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*In cooperation with WUSC Canada, the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways and UNHCR*

# MANIFESTO ON EXPANDING REFUGEE TERTIARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS IN EUROPE

## **Preamble**

At the occasion of the international conference on Tertiary Education Pathways for Refugees taking place at the University of Bologna on 10-11 March 2022, participants and engaged stakeholders express their commitment to work towards common advocacy, strategies and design of operational frameworks to further expand and create higher education pathways for refugee youth in Europe, building on successful examples, such as the Italian UNICORE programme, the German DAAD Leadership for Syria and Africa and the Student Refugee Program (SRP) in Canada managed by WUSC.

This commitment is even stronger taking into account of the ongoing needs of Afghan refugees and the rapidly escalating war in Ukraine, with hundreds of thousands fleeing. This unprecedented situation will require universities, civil society and communities, to offer large scale refugee scholarships and support to arriving youth, to continue their education and rebuild their lives and futures.

## **The Manifesto**

The undersigned organizations express their commitment to work towards common advocacy, strategies and design of operational frameworks to further expand and create tertiary education pathways for refugee youth in Europe, building on successful examples, such as the Italian UNICORE programme, the German DAAD Leadership for Syria and Africa and the Student Refugee Program (SRP) in Canada managed by WUSC.

2021 has seen a continued increase in forced displacement with global numbers now exceeding 84 million. Conflict, COVID-19, poverty, food insecurity and the climate emergency have worsened the humanitarian plight of the displaced, most of whom are hosted in developing regions, often in protracted situations.

In this fragile context, the search for durable solutions remains urgent, requiring joint action. Innovation and creativity in developing solutions should guide and support the process. Civil society, universities, students, local communities and the private sector must as encouraged by the Global Compact on Refugees, join forces in an active partnership to develop more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing.

Immigration pathways that complement traditional state-led refugee protection, known as 'complementary pathways', can help address the vast shortfall between the annual number of refugee resettlement places available and the number of refugees in first countries of asylum and for whom other durable solutions, including return or local integration, are not available.

Today, 5% of refugees have access to higher education compared to only 1% in 2019. This is far below the global average of higher education enrollment among non-refugees, which stands at 39%.

Increasing education pathways linked to a secure status with protection safeguards for refugee youth is, therefore, more urgent than ever and is a tangible way for states and the international higher education community to provide durable solutions to refugee students while contributing to improvements to their access to tertiary education. In line with the European principle of solidarity and rights expressed in the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* such as the right to asylum (art. 18) and the right to education (art. 11), expanding educational pathways will offer solutions for those most in need, promoting equal opportunities and diversity in higher education.

## **WHY?**

Compelling reasons sustaining the 'why' in favor of higher education for refugees.

Higher education is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26.2), referred to in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 13c) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 28c). Higher education is an essential part of the education continuum. Access to higher education serves as a strong incentive for students to continue and complete their studies at the primary and secondary levels. Further, higher education contributes to solutions and post-conflict reconstruction, promotes social, economic and gender equality, and empowers refugee communities.

Most refugees live in a situation of protractedness, with no prospect, as of yet, for a safe and dignified return home. Situations in the Horn of Africa, the unresolved Syrian conflict, the fractionalized conflict along with the Basin of the lake Chad humanitarian crises, complemented by the Sahel jihadist expansion, the unresolved rights approach in Afghanistan where higher education for young women is *defacto* banned, the forgotten war in Yemen, Myanmar and the painful exodus of the Rohingya, are just some of the most compelling humanitarian crises around the world, which sadly reflects the political failure in mediating and settling peace.

While still in a country of first asylum, young refugees aspiring to higher education face several barriers that end up in a clear lack of opportunities since hosting countries are often poor and face their own internal conflicts. The Sahel region, unfortunately, is the perfect example where extreme Jihadism often targets specifically education. This dramatic situation makes it difficult to satisfy even the demand of national students.

This snapshot shows the sense of urgency and highlights the clear lack of sustainable opportunities. In this sense, education is prevention. The binomial education and prevention is one of the most suitable ways to express how educating a fragile population is the answer to any potential of extreme poverty as well as radicalization.

We all agree that education is the primary means of building and regenerating society. Education is therefore a gesture of care and a pure social action. Highly educated refugees can also become leaders in their communities, creating businesses and social enterprises, or becoming engineers, scientists and technology specialists.

Increasing opportunities through creativity, flexibility and strategic partnerships is, therefore, a priority since there is a major shortage of options.

## **OUR COMMITMENT**

We commit to working towards common advocacy, strategies and operational frameworks to expand tertiary education opportunities as a durable solution for refugee students. The University of Bologna and all signatory organizations express their commitment to creating a European Tertiary Education Network for Refugees (ETENR) that will be supported by the Global Taskforce on Third Country Education Pathways.

The network will commit to respecting the Minimum Standards for Complementary Education Pathways in areas of protection and safeguarding, applications and admissions, funding, integration and psycho-social support.

The network will be composed of trans-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approaches, engaging representatives of states, international and regional organizations, universities and higher education institutes, NGOs, cities and regions, student and citizen groups, the private sector and other interested stakeholders.

The network will involve different stakeholders for the following relevant actions.

#### *European Union*

- Propose holistic frameworks for refugee education pathways, engage relevant institutions (European Parliament, European Commission, Council, European Committee of the Regions) and inter-service departments (DG EAC, HOME, EEAS) including financial support.

#### *Governments*

- Commit to the expansion of refugees' access to education-based solutions;
- Engage in agreements to facilitate access to education pathways through visa and documentation waivers;
- Ensure protection and safeguarding, providing access to permanent legal status upon graduation and facilitating the transition to employment upon graduation.

#### *Higher education institutions*

- Design and support programmes and study places reaching feasible scholarship targets in terms of numbers and profiles for the short, medium and longer-term;
- Ensure relevant procedural waivers to supplement documentary and credentials requirements.

#### *Higher education institutions, civil society and cities*

- Facilitate welcome and integration upon arrival; ensuring active participation of student and local communities by means of mentoring and opportunities to explore social, cultural, sports, and learning, including digital learning and socio-economic integration.

#### *Students*

- Welcome and include refugees' students into the student community and support their integration through language learning, co-housing, sports, cultural events and more.
- Promote initiative of raising awareness, sensitization and fundraising to support the growth of education pathways.

#### *Refugees*

- Ensure full consultation and participation of refugees in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

#### *Private sector and philanthropy*

- Support education pathways and labor market integration committing human and financial resources to support programming and pilot education pathways projects, evaluate and consider innovative funding models for sustainable financial support in the future.

## **HOW**

In line with its mission to increase learning mobility and cross border cooperation, ETENR will meet the inclusive Erasmus+ objectives to provide enhanced education opportunities to refugees, as disadvantaged groups. This goal can be achieved via varied objectives outlined under the Erasmus+ including the possibility to support Small-scale partnerships.

## **WHEN**

We will reach out to the European Parliament to support through capacity building and exchange via pilot actions and preparatory activities as well as exploring innovative financing and private sector engagement to create funds to ensure sustainable frameworks that:

- ensure human resources for higher education institutes to screen refugee applications and carry out selection processes of eligible candidates and match refugees with suitable scholarship opportunities;
- create refugee scholarships funds that include ample opportunities for language learning, personal development, social inclusion in host societies and employability trajectories;
- engage local communities in supporting refugee education offering language learning, social and socio-economic integration improving independence, enhancing educational, social personal and professional development;
- ensure networking, capacity building, exchange of best practices and mutual learning among network members;
- raise awareness about educational needs and opportunities at European, national and local levels and the benefits for diversity and inclusion.

**Bologna, 11 March 2022**