



CONCEPT NOTE

International Workshop

Higher Education in Emergencies – Setting up a Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies to deliver more, better and faster

20 January 2020

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation – Lisbon, Portugal

Providing higher education opportunities in emergency situations and in conflict-affected societies is not only a matter of realizing rights and granting protection to the critical 18-25 year-old youth bracket. It is also a question of charting a strategic vision for the future of war-torn countries. Khoulod, a Syrian student, once said: “if you build the person, the person will build the community and the community will build the country”.

Yet higher education in emergencies has long been a neglected sector from a policy, practitioner and financial perspective. According to UNHCR (2018 and 2019 data), **just 3%** of refugees can access higher education compared to 37% of global youth..

This International Workshop builds upon the timid collective efforts going on since 2015/2016 to address this challenging gap and aims at exploring further avenues for cooperation among higher education institutions (HEIs) and beyond to enable them to deliver more, better and faster academic opportunities for refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations, as well as for students in conflict affected societies and protracted crises.

Moreover, it will feature a first-ever comprehensive and systemic solution to address this global challenge by showcasing a proof of concept of a Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM) based both on (1) a simple idea – that HEIs and the academic community should be at the core center of the academic response – and (2) on an innovative approach regarding an ambitious blended financing strategy as recommended by the OECD to provide the RRM with sustaining funding.

The ultimate goal of this Workshop is to galvanize support for the RRM and generate new momentum for boosting opportunities for higher education in emergencies through concrete pledges and commitments, as a contribution to the implementation of the SDGs Agenda and the Compacts on Migrants and Refugees.

When?

2nd December 2019 (from 09h30 until 17h30)

Where?

Portugal, Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Av de Berna, 45 A, 1067-001 Lisbon)

For whom?

Target participants include representatives of higher education institutions (HEIs), associations of HEIs, students, student associations and academia in general; experts in higher education in emergencies; high-level political decision-makers; senior-level policy makers, representatives of multilateral institutions; the private sector, philanthropic organizations; civil society and the media.

Aims and Objectives

This Workshop will provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of:

- (1) best practices and lessons learned in dealing with the integration of refugees, students at risk and students in forced mobility, to be shared by HEIs participants, including some case studies;
- (2) existing gaps and how to collaborate around them to come up with solutions of the 21st century marked by growing mobility, digitalization and smart solutions;
- (3) the broader project of setting up a Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM).

This Workshop will also provide participants with opportunities to announce pledges and make new commitments as well as to sign new protocols of cooperation.

Expected Outcomes

The Workshop is expected to have the following main outcomes:

- (1) An analytical summary capturing best practices and lessons learned, as shared by participants during the sessions, including the case studies presented;

- (2) A new edition of the 2018 booklet on “Higher Education in Emergencies: a road map to achieve sustainable change”, to be featured at the Workshop;
- (3) A roadmap for the implementation of the Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies, including the launch of the “YES-Levy”, a global Youth Education Solidarity Levy to be raised on a voluntary basis within the global academic community;
- (4) A wealth of new pledges and commitments to the RRM announced by participants;
- (5) A joint Call to Action to deliver, more, better and faster academic opportunities in crisis situations.

Plenary Sessions

There will be three Plenary Sessions, at the opening, the closing and over lunch time.

They will include:

- Spotlight debates with the participation of high-level representatives, highlighting the importance of advancing practical solutions to boost higher education opportunities for students in forced mobility and in vulnerable situations, building upon the SDGs Agenda and the New York Declaration, and further developing the nexus humanitarian/development in the field of higher education;
- Short Presentations by policy experts on the current state of play: research and policy options, providing an overview of solutions and initiatives and highlighting key success factors, the main challenges, and opportunities to overcome them;
- Pitches with testimonials, ideas and solutions by students;
- Presentation of the three main components of the Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM) with a particular focus on its Financing Facility further to the Coordination Desk and the Academic Consortium.

Breakout sessions

Two parallel working forums will enable direct interaction among participants. One of the main aim of this Workshop is to identify common challenges and major barriers, share examples of interesting practices and develop practical solutions in planning and setting up new solutions to enable HEIs to deliver more, better and faster academic opportunities in times of crises.

Within each of the two breakout sessions, there will be an opportunity to explore avenues for cooperation in order to overcome barriers and challenges, linked to the particular theme of each of the two groups:

- What is the role of a coordination mechanism and what are its main priority tasks to enable higher education institutions to deliver a systemic response in times of crises?
- What are the sources of financing and financing models for higher education in emergencies?

Advisory sessions (by individual appointments)

An opportunity for participants to exchange ideas and receive tailored advice with regard to joining the Rapid Response Mechanism. Dedicated info points will be set up in the lobby at which consultations will take place.

Commitment/partnerships desks

Participants will have the opportunity to make commitments or finalize partnerships at appropriate kiosks.

Background

This International Workshop is a continuation of an emerging network of policy, practice and research that has connected a group of multi-stakeholder partners – civil society, foundations, universities and higher education associations, international organizations, government representatives, aid and cooperation agencies - engaged in and committed to promoting higher education among refugees, migrants in vulnerable situations, affected by conflicts, natural disasters and facing emergency situations.

It builds on the momentum generated by the World Humanitarian Forum, held in May 2016, in which governments and other international actors agreed to work together in order to achieve strategic transformations, as proposed in the Agenda for Humanity, aimed to “reduce the suffering of millions of people, and address and reduce humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability”. The Agenda for Humanity consists of 5 core responsibilities and 24 strategic transformations that are needed to achieve progress. Core responsibilities 3 – Leave no one behind – and 5 – Working differently to end need – are particularly important for our purpose. Moreover, this International Workshop also takes into consideration further commitments made at the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants (September 2016), as expressed in the New York Declaration. In particular in its paragraph 82, all member states recognized for the very first time the power of higher education to build resilience in emergencies and foster recovery and rebuilding from disasters

and conflict. Last but not least, it also builds on the commitments made in the framework of the Global Compacts for Refugees and Migrants as well as in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 4, 5 and 16.

Against this backdrop, this Workshop aims at marking a turning point by mobilizing higher education institutions and the global academic community in supporting and leading broader collective efforts to unleash the unique power of higher education to strengthen and uphold the protection of refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations, creating additional pathways for admission and resettlement, fostering resilience and rebuilding from disasters and conflict.

This Workshop is underpinned by the conviction that unless HEIs and the academic community are put at the center as the main driving force for delivering relevant quality higher education in crisis situations no quantum leap is possible let alone sustainable.

How to galvanize the academic community and other higher education providers to be at the forefront of a global coordinated response in order to harness tertiary education in emergency situations? What kind of trade-offs are necessary between different players on the ground? What are the existing gaps and barriers that prevent HEIs from responding to crisis situations? What are the enablers that would allow them to deliver more, better and faster?

Building upon lessons learned and best practices collected from various initiatives implemented over the years around the world to meet humanitarian needs and reduce students' risk and vulnerability in crisis situations, namely by the Global Platform for Syrian Students (www.globalplatformforsyrianstudents.org), a new project of setting up a **Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM)** will be featured to the participants in this workshop. The RRM seeks to provide a fast track systemic response for the specific target group of students and scholars at risk, in forcible displacement or in need of humanitarian assistance.

The presentation of the RRM at this International Workshop will allow an informed debate on the way forward, collect suggestions and new proposals to improve it and, ultimately, galvanize support for it, in order to do more, better and faster in the neglected though key field of higher education in emergencies.