Information Note

Title

The higher education response to the Syrian refugee crisis

Action

Higher Education Institutions are invited to attend the British Council and International Unit (IU) event on 30 June. In addition, if your institution is not featured in the compiled example responses in the Annex and you would like to share what you are doing, please contact Katie.britton@international.ac.uk

Audience

Pro-Vice-Chancellors International/Europe; Directors of International/Europe; MENA Community of Practice; project managers and/or researchers.

Executive Summary

There is a need to coordinate the UK HE sector’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis in order to align it with the needs of the affected people, as well as with the work of other sectors, multilateral donors and agencies, to ensure that it is as effective as possible. The British Council and the International Unit are together organising an information-sharing event on 30 June at Woburn House to begin this discussion. Recent responses by universities and organisations in the UK, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and internationally will also be presented.

Annexes

Examples of the HE responses to the Syrian refugee crisis
Summary

1. Universities have a long history of helping people displaced by crisis, including during the ongoing crisis in Syria. With around 5 million Syrians fleeing the country since 2011, mostly to neighbouring countries, HE institutions internationally are responding in different ways to help displaced people pursue higher education.

2. These efforts include, but are not limited to, scholarships, distance learning and language courses, as well as specific programmes such as the EU’s HOPES and DFID’s SPHEIR; and an EU Trust Fund established for Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, the Madad Fund.

3. The event to be held on 30th June will showcase initiatives by universities and organisations in the UK, MENA and internationally, in response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

4. This event will provide an opportunity for senior university representatives to find out the latest information about the refugee situation in the region, share current responses, consider some of the available funding instruments in support of delivering HE to Syrians, as well as connect with multilateral donors and agencies.

5. There is a need to coordinate the HE sector’s response to the refugee crisis in order to align it with the needs of the affected people, as well as with the work of other sectors, multilateral donors and agencies so that it is as effective as possible.

Context

6. The crisis in Syria is now in its sixth year. The war and the devastation it has caused have impacted every neighbouring country in the region in some way and have interrupted the education of thousands of children and students.

7. At present, 13.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance\(^1\) and more than 50% of Syria’s population is currently displaced\(^2\).

8. Discussions most recently have focused on the small percentage of people displaced by the conflict who are mobile to Europe, including the UK. However, the number of Syrians studying in the UK has fallen by 56.1% between 2010-11 and 2014-15\(^3\) with most significant declines seen in postgraduate taught enrolments (see annex).

9. Despite media coverage around immigration, the vast majority of people displaced by the conflict remain, and are expected to remain, in the MENA region.

Statistics: A total of 4,263,020 Syrian refugees live in host countries in MENA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2.18 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>244,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1.08 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>633,844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^1\) UN, 2016  
\(^2\) Amnesty International, February 2016  
\(^3\) HESA, 2016
10. Neighbouring countries are hosting by far the largest numbers of refugees. **Turkey alone is hosting twice as many displaced Syrians as the entire EU** and Syrian refugees constitute a **quarter of the population of Lebanon**.

11. The flow of people displaced by the conflict in Syria will continue until long-term peace and stability return. In the meantime, economic, governmental, social and educational reforms can help to provide opportunities for displaced people living in their host countries, making migration less attractive.

12. Almost 50% of displaced Syrians are children – whose education has been stopped or seriously disrupted.

13. One of the differences between other refugee crises is that before civil war erupted in Syria, twenty percent of 18- to 24-year-olds had studied at university. Currently, less than five percent of Syrian refugees in this age group have access to higher education.

14. The conflict has taken many opportunities away from young Syrians. A ‘lost generation’ of young people deprived of educational and vocational opportunities will lack the skills needed to rebuild Syria when the conflict ends.

**Challenges and needs**

15. In terms of HE needs in countries neighbouring Syria, a number of issues relating to access to HE for students recur in discussions:

- Recognition of prior learning and documentation
- Accreditation requirements set by employers
- Curricula and non-degree skills to support employability and entrepreneurship
- Portability of modular level credit for people who may be mobile multiple times
- Use of technology in partnership with local institutions, rather than only distance learning
- Flexibility of higher education opportunities for students who work or care for others
- English (and German and Turkish) language needs
- Research on what works in parallel with HE interventions
- Training teachers and lecturers to teach using new technology
- The potential of partnerships

**UUK International Unit (IU) – Sharing information and supporting the sector**

16. The IU has supported the sector through information sharing and communicating good practice, for example hosting a session on the response to the Syrian refugee crisis at the International Higher Education Forum in March 2016. Following the event on 30 June, the IU will update the sector once again, sharing any developments and plan of action moving forward.

17. In November 2015, the IU carried out a “Responding to the Refugee Crisis” survey of the sector to capture the response to refugees who might come to the UK.
18. The survey captured a range of activity occurring in the sector to assist refugee academics and staff, with efforts focused primarily on assisting:

- Syrian students studying in the UK before the crisis
- Prospective Syrian students with an asylum application pending
- Prospective Syrian students with humanitarian protection status
- Prospective Syrian students granted refugee status
- Syrian academics entering the UK on a Tier 4 or 5 visa supported by the Council for At Risk Academics (CARA)
- Syrian academics at UK universities before the current crisis
- Syrian academics granted refugee status
- Syrian academics with humanitarian protection status

19. The survey showed that:

- 60% of respondents were offering scholarships and bursaries (including fee waivers, housing costs and basic maintenance)
- Many institutions are providing financial support to existing Syrian students
- Several universities have become universities of sanctuary
- Universities are providing information to students and staff on how to assist through volunteering, donating clothing and essential items and fundraising
- Many institutions have increased their support for CARA
- Institutions are providing welfare support and counselling services to students

20. Respondents highlighted a number of issues including:

- Home Office requirements and general immigration concerns
- Checking of prior qualifications
- Managing constrained resources when demand for support services and crisis funding is increasing
- Understanding the student fee and student support regulations that apply to those with different immigration statuses

21. Numbers of Syrian students studying in the UK between 2010 and 2015
22. The British Council in MENA and in Turkey has expanded its programmes in the response countries in which it works, to meet the increased educational needs of young people.

23. British Council projects have reached large numbers of Syrians in Syria, and thousands more in host communities, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon. The British Council’s approach is to reach the broadest base of the educational pyramid, and to work with and through trusted agencies on the ground.

24. The British Council supports displaced youth in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria through the EU-funded LASER programme (Language and Academic Skills and E-learning for Refugees). By 2018, over 3000 students will have improved access to tertiary education opportunities through online higher education study, English language training and academic skills development.

25. The British Council has provided grants and language support to 127 Syrian PhD students studying in the UK, allowing them complete their studies under the Syria Higher Education Capacity Development Programme.

26. The HOPES Project (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians) is funded by the EU and run through a consortium of providers led by the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), and including the British Council, Campus France and EP-Nuffic (based in the Netherlands). The project empowers young Syrians, providing them with a wide range of educational offers in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq.

27. In Jordan, the British Council provides teacher training for 200 English teachers working in informal education and in partnership with UNICEF, is training and mentoring Ministry of Education teachers working in double-shifted schools.
HE response

- Universities and HE organisations globally have demonstrated their commitment to supporting Syrian students.

UK

- UK universities are already taking steps to help, for example, the University of York has earmarked £500,000 for undergraduate scholarships for displaced students, and set up a partnership with the Institute of International Education (which coordinates global scholar rescue programmes) to provide places for academics.
- The University of Glasgow, among others, has a partnership with the CARA to provide scholarships and waive fees.
- Other UK universities are also tailoring scholarship schemes as part of their response, including Warwick, Oxford, Sussex, Edinburgh and several of the universities in London, such as the London School of Economics (LSE), Goldsmiths, and SOAS.
- The University of Bath is working with local partner institutions in Jordan to train academics to doctoral level in areas like engineering and mathematics, and will run a local master's programme in education to train teachers in the region.
- Glasgow Caledonian University is also working on ways to provide face-to-face education for Syrian refugees in neighbouring host countries. The University of Bradford is establishing itself as a university of sanctuary, part of a broader movement to make cities and universities more welcoming places for refugees.
- Department for International Development has provided the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with a £1m “urgency grant” for research into the crisis. This will be used to fund eight projects across six universities: Coventry, Durham, Middlesex, Warwick, York and Queen Mary, University of London.

Internationally

- German universities will admit more than 50,000 Syrian students once they have been granted rights of asylum; the IIE is building a network of universities that will offer places to refugees settling in North America; and similar initiatives are planned elsewhere.
- Kiron University, an online university based in Germany, offering free online courses to 1,000 refugee students.
- SPARK, a Dutch NGO, has set up vocational programmes in Crisis Response and Early Recovery, for Syrians that have left their country to learn about reconstruction and rehabilitation strategies, and Agro-business, Trade and Industrial Production in emergency situations, for Syrians that remain in Syria.
- At the University of Regina in Canada, the students’ union has collected CA$100,000 (£49,000), through a levy on students, for the World University of Canada’s student refugee program (SRP). The University plans to then match the final amount. The programme helps student refugees pay for tuition, books, rent and clothing.
- A more comprehensive list of examples is provided below in the Annex
Annex: Examples of the HE responses to the Syrian refugee crisis

Scholarships and bursaries

UK:

University of Aberdeen: 4 scholarships (UG and PGT) for refugee students.

University of Bradford: putting in place a scheme to offer scholarships at UG, PGT and pre-sessional level - open to refugees and asylum seekers of all nationalities.

University of Bristol: offering 5 scholarships.

University of Cardiff: 2 asylum seeker scholarships.

Keele University: 1 scholarship for UG courses.

King’s College London: to offer Sanctuary scholarships for 16/17.

Kingston University: 4 scholarships

University of Warwick: 20 scholarships for refugees over two academic years.

University of York: 3 undergraduate scholarships per year for three years.

Edge Hill University: 2 Sanctuary awards.

University of Essex: refugee bursary of £1,000 grant undergraduate or postgraduate student, either refugee or dependent of refugee.

University of Sussex: 50 English language scholarships for Syrian refugees in preparation for university study and to prepare for university study has been established by the University of Sussex.

University of Sheffield: 2 scholarships

University of Edinburgh: 3 postgraduate scholarships for students from Syria studying a one-year Master’s degree programme in any subject offered. In the last year they have supported 14 refugee students.

SOAS, University of London: seven (4 UG, 2 PG, 1 PGR) new scholarships for refugee students wishing to study at SOAS.

University of East London: 10 postgraduate scholarships for Syrian refugees.

City University of London: Cass Business School to offer 3 bursaries aimed at those working to respond to the refugee crisis.
Goldsmiths, University of London: 6 (3 UG, 3 PG) new scholarships for refugees.

Queen Mary, University of London: 6 bursaries- tbc.

Royal Holloway, University of London: 1 Article 26 award.

University of Glasgow: 4 scholarships for UG, 2 Syrian refugee academics taken in as PhD students and including introducing fee waivers and extending the talent scholarship scheme to support refugee UG and PG students.

University of Oxford: St Antony’s College, in partnership with a NGO set up by Syrian expatriates Jusoor, are offering one PG scholarship a year for entry in 16/17 and 17/18 to a Syrian citizen or a stateless person residing in Syria.

LSE: Increased the funds available to nearly £500,000 per year for students classified as asylum seekers. Also, allocating 10 awards for PG offer holders, worth up to £40,000 per year for fees and living costs, depending on the course, and 3 for UG.

University of Leicester: offering English language classes for around 100 refugees.

University of Manchester: 1 scholarship.

Newman University: 1 Article 26 bursary

University of Bath: will provide scholarships on their PG MA Education programme in Amman to refugees displaced by the crisis. These scholarships will complement the British Council’s EU-funded LASER (Language, Academic skills and E-learning Resources) Project developing English language skills with refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon.

University of Westminster: 1 Education for All award for asylum seekers.

University of Winchester: 2 Sanctuary awards.

University of Wolverhampton: 20 scholarships

Scottish Government: the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) has set refugee and asylum seekers fee-status to “Scottish domiciled” enabling them to access ”fees and living-cost funding” in the form of grants and loans.

EU:

- Funding the Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES) program through the Madad Fund, and administered by the German Academic Exchange Program (DAAD), the British Council, Campus France and EP—Nuffic, the Netherlands’ organization for international cooperation in higher education. HOPES provides 400 scholarships to Syrians, English classes to 4,000 and educational counselling to over 42,000. Will also give small grants for credit-based short courses and other innovative measures by universities in the region.
- Providing €12 million for scholarships and short-term higher education programmes for Syrians in the Middle East. A further €8 million have been devoted to Higher Education...
activities and scholarships in Jordan for Syrians and vulnerable Jordanians through the German Jordanian University and the British Council.

UN:

**United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** awarding university scholarships for refugees since 1992; its DAFI program enrolls 2,240 refugee students each year. There will be 1,700 new scholarships coming soon for Syrian students.

**UNESCO:** received USD 5 million from Kuwait to provide higher education to young Syrians. A majority of the funds will go towards scholarships at universities in the region.

US:

**Institute of International Education (IIE):** the IIE is offering a small number of scholarships to Syrian refugee youth for undergraduate university studies at public universities in Jordan.

Canada:

**Georgian College:** 7 Syrian refugees will have the cost of tuition, books and ancillary fees covered – one studying at each of the institution’s seven campuses.

**University of Regina:** The students’ union has collected CA$100,000 (£49,000), through a levy on students, for the World University of Canada’s student refugee program (SRP). The UofR will match that amount. The programme helps student refugees pay for tuition, books, rent and clothing.

**Ryerson University, partnered with Lifeline Syria:** aiming to secure private sponsorship for 1,000 refugees to resettle in Toronto over the next two years. Nearly 100 student and staff volunteers will help support 11 refugee families for up to one year at an estimated cost of CA$27,000 (£13,000).

Germany:

**Kiron University:** online university based in Germany offering free online courses to 1,000 refugee students.

**DAAD:** funded with €7.8 million from the Federal Foreign Office budget, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has set up a scholarships programme for refugees from Syria. 100 hundred Syrian students will be offered the opportunity of studying in Germany in the coming year.

Netherlands:

**SPARK (NGO) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs:** 10,000 scholarships for Syrian refugees to study in Jordan, KRG, Lebanon and Turkey. Financial support from Al Fakhoora, a Qatari charitable foundation, for 600 of these.
Lebanon:

Lebanese Association for Scientific Research: will help 460 Syrian students enrol at private universities in Lebanon in 2016, and Gaziantep University, in eastern Turkey.

Research

UK:

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): Department for International Development the ESRC with a £1m “urgency grant” for research into the crisis. This will be used to fund eight projects across six universities: Coventry, Durham, Middlesex, Warwick, York and Queen Mary, University of London.

LSE: LSE’s multidisciplinary Institute of Global Affairs will be working with experts across the School and beyond to develop evidenced-based and pragmatic policies to help tackle the refugee crisis.

University of Edinburgh: PG students are involved with the LIVED project which focuses on the experiences of school-aged Syrian refugee children in the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan. The project is supported by the United Nations Association Edinburgh (UNAE) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

University of Bath, in partnership with the British Institute in Amman: develop research which can inform how governments, NGOs and other parties might more effectively respond to the long-term impacts of the Syria crisis.

Goldsmiths, University of London: Mapping Immigration Controversy is an 18-month ESRC funded research project involving Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network, Migrant Voice, The Runnymede Trust, Scottish Refugee Council, University of Warwick, University of East London, Goldsmiths, University of Bedfordshire, Birmingham City University, University of South Wales. It explores the impacts on local communities and national debate of current publicity campaigns about migration by the UK Home Office.

Education

UK:

University of York, in partnership with the IIE: will take in 2 refugee scholars.

University of Edinburgh, in partnership with CARA: Agreed to provide a bursary to assist a Syrian CARA Fellow who is on a post-doctoral placement at Edinburgh.

University of Bath, in partnership with the Amman Baccalaureate School: launched a Study Centre in partnership with the ABS to deliver an MA in Education.

University of East London: offering accredited course in Calais ‘Jungle’ camp on Life Stories.

US:
**IIE:** Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) provides fellowships for established professors, researchers and public intellectuals whose lives or careers are threatened in their home countries. The fellowships support temporary academic positions at universities, colleges and research centres in safe locations anywhere in the world.

**Germany:**

**German Rectors’ Assembly (HRK):** According to an HRK survey, over 60 universities are offering a range of activities including information events on studying at university and preparing for student life to legal advice, German classes, psychosocial support and help with finding accommodation.

**Netherlands:**

**SPARK:** setting up vocational programmes in Crisis Response and Early Recovery, for Syrians that have left their country to learn about reconstruction and rehabilitation strategies, and Agro-business, Trade and Industrial Production in emergency situations, for Syrians that remain in Syria.

**Jordan:**

**Queen Rania:** launched Edraak, a not-for-profit platform for MOOCs in Arabic. Offers Arab learners (not only Syrians) access to courses taught at universities such as Harvard, MIT and the University of California Berkeley, among others, at no cost to the learner, with the potential to earn certificates of mastery for certain courses.

**Capacity Building**

**UK:**

**University of Bath:** providing support for the Jordanian HE sector to ‘build resilience’ in relation to the refugee crisis. Working with a local University in Amman with a STEM-focus to support the training of faculty to doctoral level in areas such as engineering and mathematical innovation, essential for the development of resilient systems. Bath will also partner with the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan to conduct research in areas of national priority.

**EU:** "Tahdir", funded under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) in the framework of the European Union actions in response to the Syrian crisis, aims to identify capacity-building initiatives for Syrian individuals committed to playing a constructive role in the transition.

**Al-Fanar Media, in partnership with the IIE and SPARK:** hosted a workshop to address the needs of University-age Syrian refugees. The event brought together stakeholders from regional and international governments, UN bodies, local and international NGOs, universities, and Syrian students and professors, to share best practices and enhance coordination amongst initiatives that are supporting Syrian access to higher education.
Open Society Foundation: funding ‘SPOC-in-a-Box’ which will provide a bridge for students and academics, caught up by catastrophic disruptions, by building up recognised learner records, students will be able to build academic profiles for competitive admissions and bursary funding and for meeting universities’ criteria for the recognition of prior learning.