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Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Beirut Office



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مفوضية الأمم المتحدة للاجئين

# Sharm El Sheikh Statement on Higher Education in Crisis Situations in the Arab States

*Higher Education in Crisis Situations: Synergizing Policies and Promising Practices to enhance Access, Equity, and Quality in the Arab Region*

*Sharm El Sheikh- Egypt, 28-29 March 2017*

## Preamble

We, the participants in the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education in Crisis Situations, held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, from 28-29 March 2017, co-convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), under the auspices of H.E. Dr. Khaled El Ghaffar, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Arab Republic of Egypt, hereby

1. Recall the terms of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1992 Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World and the 1994 Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries,
2. Evoke Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that everyone has a right to education, and that higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit,
3. Take into consideration the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all”, in particular target 4.3 which states that “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocation and tertiary education, including university”,
4. Take note of the increasing research by international bodies and agencies that higher education is critical in fostering socio-economic and cultural development, at the national and regional levels, and that it plays a major role in providing hope and promoting the values of peace and mutual understanding and develops competencies for living together peacefully for sustainable development,
5. Cognizant of the exceptional circumstances that some Arab States are going through and that the most significant challenge to progress in education is conflict, which exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization,

## Issues and Challenges

6. Highly appreciate the efforts exerted by host countries and international bodies and organizations to respond to the refugee crisis challenges. We call upon the international community to play its role in this joint responsibility towards those displaced persons,
7. Acknowledge that the demand for higher education among those displaced by crisis continues to far outweigh current supply,
8. Note that without significantly enhancing tertiary education support for those affected by crisis in the Arab Region, their countries and the Region in general will be deprived of

skilled human resources in the long term and youth will be increasingly at risk of harmful practices,

9. Recognize that those affected by crisis who wish to pursue their higher education are faced with a number of challenges, namely the recognition of their prior learning, availability of valid documentation needed to enroll in higher education, the need for residency permits when in a host country, learning difficulties when curriculum or language differ from their country of origin, the need for psychosocial-support, and the high cost of higher education.

## Recommendations

Based on the principles, issues and challenges reviewed in the Statement on Higher Education in Crisis Situations in the Arab States, "Higher Education in Crisis Situations: Synergizing Policies and Promising Practices to enhance Access, Equity, and Quality in the Arab Region", as adopted by the Conference, and in view of the need for higher education to be prioritized in times of crisis, the Conference has adopted the following recommendations for the Arab States:

### Policies, Legal Framework & Coordination

10. To develop policies and legislation that mainstream crisis in national higher education planning and policy and allow for the integration of those affected by crisis in higher education institutions in an equitable manner, through policy responses pertaining to learning language, needed documentation, recognition and accreditation,
11. To enhance coordination and collaboration between all relevant stakeholders to facilitate the provision of higher education for those affected by crisis, including sufficient exchange of information between relevant stakeholders,
12. To facilitate recognition of studies and qualifications and to encourage the use of modern technology means in education and learning,

### Data Management

13. To enhance data collection and management as an important driver for policy dialogue and programme planning and implementation,

### Regional Cooperation & Institutional Capacity Building

14. To encourage regional cooperation for emergency response preparedness and to build institutional capacities for emergency response preparedness in higher education interventions during times of crisis,
15. To develop a national contingency plan to prepare for and face various emergency and crisis situations in order to ensure access to equitable higher education opportunities to all learners.

Sharm El-Sheikh, 29 March 2017