

Lisbon Call to Action

Setting up a rapid response mechanism for higher education in emergencies (RRM) in order to deliver more, better and faster academic opportunities for refugees and forcibly displaced students

A contribution to the Action Plan of the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact on Migration

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has the right to education and those affected by emergencies and protracted conflicts are no exception. In crisis situations, quality education provides protection to children and youth, contributes to self-reliance and acts as a catalyst for recovery. In post-crisis settings it builds a stronger foundation to consolidate peace and prevent a relapse into conflict. Higher education unleashes innovation and entrepreneurial skills that are important for economic activity and job creation – elements critical for stability during times of reconstruction and for longer term sustainable development. Furthermore, higher education is a powerful driver for resilience, empowerment and integration in host societies.

Since 2000 the field of education in emergencies has emerged as integral to the global education movement and many initiatives have been launched to halt the number of children and youth out of school due to conflict, disasters, displacements, epidemics and natural disasters. However, higher education has remained largely neglected and outside the sector of education in emergencies, seen by many as a luxury. This

gap is mirrored by figures: according to UNHCR, only 1% of refugee youths attend university compared with a global average of 36%. Analysis further found that among some 89.2 million young adults aged 18-24 living in 35 crisis-affected countries, 7.8 million are currently more vulnerable and at risk of education disruption, dropout and poor quality, alongside other psychosocial and protection concerns.

Bridging the gap of higher education in emergencies and in conflict-affected societies and making it a priority in policy, practice and academia was the challenge addressed at the Lisbon Conference (www.rrm2018.pt), held on 5 April at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, co-organized by the Portuguese Government and the Global Platform for Syrian Students and sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. At this conference, an ambitious and innovative course for higher education in emergencies agenda at global level was chartered aiming at setting up a Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM).

CALL TO ACTION

Against this backdrop, the **Lisbon Call to Action** goes out to everyone who is engaged in exploring, developing, monitoring and participating in efforts aimed at boosting higher education in emergencies and conflict-affected countries in a systemic and sustainable way. This includes the academic community (universities, polytechnics, higher education services providers at large), international organizations, governments, aid agencies, foundations, NGOs, the private sector and individuals. They are all invited to come together to support the RRM project in order to run a pilot over one year that will allow both to consolidate its conceptual foundations and its operational framework. See more details at the Annex (pages 8-12).

THE RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (RRM)

The Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies (RRM) is a multi-stakeholders project in the making, aimed at providing more, better and faster academic opportunities for students who are either in vulnerable situations or face humanitarian emergencies created by wars, conflicts and natural disasters.

The RRM is a unique, informal platform for dialogue and cooperation on higher education in emergencies and conflict-affected societies. Bringing together a variety of partners and stake-holders, the RRM aims at becoming the most comprehensive partnership for higher education in emergencies and in conflict-affected societies, joining hands across continents. The RRM seeks to be the main multilateral platform linking the academic community, philanthropies, the private sector, humanitarian and development players and political decision makers at national, regional and global level.

The RRM is built upon the best practices existing at international level, seeking to help boost the global agenda on education in emergencies and to contribute to reorganize this field which, until recently, has remained loosely defined, with international organizations and other players providing a patchworked assortment of services.

Currently, two main complementary initiatives are driving a reorganization of this field: the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECWF) which is the first global fund to prioritize education in humanitarian action aimed at fulfilling the educational needs of 75 million children and young people (aged 3-18) in 35 crisis-affected countries; and the RRM that aims at becoming a unique multilateral, inter-regional framework to increase awareness, policy exchange and tangible cooperation on higher education in emergencies and conflict-affected societies, targeting the 18-32 age bracket. Although at different stages of development – the ECWF is much more advanced – , with different scopes and approaches, both initiatives seem engaged in reorganizing the field of education in emergencies, the ECWF focusing on primary and secondary levels and the RRM on the tertiary level.

THE RRM – A THREE-PILLAR STRUCTURE

The RRM is underpinned by the principle that universities know what to do to integrate students and scholars coming from fragile settings, provided they are properly backed. To enable universities to achieve their mission, it is necessary to close existing capacity and financing gaps. Therefore, the RRM is based on three pillars: an Academic Consortium, a Network of Partners and a Financing Facility. The RRM **Academic Consortium** is made up of universities, polytechnics, colleges, research institutes as well as other higher education providers committed to providing refugees and students on forced mobility with opportunities to pursue their education; the RRM **Network of Partners** is made up of a wide range of members – international organizations, governments, aid agencies, foundations, NGOs, the private sector and individuals – engaged in supporting the higher education sector in conflict settings; the **Financing Facility** in support of the RRM is a blended finance initiative comprising grants, an academic solidarity levy to be raised on a voluntary basis (the YES levy) and an impact investment, the BlueCrow Dynamic Fund I.

In a globalized world, working together across these three pillars makes the RRM an important platform for dialogue and cooperation to promote a common vision of the role that higher education can play in emergencies and conflict-affected societies. A vision that recognizes the ability of higher education in emergencies to provide protection, to enhance resilience and self-reliance and to empower individuals and communities, acting as a catalyst for recovery and for strengthening fragile states.

As an open and informal framework to increase awareness, policy exchange and tangible cooperation, the RRM working together across these three pillars aims at achieving its primary threefold goals: to do more, better and faster in the field of higher education in emergencies and conflict-affected societies.

THE RRM IS SHAPED AS

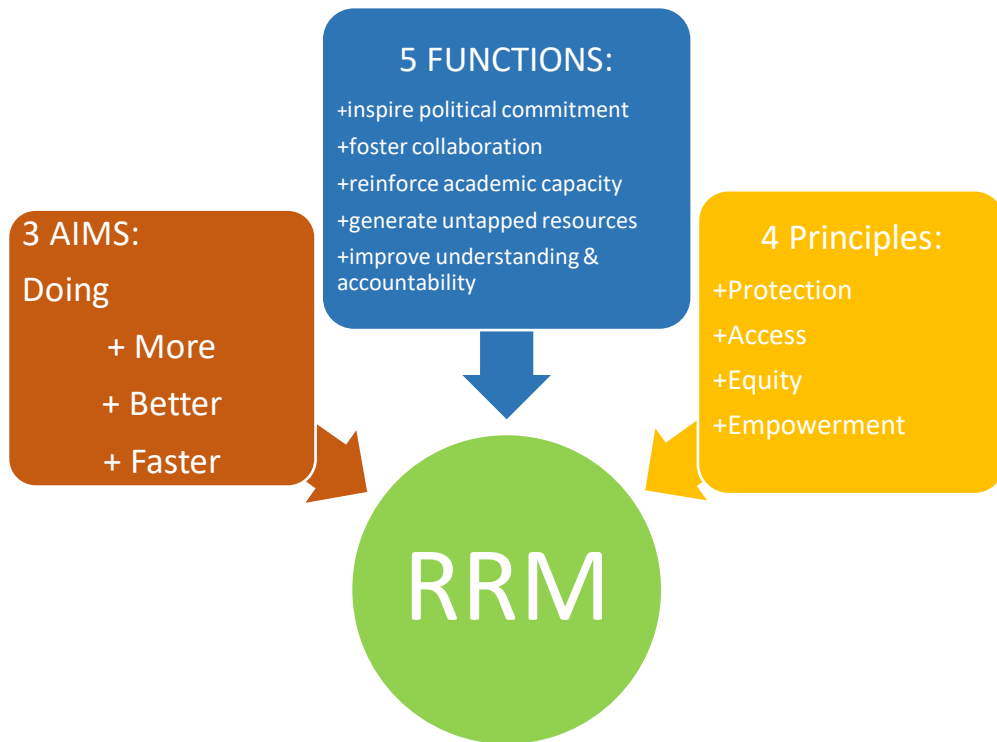
- **An equal partnership** - The RRM offers a platform to enhance understanding and awareness amongst its partners through dialogue and cooperation on topics of mutual interest relating to higher education in emergencies and in conflict-affected societies on the basis of equal partnership, mutual respect and benefit.
- **Informal** -The RRM provides an open forum for the academic community, policy makers, officials, foundations, NGOs and the private sector to discuss any issues of common interest in the framework of advancing higher education in emergencies and in conflict-affected societies, complementing the work already being carried out in bilateral and multilateral fora.
- **High-level and people-focused** - The RRM provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation not only at the level of senior officials and political decision-makers, but also puts a strong focus on fostering people-to-people contacts among all, including academia, experts, civil society representatives, private sector and youth.
- **Multi-dimensional** - The RRM covers the full spectrum of issues relating to higher education in emergencies and conflict-affected societies and devotes equal attention to rights-based, humanitarian and development approaches, to the various actors involved in the field, to simple and high-tech solutions to promote and facilitate access to quality higher education, innovative blended financing strategies, etc.
- **Open and evolutionary** - The RRM goes with the times, both in terms of issues addressed, solutions suggested and with regard to membership.

HOW THE RRM WORKS

The RRM works through close consultations and activities organized at different levels and using learning technologies when possible to connect with its various constituencies in order to deliver on its main functions.

Shaped by three main aims - doing more, better and faster-, the RRM is underpinned by four core principles, which are: protection - make sure that the academic opportunities provided offer a safe, protective and healing environment to crisis-affected students; access - ensure that crisis-affected students are provided with quality higher education opportunities to complete their studies; equity – ensure access is provided to the most vulnerable students, notably young women; empowerment of individuals and communities – make sure that higher education provides the advanced capabilities necessary for societies to assume genuine ownership of the recovery process.

Furthermore, the RRM endorses the same 5 functions as the ECWF since the RRM's main purpose is: to provide a platform to strengthen academic capacity to respond to crises, foster collaborative responses, generate untapped resources, improve understanding and accountability as well as inspire political commitment so that higher education is viewed both by governments and donors as a top priority during crises (see www.ecwf.org)



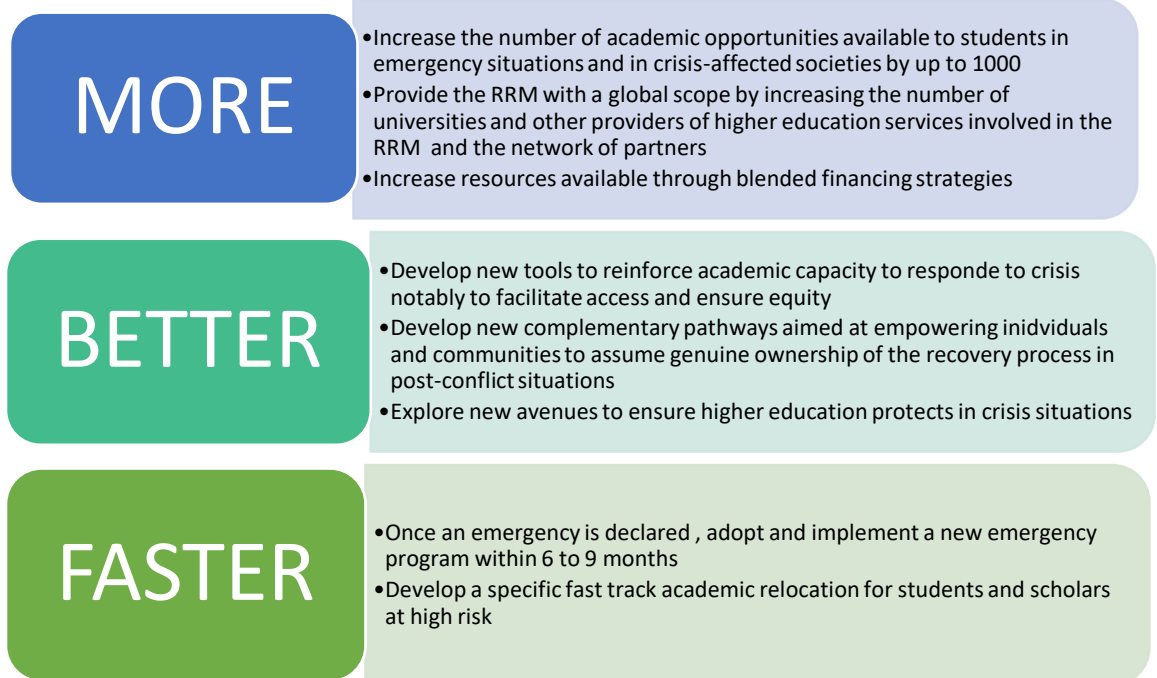
JOIN THE RRM

Join the RRM – send your expression of interest to Helena Barroco (Global Platform for Syrian Students), using the e-mail: helenabarroco@casadoregalo.pt by July 2019 or sign up at the RRM website: <http://rrm-online.org>.

ANNEX

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES FOR THE PILOT

- The one-year pilot aims at bringing together a core group of partners working together with a number of universities and other higher education providers around the world in order to do



- Within this broad set of objectives, a more detailed and concrete agenda is to be set by the RRM Taskforce, once it is operational, said agenda to be discussed and agreed with participants in the pilot.

RUNNING A PILOT OF THE RRM – What does the RRM platform offer?

- The RRM is a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation on higher education in emergencies bringing together a wide range of partners.
- It aims at creating the right ecosystem that allows universities, polytechnics, colleges and other higher education providers to do more, better and faster in times of crisis.
- During the pilot, the RRM will foster collaborative responses, strengthen academic capacity to respond to crises, mobilize extra resources, promote a better understanding of humanitarian crises and higher education needs and inspire political commitment at international and regional level so that higher education is viewed both by governments and donors as a top priority during crises.
- At the end of the pilot, the RRM will conduct an assessment of the experience and in collaboration with partners will issue recommendations for the full operational phase that will start in September 2020.
- The RRM will have no dedicated secretariat at least during the one-year pilot experience. However, an informal group of coordinators – the RRM Task Force - will be set up. It will consist of up to 7 members. Together they will assist the Network of Partners and the Academic Consortium and will be responsible for the advancement of the RRM.

RUNNING A PILOT OF THE RRM – What does it require from the Network of Partners?

- Making a commitment to be part of the RRM project over one year starting in August 2019 until July 2020.
- Running the pilot will require that each partner commits to share its own experience, knowledge and know-how on topics related to higher education in emergencies in order to
 - foster collaborative responses to crises
 - contribute to strengthening academic capacity to respond to crises through the development of new tools, common approaches, guidelines and pathways as well as best practices that can be replicated

- contribute to upholding article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to implementing paragraph 82 of the New York Declaration
- improve accurate and disaggregated data collection definition, modules and processes
- improve understanding of crisis situations, higher education needs and early planning for timely action
- strategize coordinated action in order to align it as much as possible with global priorities, such as the Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (namely SDG 4, 5 and 16), the Agenda for Humanity and the Global Compacts; to achieve this goal, it is planned to set up a Group of Friends or like-minded group within the United Nations
- explore untapped revenue potentials and make a voluntary financial contribution to help develop the RRM (to be discussed with potential donors on a bilateral basis)
- plan, conduct, follow up and monitor advocacy actions in order to inspire political commitment so that higher education is viewed both by governments and donors as a top priority during crises
- leverage the media

Each partner should appoint a Focal Point for all issues related to the project who will participate in follow-up web meetings with the RRM Task Force and in the final assessment and recommendations. Every partner can raise concerns at any time, with the possibility for discussion amongst all members on a regular basis. The RRM Task Force can provide solutions for these concerns or suggest measures to mitigate their impact.

Furthermore, partners might:

- decide to organize some joint activities – namely web activities – to hold broader discussions on topics related to the pilot.
- want to convene joint high-level meetings with governments and other parties concerned. If one party organizes a meeting with external bodies on operations covered by the RRM pilot, the other organization will be invited.
- take measures to enhance the visibility of their co-operation and joint activities within the RRM Platform with the general public. All parties will mutually support each other in their relations with the media and with regard to web contents.

RUNNING A PILOT of the RRM – what does it mean for Universities and other higher education providers and what does it require?

- This means being part of the core-group of the RRM founders with regard to its academic consortium component. As part of it, to develop close collaboration with the RRM Task Force and other stakeholders in order to monitor the pilot and evaluate it in July/August 2020 before the RRM is upgraded and fully operational.

- Running the pilot will require that each university/higher education provider commits to:
 - Hosting a number of refugees or students coming from humanitarian crisis settings (minimum 5 students, 40% at least being female students) offering them tuition fee waivers during the 2019-2020 academic year.

 - Providing these students with a similar scholarship scheme that will allow them to cover living costs and other expenses such as student accommodation. Within the pilot, a few scholarships will be available, in some cases provided by other partners.

 - Raising within each academic community (involving students, professors, staff, services providers) on a voluntary basis the “YES!”(youth education solidarity) levy of at least 1 euro/pound/US\$ once a year, maybe on the occasion of the annual registration, which will be deposited in a specific bank account.

 - Universities/higher education providers will be responsible for managing their YES! accounts at local level and for allocating each account to its own scholarship program for refugee students. They are also strongly invited to develop a matching gift program (for instance one-for-one) in order to boost contributions.

 - The amounts raised within the various YES! accounts will be accounted for as if they were a single fund – the “Global Virtual YES! Fund”- in order to be able to show results of collective action at global level and generate additional traction.

- Appointing a Focal Point for all issues related to the project who will participate in follow-up web meetings with the RRM Task Force and in the final assessment and recommendations.
- Through their Focal Points universities/higher education providers will share with the RRM Task Force best practices and lessons learned in the framework of the integration of these students into academic life. Every partner can raise concerns at any time, with the possibility for discussion amongst all members on a regular basis. The RRM Task Force can provide solutions for these concerns or suggest measures to mitigate their impact.
- Universities/higher education providers might decide to organize some joint activities – namely web activities – involving the academic staff and students to hold broader discussions on topics related to the pilot.
- Universities/higher education providers might want to convene joint high-level meetings with governments and other parties concerned. If one party organizes a meeting with external bodies on operations covered by the RRM pilots, the other organization will be invited.
- Universities/higher education providers will take measures to enhance the visibility of their co-operation and joint activities within the RRM Platform to the general public. All parties will mutually support each other in their relations with the media and with regard to web contents.