

CONCEPT NOTE

UNHCR Engagement with Academia

Ensuring an effective response to refugees' situations and empowering forcibly displaced people through data and education

Photo © UNHCR/2019: Fareshta, 22, studying computer science in English at the West University of Timisoara (UVT) is the first one to receive the Full Scholarship for refugees in Romania.

This Concept Note serves as a guide on how UNHCR can collaborate with academic institutions, potential areas of engagement and outcomes.

Introduction

Education stands as a beacon of hope for displaced populations, offering not only knowledge but also empowerment and opportunity. Academics play a pivotal role in this, contributing significantly to the protection and support of displaced individuals through research, teaching, and advocacy.

As data and analyses on forcibly displaced and stateless populations are vital for shaping the global context, the expertise of academia is invaluable for both research endeavours and for shaping the understanding of the next generation of professionals. This understanding deeply impacts refugees, asylum-seekers, internally

displaced persons, and stateless communities, guiding policies, intervention and societal perceptions.

Recognizing this, UNHCR and its partners are committed to fostering collaboration with academic institutions. This not only facilitates access to higher education for refugees but also sparks academic interest in forced displacement topics for students and young researchers.

Through this collaboration, UNHCR aims to increase insights on the matter through advanced and exploratory analyses, leveraging academic expertise to inform evidence-based policies and interventions.

Current Context

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation UNHCR has scaled up its operation in Romania to respond to the emerging needs in the new context, under the leadership of the government, in close cooperation with partners and leading the inter-agency coordination efforts.

The main areas of intervention for UNHCR include: the protection of refugees in key areas such as gender-based violence, psychosocial well-being, child protection, etc. thereby complementing the work of authorities and partners, ensuring timely identification, comprehensive services and referral of vulnerable individuals to support networks; advocacy to ensure that support services are

resilient and can effectively include refugees; effective communication and counselling through hotlines and social media channels, and referral to services and assistance mechanisms; cash assistance programs supplementing the government aid, providing a vital safety net for particularly vulnerable individuals; efforts to ensure refugees receive essential and adequate support to advance their socio-economic inclusion; garnering support for refugees and host communities through communications and campaigns; etc.

To support and inform this response, UNHCR has relied on evidence, thus enhancing its data and information management activities in close collaboration with the Romanian Government, other UN agencies and NGOs.

With a focus on activities involving academia, in Romania, UNHCR has already established partnerships with top universities, resulting in impactful initiatives such as Full Scholarships for Refugees and the integration of refugee-related modules into academic programs, granting research scholarships to students and participation to public events or extracurricular activities.

Building on this, UNHCR is committed to expanding and deepening these partnerships,

unlocking further opportunities for research, analysis, public awareness and support for displaced populations.

Objectives

To further advance the engagement with academia, a set of objectives has been outlined to advance refugee education and awareness, as follows:

- To facilitate **access to higher education for refugees**.
- To **stir up academic interest** in topics related to forced displacement among students and young researchers.
- To **bridge the gap between the theory and practice** for students and subjects related to humanitarian work, refugee law, statelessness and nationality issues.
- To facilitate **advanced research** and generate in-depth insight on refugee issues and statelessness.
- To encourage the **creation of a network** for universities and researchers studying and teaching forced displacement and statelessness.
- To **raise the level of awareness on forced displacement and statelessness** and inspire solidarity initiatives within the academic environment.

Possible Projects

Those aimed at enhancing education and research opportunities for displaced and stateless communities in collaboration with universities and local organizations. One or more initiatives can be implemented depending on capacities and types of engagement. These activities seek to address the diverse needs of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons while fostering academic engagement and community support. Additional activities may be added to the list over time.

Facilitated Refugee Access to Education

To expand refugee access to education, UNHCR will work closely with universities to identify ways in which refugees and stateless persons could access higher education, through various scholarships or programmes. This could involve providing financial support for tuition fees, offering language and academic preparation courses, and creating mentorship programs to support refugee and stateless students

academically and socially. Additionally, partnerships with local organizations and community centres can help identify and support potential candidates for educational opportunities.

UNHCR Staff or Supporter Participation in Specialized Courses

This area entails a wide range of possible actions, from intervention in courses or workshops of technical staff / senior or high-profile UNHCR staff, to collaborative projects in which special modules or workshops on forced displacement are developed for specific courses.

UNHCR can provide expertise on refugee and statelessness-related topics, but also on adjacent topics such as Protection, Advocacy, Humanitarian Coordination, Communications in humanitarian contexts, Use of Data etc. Some concrete examples can be seen below:

- Refugees' economic inclusion in host countries: challenges, opportunities, and good practices.
- Humanitarian aid, cultural and social change seen in a refugee perspective.
- International Relations and International Law seen in a forced migration perspective.
- The prevention and reduction of statelessness and protection of stateless persons.
- Communicating with vulnerable groups.
- Cultural diversity and intercultural communication.
- Child Protection and prevention of and response to gender-based violence in a forced displacement context.
- Diversity and inclusion: understanding unconscious biases.
- Protecting LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement.
- The UN in emergencies: the role and coordination models

- Information Management in emergencies
- The role of data in humanitarian aid and humanitarian emergencies.

Scholarships and Advanced Research Opportunities

UNHCR may establish scholarship programs to support bachelor or master students passionate about refugee or statelessness issues and who would like to write their final thesis on this.

This short-term scholarship program would encourage students to explore specific areas of interest identified by UNHCR, such as integration services, community engagement, and refugee law. UNHCR would provide guidance and support to students throughout the research process, including access to data, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration with UNHCR staff and partners.

Advanced research opportunities for PhD candidates may be offered on ad-hoc basis depending of the research topic and the particular situation, and under various research centres affiliated to a university. This would enable scholars to conduct in-depth studies on forced displacement issues under the guidance of experienced researchers.

Internships

UNHCR intends to collaborate with universities and local organizations to create internship opportunities for students interested in refugee protection or statelessness. These internships can involve hands-on experience in various aspects of refugee assistance, such as legal aid, social work, education, communications and community outreach. UNHCR staff would provide mentorship and guidance to interns, helping them develop practical skills and gain valuable insights into refugee issues.

UNHCR will directly communicate to universities all the internship opportunities available within UNHCR and partner organisations.

Network of Researchers on Forced Displacement

UNHCR should support networks of academics and/or researchers dedicated to forced displacement, bringing together academics, practitioners, and policymakers. Networks can facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and research dissemination through conferences, workshops, and online platforms.

Research Initiatives

UNHCR would collaborate with universities to popularize its repository of data for academic research purposes. This may involve providing training sessions for researchers on how to use the library effectively, as well as facilitating access to specific datasets and research tools. UNHCR would also encourage researchers to share their

findings and contribute to the library's resources, fostering a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to refugee research.

Public Events

UNHCR should partner with universities to organize public events aimed at raising awareness about refugees and statelessness, and promoting positive attitudes toward them and enhancing social cohesion. These events can include panel discussions, film screenings, art exhibitions, and community outreach activities. UNHCR should provide keynote speakers, resources, and logistical support for these events, while universities may contribute with their expertise and networks to ensure maximum impact and outreach. Through these collaborative efforts, UNHCR and academia can work together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees and stateless persons in Romania.

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