



European universities' response to the refugee crisis

23 October 2015

At its Council meeting on 23 October 2015 the European University Association (EUA) called on policy makers at both EU and Member State level and higher education institutions in Europe to enable refugee students to gain access to higher education, and to remove all obstacles that may prevent them from doing so. European countries have for years committed themselves to fair recognition, social inclusiveness and increased internationalisation, most recently in May 2015 at the Bologna Ministerial meeting held in Yerevan.

The recent influx of refugees into Europe underlines the fact that the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East is not a regional problem but an emergency with global implications and a matter of the utmost concern for Europe and its future. Moreover, the countries in question are the neighbours or near neighbours of the European Union, the importance of which EUA has highlighted in a recent response to the European Commission's European Neighbourhood Policy consultation.¹

Urgent action is necessary, requiring leadership and a willingness to accept responsibility for addressing and managing this crisis by all actors in society; thus also Europe's universities. This will require good coordination and a broad consensus on the integration and support of displaced students and scholars.

There are already numerous examples of universities, their staff and students responding to the current emergency by providing support to refugees in general and by reaching out to refugee students, academics and researchers. Still, universities can do more.

EUA calls upon universities and European governments to support the following action:

- Ensuring the broad provision of information on the various educational opportunities open to refugees;
- Developing foundation and bridging courses and specific programmes (propaedeutica) that allow refugees to acquire the necessary skills for entering higher education;
- Providing language teaching as a key element of societal integration and a prerequisite for successfully completing a study programme;

¹ http://eua.be/Libraries/Publications/ENP_consultation_response_from_EUA.sflb.ashx

- Guaranteeing access to education for school age children;
- Waiving or shortening 'waiting periods' to enter higher education and to qualify for student financial support and benefits;
- Offering access to higher education also for non-recognised refugees;
- Ensuring flexible conditions, procedures and processes for the recognition of degrees and diplomas, periods of study and prior learning, in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.²
- Offering funding support for refugee students and scholars and ensuring that additional means are made available for higher education institutions that engage in this process in the form of bursaries, grants and structural support measures, both from national funding sources and from Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the European Social Fund.

The expected outcome should be a more rapid integration in the host country and increased chances of contributing to the economy and society as a whole. Failing to act now may result in resignation, failure and social marginalisation, not only of current refugees, but also of future generations.

Brussels, 23 October 2015

² "All countries shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence." (Lisbon Recognition Convention)