, problems and position of Turkish and Syrian Academics. There is a necessity for creating such an office in Turkey.
- Some of the Syrian academics are holding teaching positions in Turkish universities but mostly as Arabic teachers and not in their own field, which on the long term is not sustainable.

On the other hand, it was found that the main challenges faced by Syrian students is accessing universities and mainly to obtain a scholarship (with a ratio of 10% of the interviewees being scholarship holders compared with 20% last year). Prof. Dr. Erdoğan suggested to establish a confederation of students and to elect representatives of Syrian students in universities.

Participants discussed the issue of finding adequate positions for Syrian academics and teachers while complying with legal limitations. They also highlighted that while showing solidarity to academics is important, priority should be given to academic criteria.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the third session “Beyond higher education: entrepreneurship and career guidance”**

This session incorporated presentations by

> **Associate professor Dr. Zeynep Birsu Çinçin**, Nişantaşı University on the project **HOPE 4 EDUCATION** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

According to Dr. Çinçin, the HOPE 4 EDUCATION project aims at providing 50 Syrian students at Nişantaşı University with innovative certified technical and vocational educational support and short courses training that will help them to overcome difficulties and challenges regarding their career development. The project seeks to expand the current available limited knowledge on legal structures, personal development and job opportunities.

Key activities included the organisation of an ‘Information Day’ to provide participants with information about the programme and training. The short courses training and curriculum developed incorporated the following modules:

- Academic administration and structures
- Business career planning
- Basics of entrepreneurship
- Teamwork, communication, problem solving and intercultural dialogue

At the end of the workshops, the participants received a certificate of completion from the University. In their opinion, these courses helped them learn how to choose their career pathway, communicate with people from different countries and backgrounds and find innovative solutions when dealing with challenges in their professional life.

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Through 'Çay Talks' and dialogues between Turkish and Syrian students as well as a "Support Education 4 All" seminar, social media and handbooks, more than 500 students from 10 universities were reached and know of the possibilities for career development and benefits of higher education.

This project allowed Nişantaşı University to develop local and regional partnerships and to acquire further experience in dealing with challenges faced by refugee students and Turkish institutions. They developed a "know-how" model, innovative learning tools and a curriculum which could be disseminated and used by other educational institutions. In the future, they plan to develop a mobile application and to expand their network system to reach a greater number of Syrian students.

> **Dr. Mona Aburamadan**, Hasan Kalyoncu University on the project **Higher education and career mentoring for Syrian Youth (HEM4SY)** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The project HEM4SY aims to empower Syrian and vulnerable youth from the host community between the age of 18 and 24 years in post-secondary and higher education to build their own careers' path through fulfilling their educational needs and the provision of career mentoring activities.

The project included a needs assessment with 230 youth from four different provinces of Turkey (Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kilis and Gaziantep) in universities, chambers, municipalities, the Provincial Directorate of National Education as well civil society organisations.

According to Dr. Aburamadan, this initial reach out allowed to achieve the following:

- Conducting a Turkish language training with 100 youth during 3 months in the above mentioned cities and provinces
- Organising a 5-days short career training with 106 youth
- Mentoring and coaching of 953 youth to enable them to start and/or continue their education, enhancing their employability and starting their careers in Turkey
- Conducting a teachers training with 17 teachers on mentoring and coaching
- Identifying and training 10 youth leaders to enable them to do peer-to-peer mentoring and guidance which will contribute to sustain the project achievements in their own communities
- Organising a networking seminar around communication and employment with 75 persons during which representatives from the private sector were invited. This has allowed further networking between enterprises and students and increased their chances to secure jobs.
- The youth have access to an online interactive web portal that serves as a resource centre and guiding platform also providing information on education and career opportunities in the region.

According to Dr. Aburamadan, the outcomes of the project will be sustained through the education and career mentoring methodology initiated at HKU, the 10-trained young leaders and the 17-trained teachers who will carry on in helping Syrian refugees in their education and career development.

Dr. Aburamadan also discussed the following main challenges faced and recommendations drawn during the project implementation:

- The low level of participation from refugees and especially men due to their work commitments.
- The necessity of providing financial incentives (i.e. for transportation) and further coordination between small scale projects considering that beneficiaries know that other programs offer stipends which increases competition.
- The project team noticed that Syrian refugees mainly lack awareness on the importance of having a CV and preparing a proper one, the importance of participating in a Turkish language training. They are also not aware of the training sessions available to them as well as the way for registration with KOSGEB and being eligible for work though this governmental agency supporting enterprises and labour market have special trainers to help students.

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- Some negative feelings against refugees were noticed as Turkish young people expressed their belief that refugees were taking many of their education and career opportunities.
- Insufficiency of quality educational methodologies and interventions required for the huge numbers of Syrian youth in need.

> **Dr. Özüm Sezin Uzun**, Istanbul Aydin University, on the project **Certificate Program for Syrian Refugees (CPSR)** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

Dr. Sezin Uzun presented the CPSR project, which aims at providing 90 displaced Syrian youth between 18 and 25 years in Istanbul with job-focused specialized modules. As the target group is mainly composed of Syrian youth qualified but unable to attend a higher education institution, this program will allow them to gain soft-skills geared towards employment opportunities and to actively engage in a campus environment that will support their academic integration and possibly their enrolment in higher education in Turkey.

The CPSR project was originally planned as a blended certificate program but was modified into a face to face program which includes 10 weeks offline training modules designed in line with the market needs. Modules evolve around marketing, financial management and computer programming.

Through announcement on social media and student outreach activities, more than 8,500 persons were reached. The project team conducted interviews with 110 applicants, of which 82 students (22 female and 60 male) were selected for participation. At the end of the training program, 37 students passed the mid-term and final exams.

Soft life skills study trainings and career development workshops were also conducted as part of the training which was concluded by a closing ceremony to award successful students with certificates. The ceremony also included a panel on «Increasing the Employability of Syrian Youth» and students were able to meet with representatives of NGOs running employability programs and the HR representatives of several Turkish companies.

Based on monitoring and final evaluation surveys and interviews conducted with the students and companies, it was found that Turkish language and YÖS preparation, advanced computer programming, entrepreneurship and E-marketing training were also a necessity.

At the end of the presentation, Dr. Uzun shared recommendations for increasing access to higher education and employment:

- > Turkish language training should be prioritised and included in all training programs to increase the access of Syrian youth to higher education or employment.
- > In general, training programs should be planned outside of working hours and days. Nonetheless, considering that, most Syrians work long hours, and even during weekends, blended programs with online content should be developed such as blended learning programs for Turkish language, YÖS preparation and personnel certification.
- > Promotion of training programs available to Syrian youth is a necessity.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues and recommendations addressed during the final round table discussion Higher Education, Vulnerable Youth and Refugees from Syria: Impact and Sustainability**

Based on the findings and key recommendations raised during the two days, participants were divided into three groups to discuss the following key issues and propose approaches that can be adopted on a national level:

- **Group 1:** Impact and sustainability
- **Group 2:** Volunteering and host community
- **Group 3:** Networking & coordination: Lobbying & outreach: needs assessment, target group identification, awareness raising.

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Feedback from the round table discussions: Group Findings and recommendations

The following key points and recommendations were presented by the groups:

- **Group 1: Impact and Sustainability**

Outreach:

- > Mapping of key stakeholders involved in higher education and the Syria crisis in Turkey.
- > Conducting a needs assessment on a regular annual basis to allow the monitoring of the results achieved and to ensure that projects and activities are designed to the needs of the beneficiaries.
- > There is a need for stronger visibility for refugees, through raising awareness on their personal and success stories.
- > Strengthening the collaboration between municipalities and universities.
- > Diversifying the channels of funding (i.e. EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance [IPA])
- > According to the participatory approach, civil society organisations should be an integral part of the decision making, as they are more involved with the beneficiaries. Regular direct meetings with decision makers are a necessity.

Challenges:

- > Taking into consideration the needs of the host community and specifically addressing the tension between refugees and host community.
- > The necessity for the development of social skills

Psychosocial

- > The necessity to take into consideration the psychosocial aspect in all projects design by introducing exercises, games and programmes.
- > An idea would be to conduct a “one day in my life as a refugee” campaign or tool to trigger empathy and understanding from the host community.

E-learning

- > E-learning courses would secure a sustainable learning despite the end of the funded projects and courses.
- > Necessity to inform the students about the free courses (i.e. EDEX) that are available to them.

Monitoring the outcomes

- > The importance of following up on the outcomes of the courses and projects after completion. For example, a simple mechanism would be to contact the students and follow up with them if they were able to enrol in universities.
- > Monitoring is a challenge foreseen for all projects: Key experts and managers of the organisation should conduct the follow up and compile the data after the end of the project.

- **Group 2: Volunteering and host community**

- > Collaboration between nongovernmental organisations and universities is crucial to allow further learning exchange. Students and universities would benefit from the expertise and methodologies of intervention developed by civil society organisations.
- > Integration of both Syrian and youth from the host community when designing new projects.
- > Organisation of social responsibility and volunteering activities with beneficiaries and children.
- > The provision of stipends and covering transportation for the beneficiaries partaking in the projects' activities.

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- > The development of a sustainable monitoring service.
- > Peer-to-Peer dissemination of knowledge and learning of students is important. This would be possible through the establishment of students clubs and the organisation of 'Trainings of Trainers' for students to enable them to disseminate their learning achievements and increase the awareness of their peers.
- **Group 3: Networking & coordination: Lobbying & Outreach: Needs assessment, Target group identification, and raising awareness.**
 - > The necessity for further fundraising and finding new channels for fundraising.
 - > Dissemination through social media.
 - > Continuous information sharing through face-to-face meetings and workshops such as the National Stakeholder Dialogues are important for networking, coordination and exchange of ideas.
 - > Coordinated sharing of written documents and handouts.
 - > Despite the coordination conducted by the Turkish Vice Presidency or the tertiary education group facilitated by UNHCR, funding agencies should be able to organize networking and coordination groups and meetings between the funded organisations.
 - > Update of the outcomes, learning, training for the newcomers to the team/institutions to ensure continuity.
 - > A living website or platform developed and updated by a supra body such as a governmental agency to compile all information, learning and outcomes of projects and surveys.
 - > WhatsApp group is important for the exchange and sharing of documents and learning.

At the end of the group presentations, the following issues were discussed:

- > Some participants considered the provision of incentives for students as debatable considering that the motivation of students would be only focused on stipends.
- > E-learning website tools should be shared between organisations and with the beneficiaries.
- > The necessity to conduct an advocacy campaign and increased lobbying for the unification of the YÖS exam considering that every university is adopting their own criteria, guidelines and is requiring different exam fees. Considering that TÖMER preparation and certification are needed to be able to undergo the YÖS exam, organisations and universities should lobby for a free of charge TÖMER preparation and exam.
- > Raising the awareness on the importance of women participation should be considered as a priority.
- > Well-designed projects and outreach activities as well as better selection criteria of the target group are key to avoid drop out.
- > The commitment of the organisations to further collaboration is key for a better coordination of programs. The creation of synergies between projects was seen as important for a better reach out to beneficiaries and enhanced outcomes and results.

The participants considered the follow up and continuation of this NSD as a necessity and it was suggested to develop it into a standing coordination and working group on refugees in Turkish HE. The participants agreed to organise a follow up meeting in May 2019.

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