



# Towards a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Habesha Project's<sup>1</sup> Position

## I. Global Context

The persistence of multiple crises and conflicts around the world are a constant. Currently, there are more than 15 active conflicts in the world affecting over 125.3<sup>2</sup> million people in five continents.

In the Middle East, more than 12 million people are displaced within their own countries or living as refugees in neighboring ones due to multiple conflicts affecting Syria, Iraq, and Yemen<sup>3</sup>. Particularly, the humanitarian crisis in Syria has provoked, according to the United Nations, the worst humanitarian crisis since the World War II.

In the African continent conflict continues to affect more than 53 million people<sup>4</sup>. Just in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 26 % of the world's refugee population resides, with over 18 million people under risk<sup>5</sup>, notably there are 2.4 million people in need in the Central African Republic<sup>6</sup>, 7 million in Nigeria<sup>7</sup>, 6 million in South Sudan<sup>8</sup>, in addition to the new conflict erupting in Burundi since 2015. Also, instability in Libya has not ceased since the uprisings of 2011, driving 435,000 people to flee their homes<sup>9</sup>. In Somalia the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 4.9 million<sup>10</sup>.

In Central Asia, the conflict in Afghanistan does not seem to reach an end, with high levels of violence throughout 2016 that have reportedly affected over 7.4

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<sup>1</sup> **The Habesha Project** is a neutral, non-profit, and non-faith based international Mexican-led humanitarian initiative aimed at sending a message of solidarity to the Syrian nation. It does so by making it possible for Syrian students, who had their higher education interrupted because of the armed conflict, to travel to Mexico to pursue higher education in some of the most prestigious Mexican Universities with full scholarships.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Global Humanitarian Overview 2016. p. 4 <https://goo.gl/2hnKmG>

<sup>3</sup> According to UNHCR data.

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. Global Humanitarian Overview 2016. Considering the people affected by conflict in 17 African countries.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. <https://goo.gl/izQm5T>

<sup>6</sup> Relief Web. <https://goo.gl/EX99wN>

<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit. OCHA. Pg. 26

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Pg. 29

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Pg. 23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Pg. 28



million civilians<sup>11</sup>. In Southeast Asia, the humanitarian situation at the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is characterized by a combination of vulnerability to natural disasters, armed conflicts, interethnic tensions, trafficking, and migration. Over 240,000 people have been displaced<sup>12</sup>.

In the American continent the number of people fleeing violence in Central America is at its highest levels since the eighties when the region was going through one of the darkest chapters in its history due to severe civil wars, putting countries like Mexico and Costa Rica in a new position as countries of reception rather than expulsion. Just in 2016, the Mexican government received 8781 applications<sup>12</sup> for refugee status.

Europe has not escaped this trend. Armed conflict and violence in Ukraine have transformed a once peaceful nation into area of instability for the region where 3.1 million people have been affected<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, 218 million people were affected by natural disasters on average per annum during this 20-year period<sup>14</sup>.

## II. Higher Education in Emergencies: A Neglected Issue

The sector most affected by conflicts are young people, that represent 1.8 billion of the world's population. Over 600 million of them live in fragile or conflict affected settings<sup>15</sup>. The main challenges that youth face in post conflict environments are similar to those they face in other development contexts, except that they are often exacerbated by conflict and its aftermath.<sup>16</sup>

Conflict has a devastating impact on education, both directly in terms of the suffering and psychological impact on the pupils, teachers, and communities, and indirectly in the degradation of the education system and its infrastructure. Yet these same education systems are expected to make a significant contribution to rebuilding a shattered society at a time when they themselves are debilitated by the effects of conflict.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Pg.16

<sup>12</sup> Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR). Official Statistics. <https://goo.gl/upJpcP>

<sup>13</sup> Op. Cit. OCHA pg. 31

<sup>14</sup> Relief Web. <https://goo.gl/CP1EP9>

<sup>15</sup> UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017. <https://goo.gl/GV8NjW> p. 10

<sup>16</sup> The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The World Bank. "Reshaping the Future. Education and Postconflict Reconstruction". 2005. Executive Summary, pg. XX.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Pg. XVI.



Worried about this issue, in March 2017 more than 80 states, participants and stakeholders engaged dialogue at the “Regional Conference on Higher Education in Crisis Situations” in Sharm-Sherikh Egypt, organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In this conference, the countries agreed that not only should education have a prominent role in humanitarian response, but also that crisis should also be an opportunity to review education policies and strategies to support students, address disparities in access and quality in the sub-region, and thus help in the transition from humanitarian aid to humanitarian development.<sup>18</sup>

Despite all the significant diplomatic and political efforts aimed at placing education as a core element of humanitarian response during crisis, much of the energy and resources of the international community have been directed at towards basic education, while evidence from diverse studies suggest that secondary and higher education suffer a more rapid decline during conflict and a slower recovery after conflict<sup>19</sup>. Also, highlighting that “Students are often involved, especially at the tertiary level, as activists in the political struggles that precede conflict, and so universities and postsecondary colleges tend to be targeted more often.”<sup>20</sup>

There are a very few examples of practical programs that address the educational needs of youth and young adults<sup>21</sup>. Clear evidence of the previous statements, is that only 1% of the refugee youth have access to higher education.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in the current international scenario, young people’s right to education can be considered a neglected issue.

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<sup>18</sup> The Regional Conference on Higher Education on Crisis Situations. UNHCR. UNESCO. <https://goo.gl/yGrbKV> pg.1

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 63

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pg. 18

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.68

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR. “Missing out. Refugee Education in Crisis”. <https://goo.gl/2hX5Yf>. Pg. 4



### III. Education in Emergencies: An international Legal Framework in a progressive evolution.

The right to education access in vulnerable situations has been enshrined by numerous international instruments, beginning with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>23</sup>, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>24</sup>, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of refugees<sup>25</sup>, the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education<sup>26</sup>, the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>27</sup>, the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action.

Notably, nine relevant United Nations Resolutions<sup>28</sup>, seven Security Council Resolutions<sup>29</sup> and two Human Rights Council Resolutions<sup>30</sup> have brought together the international community to affirm the relevance of this issue and have called on all parties to uphold the right of education of children and youth affected by conflict.

On September 25<sup>th</sup> of 2015 when countries adopted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, Higher Education was included under the fourth SDG on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Target 4.3 states that, "by 2030, countries should provide equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university"<sup>31</sup>. Achieving this target will facilitate the achievement not only of SDG4 but also of all other SDGs.<sup>32</sup>

Although there is a large number of instruments and resolutions where the international community has come to agree on the importance of protecting the right to education for displaced populations and people affected by conflict, it was until September 19<sup>th</sup> of 2016 during the Summit for Refugees and Migrants hosted by the United Nations General Assembly when global leaders agreed to include the right to higher education in emergencies as a part of the engagements to be addressed in the outcomes of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular migration.

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<sup>23</sup> Article 26

<sup>24</sup> Article 13

<sup>25</sup> Article 22

<sup>26</sup> Article 4

<sup>27</sup> Article 28

<sup>28</sup> Resolutions 46/182, 59/113 A and B, 63/241, 64/145, 64/146

<sup>29</sup> Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1612 (2005), 1674 (2006), 1882 (2009), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1894 (2009)

<sup>30</sup> Resolutions 8/4 and 11/6.

<sup>31</sup> Sustainable Development Goals. <https://goo.gl/HnXqqi>

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO. <https://goo.gl/XcwWq7>. Policy Paper 30.



Precisely, the New York Declaration states that “in conflict and crisis situations, higher education serves as a powerful driver for change, shelters and protects a critical group of young men and women by maintaining their hopes for the future, fosters inclusion and non-discrimination and act as a catalyst for the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict countries.”<sup>33</sup>

Never before had the international community expressed so clearly its commitment to fulfill the right to education in times of crisis, recognizing tertiary education as a seminal component for the reconstruction of societies affected by conflict.

#### **IV. Global Compact for Migration: A Solution at the Grasp of the International Community.**

The international community in the New York Declaration has set the path to create a model that puts higher education at the center of building sustainable and lasting peace in post conflict settings. Moreover, the world already counts with a small number of initiatives that have proven the feasibility and virtues of tackling the issue of higher education in emergencies.

Since 1992 the German Government has advocated refugee higher education through the Albert Einstein Program (DAFI) which up to today has helped more than 6,000 refugees continue with their higher education studies worldwide, turning displaced students and refugees into agents of change and leaders for their communities.

Recently, the Syrian crisis, that disrupted what once was one of the best educational systems in the Middle East, put at test the determination of the international community to uphold the right to education of hundreds of thousands of Syrian students that saw their possibilities to continue their studies abruptly interrupted.

To attend this crisis, diverse initiatives emerged to try to give a response to this sector of the affected population. In Portugal, the “Global Platform for Syrian Students” is promoting a rapid mechanism to guarantee higher education to young Syrian students. In United States of America, the Institute of International Education in New York has launched major efforts to place as many Syrian students as possible in American Universities.

Initiatives from middle income countries have proven that they also have the capacity and resources to be part of the response. In Mexico “The Habesha

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<sup>33</sup> A/71/L1. Point. 82



Project” was born as a civil society initiative that in alliance with public and private universities and in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been able to select, mobilize and integrate displaced Syrian students into prestigious Mexican institutions. This initiative has proven the capacity of every country to contribute to the education of those who will have the responsibility to rebuild their community once peace has been restored, no matter the distance, language, or cultural differences.

The growing number of projects and experiences provide a model that can easily be replicated and expanded to provide a solution for a large number of young adults whose futures can either be left in the clutches of conflict or turned into desperately needed human resources for their societies.

Based on alliances of private sector, academic institutions, civil society organizations and governments, these programs represent a very low cost that can be met without adding new burdens to the elevated budgets of humanitarian operations. Furthermore, it opens the way to middle and even low-income countries to be part of the response to humanitarian crises that affect communities worldwide.

While some developing countries do not have the financial capacities to make significant monetary contributions to the bill of humanitarian operations around the globe, they do count with excellent and prestigious academic institutions that can accommodate students in their classrooms. By tackling this issue, the sponsoring states would not only be contributing to the personal realization of the rights enshrined in numerous instruments adopted by the international community in regard to populations affected by crisis, but also paving the way for reconstruction by training the human resources dearly needed by states that have been affected by armed conflict or natural disaster.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration has enormous challenges to face, some of them include opposing visions and experiences among states which will require strong compromises from participating states. However, tackling the plight of the youth willing and able to get tertiary education poses no point of friction and offers long-lasting positive impacts that will only require the proper attention of the international community to provide the necessary framework and attention. Only this international instrument can provide these to invigorate the already existing movement.



## V. Recommendations

Guided by The New York Declaration and its article 82, in which higher education is conceived as a powerful driver for change, that shelters and protects a critical group of young men and women by maintaining their hopes for the future, fosters inclusion and non-discrimination and acts as a catalyst for the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict countries.

Recalling the commitment made by the international community regarding SDG 4.3 that states “by 2030, countries should provide equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university”.

Habesha Project, a humanitarian initiative led by Mexican civil society aimed at offering higher education to youth affected by conflict, expresses the following recommendations to be considered for the preparatory process of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

1. United Nations member states must uphold their commitment made on point 82 in the New York Declaration regarding higher education in the final Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
2. The United Nations Member States must comply with Resolution 64/290 of the General Assembly related to the right to education in emergency situations.
3. United Nations Member States must commit to create policies and strategies aimed at offering comprehensive mechanisms for safeguarding higher education for youth affected by conflict.
4. United Nations Member States must recognize, facilitate, and support the vital role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the development and implementation of higher education in emergency programs.
5. United Nations Member States must foster alliances and partnerships between States and their education and international development departments, the private sector, universities, think tanks, The Inter-Agency network on Education in Emergencies, multilateral agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, relevant United Nations agencies, local communities, and other interested partners for the implementation of integral higher education in emergency programs.
6. While developing higher education in emergency programs, United Nations Member States must include an intercultural dialogue orientation that promotes resilience, justice and peace in post-conflict countries and their societies.