

2. Executive Summary

This evaluation was commissioned by DG/NEAR to PARTICIP with the overall objective to assess the current generation of EUTF-funded HE support programmes and to identify elements of future EUTF interventions contributing to improving opportunities for Refugees from Syria, Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and vulnerable host communities to access Higher Education. The reviewed contexts are Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq-KRI. The reviewed programmes are the HOPES programme in all four countries, the UNHCR programme in Turkey, the GJU programme in Jordan, and the SPARK programme in Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq-KRI. As the evaluation is to be instrumental to planning the future, it is a strategic evaluation documenting the summative elements with an emphasis on their formative value. Based on evidence of the past, this report provides a strategic perspective on future action. The perspectives, realities and needs of the students have been used as a basis for the analysis of the collected information. It is through this lens that the findings and recommendations have been developed as it provides the relevance required for the improvement of the EUTF Higher Education programmes and their implementation. It was taken in account that the contexts and the needs of the young Syrian students are highly dynamic and that this affects the effects of the programmes and the way they are perceived. In addition, the report provides a macro lens to look into how the interaction of various funding instruments, programmes and implementing agents produce the results as perceived by students and stakeholders and how strategies and modalities can be adjusted to support relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the EUTF portfolio and its degree of complementarity and coordination with other EU funding instruments and other donor funding mechanisms.

Relevance

In response to the evaluation questions this report concludes that while overall the programmes are relevant in meeting the needs and increasing the perspectives of young refugees from Syria who are granted scholarships, the support is fragmented and incomplete from a student pathway perspective and does not fully consider specific protection and gender issues affecting Syrian refugees. Across all contexts, the volume of the response is far too limited compared to demand, leading the programmes to respond by maximising the numbers out of a given budget at the cost of affecting student choices and livelihoods negatively and generating higher dropouts. The low volume of the response reduces the chance to be selected to such a degree that the eligibility and selection criteria become instruments of exclusion rather than the means for targeted inclusion they are meant to be.

Effectiveness

The programmes are found to be largely effective in achieving and exceeding planned targets in terms of the number of scholarships. These stellar results are based mostly on a supply and target driven approach whereby targets are being substituted for results. This reflects poor programme designs based on inadequate result descriptors which do not allow for a qualitative assessment and reporting of the benefits delivered by the programmes. Furthermore, it leads programme actors into silo effects of individual target optimisations and fragmenting their support towards the students. The EUTF programmes do engage effectively with their respective operational contexts but mainly in transactional ways that are instrumental to achieving their targets. In doing so, they forego potential leveraging on opportunities for deeper engagement with relevant authorities at institutional and policy levels.

Efficiency

The programmes have achieved high cost efficiencies in relation to the budgeted costs. In doing so they have not always carefully considered the effects of these efficiencies on study choices, livelihoods, access to laptops and to study materials, in light of the resulting dropout rates.

Coherence

The EUTF portfolio has achieved de facto complementary action by design in which the programmes stay out of each other's way by offering scholarships at different levels with different partner universities and to different target groups in a given context. While this parallelism provides for coherent mapping of services at all levels in each context, it foregoes opportunities for integration and leverage within the EUTF portfolio, and for enhancing pathway continuity for the student. Complementarities and synergies with other EU and non-EU instruments are insufficiently explored or actively pursued as a strategy for policy dialogue and implementation of joint initiatives with national authorities.

Sustainability

The EUTF portfolio is lacking a clear multiple scenario strategy in order to maximise the sustainability of the benefits of the action. The EUTF action is predominantly response and supply driven towards the return/rebuilding scenario which turned out to be the least likely in the focus groups. The action lacks active participative engagement with young Syrians and stakeholders to develop innovative solutions that maximise the options for young Syrians towards multiple scenarios in the future. The EUTF action engages insufficiently with national state structures and policy levels to ensure sustainability of the benefits for the students after graduation, and in the contexts where it is needed, create the conditions for continuing the support to young Syrians through continued financing and building national capacity.

EU visibility and added value

The prominence of the EU flag in relation to the implementing agencies branding inversely correlates with the nature of the agency and the strength of their own brand. Notwithstanding the various degrees to which the EUTF programmes ensure visibility of the EU on all their materials and communications, students tend to get confused over the many logos straddling the materials offered by the programmes.

EU added value comes in many forms apart from funding. In Turkey it provides space for civil society innovative action and a stepping stone for university development. In Jordan it brings prestige and innovation, in Lebanon it contributes to the multicultural mix and melting pot of innovative private initiatives and in Lebanon Jordan and Iraq-KRI senior officials are engaged or keen to engage with EU expertise.

On the EU side, the opportunity to come forward with a clear consolidated strategy aimed at leveraging across functional and sectoral divisions and integrating financing instruments is often missed. This is also visible in the lack of local media strategies leaving EU media presence scattered and ad hoc without clear direction.

In light of these conclusions, this report recommends that fostering pathways is the key to providing perspectives to young Syrians who are rebuilding their lives. The EUTF Higher education programmes need to wrap their services around the student in a more consistent continuous way along the student pathway from secondary all the way to employment and livelihood.

Implications for the EUTF Programme design:

In order to enable this more comprehensive and coherent approach, the EU and the EUTF need to **shift the project design from a vertical funding and programming perspective towards a horizontal pathway perspective**. This implies structuring the programme design around robust result descriptors that are meaningful and co-created in collaboration with the stakeholders to allow for deeper qualitative assessments of the benefits that are being produced. It also means to step away from parallel complementarity and instead seek synergy and collaboration with other programmes and financing instruments towards pathway continuity for the student across services and programmes.

It also implies **maximising options and sustainability with multi scenario planning** by pursuing active participative engagement with young Syrians and stakeholders to develop innovative solutions that maximise the options for young Syrians towards multiple scenarios in the future.

A promising area in this respect is to invest in enabling digital livelihoods by priming students for understanding the digital economy and for participating in it successfully as a remote digital worker, a digital entrepreneur, or simply as an operator of a web shop or other digital platforms so that graduates can put to work their higher education competencies and leapfrog the local barriers to work.

The EUTF programmes need to **bolster their critical mass by maximising the budget** in order to approach scholarship numbers that are in line with regional proportions of higher education students per 1000 inhabitants so that the eligibility and selection criteria can become the means for targeted inclusion they are meant to be, rather than the instruments of exclusion they have become in the face of elevated scarcity of supply. Successful participation and avoiding dropout must be the number one priority. To achieve this, the EUTF programmes must reprioritise from maximising the target numbers for a given service, towards maximising the quality and relevance of the results. In calibrating costs and benefits, the programmes should use a collaborative approach to tap into the experiences of students and the perspectives of universities and authorities in order to ensure that efficiency does not come at the cost of reduced relevance and effectiveness. In close cooperation with the EUD, the EUTF programmes must engage deeper with their respective operational contexts and with relevant authorities at institutional and policy levels in order to move from the existing transactional relationships in the pursuit of targets, towards a more meaningful collaboration in the pursuit of shared results.

The EUTF action should **bolster visibility by leveraging on EU strengths and added value** by focusing on reputation building through its action. The EUD should ensure visibility through a carefully planned local and regional media strategy that goes beyond reporting visits of EU officials, with press releases, conferences and field visits with journalists around innovative collaborative and participative EUTF actions. All EUTF action should be based on a clear understanding of what makes Europe special and attractive and carry out these strengths in its action. Therefore, the EUTF action should profile as an innovator and build on EU strengths such as the EU expertise in participative collaboration and decision-making and use it to work with the young on their pathways towards entrepreneurship and job creation in conjunction with national stakeholders, private enterprise and the broader civil society.

Organisation and management of the EUTF portfolio

Effectiveness can be improved by **re-calibrating the mix of functions and responsibilities between regional and national levels according to the principle of 'acting locally and**

connecting regionally'. This recalibration of EU strategic and management functions across its programme portfolio requires a new collaboration agreement between the EUTF team in Brussels and the EUD whereby the team in Brussels takes charge of the regional strategic functions, and the EUD of the national management of contracting and operations.

The Regional EUTF team oversees the development of a regional response strategy with overall guiding principles for contextualised project designs, the development of regional fund-raising strategies, and the design and tendering of a regional programme to create networks of collective learning and facilitation and instruments for knowledge building. The EUD teams oversee the development of contextualised action documents in line with the regional response strategy and overall guiding principles, the tendering and contracting of EUTF programme agents including local partners, the monitoring and steering of EUTF programmes in the national context, engaging with the state in policy negotiation and channelling of programmes and cooperation with its institutions, ensuring linkages and mobility between study levels in the national education systems, ensuring the capacity building of state institutions and of national programme managers and coordinators where required, and fundraising and connecting funding instruments and sources in the national context.

EUTF Contracting Modalities

In order to support the recalibration of the organisation and management of the EUTF portfolio, contracting modalities must provide more transparency and flexibility and align with the guiding principles of the pathway fostering programme design. Improving the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of programme implementation entails [gearing the contracting modalities towards coherent and transparent allocation of resources, adaptive programming and engaging with local context](#).

For contracting and programme design purposes this entails establishing a more transparent mechanism in allocating programme funding to implementing agencies through a tender procedure based on the regional strategy and guiding principles to which all programmes should adhere, and which would provide coherent and complementary action and services in a pathway fostering manner. It also would require building on the strengths of the implementing partners, cooperating with the government in programme design and including local partners on equal basis in consortia.

For financing purposes, it requires a multi-annual rolling scholarship funding mechanism with a three-year horizon and a three-year phasing out period to allow for mobilising all available funding year by year and fixing overall budgets for each programme while allowing for adaptive programming and fluid internal resource allocation towards shared results and targets across the different programme components within those programmes. In order to allow for capitalising on the successes such as the calls for proposals, it is crucial to find bridges for funding the further development or scaling up of such innovations with other EU financing instruments.

In summary, fostering pathways is the key to providing perspectives to young Syrians who are rebuilding their lives. In order to enable this more comprehensive and coherent approach, the

EU and the EUTF need to shift from a vertical funding and programming perspective towards a horizontal pathway perspective. In this, the EUTF in Brussels needs to take a more strategic approach and decentralise to the EUD who need this space to be able to align the programme design to the local context. The EUTF Higher education programmes need to wrap their services around the student in a more consistent continuous way and implementing partners need to allow more fluidity in their internal budgeting and

implementation modalities in order to enable them to engage in more adaptive programming. Programmes should refrain from squeezing more numbers out of the budget at the expense of pathway fostering and of the students' ability to cope with their studies due to economic pressures. The EUTF should also seek to increase the budget significantly in order to increase the numbers so that a more significant part of demand can be fulfilled and should also ensure coherent linkage and budget allocations to secondary education to stem the drop out. The programmes should aim at maximising the options for student pathways through widening study choices, multi scenario planning, and digital livelihood development. The EUD and programmes should contextualise also by engaging deeper with the state at policy level and institutional level. The EUTF should seize the opportunity to act locally and connect regionally and gear the modalities towards transparent contextual engagement coupled with adaptive programming.

Thanks

We thank the EUD's, Programmes and implementing partners for facilitating our mission in many kind ways. We also thank the government representatives and the students for their time and input. We also thank the PARTICIP team for their support and advice. Finally, we like to thank the EU colleagues in Brussels who have shown availability and support for our work so far and hope to be able to continue to receive their input and support.