

**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



Creating Opportunities: Higher Education Pathways for Refugee Youth

Wednesday, December 8

15h00-16h30 CET

Virtual: WebEx



Audience: Foundations with expertise or interest in refugee topics, state representatives, and leading actors in international education

WHY

At the end of 2020, UNHCR estimated that 86% of the world's refugee were hosted by low- and middle-income countries where local integration prospects remain limited or non-existent. While the recent events in Afghanistan shook public opinion and triggered some interest among states in offering solutions for thousands of Afghans fleeing their country, they also reminded us that still very few safe pathways are accessible to refugees.

An estimated 35 million (42%) of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people are children below 18 years of age. Thousands of refugee students are dreaming about continuing their education and have the qualifications to enter higher education programmes in EU countries. Yet, only 5% of refugees ever access higher education, compared to a global average of 39%. Potential candidates face significant financial and legal barriers in accessing opportunities for study at universities in the EU. Increasing the number of legal pathways through higher education programmes is a tangible way to empower refugee students take ownership of their own lives, offer alternatives to dangerous journeys, and work towards the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). To achieve these targets and provide refugees with opportunities and hope for the future, new actors need to step up.

WHAT

Higher education pathways offer durable solutions to refugee youth who qualify for these opportunities based on academic merit or artistic and athletic performance. An important feature of these pathways is that refugees are able to exercise control over their own solutions by accessing them independently using publicly available information and processes. Promising initiatives to support complementary education pathways are emerging in a number of EU countries. Mostly led by committed universities, NGOs, and local communities, these initiatives show the creativity of stakeholders in pulling together resources and mobilising local actors and communities through multi-layered partnerships and models such as community sponsorship.

WHO

Foundations, in collaboration with universities and academic networks, have a unique role to play in building a framework that assists refugee students access higher education programmes, excel in their studies, and build their futures. They can help nourish partnerships across sectors, mix different types of capital, innovate where others cannot, and mobilise knowledge and insights from civil society and refugees themselves. Foundations are also important allies in creating a shared narrative around the importance of higher education opportunities for refugee youth and can support conversations on creating legal pathways through higher education programmes at the political level.

Triple Win = Impact

Refugee Youth: Opening higher education opportunities to refugee youth provides hope and a pathway to build an independent and self-determined future.

Higher Education Institutions: Students from refugee backgrounds bring a unique perspective and experience to university campuses while contributing to a more diverse and international student body.

Receiving Countries: Countries welcoming refugee students through higher education pathways benefit from the skills, experience, and knowledge students can offer to the economic and societal development of these countries.

What we propose

An event to build a space to exchange ideas amongst philanthropies with experience or interest in refugee related issues, especially in the areas of refugee education and durable solutions, and leading actors in the area of international education, including the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways and UNHCR.

The purpose of this exchange is twofold: to increase participants' knowledge on complementary pathways for admission generally and higher education pathways specifically and to explore innovative approaches to facilitate collaboration between participants interested in supporting the expansion of higher education pathways.

Objectives

The event aims at highlighting the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including foundations, to increase the number of higher education pathways for refugee students in the EU by:

- Exploring sustainable funding models to expand higher education pathways in the EU;
- Mobilising new actors and facilitating collaboration to develop sustainable models for complementary pathways through higher education;
- Exploring a tangible engagement plan for the engagement of foundations and philanthropy in building education complementary pathways in the EU and globally.