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HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION  
OPPORTUNITIES & PERSPECTIVES  
FOR SYRIANS

# NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE

Expanding the dialogue on  
Higher Education & Refugees from Syria

Monday January 21, 2019

Erbil International Hotel

Barzani Namir > Erbil

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## NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

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

#### Erbil, January 21, 2019

#### Report

**Date: 21 January 2019**

**Place: Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).**

#### BRIEF SUMMARY

On Monday January 21, 2019 the HOPES project funded by the European Union's Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad Fund' and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic, organised its second National Stakeholder Dialogue in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), entitled 'Higher Education and the Syria Crisis: Innovative Projects under the grant scheme of HOPES' at the Erbil International Hotel.

Through the grant scheme of 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 KRI, HOPES is funding five institutions to implement projects aiming at easing the access of students to higher education and providing them with capacity building courses and psychosocial support.

This gathering is part of a series of stakeholders dialogues organised on a national level bringing together representatives from these projects, ministries, higher education institutions and other key institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis to discuss the main issues addressed by these projects, their achievements and challenges as well as to further explore approaches to guarantee their greatest possible impact and sustainability.

The National Stakeholder Dialogues seek to provide a platform for discussion and information exchange, in order to expand the dialogue on higher education and the Syria crisis, to strengthen coordination on a national level and explore new approaches benefitting all stakeholders.

Following the welcome notes by the Head of the EU Office in Erbil, Ms. Clarisse Pasztory, the Iraq British Council Director, Dr. Victoria Lindsay and the deputy director of the HOPES project, Dr. Abdel Nasser Hindawi, the dialogue incorporated a panel session and various presentations from representatives from Duhok Polytechnic University, Bishkoreen Organization for Development of Women and Children, Bojeen Organisation for Human, MSELECT, and Hawler Medical University.

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

#### DIALOGUE REPORT

##### 1- Structure of the dialogue

- Welcome and introductions
- **Panel Session 1: Easing access to higher education**  
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Panel Session 2: Beyond higher education: psychosocial support and access to the labour market**  
Overview of the projects, achievements and challenges
- **Round Table Discussion: Higher education and refugees from Syria: Impact and sustainability**
  - > Discussion on the findings and their impact for different stakeholders as well as for the future.
  - > Identification of further steps towards more sustainable solutions
- **Recommendations & Closing**

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## 2- Process of the dialogue and issues addressed

The dialogue brought together 18 representatives from the EU Delegation, ministries, the projects under the grant scheme of HOPES, higher education institutions and training centres as well as other institutional stakeholders involved in tertiary education and the Syria crisis in KRI.

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

This session incorporated presentations by

- > **Dr. Ammar Isam Edress**, Duhok Polytechnic University on the project “**Pre-sessional course for high-school graduation of Syrian refugee students with low grade to enrol in diploma study at Duhok Polytechnic University**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

This project aims to help and prepare 120 post-secondary school graduates with low-grades to enrol in a Diploma or Bachelor degree at Duhok Polytechnic University (DPU).

Students, refugees from Syria and from the host community, will pursue an intensive two terms pre-sessional course, each designed for 8 weeks. The first term includes courses of basic knowledge in English language, Kurdish language, ICT, and mathematics. During the second term, students will choose to follow a variety of more advanced courses such as introduction to management, accounting or finance, journalism, law and engineering, medical sciences and agriculture according to the chosen department and study field of the students.

According to Dr. Edress, the modules were designed to ensure that students’ skills and knowledge are equivalent to the DPU standard requirements. At the beginning of the project, a survey has been conducted to collect information about post-secondary school graduates with low grades. The survey allowed them to specify the number of potential participants and to identify the students’ preferred field of study and preferred study sites such as Bardarash, Akri or Zakho.

He also emphasised the importance of taking into consideration gender equality and the inclusion of the host community in the criteria used for student selection. The main challenge faced by the university was to limit the selection to the target number, especially as they had received a higher number of applications than expected.

From an administrative perspective, DPU has contributed to covering the financial cost to counteract the delay in receiving the payment instalments from Nuffic.

- > **Mrs. Wafa Ibrahim**, Bishkoreen Organization for Development of Women and Children on the project “**Providing access to quality education for Syrian students in Domiz camp schools**” ([Link to the full presentation](#))

In her presentation, Mrs. Ibrahim highlighted the importance to provide training for teachers to enable them to understand further the learning mechanism of students and adopt accordingly qualitative teaching methods when dealing with students on different academic levels. The project implemented by Bishkoreen organisation aims to train the teaching staff, and especially the 12th grade teachers at the schools of Domiz refugee camp 1.

The project seeks to prepare qualified teaching staff to guarantee the sustainability of qualified teaching methods for targeted refugees and host community students and to increase the opportunity of secondary school students to access higher education.

In the preparation phase, coordination with the DoE is essential to identify and recruit trainers who will collaborate with Bishkoreen in developing the training curriculum and materials. A one-month Training of Teachers, 3 days per week, will be organised with 10 teachers of the 12th grade of the Derek secondary school in Domiz 1 refugee camp. During the follow-up phase, teachers will be observed in real classroom settings (two observations per teacher) to ensure that the knowledge acquired during the training is applied by the teachers.

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This training will enable teachers to use better methods and special techniques to deal with students in stressful situations, prepare them to access university and positively evolve in the process of rebuilding their community.

> **Mr. Ahmed Habeeb**, Bojeen Organisation for Human (BOHD) on the project **“Improving the Syrian refugees’ education environment to raise candidates’ scientific level at selected refugee camps over Duhok and Erbil areas”** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

This particular project by BOHD aims at increasing the success rate of refugee students in secondary school by 30% and empowering them to be able to access university and pursue their higher education.

The project consists of seminars and training workshops with 323 students’ refugees in Grade 12 at the Domiz 1 Camp- Deark school and the Domiz 2 Camp - Paeam school in Duhok, as well as the Darashakran camp school and the Gawilan camp school in Erbil. It also includes the training of 100 teachers, meetings with 120 parents and the distribution of educational material and curriculum. Through orientation visits to Duhok and Erbil universities, students are also introduced to the various study fields they can pursue.

According to Mr. Habeeb, the main challenges faced during the implementation of the project were the following:

- Being able to include and provide services to 323 students in grade 12 whereas the initial planned group was 287.
- This increase had an affect was also reflected on the syllabus material, as the organisation was only able to provide and cover the material and books of the initial target group.
- The project budget covers the implementation of activities in 4 schools whereas the need and demand exceeded the offer. The organisation decided to include the students of the Kewergosk camp from the organisation’s own budget.
- On an administrative level, and despite the delay in the international transfer of payments, Bojeen was able to conduct all the planned activities.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the second session “Beyond higher education: psychosocial support and access to the labour market”**

This session incorporated presentations by

> **Mr. Umed Shekhani**, MSELECT, on the project **“Soft skills training for Syrians in Northern Iraq”** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

The project launched by MSELECT in December 2017 seeks to provide soft skills capacity building to Syrian refugees in Iraq to enable them to thrive in the workplace through a series of 20 mini-diploma workshops including internationally certified and accredited Soft Skills courses.

The courses were organized with 15 participants per course and consisted of training covering the following modules: planning and controlling work, communicating effectively, problem solving and decision making. To this end, MSELECT carefully selected trainers holding Bachelor and Master Degrees and certificates from UK, USA and Germany and having experience in delivering training of trainers on leadership, management and entrepreneurship.

In his presentation, Mr. Shekhani discussed the main challenges faced during the project implementation:

- The reach out, commitment and retention of students, especially as the trainees were not offered daily allowances.
- The transportation of participants and risks of commuting from camps to the training locations.
- According to Mr. Shekhani, the project was able to reach 48 % of women despite the various social challenges pertaining to their participation such as family responsibilities and obtaining permissions to leave the refugee camps.



By organizing training workshops across Erbil and inside camps in Qushtapa, Baserma, Darashakr, Domiz and Kawergosi, the project was able to reach 366 students instead of the originally planned number of 300 beneficiaries.

The different backgrounds and capacities of the trainees were taken into consideration by the trainers when delivering the workshops. In the final evaluation, 87 % of the participants gave an 4/4 overall rating on the training program, 88% benefited from the trainer's knowledge and skills and 81% considered that the training material helped them acquire the needed skills.

When providing their feedback, participants suggested reducing the daily training to less than 6 to 7 hours, finding difficulties to keep their concentration up, and proposed to continue the training in more advanced topics such as entrepreneurship and business skills.

> **Dr. Banaz Adnan**, Hawler Medical University on the project **"Psychosocial support services for Syrian refugee students in Erbil"** ([Link to the full presentation](#))

According to Dr. Adnan, the majority of students in the Kurdistan region of Iraq are not able to deal with their psychological and social problems despite the willingness and ability of experts due to the lack and shortage of specific psychosocial and special centres or services inside universities.

Through this project, the Hawler Medical University seeks to establish a centre for psychosocial support that will provide services to all Syrian and host community students in universities and will help preparing an expert team of specialists and academics to deal with psychological, social and psychiatric problems in the future.

Key activities of the centre include holding seminars and workshops that aim at raising awareness on mental health issues, providing recreational and rehabilitation aids in the attempt to help students become independent individuals and active in the community.

Any student facing a psychological or social problem related to displacement, trauma, or difficulties in integration in the new educational environment can visit the centre to receive care and advice. The team of specialists will be assessing the psychological state and the needs of the students and will be able to diagnose and treat psychiatric disorders.

Dr. Adnan highlighted the importance of such a centre for the rehabilitation of refugees and helping them to overcome their problems and difficulties, which will improve not only their quality of life but will also, have a positive effect on their academic studies. Students from the host community will also benefit from these services.

❖ **Brief outline of key issues, challenges and recommendations addressed during the final session "Higher education and refugees from Syria: Impact and Sustainability"**

The final session was dedicated to discussing challenges and recommendations raised by the projects:

- > International transfer of the projects' funds and the subsequent delay in meeting the deadline and achieving the projects' objectives due to the bank transfer system in KRI. Participants suggested using an international supplier for the fund transfer. Another suggestion was to make transfers through personal accounts instead of using the NGO's bank account. It was also suggested that Nuffic should send the payments individually and not all together to all projects to avoid further bank issues.
- > Limitation of the budget and the limited number of selected projects. Participants wished that more projects had been selected in KRI and considered that the criteria and selection process of the grant scheme was vague and not clear for them.
- > It was suggested to recruit a dedicated team within the organisation/ university for the project implementation, which will ensure a strengthened internal communication and better follow-up.



- > Reporting and dissemination of achievements and lessons learned is a necessity for an enhanced learning exchange.
- > The importance of including the host community, especially the vulnerable youth in any project developed in KRI which will allow further acceptance and support from the government.
- > It was suggested to expand the spectrum and target group of some projects such as the centre for psychosocial support at Hawler Medical University as such services are needed in different parts of the region.
- > Priority should also be given to technical and vocational projects as well as orientation and career guidance trainings.
- > Considering the language barriers and challenges faced by students, English courses and specifically the Higher Education English Access Programme (HEEAP) of HOPES should be considered in KRI in the future.
- > Organisations should start including digital technology and online learning in the design of their projects.